

**PROMOTING A PANDEMIC RECOVERY:
EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT MANAGING THE
GROWING DEBT CRISIS PROJECT**

**EFFECTS OF GENDER -
INEQUALITY DURING GLOBAL
HEALTH EMERGENCIES:
EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA**

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SUPPORT

ABOUT RED SUR

The South American Network on Applied Economics (Red Sudamericana de Economía Aplicada, Red Sur), is a policy-oriented research network integrated by public and private universities and centers of knowledge production in the region. It conducts research in the areas of economic development, productivity and innovation, natural resources, inclusive growth, employment, integration, trade and value chains.

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EFFECTS OF GENDER- INEQUALITY DURING GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES: EVIDENCE FROM NIGERIA

Working Paper of the Project “*Promoting a pandemic recovery: evidence to support managing the growing debt crisis*” (IDRC - Red Sur N° 109742-001)

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The project was led by Fernando Lorenzo (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas, CINVE/Red Sur). The academic direction of the project and the process of elaboration of this document was carried out by Red Sur Regional Technical Coordination team, composed of Andrés López (IIEP-UBA-CONICET/Red Sur), Ramiro Albrieu (Red Sur), Luis Miguel Galindo (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM) and Álvaro Ons (CINVE/Red Sur).

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The series of publications resulting from the project includes the following titles that are published as Red Sur Working Papers and Policy Briefs, available at www.redsudamericana.org:

Number	Title	Authors/Institution
Policy Brief No 1/2022	G20 Policy Brief Indonesia 2022. Policy Proposals for External Debt Management and Sustainability in Developing and Low-Income Countries TF7 - International Finance and Economic Recovery	Fernando Lorenzo (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas), Luis Miguel Galindo (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Ramiro Albrieu (CIPPEC), Dionisio Borda (Centro de Análisis y Difusión de la Economía Paraguaya), Paul Lakuma (Economic Policy Research Centre), Mma Amara Ekeruche, Alemayehu Geda (Addis Ababa University), and Arjan de Haan (IDRC)
Policy Brief No 2/2023	LAC Policy Brief “Results and Policy Implications in Latin America”	Miguel Galindo (UNAM), Fernando Lorenzo (CINVE/Red Sur) and Ramiro Albrieu (Red Sur)
Policy Brief No 3/2023	Construyendo un futuro sostenible en el Sur Global	Ramiro Albrieu (Red Sur)
Policy Brief No 4/2023	Policy Brief I - Ethiopia: Profile of Ethiopian Debt and its Institutional Challenges: An Exploratory Analysis	Getnet Alemu and Alemayehu Geda (Addis Ababa University/AAU)
Policy Brief No 5/2023	Policy Brief II - Ethiopia: Fundamental and Proximate Drivers of Public Debt in Ethiopia (1980-2023)	Alemayehu Geda and Addis Yimer (Addis Ababa University/AAU)
Policy Brief No 6/2023	Policy Brief III - Ethiopia: A Two-Edged Sword: The Impact of Public Debt on Economic Growth—The Case of Ethiopia	Addis Yimer and Alemayehu Geda (Addis Ababa University/AAU)
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Working Paper No 5/2023	Estudio País: Construyendo un Futuro Sostenible en Bolivia (in Spanish)	Omar Velasco, Wilson Jiménez, Josué Cortez and Diego Peñaranda (Fundación ARU)

Number	Title	Authors/Institution
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Working Paper No 9/2023	Debt for Climate and Development Swaps in Nigeria	Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA)
Working Paper No 10/2023	Determining the Optimal Carbon Pricing for Nigeria	Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA)
Working Paper No 11/2023	Sustainable, Inclusive and Environmentally Responsive Debt in Uganda: Implication of COVID 19	Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)
Working Paper No 12/2023	Profile of Ethiopian Debt and Its Institutional Challenges: An Exploratory Analysis	Getnet Alemu and Alemayehu Geda (Addis Ababa University/AAU)
Working Paper No 13/2023	Fundamental and Proximate Drivers of Public Debt in Ethiopia	Alemayehu Geda and Addis Yimer (Addis Ababa University/AAU)
Working Paper No 14/2023	A Two-Edged Sword: The Impact of Public Debt on Economic Growth: The Case of Ethiopia	Addis Yimer, African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) and Department of Economics Addis Ababa University (AAU) and Alemayehu Geda, Addis Ababa University (AAU)

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INTRODUCTION

Global crises including pandemics, climate change, and debt crisis are having a disproportionate impact on women relative to their male counterparts (Blanton, Blanton, & Peksen, 2019; Bateman & Ross, 2020; Sultana, 2021). Due to the roles women play in the economy, society and politics, they remain more susceptible to negative impacts when disruptions to business as usual occur. For instance, where there are restrictions to movement, women are more prone to experiencing job losses or reduced working hours, as they are overrepresented in sectors such as tourism and hospitality as well as the informal sector which require face-to-face interaction. In addition, women are more likely to be responsible for additional burdens in childcare, education, elder or family care, and domestic work further limiting their ability to participate in the labour economy altogether.

In particular, when global health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic occur, women are relatively more impacted. Women are at the fore front of health emergencies, facing greater risks and challenges, as they make up about 70 percent of the global health and social workforce (WHO, 2022). Aside a large number of women working in emergencies, there remains a significant lack of sex-disaggregated data during health emergencies which makes it difficult to assess how the incidence of the crisis differs between men and women. Furthermore, evidence has shown that there are unintended consequences of public health lockdowns, including increased gender-based violence and limitations on access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) among women. Therefore, it is imperative that health emergencies' responses are gender sensitive; decision-making processes are gender inclusive; and policies and programmes are gender mainstreamed.

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the micro- and macro-effects of gender inequality on economic development as well as to identify the extent to which women and women's issues are underrepresented in macroeconomic policy development, decision- making and implementation in Nigeria. With government's limited fiscal space and rising debt level in Nigeria, it is important to understand how the government responded during the COVID-19 pandemic and understand appropriate measures to minimise the impact of future health emergencies on women. As a result, the paper compares Nigeria's policy responses to success stories in Africa - Mauritius and Rwanda - countries that have recorded achievements in addressing gender-related inequalities in the aftermath of the pandemic. The findings show that while Nigeria has made some strides in addressing gender-based violence and providing economic support but not much progress has been made in the areas of provision of education services and health care.

The findings can be grouped into three. First, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected women across several dimensions including unemployment, education, health and nutrition, childcare and gender-based violence. Women are overrepresented in sectors that are more susceptible to the pandemic's impact such as accommodation and food services (89 percent), trade (65 percent), human health and social services (61 percent), and education (50 percent) leading to high unemployment among women. These sectors, except for human health and social services, have experienced an output contraction of higher than 10 percent in Nigeria. On schooling, students in non-compulsory school age had lower return rate and females were the least reported to return to schools, resulting in an increase in the number of out-of-school children that are female. On health, the decline in the demand for and supply of non-COVID-19 related health care led to a reduction in non-essential services for women such as antenatal care, family planning, and other critical healthcare services. In Nigeria, Gender-based violence (GBV) also increased due to perceived failure of social infrastructure, close contact with the opposite gender, and economic dependence (WARDC, 2020).

Second, the study shows that gender inequality had a significant and negative effect on economic growth. The study employed a macro-level analysis, which entailed regressing the gender inequality index on real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, which was then used to estimate output and revenue loss associated with persistent gender inequality. Third, the study shows that gender inequality contributes to a shortfall of 36.25 percent of Nigeria's real GDP per capita. Based on the output loss of 36.25 percent associated with the current level of gender inequality in Nigeria, the model simulates what the growth rate would have been if gender parity was in place in Nigeria. Under gender parity, Nigeria's growth in 2020 would have declined by 1.14 percent rather than 1.8 percent. With the projection, Nigeria would have grown by 3.6 percent in 2023 under a gender-neutral scenario and 3.4 percent in 2024 rather than around 2.5 percent. Further simulations show that the revenue projection of 7.4 percent of GDP for 2020 could be much higher at 8.6 percent of GDP under the assumption of gender parity.

The negative micro- and macro-effects of the pandemic are due to the fact that Nigeria's policies, institutions and law-making apparatus fall short of addressing gender equity concerns. One of the significant gaps in Nigeria's gender policies and laws is the lack of implementation. In addition, Nigeria has a patriarchal culture that limits the role and status of women in society. Many of these cultural practices such as child marriage, limited educational opportunities, female genital mutilation, limited property rights and gender-based violence are discriminatory and harmful to women. Nigerian women still face significant barriers to accessing economic opportunities, including limited access to credit, property rights, and formal employment. In Nigeria, women represent 6 percent of parliament positions and 10 percent of ministerial positions as of 2021 (Ette and AkpanObong, 2022). The data suggests that women are still very much underrepresented in political leadership positions and as such, the political representation of women in decision-making positions remains very low (Ette and AkpanObong, 2022).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 delineates the research design adopted throughout the study. While section 3 presents the micro-effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on key variables including unemployment, education, health services, and gender-based violence, section 4 examines the impact of gender inequality on the macroeconomy and in particular, economic growth and government revenue. Section 5 discusses Nigeria's policies, institutions and laws on gender. Section 6 assesses how well Nigeria has performed relative to top performing countries in Africa. Section 7 offers recommendations to improve outcomes in Nigeria, while section 8 draws a conclusion and comments on further research.

I. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employs an innovative research framework to document and investigate the micro-impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in Nigeria, the macro-effect of having a gender unequal society on government revenue and economic growth, and whether the Nigerian government revised policies to safeguard the interests of women during and after the pandemic. The research design comprises three complementary elements: desk research, interviews, and quantitative analysis or model. Hence, the desk research and quantitative method deployed in the study alongside the interviews support the development of a detailed and comprehensive case study for Nigeria

Desk research and comparative analysis

For this study, the approach to desk research entails reviewing government gender-related policies prior to the pandemic and those introduced during the pandemic, as well as synthesising evidence from literature on how the pandemic affected women. The study also adopts a comparative approach to examine how leading gender-equal countries across the world responded to the pandemic.

The review of government policies is aimed at understanding whether or not existing policies were effective in protecting women's rights during the pandemic, as well as understanding how the pandemic led to emergence of new policies and improved the state of gender equality in the society. The synthesis of this research focused on five areas: labour market (unemployment), education, health/nutrition, childcare, and (GBV) for three reasons. First, the labour market and education help in understanding how the educational sector and job market reacted to the pandemic, which in turn would determine the extent of access to economic opportunities both in the short-term and in the long (UN Women, 2020). Nutrition and education are strong predictors of human capital development, and unequal access to these resources might prolong the impact of the pandemic on an individual (FAO, 2020; Zucker, 2021). GBV helps in deepening our understanding of how vulnerable the females could be during periods of economic downturns (UN Women, 2020). Vaccine hesitancy and uptake were excluded because they are extensively studied in other studies such as Wenham, et al. (2020) and Flor et al. (2022).

In addition, by documenting lessons from best performing countries in Africa with regards to women-related issues, the study highlights areas for improvement in the event that a health emergency or other global crises occurs. Two countries (Rwanda and Mauritius) were selected as comparators to examine how policies and institutions can protect women's interests during future health emergencies, considering the high probability of similar events occurring in the next century (Marani et al., 2021). With this desk research approach, the study offers insights on how to bridge gender gaps in policy design and implementation in the face of epidemic/pandemic.

Interviews

A cross sample of civil society working on gender issues were interviewed to deepen our understanding of what happened during the pandemic, as well as areas for change to ensure improved and prompt policy response in the future. The selection of these CSOs was based on a purposive and targeted stakeholder selection strategy that aimed to identify and interview study participants within the Nigerian gender CSO community who are available and willing to participate in the study. The strategy entails identification of CSOs playing an active role in influencing gender friendly policies in Nigeria.

For the study, four civil society organisations (CSOs) were interviewed, and the discussion complemented evidence from the desk research as well as the quantitative research framework or modelling. Our perspective is that CSOs are pressure groups and as such, are knowledgeable about the government's successes and missed opportunities in utilising the pandemic to bridge the gender gap in Nigeria. Pressure groups are a team of individuals that come together under a common goal to influence public policy.

Additionally, the selected participants are representatives in the gender space giving their significant interest and stake in gender issues in Nigeria. Hence, the findings from these CSOs' interviews can provide valuable insights into the government's response to the pandemic and its impact on gender issues in Nigeria. While it is important to acknowledge that the survey's findings may not necessarily be generalizable to the entire Nigerian gender CSO community, the utilisation of a purposive sample allowed for a more in-depth understanding. Despite this limitation, the findings still offer valuable insights into the government's response and can contribute to informing policies and practices aimed at

addressing gender inequality in Nigeria.

Quantitative research

A two step-approach was undertaken. The first step entails estimating the impact of gender inequality on GDP per capita. The second step entails computing how much GDP and government revenue losses are associated with gender inequality with a focus on the pandemic period.

In the first step, the impact of gender inequality on GDP per capita was established. Based on the moderate changes recorded in the measure of gender inequality index (GII), the study utilised data for 48 African countries averaged over the period of 2000 and 2021. The result obtained was then extrapolated to indicate how gender inequalities affect the Nigerian economy.

The existence of reverse causality from economic development on gender inequality (Ferrant and Kolev, 2016) and the cross-sectional nature of the data employed in the study, indicates that the ordinary least square estimation approach is inappropriate. However, a two-stage instrumental least square (2SLS) addresses the endogeneity issue and was employed. The cross-sectional nature of the data employed makes 2SLS more appropriate than Generalised Methods of Moment (GMM) and dynamic Ordinary Least Square (DOLS) which are mostly used for panel data or in the case of time series.

Following Dollar and Gatti (1999) and Ferrant and Kolev (2016), three instruments were used – the Year of ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Civil Liberty (CL), and Religious Fractionalisation (Religious). These instruments are assumed to have a relationship with gender inequality but are uncorrelated with economic growth. A country that has ratified CEDAW is expected to implement conscious effects towards gender equality (Ferrant and Kolev, 2016). CL measures the extent to which citizens can exercise their freedoms of expression, assembly, association and religion. Hence, a society with high civil liberties is likely to have high low gender inequality (Dollar and Gatti, 1999). In addition, Dollar and Gatti (1999) show that religion is highly correlated with inequality, as some religions are willing to pay the high cost associated with gender inequality. Accordingly, societies with high religious fractionality are more likely to favour gender equality. Consequently, the first stage equation is specified as follows:

$$\text{First stage equation: } \text{GII} = f(\text{CEDAW, Civil liberty, and religious}) \quad (1)$$

The purpose of the first stage equation is to obtain unique values of GII that are less likely to be sensitive to changes in the dependent variable - GDP per capita; thereby addressing the endogeneity issue. The main regression equation is specified in Eqn. 2. In addition to the main independent variable - gender inequality index (GII), five additional determinants of growth were included in the model as control variables, although in a stepwise approach. The use of control variables helps in ensuring that the results obtained are accurate. The control variables are trade openness, education, physical capital and landlocked status. The model is described as follows:

$$\text{Second stage equation: } \text{GDPPC} = f(\text{GII, TO, Edu, PC, Landlocked}) \quad (2)$$

The study employed four explanatory variables for economic growth: human capital (Edu), Physical capital (PC), trade openness (TO), and landlocked. These factors were selected based on evidence from cross-country growth literature (Barro, 1991; Barro, 2005). The first variable is trade openness. An economy that is open to trade records a higher rate of economic growth due to economies of scale associated with trade (Frankel and Romer, 1999). Hence, trade openness is associated with high economic growth.

Human capital is fundamental in economic development (Krueger and Lindahl, 2001) and it is the second control variable. Following Barro (1991), human capital was measured using the average years of schooling of people above 25 years. Higher human capital is associated with innovation and creativity, which in turn leads to increased productivity and output. Physical capital measures the stock of physical capital in an economy. Availability of infrastructure increases efficiency, which in turn, promotes economic growth (Barro, 2003). Being a landlocked country is expected to undermine economic growth through the high cost of transportation associated with trade (Collier, 2007).

In the second step, output loss associated with gender inequality is computed. This is computed by

estimating what the output level ought to be assuming gender neutrality. Gender neutrality means that male and females have equal rights and the score of GII equals zero (0). This indicates that gender neutrality is equal to the situation where gender inequality is omitted from the model. Output loss is, therefore, computed using the coefficients derived from the estimation of equation 2 with and without the gender inequality index. The difference is regarded as the cost of gender inequality, which is then used to simulate loss in GDP growth and government revenue.

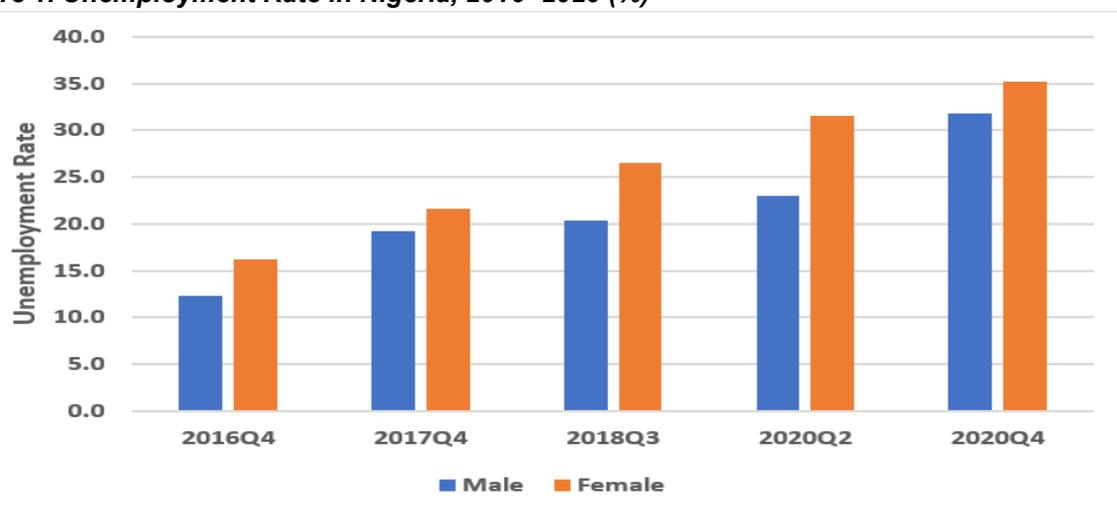
II. MICRO-EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN IN NIGERIA

This section of the study seeks to understand how the pandemic affected women in Nigeria, a country with over 200 million people, half of whom are female (World Bank, 2021). The section focuses on four areas: employment, education, health and nutrition, and childcare. The evidence in this section relies heavily on publicly available data and published studies.

Unemployment

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the global economy, and Nigeria has not been exempted. The pandemic resulted in an increase in the unemployment rate of both males and females. As of Q4 2020, the unemployment rate among females is 35.2 percent and it is 3.4 percentage points higher than male unemployment rate 31.8 percent (see Figure 1). Female unemployment rate in Nigeria rose from 16.3 percent in Q4 2016 to 35.2 percent in Q4 2020 representing an increase in unemployment rate by 18.5 percentage points, while the male unemployment rate increased from 12.3 percent to 31.8 percent, indicating an increase of 19.5 percentage points. The high unemployment rate among females indicates that the pandemic worsened women’s labour market condition.

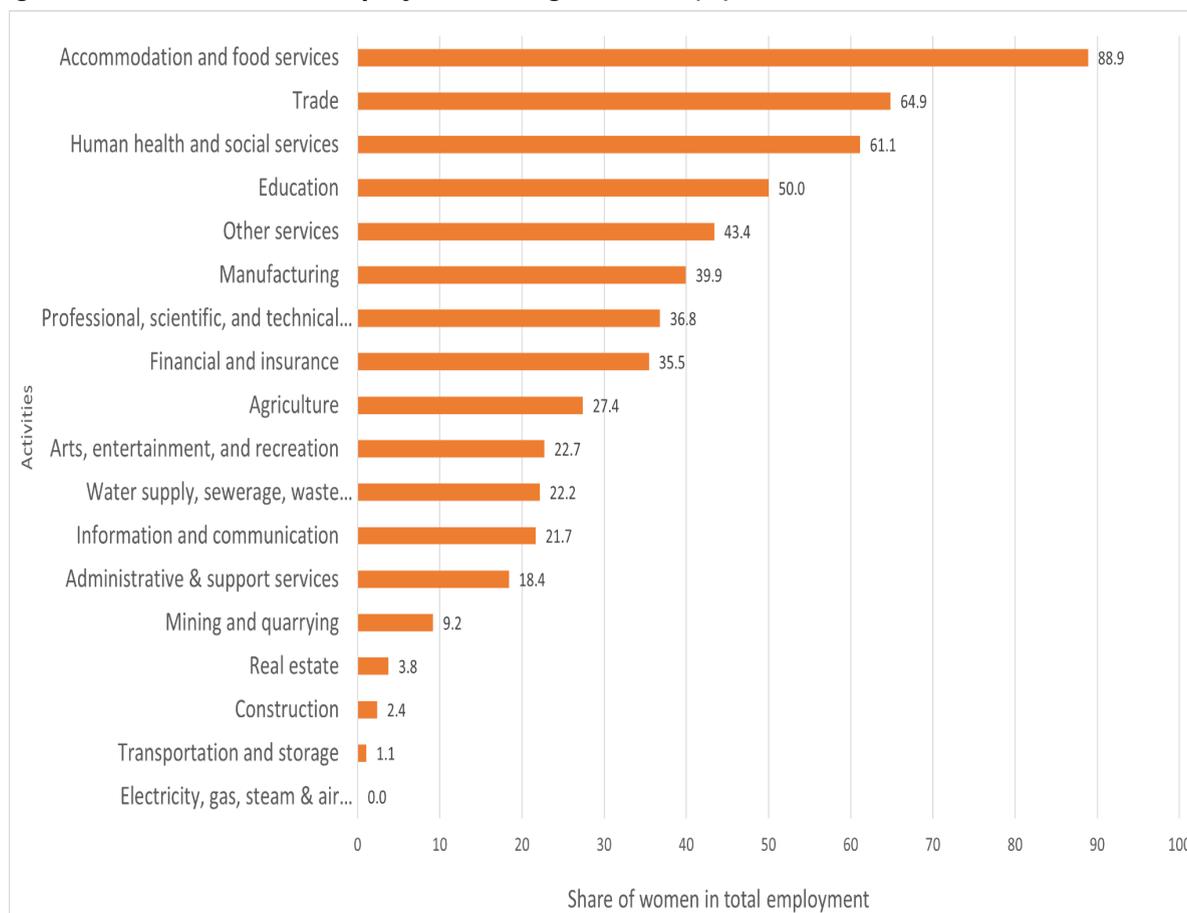
Figure 1. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria, 2016 -2020 (%)



Sources: National Bureau of Statistics, (2016, 2017, & 2020).

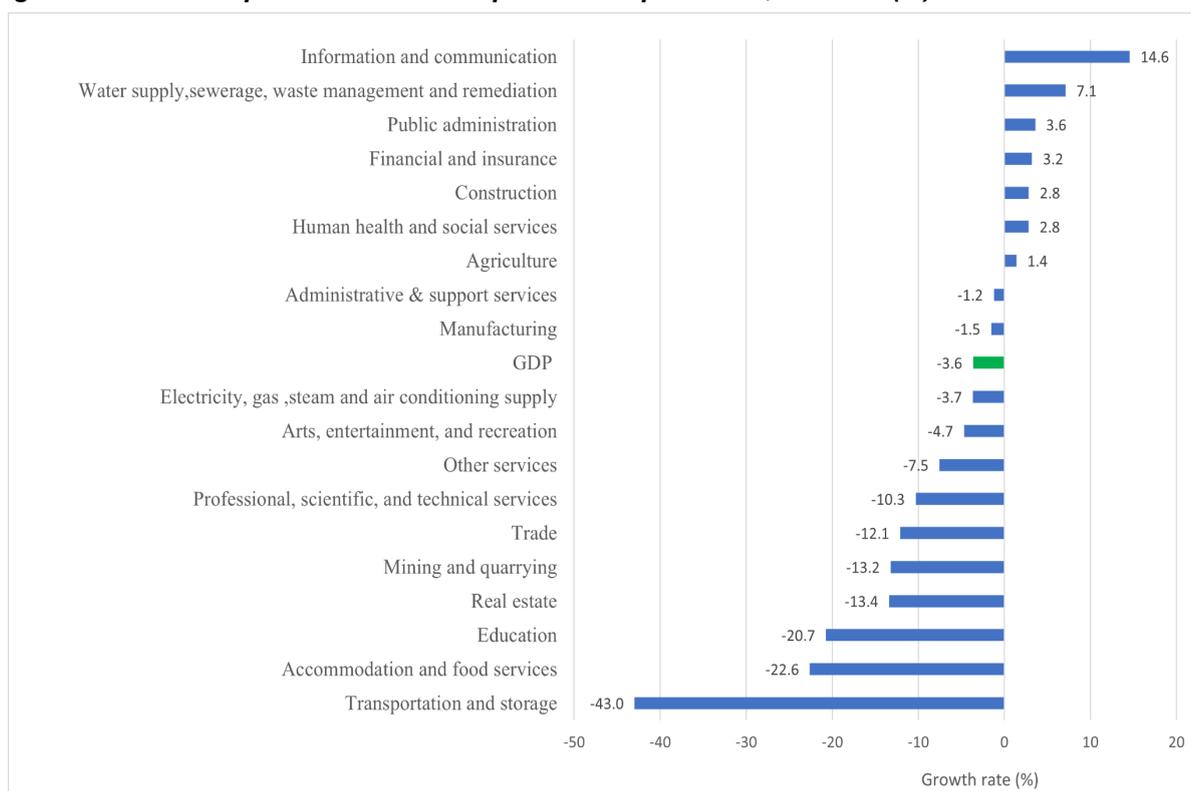
The lockdowns and restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of many businesses and loss of jobs, especially in sectors such as hospitality, tourism, and retail trade, where women make up a significant portion of the workforce. According to the 2017 employment data, more than half of the employees in accommodation and food services (89 percent), trade (65 percent), human health and social services (61 percent), and education (50 percent) are women (see Figure 2). Apart from human health and social services, the remaining sectors experienced output contraction of higher than 10 percent (see Figure 3). Hence, the high unemployment rate among women is largely because the sectors the women are mostly engaged in are the most affected by the pandemic (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi, & Adekoya, 2022). For male, the rise in unemployment is due to the contraction in real estate and mining/quarrying sectors, which are male dominated.

Figure 2. Share of women employment in Nigeria, 2017 (%)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2017)

Figure 3. Economic performance at the peak of the pandemic, 2020 Q3 (%)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2020)

The informal sector has been a critical source of employment for many women in developing countries (UN, 2020a) including Nigeria and mostly work as traders, artisans, and other informal occupations. The imposed lockdown measures affected the ability of many women who work in the informal sector from carrying out their businesses and this led to a loss of income and jobs (Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center, 2020; United Nations, 2020). The findings from conducted interviews align with this evidence, indicating that the policies implemented during the pandemic had a negative impact on the informal sector, resulting in challenges in meeting their economic requirements.¹ For instance, many market women who sell foodstuffs, clothing, and other essential items were forced to close their businesses due to the restrictions on movement and social gatherings (Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center, 2020). Also, artisans who rely on customer visits to carry out their work were also affected, as many people were reluctant to have them come into their homes due to the fear of contracting the virus (Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center, 2020).

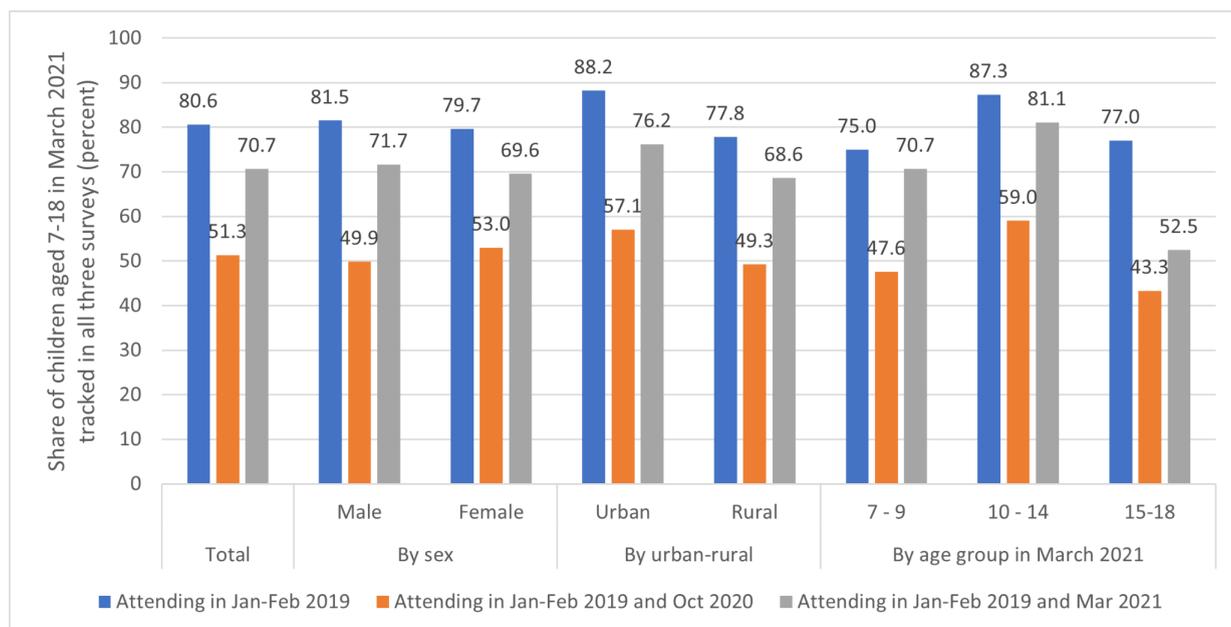
Income and job losses for women in the informal sector had an extended impact on their households and the economy in general. In Nigeria, the average household size is 5, suggesting that women are responsible for the upkeep of about 4 individuals within the household (NBS and UNICEF, 2022). Many of these women are breadwinners in their families, and the loss of income meant that they could not provide for their basic needs (UN Women, 2020). This led to increased poverty and vulnerability for many households in Nigeria. Furthermore, the pandemic worsened existing gender inequalities in Nigeria. Before the pandemic, women in Nigeria already faced a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and elderly relatives (International Labour Organization, 2018). This work is often essential for maintaining households but it is generally undervalued and unrecognised. Women in Nigeria often perform this work in addition to their paid work, making it difficult for them to balance their responsibilities and pursue their own goals and ambitions. Additionally, many women have had to reduce their working hours or leave their jobs altogether to focus on caregiving. This has further led to a reduction in economic output (Akanji et al, 2022).

¹ Interview with GREENCODE (2023)

Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on education in Nigeria. With the closure of schools to prevent the spread of the virus, students were forced to discontinue their education. According to UNESCO statistics, the national school closures in March 2020 affected millions of students across primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Young & Aref-Adib, 2020). Consequently, when schools were reopened in October 2020, as shown in Figure 4, Nigerian students in non-compulsory school age had lower return rate and females were the least reported to return to schools, resulting in an increase in the number of out-of-school children that are female (Dessy et al. 2021). The only other group that had a return rate lower than females are those living in the rural areas.

Figure 4. Enrolment in school by gender, location and age, 2019-2021 (%)



Source: Jonathan Lain and Tara Vishwanath (2022) COVID-19 and Nigeria's human capital crisis. Brookings Institute, Future Development

As businesses closed and jobs were lost, many families struggled to afford school fees and other educational expenses. This is particularly challenging for students from low-income backgrounds who may already be struggling to subsist. As a result of these financial challenges, students, especially the female ones, are forced to early marriage as a route out of poverty. This not only limits their educational opportunities but also has long-term consequences for their career prospects and economic mobility as well as macroeconomic output (Zucker, 2021).

Adult women in school had competing priorities during the pandemic. The closure of schools further compounded issues around women's work-life balance. This situation was particularly challenging for women who were already balancing between work and family responsibilities before the pandemic (Olibamoyo et al, 2020). For these women, the closure of schools, with the shift towards remote schooling, added to their burden as it made it harder for them to balance their multiple roles and responsibilities. With children and elderly family members at home, many women have been forced to take on additional domestic responsibilities (CARE International, 2020), leaving them with limited time and energy to focus on their career including education.

The pandemic put women at a disadvantage career-wise. With increased family responsibility, career becomes secondary for women and caregiving takes a significant share of their time. As a result, women may find themselves stuck in low-paying jobs or unable to re-enter the workforce later (Zucker, 2021). This further worsened the negative impact on their future financial security and overall well-being considering that evidence has shown that education is correlated to future earnings.

Health and nutrition

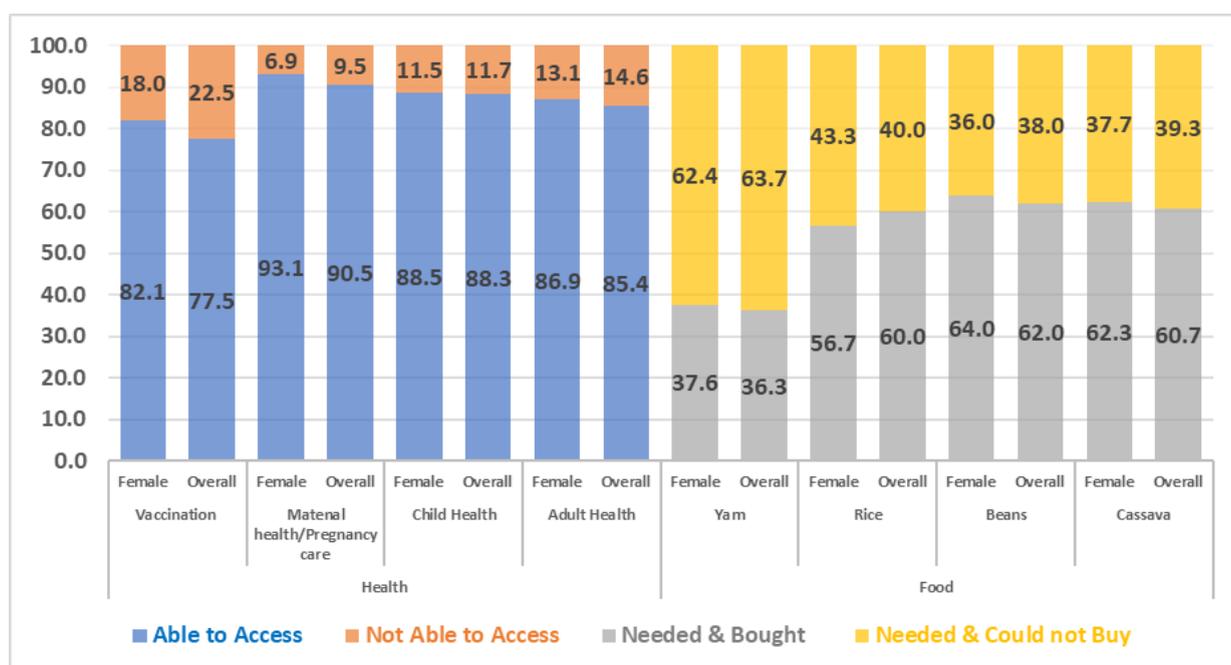
The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the health and nutrition of women in Nigeria. The impact included limited access to healthcare, disrupted food supply chains, and increased malnutrition (UN, 2020b).

One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic on women's health was reduced access to healthcare services. The lockdown measures introduced to slow the spread of the virus led to a reduction in non-essential services. For instance, CARE International (2020) conducted a study based on 201 family planning visits which revealed that the use of contraception among adolescent girls dropped by 66 percent from January to May 2020, while adult women experienced a decline of 46 percent. Essentially, the pandemic created disruptions to both the demand and supply sides of essential health services (EHS) in Nigeria.

On the demand side, fear and stigma associated with visiting hospitals or health care centres led to a decrease in demand for non-COVID-19 related health services, and physical barriers such as lockdowns and movement restrictions made it difficult for people to access health care (Edem, et al., 2021; Balogun, 2021; and Ahmed et al., 2020). Additionally, the limited decision-making ability of women within their households acted as a barrier to their access to services. In certain cases, women were required to acquire consent from their husbands before leaving their homes for non-emergency healthcare, and a few were even penalised for neglecting to seek permission (Pierce, 2020).

On the supply side, diagnostic and treatment centres reduced services and faced shortages of medicines and supplies. Health workforce constraints posed a major challenge, with staff shortages and increased infection rates among health workers (Adewole, 2020 and Ahmed et al., 2020). Additionally, poor supply chain management and limited ability to import goods have resulted in shortages of essential drugs and commodities (David and Adebisi, 2020). These trends made it difficult for women to access essential services such as antenatal care, family planning, and other critical healthcare services. Pregnant women were particularly affected by reduced access to healthcare services (Adelekan et al, 2021). Figure 5 provides information about access to food and healthcare by female household heads as well as the national average. Furthermore, women are willing to be vaccinated at a higher rate than men (82 percent for women relative to 78 percent overall). However, girls (89 percent) and women (87 percent) had lower access to health care relative to the national average.

Figure 5. Access to food and healthcare services during the pandemic, 2020-2021 (%)



Source: COVID-19 National Longitudinal Phone Survey Round 1, 2020-2021

Another major consequence of the pandemic has been the disruption of food supply chains, leading to food shortages and higher food prices. This has had a particularly significant impact on women's ability

to access nutritious foods, especially in rural areas. This disruption led to increased malnutrition among women and children in Nigeria. Malnutrition is a serious public health issue in Nigeria, with high rates of stunted growth and underweight children (NBS, 2018). The pandemic made the situation worse, creating disruption in food supplies and putting more women and children at risk of malnutrition. As shown in figure 5, on average, 45 percent of women could not purchase staple food products such as yam, rice, beans and cassava due to their unavailability. For rice, less women (57 percent) had access to purchase it relative to the overall average (60 percent).

Childcare

The provision of childcare is a factor that distinguishes working mothers from single women or their male counterparts. It is established in the literature that motherhood comes with career costs when working conditions are not conducive to working parents (Health, 2017). The pandemic reopened the conversation about the role of females, especially working mothers, as it pertains to childcare (Carli, 2020). At the peak of the pandemic, schools were shut down disrupting in-person teaching, which was later replaced with virtual learning (Azubuike, et al., 2021).

With the closure of schools and day care facilities due to the pandemic, many women in Nigeria had to take on even more caregiving responsibilities. According to a July 2020 survey conducted by the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center, which involved 5,813 women from nine states and the Federal Capital Territory, 60 percent of women were "fully engaged" in childcare. However, men did not share the burden of care work and prioritised returning to paid work (Unaegbu et al., 2020). Given the increased levels of care work, it was even more challenging for women to work outside the home, as they had to balance their caregiving duties with their paid work or find ways to earn income from home.

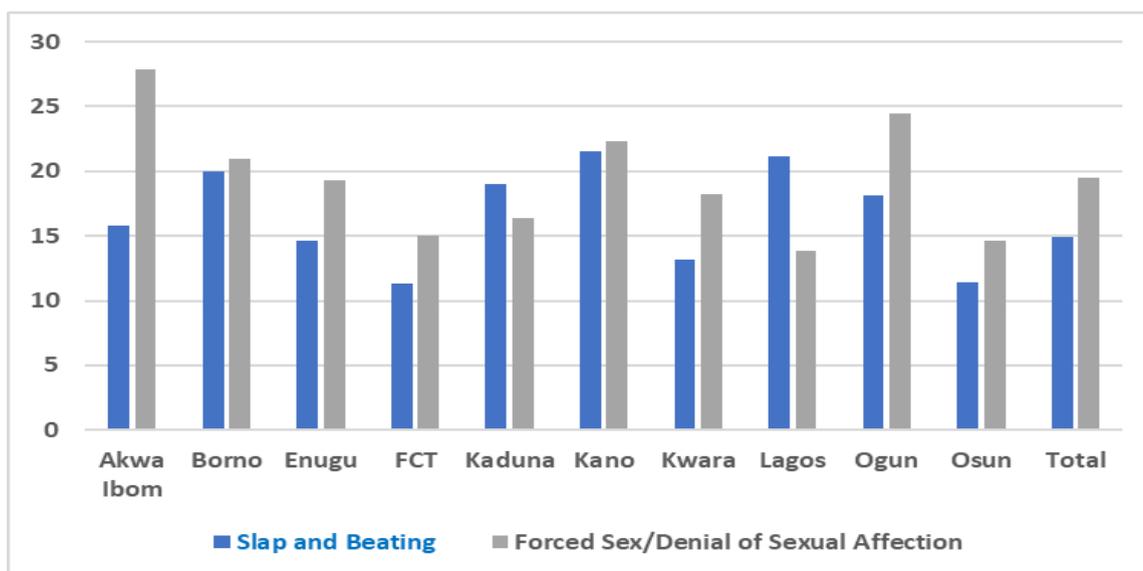
Gender based violence

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Nigeria significantly impacted gender-based violence (GBV), particularly against women. The government's implementation of lockdowns and restrictions aimed at controlling the spread of the virus resulted in a surge of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of GBV. Before the pandemic, it was reported that approximately 30 percent of women aged between 14 and 49 years had experienced sexual abuse in Nigeria (UN Women, 2020). However, the pandemic amplified the magnitude of GBV due to various factors, such as the perceived failure of social infrastructure, close contact with the opposite gender, and economic dependence (Mittal & Tushar, 2020). This implies that the financial struggles of women during the pandemic have disadvantaged them in their intimate relationships, leading to increased gender-based violence.

According to a United Nations (UN) report, there was a significant increase in reported cases of gender-based violence in Nigeria around the peak of the lockdown (March and April 2020). The number of reported cases doubled from 346 in March 2020 to 794 in April 2020 (UN, 2020b). Responses from our interviews show that women were affected in terms of loss of economic livelihood which translated to increased economic dependence on partners. Furthermore, the ban on large gatherings led to an increase in GBV as women were forced to stay at home with abusive partners and family members. Most organisations that participated in our interviews confirmed that having excessive close contact with partners worsened the occurrence of GBV. For instance, one of the organisations mentioned that many women live with abusive partners and use work as a means of escape².

Figure 6. Physical Abuse in Nigeria During COVID-19 Period, 2020 (%)

² Interview with Cedar Seed Foundation (2023)



Source: Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre, 2020

The Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC, 2020) conducted a study on the prevalence of physical and emotional abuse among women in Nigeria. The study included questions on the frequency of physical and emotional abuse, with responses ranging from always, occasional, or never. Respondents who reported experiencing abuse always or occasionally were grouped together, as illustrated in Figure 6. The findings suggest that the close proximity between both sexes during the pandemic exposed women to forced sexual acts more frequently, contributing to the increased incidence of rape particularly in Akwa Ibom, Ogun, Kano, and Borno states. Similarly, other forms of physical violence such as slapping and beating were prevalent in Kano, Lagos, Borno, and Kaduna states. In an interview, a participant stated that the pandemic had resulted in girls and women being raped and ejected from their homes, with little recourse to the proper authorities.^{3 4}

Another major challenge faced by women in Nigeria during the pandemic was the lack of access to justice and support services (Ogundipe, 2021). Many courts and police stations were closed during the lockdowns, making it challenging for women to report incidents of GBV or access legal assistance. In addition, the limited availability of support services such as counselling, and medical care made it difficult for women to obtain the assistance they required (Balogun, Banke-Thomas, Gwacham-Anisiobi, Yesufu, Ubani, & Afolabi, 2022).

III. IMPACT OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON THE MACROECONOMY

This section addresses two questions: (i) what is the impact of gender inequality on economic growth? and (ii) how has the pandemic amplified the effect of gender inequalities on economic growth and government revenue in Nigeria? These questions help in contextualising the importance of gender-related policies and action in fostering economic growth and development in Nigeria, especially during disruptive events such as the COVID- 19 pandemic.

Following the first question, in the study, a two-stage least squares (2SLS) model was used. For the estimation, the dependent variable is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, and the main

³ Interview with GREENCODE (2023)

⁴ Interview with Cedar Seed Foundation (2023)

independent variable is gender inequality.⁵ The results are presented in Table 1⁶. The results show that gender inequality has a significant and negative effect on economic growth. Specifically, a positive (negative) change in the measure of gender inequality results in an increase (decrease) in GDP per capita by 0.06 percent, on average. In other words, African countries experienced lower GDP per capita due to the existence of gender inequality. The findings are consistent with the evidence in Dollar and Gatti (1999) and Ferrant and Kolev (2016) that gender inequality contributes to lower economic growth, given that the potential of about half of the population is not optimised for national development. In other words, the existence of gender inequalities undermines the rate of economic growth.

In addition, the results show trade openness has a positive effect on GDP and is consistent with the evidence in Frankel and Romer (1999). When landlock and investment are controlled for, the effect becomes statistically significant at 10%. An increase in trade openness is expected to result in an approximately 0.4 percent increase in GDP per capita. The results indicate that African countries that are more open to external markets have a higher level of per capita income. Knowledge transfer and economic specialisation are main channels trade openness fosters economic growth (Zahonogo, 2016; Almeida and Fernandes, 2008). Another control variable is year of schooling, as a proxy for human capital. The results show that an additional year of schooling results in an increase in GDP per capita by 0.2 and the effect is statistically significant at 5%. The results are consistent with the growth literature on human capital on the role of education in boosting productivity and innovation (Barro, 1991; Barro and Lee, 2013).

Another control variable employed in the study is physical capital. Physical capital measures the stock of capital in an economy. As shown in Table 1, physical capital has a positive and significant effect on GDP. A change in physical capital is associated with an increase in GDP per capita by about 0.2 percent. The result is consistent with the evidence in Barro (2003) and deron and Serven (2010) about the increasing effect of extra investment in infrastructure. In other words, African countries with higher levels of investment in physical infrastructure are more likely to experience rapid economic growth and development. Landlock status has a negative and significant effect on economic growth. This is consistent with the evidence in Mackellar et al. (2000) and Faye et al. (2004) about the adverse effect of landlock on trade through distance from coast and transportation costs. Furthermore, the results show that changes in the control variables do not significantly alter the conclusion arrived at in column 1; specifically, the negative impact of gender inequality on economic growth.

The magnitude of the output loss associated with gender inequalities was obtained using the parameters in column 1 of Table 1 by computing output level with the inclusion of gender inequality as well as without gender inequality variable. The computation shows gender inequality contributes to a shortfall in Nigeria's economic growth by about a quarter⁷. In other words, the income level would have been higher by about a quarter if Nigeria operates under gender neutrality.

Table 1. Effect of gender inequality on GDP per capita

	(1)	(2)	(3)
GII	-0.055*	-0.055*	-0.029

⁵ In the methodology section, further information is provided about the variables and the estimation technique adopted, as well as other control variables employed in the study.

⁶ Only the second stage results were reported.

⁷ Without gender inequality variable, lnGDPPC is 10.39 whereas it is 6.63 when gender inequality is included in the model resulting in a gender gap of 3.77, which is about 36.25 percent of 10.39.

	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.027)
Trade openness	0.375 (0.328)	0.562* (0.306)	0.509* (0.286)
Year of schooling	0.169*** (0.059)	0.126*** (0.044)	0.198*** (0.054)
Physical capital		0.175*** (0.061)	
Landlocked			-0.390** (0.181)
Constant	7.896*** (2.733)	5.346*** (3.124)	2.381** (2.381)
Observations	37	36	37
R-squared	0.646	0.657	0.706

*Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses; *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$; Dependent variable: GDPPC; Source: Authors' computation*

Assuming parity

Based on the estimates presented in Table 1, the model shows the extent to which gender inequality contributed to the economic shock associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. For this subsection, IMF World Economic Outlook for 2019, 2020, and 2021 were employed.

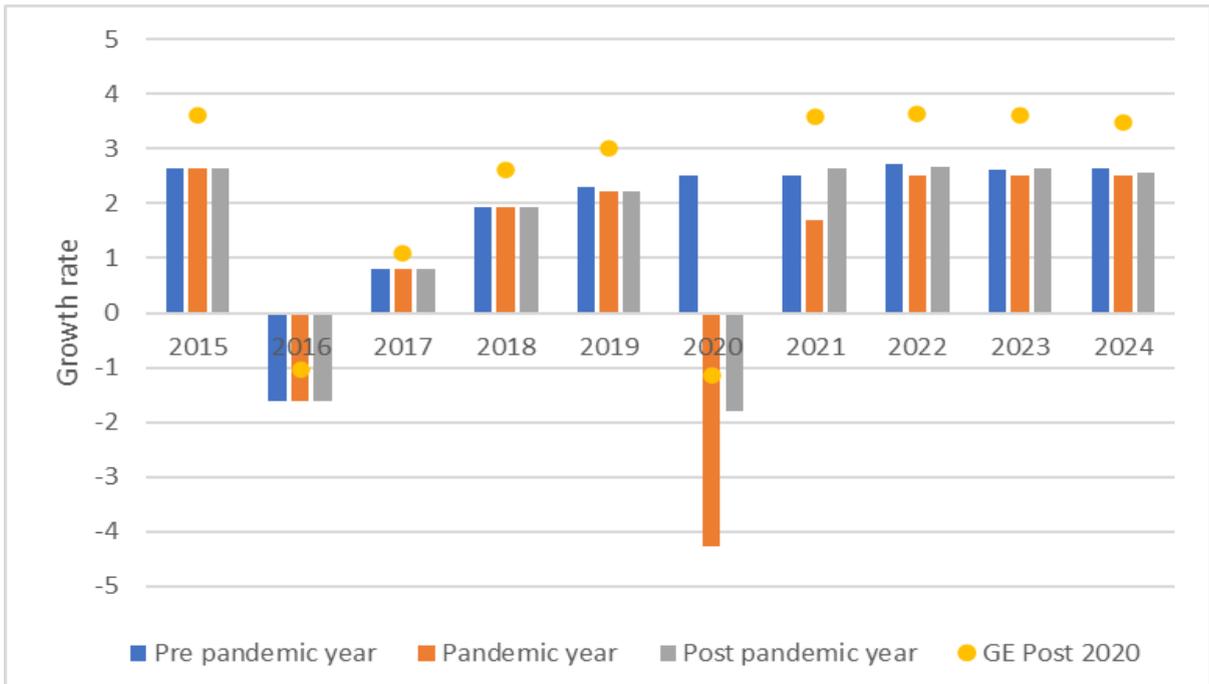
Every year, the IMF publishes economic projections twice - in April and October. The study used the October projections. In the October projection, the value for the previous year is the actual value, not an estimate, whereas, in the April projection, it is an estimate. The data points reveal the projection for the Nigerian economy prior to the pandemic, during the pandemic, and a year into the pandemic. The estimation for the post-pandemic was modified with the assumption of gender neutrality, that is, parity. The results obtained were compared to pre-pandemic projections. These analyses were carried out for two economic indicators - economic growth and government revenue.

Level of economic growth

As shown in Figure 7, Nigeria's growth path was disrupted by the pandemic. The pandemic results in a sharp drop in output growth to -1.79 percent in 2020 from 2.52 percent projected during pre-pandemic. At the peak of the pandemic the output growth was predicted to contract by 4.28 percent. By comparing projected growth rate during the height of the pandemic to actual output growth, the data indicated that the decrease in output was overestimated. The overestimation could be attributed to responsive government policies, which reduced the severity of the impact of the pandemic on the economy (World Bank, 2022). Further, as shown in Figure 7, the impact of the pandemic is expected to be neutralised in 2023 as the growth returns to pre-pandemic projection.

Based on the output loss of 36.25 percent associated with the current level of gender inequality in Nigeria, the paper simulates what the growth rate would have been if gender parity was in place in Nigeria. As shown in Figure 7, under gender parity, Nigeria's growth in 2020 would have declined by 1.14 percent rather than 1.79 percent. With the projection, Nigeria would have grown by 3.61 percent in 2023 under a gender-neutral scenario and 3.49 percent in 2024 rather than around 2.5 percent.

Figure 7. Gender inequality, pandemic and economic growth in Nigeria, 2015-2024 (%)



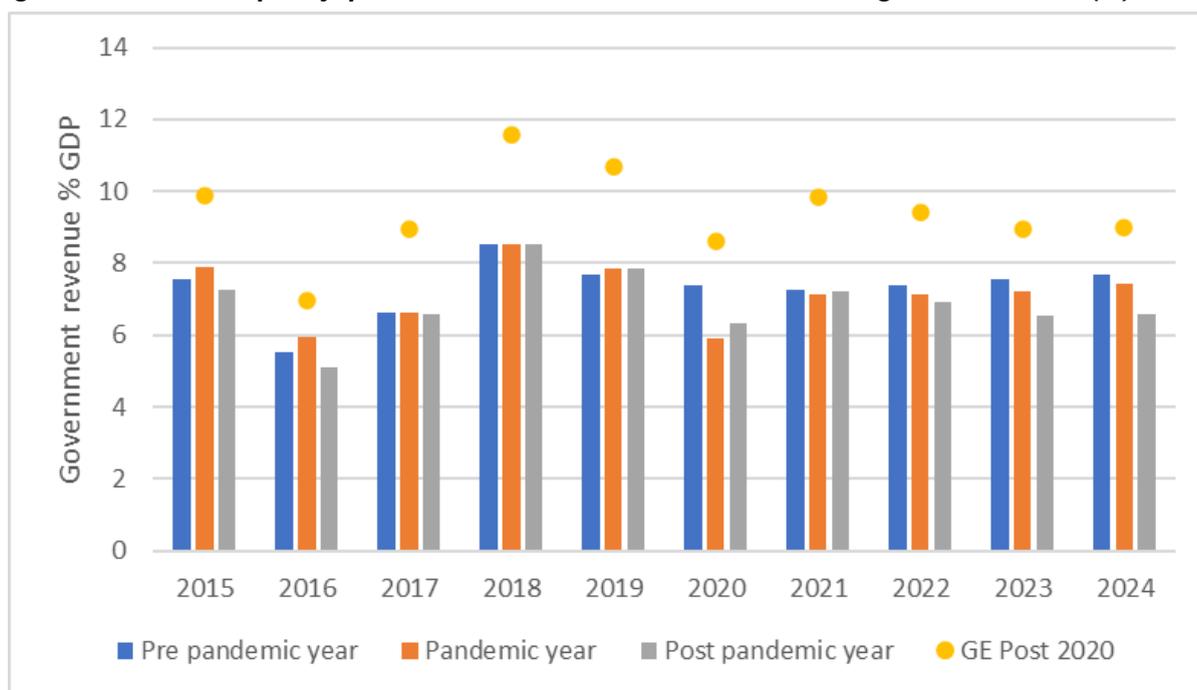
Source: Author's computation based on IMF World Economic Outlook for 2019-2021

Government revenue

In addition to output growth, the impact of the pandemic can be evaluated through the lens of government revenue. Here, we proxied economic activities using government revenue. This is based on the assumption that the volume of economic activities is linked to the level of sales, which in turn, informs tax liabilities and government revenue (Gupta, 2007; Gwaindepi, 2021). As shown in Figure 8, the revenue realised in 2020 declined from 7.4 percent of GDP projected prior to the pandemic to 6.32 percent of GDP, which is the actual revenue collected. With the revenue projection at the peak of the pandemic at 5.92 percent of GDP, which is lower than the actual revenue of 6.32 percent. The data suggests that at the onset of the pandemic, its impact on revenue was overestimated by 0.41 percentage points.

Gender inequalities affected output growth through an effect on the number of people that were in the labour force. The inequalities also affected revenue through the same channel, as low output results in low taxable income. Based on the computation from Table 1, we simulated what the revenue level would be assuming Nigeria was operating at gender parity. The results in Figure 8 show that the revenue level of 8.6 percent of GDP for 2020 under the assumption of gender parity despite the pandemic, is higher than the revenue projection of 7.4 percent of GDP prior to the pandemic. As the revenue projections for 2022 to 2024 are projected to decline based on weak tax administration, closing the gender gap has the potential of increasing tax revenue beyond the projection prior to the pandemic.

Figure 8. Gender inequality, pandemic, and revenue mobilisation in Nigeria, 2015-2024 (%)



Source: Author's computation based on IMF World Economic Outlook for 2019-2021

IV. POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND LAWS ON GENDER

Gender equality is a development strategy critical to poverty eradication, improved health outcomes and living standards, and protection of the fundamental human rights of women. Thus, it is listed as one of the prerequisites of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is universally agreed that empowering women, giving them a voice in decision-making and policy implementation, and ensuring their participation in productive (economic) activities and generation of income leads to increased poverty alleviation, improved general living standards, good governance, and creation of employment (Durosaye, 2023). Several governments, in acknowledging these gains, have adopted gender equality into their plans and strategies for economic and national development, and Nigeria is no exception. In line with global best practices, Nigeria has a number of policies and laws aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights.

Situation pre-COVID-19 pandemic

The government of Nigeria has taken a number of policy steps to drive women inclusion and gender equality in the country. While some of these policies became known during the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of these policies were put in place decades before the pandemic occurred. For example, the Child Rights Act law passed in 2003, sets out a number of provisions aimed at protecting the rights of children, particularly the girl child. This law includes provisions aimed at protecting girls from harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and child labour (Ladan, 2021).

Furthermore, the Nigerian government launched its National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2006, following in-depth research and extensive consultations with various government and public sector development stakeholders and partners. This policy aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. It sets out a number of goals and strategies, including improving women's access to education, health care, and economic opportunities, as well as reducing violence against women and promoting women's participation in politics and decision-making (UN Women, 2023).

Specific objectives of the policy include:

- I. Strengthen the capabilities of women to take advantage of economic and political opportunities to attain gender equality and women empowerment;
- II. Promote equal opportunity in all areas of the country's political, social, and economic sphere for men and women;
- III. Ensure the adoption of gender mainstreaming approaches, tools, and instruments in economic and national development plans;
- IV. Incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) framework in the country's laws, legislation processes, judicial and administrative system;
- V. Educate and sensitise stakeholders on effectively integrating the importance of gender equality and women empowerment in national development policies and programmes (Durosaye, 2023).

Following the National Gender Policy of 2006, The National Gender Policy Strategic Framework (implementation plan for the NGP) was set up and designed to run for a 5-year period, from 2008 to 2013. Its main objective is gender equality, and the empowerment of women and women's human rights. It outlines the mechanisms and strategic result framework for ensuring the attainment of gender equality targets across all sectors as specified in the National Gender Policy. It also highlights government agencies responsible for the implementation of the policy framework. These agencies include, the Federal Ministry of Justice, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Trade, Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry, National Human Rights Commission, as well as the National Judicial Council. The National Gender Policy Strategic Framework outlines seven broad strategies for achieving the goals of gender equity and equality at the individual, organisational, and national levels. These strategies include; strengthen gender policy, partnerships, and programme reforms across all sectors of the economy, increase capacity building, skills development and technical expertise on tools and instruments for sustained gender-responsive development, enhance financial accountability and gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors, strengthen legislation, gender justice and human rights protection, and strengthen gender-based research and data collection (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development (FMWASD), 2008).

In addition, this Framework consists of four expected outcomes broken down into various outputs. Outcome 1 of the Framework entails changes in public perception of the roles of women and increasing respect for women and child rights. For this, the following outputs are envisaged: (1) schools curricula reviewed and changed (primary and secondary) to reflect changing and empowering gender roles for women and men; (2) Nigeria's popular culture reflects a new awareness of changing gender roles that support empowerment of women; and (3) engendered National Orientation Agency. The purpose of Outcome 2 is that women and child rights are promoted and protected. For this, the following outputs are contemplated: legal and constitutional reforms undertaken to promote the principles of non-discrimination, protection and promotion of women and child rights; the administration of justice in Nigeria is more proactive in the protection of women and child rights using Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; gender is mainstreamed within the National Legal Aid Structure; harmful traditional practices against women and children criminalised in Nigeria; national response on sexual and gender based violence and women rights abuses available; strengthened capacities of organisations of women living with HIV/AIDS and with disabilities to engage in discourse affecting their rights and influence decision making for equal access and empowerment; and strengthened capacity of States' and National Assemblies to initiate and pass into law, bills promoting women's human rights and participation (FMWASD, 2008; Durosaye, 2023).

Outcome 3 of the Framework provides for reduction in the overall poverty index of women. To this end, the following outputs are stipulated: strengthened capacities of the Federal Ministry of Trade and Export Promotion Council to support gender sensitive trade regime; fund established to support small and medium scale women entrepreneurs; and enhanced capacities of women entrepreneurs and producers. Outcome 4 targets at national accountability to gender equality and promotion of child rights enhanced. The following outputs are contained in this Outcome: enhanced capacities of the national and states' gender machinery to implement and monitor the implementation of the National Gender Policy as an accountability tool on national commitments; capacity of the Ministries of Planning & Finance strengthened to provide guidelines for institutionalisation of gender sensitive budgeting; strengthened capacities of political parties to mainstream gender and promote women's empowerment (manifestos & strategies to implement with allocated resources); electoral reforms undertaken to ensure that policy is integrated within electoral laws; and capacities of women affected by conflict strengthened to engage in peace building initiatives in communities affected by conflict (FMWASD, 2008; FAO, 2023).

In 2014, the National Policy on Education was adopted with the aim to promote gender equity in education by increasing girls' enrolment and retention rates in schools. Thus, reducing the out of school girl children (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), 2014). Similarly, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act was passed into law in 2015. This law criminalizes a range of gender-based violence, including rape, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence (International Labour organisation (ILO), 2015).

Table 2. Comparison of Gender Policies in Nigeria

Child Right Act Law 2003	National Gender Policy 2006	National Gender Policy Strategic Framework 2008 - 2013	National Policy on Education 2014	Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015
Protection against: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Early child marriage ✓ Child labour ✓ Sexual violence 	Protection against: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gender based violence 	Protection against: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All form of discrimination ✓ Sexual and gender-based violence ✓ Women abuse 		Protection against: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Domestic violence ✓ Female genital mutilation ✓ Rape and sexual abuse
	Girl's/Women's Empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthen the capabilities of women to take advantage of economic and political opportunities ✓ Promote equal opportunities for both men and women 		Girl's/Women's Empowerment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase girls' enrolment and retention rates in schools ✓ Reduce the out of school girl children 	
Education/Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ On child labour ✓ Child marriage 	Education/Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Educate and sensitise stakeholders on effectively integrating gender equality in National development policies/ programmes 	Education/Awareness : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Changes in public perception of the roles of women ✓ Review and change Schools curricula (primary and secondary) to reflect changing and empowering gender roles for women 		Education/Awareness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ On female genital mutilation

Source: Author's compilation from FMWASD, 2008; NERDC, 2014; ILO, 2015; Ladun, 2021; Durosaye, 2023.

Gaps and Constraints in Nigeria's Gender Policies

Although Nigeria has made significant strides in the development of gender policies and laws, there are still several gaps in these policies and laws that hinder the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

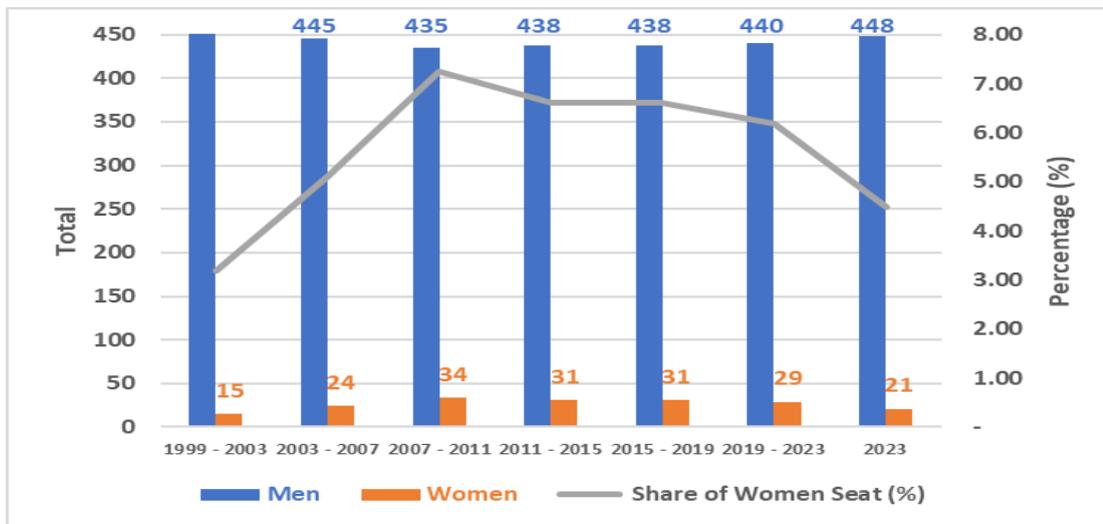
- I. **Lack of Proper Implementation:** One of the significant gaps in Nigeria's gender policies and laws is the lack of implementation. Many of the policies and laws enacted to promote gender equality are not effectively enforced due to a lack of political will, inadequate resources, and corruption (Chitongo and Ojogiwa, 2021). This situation undermines the impact of the policies and laws on women's lives.
- II. **Patriarchal Culture:** The central culture that permeates the Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature (Ejumudo, 2013) and this culture limits the role and status of women in society. Many of the cultural practices like, child marriage, limited educational opportunities, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence are discriminatory and harmful to women (Godwin, 2013). Research shows that about 43% of girls in Nigeria are married before their 18th birthday (Girls Not Brides, 2023) and this affects the educational opportunities for girls. Despite the enactment of laws that prohibit these cultural practices, many communities continue to engage in them and as a result, women's rights are not fully protected (Ejumudo, 2013; Chitongo and Ojogiwa, 2021). Hence, regardless of initiative for a significant transformation in gender related concerns, this culture remains a major limitation.
- III. **Weak Criminal Enforcement Action:** Violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and trafficking, is prevalent in Nigeria. One in four women in Nigeria has experienced a form of physical or sexual abuse in her life (allAfrica, 2022). While there are laws that criminalise these violent acts against women, implementation and enforcement remains weak. Thus, leading to impunity for perpetrators and a lack of justice for survivors.
- IV. **Economic and Political Opportunities:** Nigerian women still face significant barriers to accessing economic opportunities, including limited access to credit, property rights, and formal employment (Idike, Okeke, Okorie, Ogba, & Ugodulunwa, 2020). In addition, Nigerian women are still very much underrepresented in political leadership positions and as such, the political representation of women in decision-making positions remains very low (Godwin, 2013; Olaboopo, 2022). This is due to the inadequate implementation of policies and laws aimed at promoting economic and political empowerment for women.

Parliament Representation

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the existing gender inequalities and their disproportionate impact on women, especially as caregivers and frontline workers. Unfortunately, Nigeria's Parliament has failed to address these disparities due to its weak gender parity (Eniola, 2018). This weakness worsens the inequalities that women face, as their voices and perspectives are not adequately considered in COVID-19 policy decision-making processes.

Gender parity in Parliament representation in Nigeria has been a persistent issue (Olaboopo, 2022). Women in Nigeria are underrepresented in politics, and various barriers hinder their participation in governance. Despite constituting over half of Nigeria's population, women hold significantly fewer political leadership positions than men. This underrepresentation is primarily due to cultural and social norms that limit women's participation in public life, limited access to education and resources, and gender-based violence and discrimination.

Figure 9. Representation in the Nigerian National Parliament (Senate and House of Representatives) 1999 - 2023



Source: Inter- Parliamentary Union, 2023

For instance, after the 2019 general election, women only occupied 6.18 percent of seats in the Nigerian National Assembly. This figure is well below the global average of 26.1 percent of women in parliament and against the objective of gender parity. Currently, Nigeria ranks 182 out of 193 countries in terms of women's representation in Parliament, according to a 2023 report by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU). It is crucial to address gender inequality in Parliament representation to ensure that women's voices and perspectives adequately come into play in decision-making processes related to COVID-19 policy and beyond.

Evaluation of Covid-19 Macroeconomic Policy Interventions: are they Gender- Responsive?

Following the announcement of the coronavirus outbreak in December 2019, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) established the National Coronavirus Preparedness Group (NCPG) to ensure that the country was adequately prepared for the onset of the virus (Obiakor, Iheonu, & Ihezue, 2021). The group met daily to assess the risks associated with the spread of the virus and initiated measures to strengthen the country's preparedness in case of an outbreak.

To further enhance the country's level of preparedness, the Federal Ministry of Health established a Technical Working Group in January 2020 (Dan-Nwafor et al., 2020). This group is an inter-ministerial committee set up to support the NCPG. After the first case of COVID- 19 was confirmed in Nigeria in February 2020, the NCPG transitioned to the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) at NCDC, which is the highest level of response for public health emergencies in the country. The EOC is responsible for case management, laboratory testing, research, logistics, surveillance, epidemiology, among others (NCDC, 2022). Rapid response teams (RRTs) were also deployed in all states across the country to strengthen response activities at all levels, including state and local government.

Also, a Presidential Task Force for the Control of Coronavirus was created in March 2020 as part of the decision-making category and was responsible for making high-level decisions on COVID-19 response and recovery. The task force was made up of 12 members, with only two women as members. This suggests that there may be a gender disparity within the Nigerian presidential task force, and the decision-making process regarding women's issues may not be viewed through a gender lens. In addition, the Nigeria COVID-19 Research Consortium (NCRC) was established to generate relevant research evidence on COVID-19 in line with the global research roadmap by WHO (Dan-Nwafor et al., 2020).

Box 1. COVID-19 Macroeconomic Policies in Nigeria

The Nigerian government implemented measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 in March 2020, including travel bans, border closures, and quarantine for international returnees, as well as non-pharmaceutical interventions such as stay-at-home orders and closure of schools and workplaces. Ekeruche and Adeniran (2021) show the extent to which these policy measures had severe impacts on Nigeria's macroeconomy and the livelihoods of households. The economy suffered from a recession in the third quarter of 2020, however, key sectors including telecommunications and information services (15.9%), financial institutions (13.34%), and quarrying and other minerals (21.16%) continued to experience significant growth, which led to a recovery. The Nigerian government has responded notably to address the pandemic's impact on the economy. So far, \$ 1.4 billion in additional spending has been executed, which is estimated at 0.3% of GDP.

To address the social and financial impact of the pandemic, the government implemented policies such as social and labour market protection, violence against women prevention, and economic, financial, and fiscal support for businesses and vulnerable households (UNDP- UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, 2021). Awareness and sensitization initiatives were launched to address sexual and gender-based violence during lockdown, for instance, the Sokoto state Ministry of Women Affairs and Children launched the Nana Khadija Centre, the first centre of its kind in North-western Nigeria, to provide legal, medical, and psychosocial support to survivors of GBV (UNDP-UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, 2021). Specific empowerment programs were developed for traders, SMEs, widows, and school children, such as the Rapid Response Registration (RRR) TraderMoni, and MarketMoni programs, including the distribution of grains and meals.

HOW WELL HAS NIGERIA PERFORMED RELATIVE TO TOP PERFORMING AFRICAN COUNTRIES?

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, as it relates to the increased vulnerability of women and children, several countries put in place gender responsive policies to mitigate the challenges of these vulnerable groups. The GII was used to obtain two top-ranking countries in Africa that Nigeria can draw lessons from (Rwanda and Mauritius). These countries were also analysed using the UNDP COVID-19 global policy response tracker to discuss the policies they introduced that make them stand out. The response tracker monitors policy measures enacted by governments worldwide to tackle the COVID-19 crisis, and highlights responses that have integrated a gender lens. Launched in September 2020, it includes national measures that are directly addressing women's economic and social security, including unpaid care work, the labour market and violence against women (UNDP- UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, 2021).

Country Case Study - Mauritius and Rwanda

Mauritius

Mauritius has emerged as a leading country in Africa when it comes to implementing gender-responsive policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing the specific challenges faced by women and girls. The nation has a long-standing commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, with a focus on increasing their representation in political, economic, and social spheres. However, the pandemic has presented Mauritius with difficult policy decisions as it strives to strike a balance between socio-economic recovery and the protection of human rights for all.

Even before the pandemic, Mauritius faced a concerning issue of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), with approximately one in every four women reportedly experiencing such violence (Dabee & Beejan, 2020). Disturbingly, statistics showed that the number of GBV cases increased five-fold during the COVID-19 lockdown period, further worsening an already grave situation (Dabee & Beejan, 2020). In response to this rising violence, the Government of Mauritius took decisive action by launching a National Strategy and Action Plan to eliminate GBV in the country (Dabee and Beejan, 2020). Introduced on November 25th, 2020, this comprehensive strategy aimed to address the cultural and institutional aspects unique to Mauritius and foster collaboration between government agencies and civil society organisations in the fight against GBV and gender inequalities (Kaleidoscope International Trust, 2022).

The National Strategy was a guiding framework for developing a four-year Action Plan, outlining specific activities in four key focus areas. Efforts were made to challenge societal norms and beliefs perpetuating gender inequality, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. The needs of GBV survivors were prioritised, ensuring they received the necessary support and assistance. Also, improvements were sought in legal remedies and services provided by public institutions to address GBV cases better. A robust monitoring and evaluation system was implemented to assess the progress made in combating GBV and achieving gender equality (Kaleidoscope International Trust, 2022).

By implementing these gender-responsive policies and strategies, Mauritius has demonstrated a commitment to creating a safer and more equal society for women and girls. The proactive measures taken by the government, in collaboration with civil society organisations, underscore the importance placed on eradicating GBV and fostering gender equality. Such efforts not only address the immediate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic but also contribute to a long-term vision of a more inclusive and empowered Mauritius.

Rwanda

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Rwanda has implemented a range of gender-responsive policies to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on women and girls (UN Women, 2021). These policies address the social, economic, and health-related challenges faced by women and girls during the pandemic, recognizing that gender inequality increases the vulnerability of women and girls to the virus (World Health Organization, 2021). Even before the pandemic, Rwanda has been popular for including women in decision-making processes: for instance, the Rwandan Constitution is notable for

reserving 30 percent of parliamentary seats for women. According to the UNDP-UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (2021), one of the key gender-responsive policies implemented by Rwanda is the establishment of a national hotline for GBV Gender-based Violence (GBV) reporting. The hotline is staffed by trained counsellors who provide support and counselling to survivors of GBV, as well as referrals to legal and medical services. The hotline is accessible all through the day, and the government has launched a national campaign to raise awareness of the hotline's availability and its objective to work against GBV.

Rwanda also runs a Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI) commonly known as “Mutuelle”, which is the main insurance scheme for up to around 80 percent of the population (Rwanda Social Security Board, 2023). The enrolment for the poorest is subsidised by the Government. Usually, upon paying the premium, the insurer had to wait for a month for the health insurance to become effective. To facilitate easy access to health service amid the COVID-19 pandemic, amendments were made to the scheme to remove the waiting period prior to accessing medical services using CBHI, including family planning, antenatal and postnatal care, and childbirth professional care (Ministry of Health Rwanda, 2021).

According to the World Bank (2021), another important policy implemented by Rwanda is the provision of economic support to vulnerable households. The government launched a cash transfer program that provides monthly cash transfers to pregnant women, children less than two years and vulnerable households, including those headed by women, to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. Women who head households were disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to their over-representation in low-paying and informal jobs, and this policy is essential in addressing this issue. In addition, Rwanda implemented policies to ensure that girls' education is not interrupted by the pandemic. The government has provided radio and television programs to support remote learning, distributed learning materials, and provided menstrual hygiene products to girls to reduce absenteeism (U.S. Embassy Rwanda, 2020). This policy is essential as girls are more likely to drop out of school due to economic pressures and social norms that prioritise boys' education over girls.

Rwanda's policies during the COVID-19 pandemic have been effective in mitigating the negative impacts of the pandemic on women and girls in the country. The government's response has been proactive and has recognized the gender-specific challenges faced by women and girls during the pandemic, as they have addressed the economic, social, and health-related impacts of the pandemic on women and girls. The responses have been designed to ensure that the pandemic does not worsen existing gender inequalities.

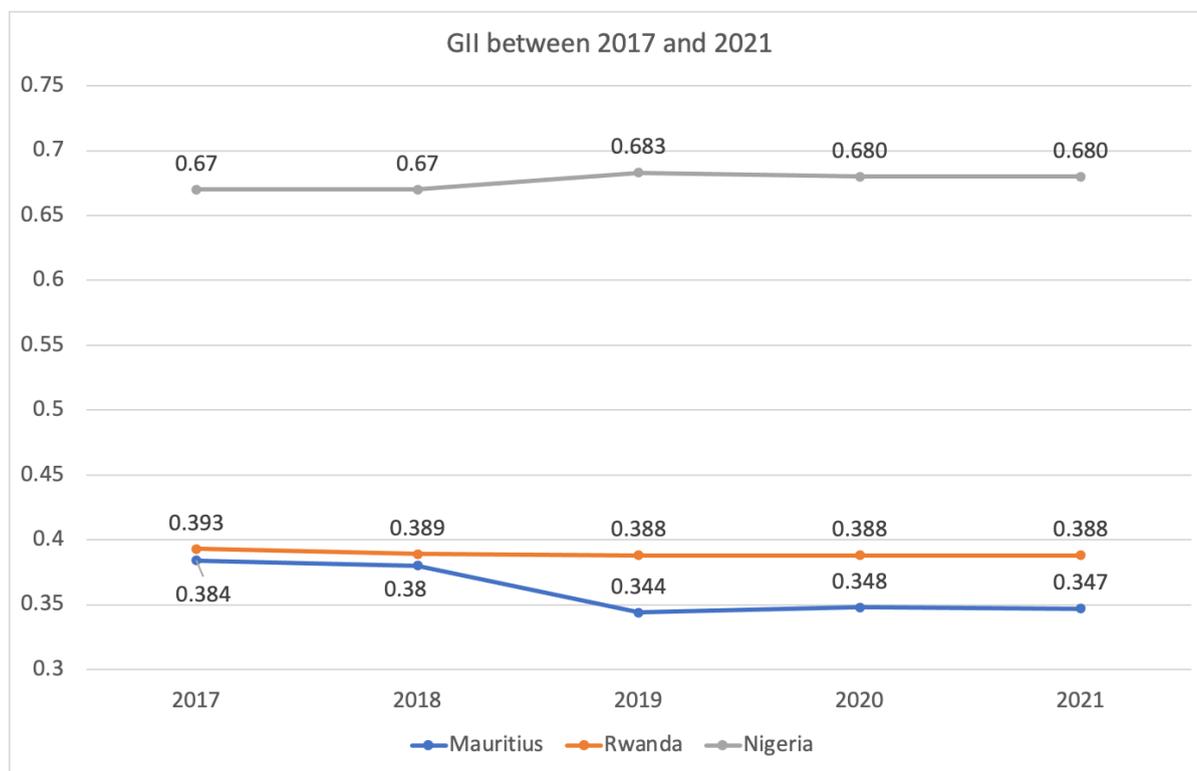
Comparison of Nigeria, Rwanda and Mauritius

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened pre-existing gender inequalities, particularly in lower middle-income countries (LMICs), where most African countries are classified. Countries in Africa, just like the rest of the world, had to adapt quickly to the new reality brought on by the pandemic. While lessons learned from managing other public health emergencies such as the Ebola epidemic helped in responding to COVID-19, vulnerable groups such as women and girls, were disproportionately affected by the economic and social consequences of lockdowns and inadequate healthcare access (African Union, 2021). The African Union (2021) further states that in Africa, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) increased significantly during the pandemic, especially among women and girls in poorer economic conditions. Reported cases of rape, unplanned pregnancies, early and forced marriages, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and sexual abuse increased as well. Furthermore, the closure of educational institutions disrupted educational opportunities for girls and contributed to harmful traditional practices. Access to healthcare facilities for women became increasingly difficult due to the overwhelming number of patients compared to medical personnel and healthcare facilities available. The pandemic has had a negative impact on African economies, healthcare, and education systems, as well as widened gender inequalities.

Among the top-performing countries in Africa in terms of gender equality, Mauritius and Rwanda stand out for their remarkable progress. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) data, as depicted in Figure 10, demonstrates a consistent decline in gender inequality in these nations, highlighting the effectiveness of their policies in addressing gender disparities. Mauritius, for instance, witnessed a decline in its GII from 0.384 in 2017 to 0.347 in 2021, indicating significant strides in reducing gender inequality. Similarly, Rwanda's GII decreased from 0.393 to 0.388 during the same period, showcasing its commitment to narrowing gender gaps. In contrast, Nigeria experienced higher levels of inequality each year when compared to these countries under review. Nigeria's GII slightly increased from 0.67 in 2017 to 0.68 in 2021, indicating a widening gender gap and suggesting the ineffectiveness of policies aimed

at reducing inequality. Consequently, Nigeria can draw valuable lessons from the experiences of Rwanda and Mauritius, adopting their successful strategies and approaches to address gender disparities within its own context.

Figure 10. Gender Inequality in the selected countries



Source: Authors' computation based on UNDP's GII

Based on the findings of the UNDP-UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (2021), it is evident that both the top-ranking African countries, Mauritius and Rwanda, as well as Nigeria, have implemented gender-responsive policies to address the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. A summary of these policies can be found in Table 3. Notably, all countries recognised the alarming rise in gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic and implemented measures to combat it. They established emergency national hotlines to provide support and assistance to GBV victims, recognising the urgency and importance of addressing this issue.

In terms of economic support, all countries, except Mauritius, introduced policies aimed at improving the economic well-being of their citizens. Rwanda, for instance, focused on providing economic support specifically tailored to women-headed households, pregnant women, and young children. These targeted interventions aimed to alleviate the economic burdens faced by vulnerable groups during the pandemic.

However, Nigeria's response fell short in terms of implementing policies that effectively addressed the healthcare and education needs of women during the pandemic, which are crucial areas of concern. In this regard, Nigeria can draw inspiration from Rwanda's policies, which demonstrated a clear focus on improving healthcare and education for women and girls. By emulating these policies, Nigeria can enhance its response to the pandemic, ensuring that the healthcare and educational needs of women are adequately met.

Table 3. Gender responsive COVID-19 Policies of Nigeria, Mauritius and Rwanda

Nigeria	Mauritius	Rwanda
<p>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a national hotline for emergency calls for GBV Victims. • Carried out awareness campaigns against GBV 	<p>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a national hotline for emergency calls for GBV Victims. • The Government launched a National Strategy and Action Plan to eliminate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) 	<p>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a national hotline for emergency calls for GBV Victims.
<p>Economic Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit facilities were provided to households and businesses. • Cash transfer programs based on the National Social Register. 	<p>Economic Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIL 	<p>Economic Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government launched a cash transfer program that provides monthly cash transfers to pregnant women, children less than two years and vulnerable households, including those headed by women, to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic.
<p>Health Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIL 	<p>Health Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIL 	<p>Health Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes were made to the existing Health Insurance scheme in the country to improve access to health care for women.
<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIL 	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIL 	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The country implemented policies to ensure that girls' education is not interrupted by the pandemic. The government introduced radio and television lessons to support remote learning, distributed learning materials and provided menstrual hygiene products to girls to reduce absenteeism.

Source: UNDP-UNW COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (2021)

V. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE GENDER RESPONSIVE POLICIES IN NIGERIA

Following the discussions of the policies and strategies employed by the leading countries in terms of gender equality in Africa, the following steps should be taken in Nigeria:

Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

To address the issue of COVID-19-induced gender-based violence in Nigeria, several lessons can be drawn from the case study countries. First, the government must take action to strengthen legal protections for women and girls. This includes ensuring that perpetrators of GBV are held accountable for their actions and providing adequate support to victims, which could involve setting up a plan like the National Strategy and Action Plan enacted by Mauritius. Additionally, the government should increase access to support services for victims of GBV in Nigeria. This includes increasing funding for shelters and crisis centres and providing training for health workers, social workers, and other professionals on how to identify and respond to cases of GBV. The government can also collaborate with civil society organizations and community groups to get a wider coverage for awareness campaigns on GBV, including its effects and how to prevent it.

The government can leverage technology to provide support and resources to victims of GBV. This includes adequately funding the use of hotlines and online platforms where victims can seek help and access information on available support services, which proved to be effective in most countries. The government can also partner with telecommunication companies to provide free SMS and call services to victims. It is also important for the government to address the underlying socioeconomic factors that contribute to GBV. This includes addressing poverty, providing economic opportunities for women, and promoting gender equality in all spheres of life. By addressing these issues, the government can reduce the incidence of GBV and promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

Providing additional economic support

Nigeria should prioritise the provision of social protection measures that target women. Social protection measures such as cash transfers, food assistance, and health insurance can help women cope with the economic shocks of the pandemic and future health emergencies. These measures can also help mitigate the gendered impacts of the pandemic, as women are more likely to be affected by poverty and food insecurity than men. For example, the World Bank has recommended that Nigeria scale up its social protection programs to protect the most vulnerable, including women and children, from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2020).

Also, Nigeria should focus on increasing the participation of women in the formal economy. Women are underrepresented in formal employment in Nigeria, with only 14 percent of women in the labour force holding formal jobs (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This makes them more vulnerable to economic shocks such as job loss and income reduction. Policies that promote women's participation in the formal economy could include affirmative action measures such as quotas for women in public sector employment and gender-sensitive procurement policies that prioritise female-owned businesses. This is in line with the findings of the case studies, which is also similar to recommendations from the International Labour Organization (ILO) that states that Nigeria should support women entrepreneurs to help them adapt to the economic impacts of the pandemic (ILO, 2020).

Improving Health Care

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inadequacies of healthcare systems worldwide, including Nigeria's, and implementing policies that improve healthcare for women in Nigeria is crucial to mitigate these impacts. Hence, the government should improve the dilapidated healthcare infrastructure. Nigeria needs to increase investment in healthcare infrastructure, including upgrading health facilities, expanding access to essential medicines, and increasing the number of healthcare workers which are short of what is required for effective health service delivery. This will not only help address the immediate challenges of the pandemic but will also enhance the overall quality of healthcare, including reproductive and maternal health services.

Nigeria should also aim to expand access to telemedicine, as during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of telemedicine proved to be increasingly important, especially for women who may be unable to visit health facilities due to mobility restrictions or safety concerns. Telemedicine allows

women to receive medical attention anywhere they are, through the use of devices like smartphones and laptops. Nigeria can implement policies that promote the use of telemedicine for routine check-ups, consultations, and referrals, thereby reducing the burden on healthcare facilities and increasing access to care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted access to reproductive and maternal health services, leading to an increase in maternal and infant mortality rates (Adelekan et al, 2021). Nigeria needs to increase funding for these services and ensure that they are accessible to women in both urban and rural areas. Hence, the government should increase funding for reproductive and maternal health services.

Providing Education Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on education worldwide, with many countries implementing policies such as school closures, online learning, and social distancing measures. According to UNESCO (2022), Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children globally, with girls accounting for a significant proportion of those not attending school. Thus, a number of measures can be adopted to improve the participation of girls and women in the education system. The government should address socio-economic barriers, as a major barrier to education for girls in Nigeria is socio-economic factors such as poverty, early marriage, and gender discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these challenges, with many families struggling to provide for their basic needs, let alone education. Nigeria should implement policies that address these socio-economic barriers, such as cash transfer programs, school feeding programs, and support for families with limited resources. Other incentives could also be provided for women and girls, such as scholarship schemes to increase female enrolment.

Another key action is the need to expand access to distance learning. Distance learning has become a vital tool for education during the pandemic, particularly in areas where schools have been closed. Nigeria should prioritise expanding distance learning programs, such as radio and television broadcasts, to reach more girls who do not have access to the Internet. In addition, Nigeria should invest in teacher training to ensure that educators are equipped to deliver quality distance learning programs.

Increasing access to technology and internet connectivity is also crucial to ensuring education for girls is unhindered. One of the main challenges facing girls in Nigeria as a result of the pandemic has been having access to technology and internet connectivity for remote learning. This has been a major obstacle for girls trying to participate in online learning, particularly in rural areas lacking infrastructure. Nigeria should prioritize investment in digital infrastructure to ensure that girls have access to the technology and internet connectivity they need to continue their education.

Finally, there is a need for increased political will, resources, and implementation of policies and laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality. Cultural attitudes and practices that discriminate against women must be challenged, and women's economic and political empowerment must be prioritised.

VI. CONCLUSION

In 2020, the emergence and rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus resulted in renewed attention to the gendered impact of pandemics. Previous pandemics have shown that women are frequently affected to a greater extent than their male counterparts. Although evidence shows that countries tried to some extent to address gender-specific issues while deploying policy responses to the pandemic, there is, however, limited literature on the extent to which these COVID-19 macroeconomic policies are gender-responsive. This makes it challenging to gauge the extent to which the pandemic has affected women and girls and determine what actions could be taken to alleviate the attendant negative consequences.

This study, therefore, investigated several dimensions on the nexus between gender and the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular emphasis on four key issues. First, it examined the effects of the pandemic on women in Nigeria, with a focus on their education, employment, childcare, health and nutrition, and gender-based violence during the pandemic. The study finds that the pandemic had a negative impact on women's economic status, with lower earnings for those working in the informal sector and an

increase in unpaid care work. Furthermore, access to schooling and non-essential health services such as antenatal care declined.

Second, the study conducted a scenario analysis using two-stage least squares (2SLS) and found that gender inequality had a negative and significant effect on economic growth and government revenue, which is consistent with previous studies. The study concludes that Nigeria's economic growth would have been about 36 percent higher if there had been gender neutrality. The analysis further revealed that years of schooling, trade openness and physical capital has a positive and significant effect on GDP, while landlock has a negative and significant effect on GDP.

Furthermore, the paper identifies gaps in policies, institutions and laws capable of closing the gender gap. While there are several laws in place, there is limited implementation as Nigeria has a patriarchal culture that limits the role and status of women in society. Many of these cultural practices like, child marriage, limited educational opportunities, female genital mutilation, limited property rights and gender-based violence are discriminatory and harmful to women. Also, Nigerian women still face significant barriers to accessing economic opportunities, including limited access to credit, property rights, and formal employment. In addition, Nigerian women are still very much underrepresented in political leadership positions and as such, the political representation of women in decision-making positions remains very low. These are underlying factors that underpin the trends in gender-insensitive policy making and implementation.

Finally, the study conducted case studies of top-performing countries in Africa (Mauritius and Rwanda). The paper finds that Nigeria significantly underperformed particularly in areas related to the provision of education services and health care.

This study highlights the significance of understanding women's experiences in designing effective policies that cater to the specific needs and interests of women. As a significant proportion of women are involved in the informal sector, it is imperative for the government to establish a framework that minimises the adverse effects of future pandemics on women- owned informal businesses. This may require prioritising the provision of financial assistance and training to women in the informal sector to upgrade their enterprises to a formal business model. Additionally, the study highlights that the exclusion of women from economic activities has a detrimental effect on the economy, thereby necessitating the implementation of policies that promote women's economic activities. One way to achieve this is by investing in women's education and empowerment to increase their participation, retention, and growth in the workforce. Failure to do so could result in gender-biased policies during pandemics and negative effects on women in future health emergencies.

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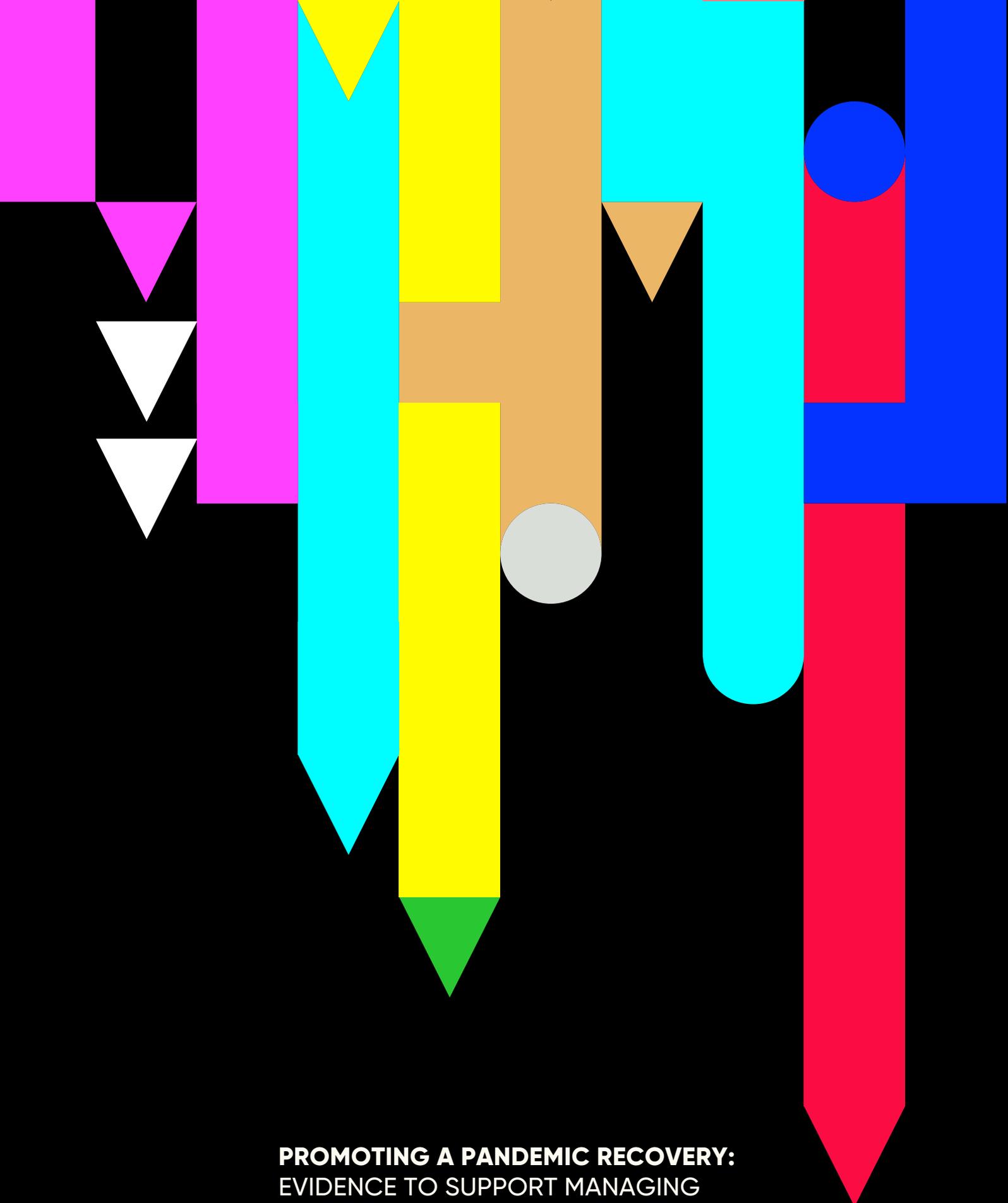
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