



# POLICY BRIEF

Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Youth: Findings from "COVID 19 and the Youth Question in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda"

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### About this policy brief

This policy brief represents the findings of a three-year research project, "COVID19 and the Youth Question in Africa," conducted across Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. The project, funded by IDRC, aimed to bridge the divide between marginalized youth and their governments. By promoting transparency and accountability, it strived to improve governance mechanisms.

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### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing gender disparities among youth in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, having a disproportionate impact on young women and girls. This policy brief, informed by findings from the research study "COVID19 and the Youth Question in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda," sheds light on these gendered impacts and proposes strategic interventions to address them.

### Gendered Impact of School Closures

The pandemic-induced school closures have intensified the gender divide. Girls, disproportionately impacted, face a higher risk of dropout due to increased domestic responsibilities, early marriages, and teen pregnancies. There has been a dramatic spike in female dropout rates across the three countries, threatening to roll back decades of progress in girls' education.

### Inequalities in Access to Digital Learning

Access to digital learning, while a challenge for all students, is particularly acute for girls due to socio-cultural norms and resource allocation within households. This gender digital divide is exacerbating educational disparities, threatening to leave a generation of young women behind.

### Impact on Mental Health

Young women are experiencing heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the pandemic. Social isolation, fear of the virus, and increased domestic violence are key contributing factors. This mental health crisis requires urgent attention and response.

## Economic Impact and Youth Livelihood

The economic slowdown and rising unemployment have exacerbated gendered labour inequalities. Young women, particularly those in the informal sector, have been disproportionately affected due to their concentration in sectors heavily hit by the pandemic.

## Recommendations

### Reopen Schools Safely

Prioritize the safe reopening of schools and implement catch-up programs to bridge learning gaps. Strengthen measures to retain girls in schools, such as menstrual hygiene management facilities, and programs addressing early marriage and teen pregnancy.

### Bridge the Gender Digital Divide

Enhance girls' access to digital learning by providing devices and internet connectivity. Implement gender-responsive digital literacy programs, ensuring girls can fully participate in the digital economy and society.

### Enhance Mental Health Support

Invest in mental health services targeting young people, particularly young women. Encourage schools to integrate mental health in their curriculum and ensure access to counselling services.

### Promote Gender-Equal Economic Opportunities

Develop youth employment initiatives that explicitly target young women and provide training in resilient sectors. Improve access to capital for female entrepreneurs and provide business training and mentorship.

## Conclusion

COVID-19 has starkly revealed and exacerbated the gender inequalities among youth in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. However, by adopting strategic, gender-responsive interventions, we can address these disparities. The current crisis offers an opportunity to reimagine and create a more equitable future for all young people, irrespective of their gender.

This policy brief is developed as part of the "COVID-19 and Youth Questions in Africa" Project Implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.



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