



# Gender Equality and Mainstreaming for Recognition of Prior Learning in Kenya

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) presents a pathway for women's empowerment in Kenya, supporting inclusive economic opportunities for underprivileged groups. However, historic barriers to education have left many women without access to formal training, and as RPL gains momentum, they risk being left behind in gaining certifications and recognition for their income-generating skills learned through informal work. As Kenya implements a national RPL system, it is vital to ensure gender mainstreaming is embedded at all levels, and stakeholders have the capacity and awareness to conduct RPL activities with gender equality practices.



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# Rationale for Gender-Responsive RPL

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## Understanding RPL

RPL is the process of recognizing knowledge and skills gained outside of the formal education system. It identifies, reviews and assesses skills learned through lived experience and matches them against prescribed standards or qualifications, providing certification or credit value often required for entering formal education, further learning, and professional growth.

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## RPL in Kenya

The need for RPL in Kenya stems from the colonial education system, which left many with gaps in their education and training, leading to inequality of opportunities, illiteracy and unemployment. While efforts have been made to address these issues, skills development outcomes still do not match market needs due to a mismatch between skills produced and labour market demands.

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## RPL: A Pathway for Empowerment

While young Kenyans face barriers to accessing formal education and training, women and girls face an additional layer of barriers, such as patriarchal social norms, early pregnancy, domestic chores, and gender-based violence. RPL systems should be designed with the goal to improve gender equality at all levels, and be gender-responsive in their design and implementation to anticipate and accommodate the issues women face.

# Stakeholder Insights

## Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholders reported issues with miscommunication, duplication of efforts, ambiguous terminology, mistrust of the RPL process, inequitable services for women, and lack of decision-making opportunities for groups most impacted by RPL. More effort is needed to develop a shared understanding of concepts and procedures, and to bridge gaps between stakeholders.

## RPL Awareness

There is a lack of awareness of RPL and its potential to increase women's livelihoods, both among women themselves and among decision-makers such as business owners, TVET faculty and staff, and policymakers. Information is not effectively communicated to women, and market and economic systems are often viewed as gender-neutral, leaving women unable to access available resources.

## Embedding Gender in RPL Framework

Although RPL has become a priority area for formalizing workers' skills, there is a lack of interventions targeting women within larger systems and processes. Gender mainstreaming, gender-based policies, gender-responsive programming, and gender sensitization within public agencies, institutions and the private sector are needed to benefit all beneficiaries and be efficient with limited resources.

# Accessibility to RPL for Women

## 1 Financial Assistance

Women need financial assistance for transportation, costs of tests and materials, accommodations, and wages and time lost while accessing RPL services.

## 2 Gender-Friendly Facilities

RPL facilities should provide childcare, maternal care spaces, and access to sanitary and hygienic spaces to accommodate the needs of women.

## 3 Flexible Pathways

Flexible pathways, such as partial credentials or bridging programs, flexible testing times, and gender-sensitive language translation and interpretation, are needed to aid women's reentry to education and the workforce.

## 4 Sector Selection

Selection of sectors for RPL should include both those where women are typically underrepresented (e.g., STEM, trades) and those where they are overrepresented but lack formal recognition (e.g., childcare, domestic work).

# Guiding Principles



## Recognition of Intersectional Identities

Gender-based interventions must be flexible to accommodate women who belong to multiple underprivileged groups, such as those with disabilities, religious or ethnic minorities, single mothers, or LGBTQA+ individuals.



## Gender-Inclusive and Accessible Design

RPL services and supports should be designed with women as the primary users, incorporating principles of universal and inclusive design, such as appropriate assessment options, accessible facilities, gender-sensitive staff, and financial support.



## Integrating System Thinking

Gender-based policies and procedures should prioritize the outcomes of people who access RPL, especially female recipients, to ensure consistency across institutions and positive impacts throughout local, national, and international hubs.



## Kenyan Socioeconomic Context

Gender equality strategies should align with long-term national goals, such as Vision 2030, the Big Four Agenda, and the National RPL Framework, while considering the impact of Covid-19 on the education infrastructure.

# Vision 2030 and the Big Four Agenda

The Kenya Vision 2030 aims to transform Kenya into a newly industrialized, middle-income country by 2030, providing a high quality of life and a clean and secure environment to all citizens. The Big Four Agenda, the third medium-term economic blueprint from 2018-2022, focuses national resources and attention on four major sectors: food security and nutrition, affordable universal health care, affordable housing, and manufacturing. RPL programs and practices should be sensitive to these new and evolving strategic plans, especially relating to economic needs and directives.



# Kenya's National RPL Framework

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## KNQF Alignment

The Kenyan National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) developed the national RPL Policy Framework in 2020 to align RPL to the Kenyan National Qualification Framework (KNQF).

2

## Objectives and Outcomes

The RPL Framework provides objectives and outcomes of RPL, defining roles and responsibilities for institutions.

3

## Implementation Process

The Framework outlines the process of implementing RPL in Kenya, including a directive for inclusivity, non-discrimination and gender-responsive policies and practices.

4

## International Partnerships

The government of Kenya has been supported by international partnerships, such as Young Africa Works TVET-02 and PROSPECTS, to establish and roll out RPL in the country.

# Impact of Covid-19

Lowered revenue for educational institutions

Higher enrollment demands on public training institutes

Permanent closures of private institutions

Remote learning platforms

Higher mental health and substance abuse challenges

Higher pregnancy rates, especially for girls and young women

Increased absenteeism and dropout rates

Inconsistent enrollment

Covid-19 had a significant impact on the education infrastructure in Kenya, including lowered revenue for educational institutions, permanent closures of private institutions, higher enrollment demands on public training institutes and remote learning platforms. Students also face more substantial mental health and substance abuse challenges, increasing absenteeism, dropout rates, and inconsistent enrollment. Additionally, there have been higher pregnancy rates, especially for girls and young women, accelerating the need for gender-friendly facilities and support.



# RPL for Reentry and Job Opportunities

A significant focus of RPL is on helping people enhance job opportunities as they search for better employment; however, RPL can also serve to help students who have had their studies interrupted due to the pandemic reenter the education system. By providing a pathway for recognition of skills and prior learning, RPL can empower individuals, particularly women and underprivileged groups, to gain certifications and access formal education and training, leading to improved economic opportunities and sustainable livelihoods.





# Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Recognition of Prior Learning in Kenya

This guide provides a comprehensive strategy for embedding gender equity practices within Kenya's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework. It outlines the rationale, approaches, and practical applications for ensuring women have equal access and opportunities in the RPL process. By aligning with national policies and engaging stakeholders, this strategy aims to empower women, challenge gender norms, and promote inclusive economic growth through skills recognition.



# National Framework Strategies

1

## Overarching Policies

Several gender-based policies and strategies exist within Kenya's public sector agencies, providing a cohesive framework for implementors to build equitable RPL programs and initiatives. Aligning with macro-level goals like Vision 2030 and the SDGs lessens duplication of efforts and facilitates monitoring and assessment.

2

## Stakeholder Communication

With numerous organizations participating in RPL, facilitating meaningful communication between stakeholders, especially those from rural areas, can be challenging. Intentional focus on knowledge sharing and equitable communication methods is needed to ensure all parties, including local gender advocates, are involved in developing RPL.

3

## Enforcement and Monitoring

Gender-based policies must be established at the national level and utilized, monitored, and enforced throughout programs and projects. This ensures consistent standards and outcomes within institutions, increasing women's and girls' access to certification.



# Institutional Strategies

## Organizational Structures

Establishing relevant gender equality practices within organizational structures should prioritize the local community context. Clear roles, responsibilities, mandates, and accountability procedures are needed, along with activities like Gender Committees and gender focal points. Organizations can also collect gender-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based decision-making.

## Educational Institutions

Gender equality at educational institutions involves changing gender norms in subject and career choices, increasing women's participation in male-dominated sectors, and making infrastructural changes like washrooms and childcare facilities to facilitate women's participation in education and training.

## Industry Players

Industry players promoting RPL among their workers need to ensure equal opportunities for women, fair compensation for women who gain certification, and serious consideration of women seeking formal employment through RPL credentials.

# Community and Individual Level

## 1 Community Perceptions

Gender perceptions at the community level direct women's roles at the household level and their ability to exercise agency. For gender mainstreaming to be effective, there needs to be a change in perception of gendered roles and norms at the community level.

## 3 Multi-Stakeholder Approach

Gender mainstreaming at the community level involves a multi-stakeholder approach, with partnerships between community-based groups, community leaders, and the engagement of men and boys. This participatory approach is an effective way to initiate change and challenge the status quo.

## 2 Household Dynamics

Traditional gender roles at the household and family level lead to many women dropping out of secondary education. Promoting gender equality at the community level will lead to more women gaining confidence to access RPL and increase their participation in formal education and employment.



# Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

1

## Senior Leadership

Gender-inclusive initiatives must start at or be supported by senior leadership as champions for gender equality. Leaders should embed values of gender equality in organizational culture, ensure gender-responsive policies, review governance structures for biases, and engage with stakeholders to establish goals and targets.

2

## Participatory Approach

Using participatory approaches and methods ensures all voices, including women in informal occupations, community leaders, advocacy groups, and others, are integrated into the development of RPL initiatives. This increases agency, ownership, and the localization of the RPL system.

3

## Engaging Men

Combatting gender inequalities in RPL necessitates building investment from men and male leadership by including their voices. Framing men as stakeholders in gender equality places them as active agents in changing RPL to a more inclusive system that benefits all.

# Inclusive and Accessible Practices



## Human Rights-Based Approach

The human rights-based approach aims to promote and protect human rights by addressing inequities and discriminatory practices that impose barriers on groups like women. It encourages participation, inclusion, and accountability in development initiatives like RPL.



## Gender-Based Analysis

A gender-based analysis investigates gender-responsive data to understand power dynamics and their outcomes for women and girls. This allows institutions to assess and carry out recommendations informed by gender-disaggregated data within their capacity.



## Community Engagement

Developing communicative strategies depends on local context factors, such as engaging through leadership, gender-targeted campaigns, and reaching women in places they gather. Effective community engagement is vital for increasing women's willingness to see RPL as meaningful.

# Capacity Building Approaches

## Gender-Responsive Budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting incorporates a gender-based perspective into budgetary processes, merging gender-sensitive RPL policies with budget practices to embed macro-level decisions into practical application and reduce gender inequities.

## Gender Policies and Committees

While gender mainstreaming policies exist in TVET institutions, cultural stigma and gender stereotypes still restrict women's participation. Gender committees can work alongside policies to change campus culture and normalize gender-equitable activities.

## Gender Training

Gender sensitization training within an institution has a multiplier effect, normalizing non-discriminatory attitudes and standardizing gender equality practices, including conducting gender analysis, scaling training, and increasing the valuation of gender equality on the ground.

## Gender-Based Monitoring and Evaluation

Gender-based monitoring and evaluation of RPL practices is used to reveal whether they address different priorities and needs of women and men, and to identify measurable, gender-based outcomes and indicators. This ensures practices remain relevant and reduce gender inequities.



# Significant Policies and Consultation Process

Policy	Description
Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	The pinnacle document for gender equality, outlining state, organizational, and individual obligations to protect and promote women's civil, political, economic, social, and cultural freedoms within a framework of non-discrimination and equality.
Recognition of Prior Learning Policy Framework in Kenya, 2021	The national RPL framework, developed through a stakeholder consultation process involving a consortium of Kenyan and Canadian institutions, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders.

The process for developing this Gender Mainstreaming Strategy involved extensive stakeholder consultations, including interviews and focus groups with TVET institutions, government agencies, international organizations, women's associations, and other relevant parties. The consultations aimed to gather first-hand perspectives, identify gaps and opportunities, and ensure the strategy is inclusive and aligned with national development strategies.



Q&A

THANKYOU!