

## **Constraints to Women Economic Empowerment in the Manufacturing Sector in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

*Studies show that the manufacturing sector in Kenya has over the years been male dominated. While women have gained entrance into the manufacturing sector, they face various hurdles emanating from gender socialization, cultural norms and stereotypes. Additionally, women have limited access to and control over productive resources, inadequate business knowledge and skills which affect their economic advancement. The objective of the paper was to explore the constraints women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector face and how they can be addressed for attainment of women Economic empowerment in the sector. Data was collected using a questionnaire consisting of quantitative section, qualitative section, focus group discussion and discussion at the Women in Manufacturing Nyeri Conference. Data was then analyzed using descriptive and econometric approaches and reported as quantitative and qualitative results. Majority of the respondents reported that households own productive assets but only 21% of the respondents had land title. A significant number of women reported that they had limited control over household productive assets and could not make exclusive decisions about business and household income. The survey revealed that husband's dominance and control over women's personal resources and business life is a major problem that hinders business development among women. The enterprises are also frustrated through heavy taxation, both at the county and at the national levels. Women also face challenges in meeting business registration requirements due to multiple stop shops.*

### **Keywords:**

### **Introductiona**

Women are key drivers of growth in the agricultural and informal sectors in the Kenyan economy. Their enterprises account for 20 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Republic of Kenya, 2016). Furthermore, women form about 49 percent of the labour force in Kenya (World Bank, 2020). Despite their many contributions, women experience wage inequality for the same work (have a 0.682 score on male wage) and only 7 percent of them have access to business finance (Africa Development Bank, 2015).

Over the years, the manufacturing sector in Kenya has been a male-dominated. However, in the recent past women have ventured into the sector as workers and others as entrepreneurs. Evidence shows that the few women who have dared to venture into the sector have generally smaller shares of ownership of the high-value enterprises (KAM, 2018). Limited access to and control over productive resources, and inadequate business knowledge and skills are factors that could have contributed to these inequalities. Other possible factors for the inequity include low-return due to

education background, cultural stereotypes and gender socialization including the patriarchy nature of societies, triple gender roles (home production, reproduction, and community roles, and marginalization (Wanjala and Were, 2009; Africa Development Bank, 2015). It is also noted that while evidence suggests that women generally have smaller shares of ownership of the high-value enterprises, only 21 percent of them are formally employed in the manufacturing sector. The industrialisation policy of 2012 does not overtly and adequately support and encourage women-owned enterprises as witnessed by low rate of participation by women in this sector.

These factors have made women shy away from starting and participating in the manufacturing enterprises. The objective of the paper is to explore the constraints faced by women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector and how they can be addressed to attain women economic empowerment in Kenya.

## **2.0 Literature**

The power to make and act on economic decisions significantly influences the performance of women-owned enterprises. Hashemi et al. (1996) and Garikipati (2008), both use decision-making power as a proxy of empowerment to investigate the effect of credit programs on women in Bangladesh and India. Their analysis concentrated on uncovering the effect of owning land on the decision-making power of women. The results suggested a high probability that women who owned land had a stronger say, or at least participated in joint decision-making (Allendorf 2007).

Other studies have further documented lack of access to productive resources as a major hindrance to the growth of women-owned enterprises. Bjerge and Rand's (2011) studied small and medium enterprises in Vietnam between 1997 and 2009, and found that women had unequal access to formal bank loans than men, mainly due to a lack of access to land and property which act as collateral. Alene (2020) examined the factors that influenced the performance of women entrepreneurs in micro and small enterprises in Ethiopia, and established that women entrepreneurs who had their working premises situated on their own land had a higher chance to maximize profits over their counterparts. This finding was consistent with that of Awoke (2019).

Wangari (2017) equally conducted research on factors affecting the performance of businesses owned by female entrepreneurs in Kenya. The results indicated that there was a positive correlation between performance and access to capital, showing that access to capital influenced business performance. This result is consistent with that of Mugo and Gakobo (2020) who did a study on the effect of financial accessibility challenges on the growth of women group owned enterprises in Limuru market, Kiambu County, Kenya.

There continues to exist a significant gender gap in access to land in Kenya despite the introduction of laws on gender equality into property and inheritance laws. Less than 7 percent of Kenyan women own land as opposed to 30 percent of men. About 28 per cent of Kenyan women jointly own land with men through processes such as marriage which then makes it hard for them to access it easily because they need the spouse's approval before use (UNCTAD, 2018).

Ojong and Moodley (2005) also discussed women's limited decision making. Their study analyzed leadership issues affecting the productivity of women entrepreneurs in KwaZulu-Natal, and found that women were incapable of making independent decisions despite the fact that they were the ones running the businesses. It was found that men who were in joint business with their wives still expected all daily sales to be given to them or be deposited into their personal accounts. What this meant then is that the women were disadvantaged when it came to decision-making about the enterprise, hence negatively affecting their performance. This would consequently affect the woman's decision-making even at the household level in terms of making large household purchases and also decisions regarding the use of property.

Rudhumbu and du Plessis Maphosa (2019) investigated how entrepreneurship could boost skill and knowledge required for profitability of enterprises and thus empowering women in Botswana. The researchers used stratified sampling technique in selecting 400 female entrepreneurs; a structural questionnaire was administered, One-way ANOVA descriptive statistics and regression analysis were done. The findings indicated that entrepreneurial skill had a positive impact on women businesses. Through training and entrepreneurial education, women were empowered with knowledge and techniques relevant for managing their enterprises. Strategies on marketing products, expansion of the business were capacitated through training and entrepreneurial education. The training was found to be vital in coming up with strategies and business plans used in accessing finances from lending institutions. Moreover, women were able to increase their product markets using strategies acquired from the training.

Vyas (2018) highlighted how skill development impacted on women empowerment in India based on secondary data analyzed. The skills considered were managerial, personality, communication, accounting, business etiquettes and entrepreneurship. Skill development was found to be essential in improving productivity, earnings and employment among women entrepreneurs.

In 2018, The Kenya Association of Manufacturers (KAM) adopted a mixed method approach to establish constraints to engagement of women in manufacturing activities in Kenya. The report discussed limited financial access as a hindrance to women venturing in the manufacturing sector. The study established that lending institutions placed costly, stringent requirements for obtaining loans, thus limiting financial access among women entrepreneurs. Moreover, banks' requirement on expensive collateral such as land that women commonly lacked aggregated their constraints from obtaining funds. The study further concurred that lack of appropriate skills by women entrepreneurs translated to inappropriate adoption of technology, noting that enterprises that were prone to replicating competitor's products reduced their profitability and growth trajectory. However, through skill training they could acquire appropriate techniques for thriving in the market with the competitors. Limited education and skills promote lack of proper financial records such as books of accounts that impede them from accessing credit.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The study involved a survey of 19 manufacturing firms in Kiambu County including: Limuru, Kabete, Kiambu, Ruiru, Juja, and Thika. Selection of firms was purposive and was drawn from a list of members belonging to KAM with reference to whether the firms were members of the WIM programme or not. Following the census approach, 14 WIM members and 5 non-members were interviewed. Data was collected using an interview schedule that contained various modules including household information, business characteristics, employment and remuneration, participation in WIM program, income, agency and decision making. Qualitative data was also collected through a stakeholder webinar, visits and discussions with the County Government of Kiambu Officers and participants at the Nyeri WIM Conference. Other than the survey method, and visits, additional data was collected through an FGD. Working with KAM, the membership of the FGD accounted for the differences in the sector, size of business, location and leadership. The FGD also included three male participants, who are members of KAM. The varied gender allowed for collection of sex-disaggregated opinions. The FGD gave a deeper insight into the constraints that affect women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector.

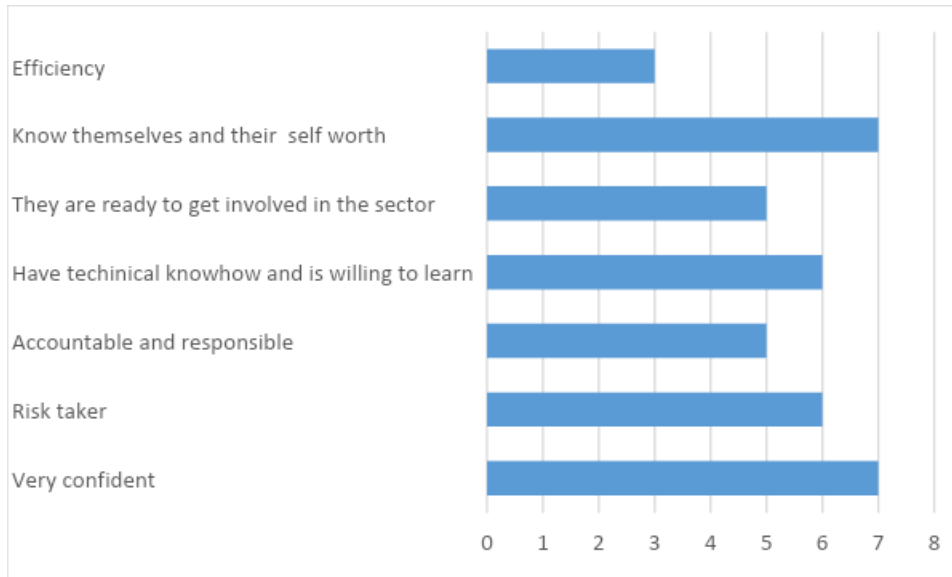
The study used an online *Survey To Go* platform for data collection. Quality checks were conducted on the data in the server to ensure consistency and accuracy. At the end of the data collection, all data was exported from the *Survey To Go* platform to spreadsheets (STATA/Excel) for further cleaning and checking of any errors and inconsistencies.

Data from FGD was transcribed and organised along each of the interview questions. Key ideas and views were summarized along the main themes/clusters and used to triangulate quantitative data. The analysis of data from FGD was done in narrative form and where necessary, key quotes from respondents were used to reinforce the findings.

### **4.0 Empirical results and discussion**

#### **4.1 Important traits necessary for women to succeed in the manufacturing sector interesting traits that were collected.**

Participants mentioned the following traits that they find necessary if women are to succeed in manufacturing industry



**Figure 1: Important traits necessary for women to succeed in the manufacturing sector.**

The above traits are indicators that women have voice, power and agency and are thus empowered. These behaviors are considered masculine. Evidence shows that women are less self-assured than men (Kay, 2014). Therefore, women lack self-confidence to take on greater technical responsibilities. SOWON (2020) observes that since women are expected to be feminine, women who display too much “male” behavior (such as confidence) are not well received by their peers at the top because they appear to be "not feminine enough" and inauthentic. Yet women who display too little of this behavior are perceived as too feminine and not suited for the manufacturing. Women are not socialized to believe in themselves, they particularly second guess their decision or actions and look for affirmation from significant others. Such lack of self-assurance for girls emanating from agents of socialization, structure and institutions results in low confidence levels in girls/ women in later life and especially in the world of work. Yet, as per the participants, confidence matters as much as competence to succeed. Agreeing with women participants Shipman (2009) in her book *Womenomics* states that lack of confidence is the dark spot and a force that is clearly holding women back from succeeding.

#### **4.2 Limited access to credit**

Although 63% of women had access to credit, a large proportion, 37% of them engaged in manufacturing did not have access to credit. For those who have access to credit, funds come from both formal and informal sources such as *Chamas*, SACCOs and commercial banks.

Women have challenges in terms of access to initial capital outlay due to the difficult task of raising requisite capital. Commercial banks have stringent requirements for business financing that many women may not be able to meet. However, it was noted that women utilize alternative mechanisms to address the challenges associated with difficulties in accessing capital by getting money from “*chamas*” or “merry-go-rounds” which are form of socio-economic welfare clubs or table banking from Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) which is not very promising because they have to wait for a member to clear their loans before their turn to borrow.

### 4.3 Limited employment opportunities

Majority (52 %) of the respondents said that their businesses did not have mainstreamed gender-responsive employment policies. This practice limits many women’s opportunities to work in the manufacturing in sector as observed in other sectors of the economy in general.

### 4.4 High rate of business taxation

A majority of approximately 84% of the respondents indicated that their businesses were affected by government taxation limiting their operations and production processes. They believed that the tax issues that need to be addressed by the government include among others: tax exemptions, dividend taxation, profit taxation, tax holidays, VAT and interest taxation. Specifically, they want to see the following changes: that any form of taxation should be lower than 30 %; better licensing procedures; lower tax rates for new businesses; reduction in VAT rate; and tax relief for small businesses. Moreover, 84 % of the respondents believed that the income tax act needs to change in favor of women owned enterprises.

### 4.5 Limited access and control of productive resources

Many women business owners reported that their households owned productive assets such as land. But only very few of them own land title deed while a small number own the land jointly with their spouse or partner.

**Table 1: Legal ownership of resources**

Land Ownership	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Myself alone	4	30.77	30.77
Jointly with spouse/partner	6	46.15	76.92
Partner alone	2	15.38	92.31
Other	1	7.69	100.00
Total	13	100.00	

Source: Pilot Survey, WIM Team

Meanwhile, only a minority of these women can make decisions on the use of land owned by the household.

**Table 2: Decision making regarding the use of land**

Decision on Land Use	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Myself	5	26.32	26.32
Jointly with spouse/partner	7	36.84	63.16
Other	7	36.84	100.00
Total	19	100.00	

*Source: Pilot Survey, WIM Team*

Moreover, majority of the women said that decision making on the use of land are done jointly with the spouse or partner. This implies that women entrepreneurs only enjoyed limited independence with regard to access and control of productive assets.

**4.6 Time management constraint**

From the pilot survey data, all women business owners indicated that they could change their daily schedule if an emergency comes up. However, not all of them had the liberty to do the same if what comes up is not an emergency. For those who do domestic work (cooking, cleaning and caring for children), majority of the women said that they would be able to ask someone else to do this work if an emergency comes up.

**Table 3: Time flexibility if something comes up that is not an emergency**

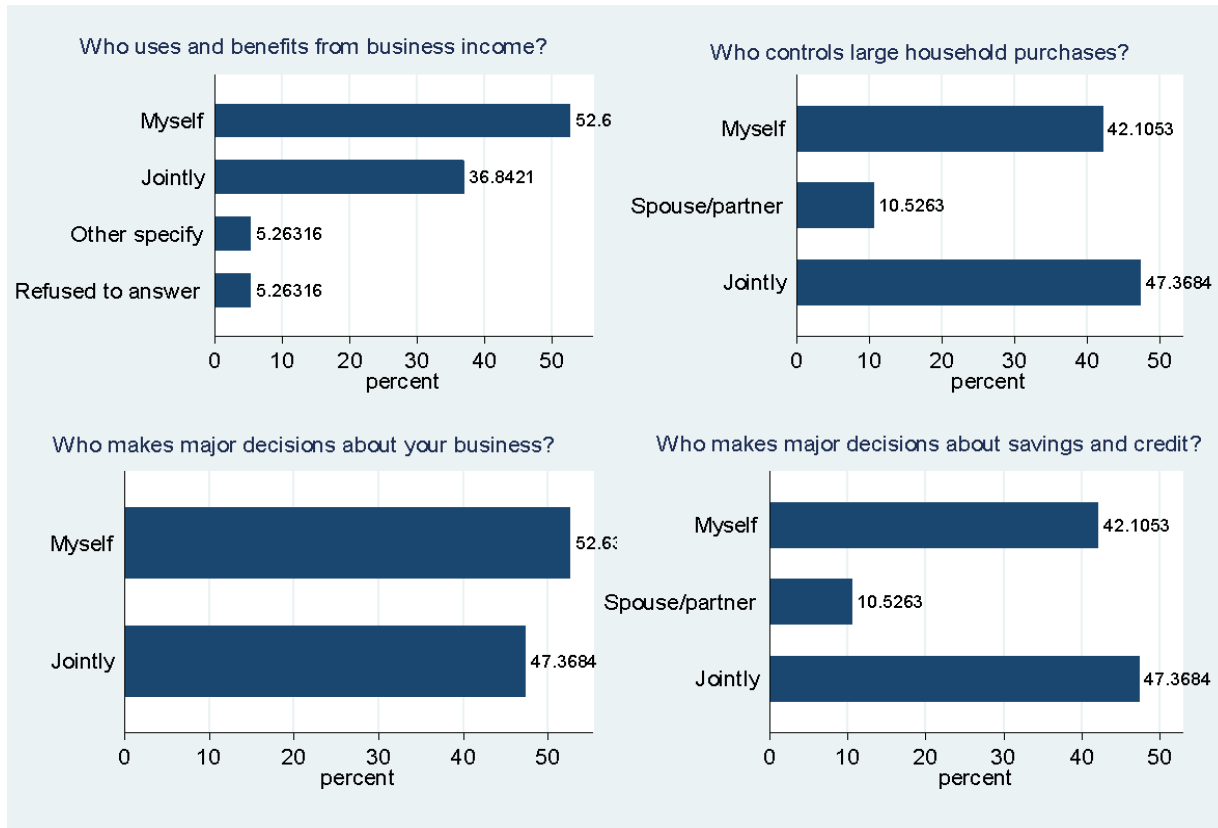
Flexibility	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Yes	12	63.16	63.16
No	7	36.84	100.00
Total	19	100.00	

*Source: Pilot Survey, WIM Team*

In summary, these observations show that most women in business are flexible to change their schedule or routine if responding to some kind of emergency. But not equally likely if what they are responding to lacks urgency especially when respondents are reported doing some kind of income generating activities.

**4.7 Decision making**

Most respondents, 74 % indicated that they have control over their own earning, while a minority of the respondents shared jointly the decision making over their earnings. On the decision making over their spouse/partner’s earnings, 21 % said that it is the spouse/partner who is in control; around 37 % decide jointly; 11 % are decided by themselves (respondents); and a large percentage of 31 % did not specify. Figure that follows shows the responses on decision making.



**Figure 2: Decision making in the household.**

Responses on the control over large household purchases showed that majority of the respondents at about 47.4 % make decisions jointly; 42 % make decisions by themselves; but the other 11 % are done by their spouses/partners. The same pattern was observed for the decision making on savings and credit. 52 % of the respondents, themselves make decisions on business investment while 47 % decide jointly. In terms of benefits, around 53 % of the respondents reported to benefit most from their business income. Additionally, 47.4% of the respondents believed that they are more independent in making decisions since they joined WIM/KAM; the rest were unsure or 8 disagreed.

**4.8 Lack of freedom to travel and make decision**

Women are not able to travel without consent/ authority/ approval from their husbands or sometimes from their mothers in law. Women find themselves in strenuous circumstances, especially if they have a little child who they can’t leave behind in addition to balancing family obligations and career. Men control women freedom of movement as participants put:

*I think there are situations where you find some men have those personalities that are rather narcissistic, and would rather not allow a woman to do her thing. Yes, they are dealing with women who are empowered, but it’s like they have not accepted it fully. They still feel the need to have final say when it comes to different decisions that pertain to that woman. So, you find that even if it’s a get together, it could be a party, it could be a networking opportunity for the woman, and they need to attend, and now when they lay it*



*down the partner has issues, asking "do you have to go? Who are you meeting there?" it causes a lot of friction, and sometimes they have to just go then come back and apologize. So I think it also boils down to the personality, the culture and how the men are brought up, where they are brought up in a way that a woman does not have so much say, they have to make final decision about all these, and it affects some of the households, and you find women sometimes restricting themselves to get opportunities for growth and networks but they cannot because they'll end up having a lot of friction at home and they end up giving up on their dreams to have peace at home. So, I have interactions with people who experience such. They somehow find a way around it, but the main thing I'd recommend is to always have expectations laid down very clearly, it could be at the beginning of the relationship. And of course, now when you have our daughters and we are bringing them up, we need to empower them and make them understand that any time they are relating with others, they need to have their expectations clearly laid out, and also their views, and what are they working towards and if their partners are ok with it. Because now when it comes to that, we can always revert back to how we started and what we had agreed, because now it's just open and there are no expectations, then it's means its open to someone to act upon how the current situation is, and you end up giving up and compromising your growth and the plans that you have.*

This notion was affirmed by another participant who had this to say:

*I don't know what to say. Yes, of course there are very many women who cannot travel without permission and long uncalled for explanations. We might even be victims ourselves. When somebody is not confident and is always insecure, they will always try to pull you down, they'll always try to make sure you don't do anything, you don't advance, you don't, you don't, you don't. In my case after 5 years of subjugation, I just decided it was enough to walk out of my marriage (divorced).*

Most men don't like seeing their women progressing academically or becoming economically empowered, they feel threatened and intimidated. They can stand a woman who has a voice and agency and can make her own decision. As one participant put it:

*...if a woman gets married right after college men don't allow them to even get a master's degree they don't allow women to go and work anywhere. They become very restrictive marriage becomes a prison or place where your potential cannot be exploited just because you are a female. Women self-esteem goes down, you are not allowed to think or do anything, and you are not going anywhere. When a woman starts an investment, like packing lanolin he discourages you by saying it will not amount to anything. Normally, the men who do that are very insecure, inadequate and I don't know how you can change them. They subject women to a lot of domestic violence, a lot of abuse in it. So, it's not just like you are not being given permission. But you are also pulled down, including being told stuff- how ugly you are, even if you are as beautiful, told how you are fat even if you are just 50 kilos, and stuff like that. He makes sure he has control over you, until you start thinking he's the only person in the whole world who can love you because you are so ugly, useless and whatever. It actually gets to a point where women start believing their husband, and then they hang on in there because they have nowhere else to go. It happened to me, I felt submerged and I had to leave".*

From the foregoing, it is clear that only a small percentage of women in manufacturing have supportive men who are not intimidated or threatened by their success/ empowerment. Such women can transact business out there in the public sphere with confidence and backing from their husbands. However, a large percentage of women have varying challenges including travel restrictions and cannot travel without permission.

#### **4.9 Lack of exposure and mentorship**

Married women support their husbands in running the family-owned business. Some families include their children in manufacturing business operations, such women and children whether male or female are mentored to run the business and even to take over because they gain the relevant training and skills for the business on the job. This informal entry into manufacturing is seen in family-owned multi-generational firms. For such women and children, it is easier for them to move into administration and technical aspects of the manufacturing business. The lack of necessary education, exposure and technical skills limits women opportunities to participate in the manufacturing sector and results in most women falling within the sector's unskilled workforce.

#### **4.10 Gender and social norms related? regarding to STEM careers.**

Majority of respondents stated that manufacturing industry is a male dominated sector where people don't expect women to venture. This was affirmed by Angela (not her real name) who has worked for more than 10 years in the sector. She stated that manufacturing is purely technical and that there are very few women in the sector, which she attributed to low uptake of technical courses such as STEM and TVET by girls/women in schools, colleges and universities. Prevailing gender norms, patriarchal norms constrain women and girls from taking science and TVET courses in primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Moreover, STEM courses are considered masculinity and the perception is that STEM courses are hard, time consuming and expensive and therefore to be avoided by women/girls.

#### **4.11 Gender Stereotypes, myths and taboos (gender norms)**

Gender norms describe women and men's roles in the society. The society does not encourage girls to take up technical roles in manufacturing and such the few women who have ventured in this sector are often looked down upon, undergo character assassination and are belittled. Women in manufacturing, more than men, have to work extra hard to transcend restricting gender norms, to prove their ability, worth and avoid being ignored or treated with contempt by customers. One respondent during the FGD stated "*the community looks at women in manufacturing with astonishment and wonder how women in manufacturing maneuver around men and think it's impossible*".

Majority of women in the manufacturing sector experience conflict between job expectations, their work schedule, and family or community commitments. Gender stereotypes and perceptions still play a role in what type of roles women will be willing to take on, and this affects their choice of training or course undertaken, as well as the actual position applied for and accepted in manufacturing. Majority of them apply for human resource roles, cleaning and making tea as tea

girls. Additionally, triple gender roles (reproductive, productive, community roles) women play in society are challenging for women to participate fully in manufacturing. Balancing job requirements and household responsibilities can be complicated in manufacturing which is regarded as a disruptive career for family women.

#### **4.12 Personality change and character transformation for women in manufacturing**

Working in a male dominated sector and with majority men has necessitated these women to change their personality in order to fit in and to survive in manufacturing. This was affirmed by one participant who said that she has transformed from the emotional feminine person she was, to an emotional intelligent person who works with experts on a win-win situation instead of emotional battles and fights. A rare attribute the society expected women to have, as she explains:

*In as much as my mother looks at me as a success in everything that I do, she sometimes during our normal conversation tells me that I really approach issues like a man. Yes, I have changed, when you are working in such an environment. I work in it and changes you to become and sometimes act like men. So, there's a contribution that the environment can either transform you especially if you have accepted it as the environment that you're working in and you will come out as a better person.*

The notion of personality change was supported by another participant (Edith) who works in steel manufacturing industry who says:

*I can tell you, the first, first month it wasn't easy. How you even tell the people around you that you work in a steel industry? They look at you with open mouths, and ask did you lack better choices? But what makes one stand out, as the earlier participant has said, is believing in yourself, and in your expertise, and more so believe you are in the right place, believe in what you do and what you are capable of doing. And at some point, it hardens you. You have to be as hard as the men are, and be the strong person. I had to become rough and tough and wear a thick skin. Sometimes when I hold a discussion with my old friends, they are like is that you? They say they did not expect that from me. They actually tell me I have become a woman-man".*

Other constraints to women economic empowerment identified during the Nyeri WIM conference by the speakers and other participants include: limited knowledge about the initiatives available for operating the enterprises; inadequate knowledge on packaging products; limited knowledge on how to brand their products for different markets; high tariffs experienced when transporting the products from one county to another or through another which increases their prices thereby limiting market access; and high logistic costs when transporting their products to distance markets.

## **5.0 Conclusion and recommendations**

### **5.2 Conclusion**

The average number of employees from the sampled businesses was 15 employees, with an average asset value of about 8.9 million. Most of the businesses (79%) are located in urban or peri-urban settings in small towns (63%). Majority of the respondents reported that households own productive assets but only 21% of the respondents had land title deed. A significant number of women reported that they had limited control over household productive assets and could not make

exclusive decisions about business and household income. Focus group discussion established that society does not relate informal business as part of the manufacturing sector. The survey revealed that husband's dominance and control over women's personal resources and business life is a major problem that hinders business development among women. The second constraint that was identified is taxation. The enterprises are getting frustrated through heavy taxation, both at the county and at the national levels. Thirdly, women face challenges in meeting business registration requirements due to multiple stop shops. Fourth, enterprises fail to get necessary assistance from the institutions that are in charge. Fifth, land ownership is retained by majorly men and women are viewed as home care takers, which limits their engagement in various production activities.

Participation in the KAM/WIM program impacted on women's power, voice and agency to varying extents. The study noted the ambiguity in the correlation between the WIM program and women's access to and control over resources, and decision making at the household level, which, in part, could be related to the men's opinion that they are not prepared to handle the empowered woman at home.

The registration requirements including legal, regulatory, and compliance are not consolidated in a single place. This leads to inefficiency and increases the cost of doing business. Moreover, women are not sensitized on available opportunities to engage in the manufacturing sector. This sensitization is required in order to encourage growth of micro and small enterprises. Taxation featured as another key concern affecting the enterprises' performance. The women suggested the need to restructure the tax system, provide tax relief and review the Income Tax Act, so as to improve the productivity of the women owned enterprises. The issue of cross County taxation impacts negatively on the performance of women enterprises.

Women reported limited control over household productive assets and could not make exclusive decisions about business and household incomes. Spousal dominance and control over Women's personal, resources and business life is a major problem that hinders business development among women.

In summary, the constraints to economic empowerment of women in manufacturing include: limited access to credit; limited employment opportunities; high rate of taxation; limited access and control of productive resources; time management constraint; decision making; lack of freedom to travel and make decision; lack of exposure and mentorship; gender and social norms regarding to STEM careers; gender stereotypes, myths and taboos (gender norms); personality change and character transformation for women in manufacturing.

### **5.3 Policy Implications**

Government should:

1. sensitize women on the available opportunities for women engaged in the manufacturing sector to encourage growth of micro and small enterprises.
2. consolidate legal, regulatory, and compliance requirements in a single place to enhance efficiency and reduce the cost of doing business.

3. introduce tax incentives for women entrepreneurs in the manufacturing sector
4. deal with the issue of cross-county taxation in order to create a conducive environment for women-owned enterprises to thrive.
5. advocate for Women's control over household productive assets and participating in making of exclusive decisions about business and household incomes in order to avoid spousal dominance and control over Women's personal, resources and business life.
6. support education sector to ensure enrolment and retention of girls and women in STEM courses to enhance access to technology, marketing and management skills, training, and advisory services
7. involve men as champions and change agents in the intervention program design. Women cannot be empowered if we leave the men behind. And women therefore cannot be successful if the men are left behind.

KAM should:

1. reach out to their members to join the WIM program
2. assess and review the WIM program to target better voice and agency in household decision making.
3. engage a gender specialist to help co-create gender responsive programs using gender transformative approaches. Such that women will not only be empowered in terms of money and positions, but also power, voice and agency.

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