

Women sidelined in Covid-19 teams — report

BY FAITH NYAMAI

Women are not well represented in the national Covid-19 response teams and plans across the globe, a new report has shown.

The CARE International report reveals that despite the disease disproportionately affecting women, their needs across the globe are going unmet.

It further reveals that the glaring gap in the female to male ratio representation is likely to affect women negatively during and after the pandemic.

CARE Secretary-General Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro said women are bearing a disproportionate burden in the pandemic, yet in far too many countries their voices are silenced.

"If world leaders are truly committed to fighting this pandemic, they urgently need gender equity. Not just lip service, but real action," she said.

Saying women make up over 70 per cent of the global health and social care workforce, with many facing escalating levels of gender-based violence during the movement restrictions.

CARE Kenya Country Director Philippa Crosland Taylor said the exclusion of a diverse range of women from public and political decision making is unacceptable.

"The exclusion leads to laws, policies, public and political decisions, budget allocations, services, and programmes

that fail to account adequately or even at all for women's experiences, needs and rights," she said.

The challenge, Ms Taylor said, is not simply to add women to existing structures, but to transform those structures to allow for women's meaningful participation.

According to the report, majority of national-level committees established to respond to the pandemic do not have equal

30 per cent

Representation of women in Kenya's Covid-19 response committees according to a recently released report by CARE International.

female-male representation. The research sampled 30 countries across the world, including Kenya.

Of the countries that had established such committees, 74 per cent had less than one-third female membership, and only one committee was fully equal. On average, women made up 24 per cent of the committees.

In seven countries — about 25 per cent of the sample — CARE could not find evidence that the government had made funding or policy commitments for gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproduction

health (SRH) services, or women specific economic assistance.

The research also established that 54 per cent of countries have taken no action on GBV that CARE could find, while 33 per cent do not appear to have addressed SRH in their response despite clear evidence of the impact of the crisis on these issues.

Further, 76 per cent of the countries surveyed have made at least one policy commitment that supports women, but one policy cannot account for the tremendous implications of the pandemic on gender equality.

From the research, Kenya has less than 30 per cent women representation. Across the world, only Canada has more than 50 per cent of the national Covid-19 response team made up of women.

Brazil has the lowest percentage of women serving at the national level, with less than 4 per cent representation. The country has also taken few steps to meet women's needs during the pandemic.

"Countries that have more women in leadership, as measured by the Council on Foreign Relations Women's Power Index7, are more likely to deliver Covid-19 responses that consider the effects of the crisis on women and girls," read the report.

In many contexts, a lack of gender balanced leadership could worsen the effect of the crisis for women and girls and their families, the report notes.