



GENDER LENS IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

Insights from the Preparatory Seminar series towards the 2020 ARIN
International Conference 'Africa in the Post-COVID-19 World: Lessons for
Research and Policy'

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About ARIN

[The Africa Research and Impact Network \(ARIN\)](#) is an impact platform that brings together a network of scholars and policymakers across Africa to leverage on their work to bring out a unified voice of Africa's research priorities. Modeled as a network, ARIN seeks to leverage on the capabilities of African talented scholars in a flexible manner, and to foster linkages amongst researchers across and beyond Africa in various fields to leverage their knowledge towards Africa's research excellence and impact pathways. This means ARIN is not only focused on the African continent but uses Africa as a base on which to engage on topics within and outside the continent. ARIN's core focus is to engage in peer learning and sharing good transformative research and impact practices targeting key sectors identified as critical for sustainable development. Thematic disciplines include natural resource management, climate change and energy, science technology and innovation, agriculture and forestry, cities and resilience, and trade and mining. These disciplines also intersect with analytical approaches. In addition, the platform is keen to convene dialogues on various research and people topics such as the intersection between COVID-19, and policy analysis.

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ACRONYMS

ARIN	Africa Research and Impact Network
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
WHO	World Health Organization
UNISDR	United Nations International Disaster Risk Reduction
JCA	Joint Call for Action
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
STI	Science Technology and Innovation
CASE	Climate Action and Sustainable Energy
CR	Cities and Resilience

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is a product of the ARIN Inaugural International Conference Gender side event held on 19th November 2020, designed to stimulate discussions and debates on gender lens in disaster risk reduction in the context of COVID-19. The organization and execution of the session was overseen by the ARIN Secretariat, the ARIN focal points across the four African regions and the 1st cohort of the ARIN fellows. Special acknowledgement goes to the Tomorrows Cities Nairobi Risk Hub funded by the UKRI-GCRF, that was central to framing the thematic focus areas of the session. Lastly, we acknowledge the over 50 participants and the three panelists; Mathew Mabefam from University of Melbourne; Ms Tasiana Mzozo from World Health Organization (WHO); and Honorable Esther Pasarris (Nairobi County Government Women Representative) who actively engaged in the discussions providing thought provoking questions and insights.

1.0 Introduction

This report summarizes the side event proceedings, an event that was part of the high-level conference on *Africa in the Post-COVID-19 World: Lessons for Research and Policy* convened by African Research and Impact Network (ARIN) and the Tomorrows Cities Nairobi Risk Hub¹. ARIN offers researchers a platform to leverage their work to bring out a unified voice of Africa's research priorities. Besides, the Nairobi Risk Hub, whose agenda is to reduce disaster risk for the poor in tomorrow's cities played a central role informing the context of the discussions on gender and disaster risk reduction.

This event was virtual and was attended by a broad run of participants from all fields: governments, community leaders, Tomorrow's cities hub, international organizations, research partners, nonprofit organizations, trade, state organizations, and higher institutions. Over 50 participants from across the globe joined the event.

1.1. Background and Contextual Setting

In the context that we live in, risks abound and are systemic in nature. Proliferating risks are emerging in ways never anticipated before. We now live in a world where one hazard cascades to multi-hazards and a never-ending chain starts. Perhaps it is time that institutions, policymakers, and financiers did focus more on preventing the risks and losses that arise from risks than preparing and responding to risks as and when they occur.

With COVID-19, the systemic nature of risks has been exposed, and the potential cascading impacts laid bare. It is also correct to note that; gender equality gains might have been eroded. Consequently, the vulnerability has intensified, where the poor, the marginalized, the aged, the disabled, men, women, boys, girls, communities, and countries bear the brunt. The Sendai Framework monitor records unpleasant statistics regarding disasters and vulnerability. It shows that the least developed countries approximately record 40% of deaths and 48% of livelihoods disrupted whenever disasters occur. The framework recognizes the need for reducing risks and building resilience and livelihoods.

¹ <https://www.tomorrowcities.org/city/nairobi>

Notably, the framework acknowledges all the critical role that gender plays in disaster risk reduction. Women, for instance, are considered vital stakeholders in DRR efforts, especially at grassroots levels. However, their roles in DRR decision-making are limited. This event aimed at highlighting the impacts of COVID-19 and responsive measures in the spirit of not leaving anyone behind and social inclusion.

The gender and COVID-19 dialogue (including the side event and seminars) was aligned to the broader ARIN thematic areas on Cities and Resilience; Science Technology and Innovation (STI); and Climate Action and Sustainable Energy, which are vital towards positioning Africa to attain sustainable development goals. Gender is recognized as an intersectional and cross cutting issue across these themes, thus a key aspect of life spheres. For instance, cities are home to most informal workers, among whom different groups of people live and where women constitute a higher proportion. In these cities, a large composition includes women working in settlements and casual labor jobs. Indeed, gender disparities persist even in STI, where women lag, and so is the same with Climate Action and Sustainable Energy (CASE).

While various efforts continue to be made in bridging the gap, many remain to be done to bring everyone on board. Worse still, and with COVID-19, there have been evident and widening gender disparities in the cities, STI, climate action, sustainable energy, and in all spheres of life. It is within this context that this event aimed to identify the critical connections between gender elements and disaster risk reduction based on the COVID-19 experiences.

1.2 Conference Objectives

The objectives of the side event were:

1. To discuss the relationship between gender and disaster risk reduction
2. To highlight the gendered impacts of COVID-19 from various points of view (National, Diaspora, and Global- WHO).
3. Explore priority measures and responses to the gendered implications of COVID-19 towards "Build Back Better" (resilience and livelihood).

2.0 Methodological Approach

This technical report draws insights from the dialogue on gender and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the context of COVID-19² that was held to discuss what the COVID-19 experience means for gender in DRR. The dialogue was held virtually and was attended by participants drawn from various sectors including the government, community leadership, gender commissions, and research organizations. The discussion involved presentations on disaster risk policy processes and the role of gender in these policies. A panel discussion comprised of: Hon Easter Pasaris (The Nairobi County Government Women Representative); Ms. Tasiana Mzozo (DRR Specialist for East and South Africa, World Health Organisation); and Dr. Matthew Gmalifo (the ARIN Diaspora Focal Point at the University of Melbourne, Australia). The panelists provided the national, WHO, and diaspora perspectives on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and mitigation measures, corroborated and drawn from across the three thematic areas.

Dr. Joanes Atela, the ARIN convener and the Nairobi Risk Hub Lead, closed the session with a call to action on the pandemic's differential and gendered effects. He noted the complexity that bedeviled gender and urged for the need to unpack the complexities and perceive gender and points of strength and not only on the weak points. The report also draws from the weekly dialogues convened by the ARIN between April and August 2020 during the on-set of the COVID-19 where contextual discussions were held with researchers, practitioners, and policymakers across the world, with a focus on social differentiation and governance in response to COVID-19 and lessons therein³.

3.0 Key Insights from the Deliberations and Discussions

This section highlights some of the insights that emerged from the discussions, mainly focusing on the policy outlook, the relationship between gender and disaster risk reduction drawing from the COVID-19 experiences. Additional suggestions on how to leverage gender opportunities to "Build Back Better" are outlined here.

² <https://www.arin-africa.org/event/gendered-impacts-of-covid-19/>

³ See here <https://www.arin-africa.org/category/news-blogs/>.

3.1 Gender differentiation and dynamics in the context of disasters

Gender is socially constructed and analyzes behaviors, characteristics, attitudes, and social norms linked to biological sex at birth. Gender as a social construct varies from society to society. This construction is also likely to change with time (WHO, 2007). In other words, gender refers to the roles, expectations, and values placed on men and women by society in what it considers to be appropriate for them. In the context of COVID-19, gender differentiation and perceptions have not been fully understood or explored, with sex (biological attributes) being confused with the social constructs (gender). According to Ahmed and Dumanski (2020), there is an urgent need to consider applying targeted approaches that consider the intersectional nature of gender in COVID-19.

Indeed, gender differentiation structures ways in which disasters such as COVID-19 interact and impact people. Simultaneously, gender-based elements and design define opportunities and capabilities for responding to disasters in general. Besides COVID-19, we now live in a world where one risk cascades to multiple risks, thus creating multi-hazards. Gender mainstreaming in all types of disasters, from biological to natural disaster, is primary. This consideration will accord gender-sensitive policies, plans, and strategies, all aimed at disaster risk reduction.

To illustrate how dynamic gender is and with a case in point, current world statistics indicate higher mortality for men over women with COVID-19. This state has been attributed to biological factors by some research, while another study from the Harvard GenderSciLab⁴ intimates that social factors might be playing a more significant role, such as behavior, environment, age, underlying health conditions, occupation, and age.

These statistics debunk the narrative of women as the most affected in the face of disasters, but instead introduces a more dynamic aspect, and that is; COVID-19 could be seen mainly from the feminine lens. This was further explained in the discussion based on the socio-economic impacts that women suffer and will continue to, given their vulnerability. Indeed, women have historically experienced an erosion of their livelihood capabilities due to multiple barriers that limit their role in risk governance and other leadership spaces such as; sociocultural factors, individual characteristics, legal and institutional, and socio-economic factors.

⁴ <https://www.genderscilab.org/gender-and-sex-in-covid19>

With the advent of new disasters such as the COVID-19, and majority of the women working in informal sectors, they have lost most livelihoods besides other gender-related negative impacts, making them more vulnerable. Besides discussing men and women and the relational impacts of COVID-19, there are other essential gender categories, including the elderly, the disabled, the youth, young boys and girls whose different voices have not been well advanced during the pandemic, yet they suffered severe negative impacts due to socially-oriented differentiation.

The discussion highlighted the need for an all-inclusive approach to the gendered implications of COVID-19. It highlighted gender integration into disaster risk reductions in ways such as including both men and women in disaster risk committees, gender-differentiated needs assessments, and meeting gender-specific needs of women and children. In addition, provision of shelters and a focus on health services are vital in building resilience and recovery, especially in developing countries whose disaster levels and effects usually are severe.

3.2 Gender and COVID-19 Intersectionality

Gender intersectionality is an approach to gender mainstreaming that ensures varied interests of each gender is factored in interventions and services offered to different groups of people. This is all aimed at ensuring inclusivity and a larger outreach to differentiated groups of people. One of the critical insight that emerged in the dialogues is that while disasters do not differentiate in their occurrence, the experiences among different groups of people are quite differentiated. The most vulnerable groups of people suffer the most brunt, and apparent gender disparities emerge. This observation corroborates with literature from UNISDR (2009), which notes the differential impacts that affect men, women, and other vulnerable groups disproportionately in the face of disasters. The panelists highlighted, for instance, that:

- Women have had to bear the most brunt with COVID-19. Whereas figures show that most men have died from the disease, women have had to pay the highest price in terms of the long-term socio-economic impacts. Some of the gender-specific effects include but are not limited to: health (where reproduction resources have been redirected to the pandemic), lost jobs and incomes, increased unpaid care services for women during this pandemic, and higher incidences of gender-based violence. These impacts are likely to last a long time post COVID-19.

- Globally, gender equality gains made towards Sustainable Development Goal 5⁵ (SDG) have been lost during this pandemic, with women majorly affected and losing incomes and livelihoods due to the nature of their work (informal jobs).
- COVID-19 has had similar adverse, albeit differentiated, and intersectional gender impacts due to, but not limited to:

-
- *Restricted movements curtailing working and ability to earn a living*
 - *Noted increase and incidences of domestic violence*
 - *Curtailed access to requisite sexual and reproductive health services*
 - *Increased unpaid care work for instance the closure of schools*
 - *Increased exposure for health workers (women are a majority in first-line services).*
 - *Suspension of funding to key health sectors, and lack of access to quality healthcare*
-

3.3 A Reflective Approach to Gender in the Context of COVID-19

This discussion took a deeper reflection on what gender means in the wake of COVID-19. The inclusion of gender-sensitive policies and measures to alleviate the brunt of the pandemic were explored.

"More males have been infected globally, although there seems to be an equal epidemiological distribution in Africa (49% M, 51%F). This calls for empirical research (disaggregated data) to establish the reasons for current epidemiological trends: It would be essential to demonstrate the following: Are more men than women testing for COVID-19 globally? Do men have more underlying conditions that make them more susceptible to the pandemic? Are men able to access health/pandemic information much more quickly and, therefore, more health empowered than their women counterparts?" (Ms. Tasiana Mzozo, World Health Organization)

⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

In a rejoinder, the panelists agreed that globally the health system is overstretched, but more so in the African region due to underlying capacity challenges. It would be essential to address these underlying systemic issues to reduce further gendered vulnerability. It was noted that with the global leadership being dominated by men, there exists some level of risk. Critical political decisions could easily overlook the needs of women. Invariably, studies indicate, countries led by women have shown better leadership in COVID-19 containment.

“Kenya's African governments have attempted to cushion vulnerable households such as through cash transfers and meal packages. However, this is very limited, given the current demand. With a vast number of female-headed households/single mothers as well, women are hugely affected. Besides, the government has prioritized efforts to respond to gender-based violence and instituted hotlines to respond to the victims and rehabilitate them quickly. This is also in line with the UN initiatives where the UN Women have launched a tracker- a living database to track and monitor progress and share best practices to prioritize gender equality in this time of the pandemic, <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker>. These meso and micro initiatives are all set to guard against the erosion of gender strides made thus far towards sustainable development goals”. [Hon. Esther Passaris, Women Representative, Nairobi County Government, Kenya]

“There are significant lessons to draw from other parts of the world to deal with disasters. This would, for instance, involve the protection of citizens from evictions due to rent arrears, activation of calamity-based stipends, and establishments of IT-Based home-based reporting platforms. The realization that both men's and women's involvement in disaster risk reduction is a critical player in gender mainstreaming even in this pandemic. To reemphasize is that developed countries and those led by women presidents have fared better during this pandemic. This is a reaffirmation that both men and women in governance and leadership role awards unique outcomes, especially in disaster management processes”. [Matthew Gmalifo, University of Melbourne]

4.0 Summary and Conclusion

From the preceding discussions, gender as a construct is dynamic and has a central role in disaster risk reduction efforts. In the world we currently live in, disaster risks are on the rise. Multiple threats from multi-hazards, and given that hazards and vulnerability precipitate risks, the discussions hinged on the intersectionality of gender in disaster risk and appreciated how disasters are gendered. Notably, whereas disasters are not gender biased, the experiences and their impacts are differentials among; men, women, youth, children, the disabled, the elderly, and the marginalized. Even within this cluster of people, the COVID-19 impact varies depending on their exposure to risks (vulnerabilities).

In conclusion, gender issues are broad and have been misrepresented and underrepresented, a factor attributable to inadequate gender-disaggregated data somewhat. Whereas the gender discourse appears most spoke about, there are underlying serious issues to do with increased violence, lost livelihoods, and health-related factors in the face of COVID-19, which need further addressing and redressing. In the spirit of social inclusion and not leaving anyone behind, this event mooted mitigations on gender and disaster risk reduction, which are contextually set on location and COVID-19. Some of the measures highlighted include; social protection to the vulnerable, cash transfers for basic needs, tax reliefs, e-reporting of gender-based violence, and Medicare.

This side event certainly set the stage for further dialogues on gender and disaster risk reduction across climate change, adaptations, cities and resilience, science, technology, and innovation. ARIN and the Nairobi Risk Hub recognize the role of gender in creating positive impact pathways in Africa and towards the attainment of sustainable development goals. It is against this understanding that ARIN and the Nairobi Risk Hub intend to focus on gender mainstreaming in all its activities and the need for transformative social inclusion as we build back better in the Post COVID-19 recovery process.

References

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- <https://www.genderscilab.org/gender-and-sex-in-covid19>

5.0 Annexes

Annex 1:Program

TIME (EAT)	AGENDA	FACILITATOR
11.30- 11.35am	Welcome and Introductions	Syprose A. /Asenath
11.35- 11.45am	Policy Outlook	Charles Tonui
11.45- 11.55am	Gender Lens in Disaster Risk Reduction	Dr. Asenath Maobe
11.55- 12.20pm	Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 (National Perspectives)	Hon. Esther Passaris
12.25- 12.40pm	Gendered impacts of COVID-19 (WHO Perspectives)	Ms. Tasiona Mzozo
12.40- 12.55pm	Gendered impacts of COVID-19 (Diaspora Perspectives)	Mr. Matthew Gmalifo
12.55- 13.05pm	Q&A	Asenath/ Syprose
13.05- 13.10	Closing Remarks ARIN/Nairobi Risk Hub Lead	Dr. Joanes Atela

Annex 2: Concept Note

Click here for [Concept Note](#)

Annex 3: Panel Discussion Questions

Hon. Esther Passaris (National Perspectives), Nairobi County Women Representative

As a women representative in Parliament, one of your roles is to represent the women, whom the Constitution recognizes as a marginalized group (Article 100). In light of these and as a social entrepreneur, would you highlight-

1. The different impacts of COVID19 on women and men in Nairobi city county, with a focus on economic vulnerabilities (lost jobs/ lost incomes/poverty) that has affected women more disproportionately
2. The gender inequalities that have increased during this pandemic and the government measures /should have/have been laid to address the suffering in this pandemic?

Ms. Tasiana Mzozo (WHO Perspectives)

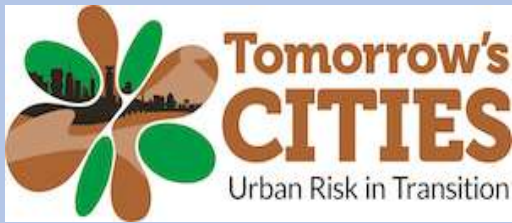
The work of WHO is aligned to the advancement of sustainable development goals, two of which SDG 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages* and SDG 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. In the context of WHO:

1. How does Covid-19 reveal gender disparities and inequalities in the healthcare workforce?
2. How have these SDG goals been hindered during this pandemic, and how WHO has intervened to address the evident loss of gender equality gains made so far?

Dr. Matthew Gmalifo (Diaspora Perspectives)- University of Melbourne, Australia

1. Kindly give us the **diaspora perspective** on gender vulnerabilities caused by COVID-19 and the extraordinary measures used to address the gendered impacts of COVID across health, economic, gender-based violence, and unpaid care?
2. During this pandemic period, several studies have shown that women's socio-economic vulnerabilities have been heightened as compared to their counterparts. What is your broad view on Special Interest Groups (women, youth, persons with disabilities (PWDs), children, the older members of society, minorities, and marginalized groups), and how they have been impacted?

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