INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting an unprecedented and significant strain on Kenya’s economy, highlighting and magnifying inequalities and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls. It is posing a serious threat to women’s employment and livelihoods, especially in the informal sector where women make up 63% of street traders and 70% of workers in the horticulture sector, all of which have been hard hit. Beyond the economy, Kenyan women and girls are grappling with other social problems such as a rise in cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV). Recent reports indicate that sexual violence accounted for 35% of all criminal cases reported, in the first two weeks of the curfew.

An immediate coordinated, people-centered and gender-sensitive response is necessary to address these issues. Governments, businesses, workers’ representatives, civil society organizations and citizens all need to be involved to mitigate the impact on people’s lives and to address the specific risks and vulnerabilities girls and women face because of the deeply rooted inequalities and stereotypes in society.

This document summarizes the best practices on mitigating these impacts, drawing on the recent dialogue with the private sector in Kenya hosted by UN Women, Global Compact Network Kenya, Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The dialogue explored how they are using their power, influence and resources to protect the rights, physical and mental well-being of employees during this time, to support communities around them and ensuring long-term business recovery efforts restore economic stability as well as addressing the needs of women in their supply chains and customer base.
KENYAN PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE
The following are some of the interventions from the private sector in Kenya, on how they are using or can use their power, influence and resources to protect the rights, physical and mental well-being of employees during this time, support communities around them as well as ensure long-term business recovery efforts restore economic stability.

**HEALTH FIRST:**
Protecting health services and systems during the crisis

- Supporting recruitment and training of health workers
- Ensuring continuous medical care, including Sexual and reproductive health services during this period of social distancing through telehealth services

**PROTECTING PEOPLE**
Social protection and basic services

- Supermarkets agreed to reduce prices of essential food items, e.g. 5% reduction on cooking oil prices
- Repurposing factories to produce protective clothing and hand sanitizer
- Offer borrowers a break on loan repayments
- Enhancing the participation and representation of women in COVID-19 leadership taskforce for private sector
- Provide public information on COVID-19 prevention
- Manufacturing of ventilators
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**LABOUR MARKETS**
Protecting jobs and promoting decent work

- Advocated with government for tax reductions, suspend listings, zero ratings of imports, removal of duty on essential goods, and suspending listings of non-performing loans, the benefit of which will be more accessibility and affordability to the general public
- Enhancing liquidity measures so companies can cushion their employees during lockdown and not resort to sending staff home with no support
- Cushioning consumers by removing fees on mobile money transactions of less than Ksh. 1,000
During the dialogue, participating companies shared other specific measures they have taken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 particularly on women employees, those working in the informal sector and living in the communities they operate in. Acknowledging the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, these companies have gone over and above to:

- Offer flexible working arrangements to their staff
- Partner with county governments to fumigate marketplaces
- Provide handwashing facilities to women in markets which includes daily replenishment of the water supply
- Have senior company leadership checking in on staff mental well being
- Making available free dignity kits to all women employees, cushioning them against any shortages
- Provide free delivery services of food stuff to vulnerable households in informal settlements, many of whom are female headed.
- Integrate measures to prevent GBV in their ongoing staff engagement programmes
- Hire more health care personnel (80% of whom were women) to care for their staff,