

Women are the backbone of rural economies in developing countries and play a significant role to ensure their families' well-being. The purpose of this study was to determine challenges facing women enterprises in Kandara District, Murang'a County. The study was based on the assumption that women in Kandara engage in various business enterprises and in the process, they face challenges that impede their business development. The study reviewed relevant literature in economic empowerment of women, situation analysis of women in Small and Medium Enterprises. Challenges facing Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya and strategies for economic empowerment. The study was guided by Shane's General Theory of Entrepreneurship and was carried out in Kandara District and involved a sample population of 863 registered women in Small and Medium Enterprises. The research design used was descriptive survey. Simple random sampling was used to obtain the sample population of 286 female respondents which accounted for a 30% representation and 20 male SME owners purposively selected. Data were collected using questionnaires and focused group discussion guide and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software after coding it. The study found that a majority of female entrepreneurs in Kandara District is aged 26-35 years: married. Widowed or separated: with family responsibility and stability being a challenge to them. It was further established that the level of education is not a serious challenge to them since a majority had basic education. A majority of them operate small sole proprietorship businesses with minimal capital investments and small profit margins. The study revealed that a minority of the sampled entrepreneurs had business licenses while a majority lacked and some operated on road reserves. The study also found that women SMEs from Kandara District faced historical, deep-rooted, sociocultural, Economic and political discrimination, bias, Stereotypes and prejudice, founded on patriarchy, which placed the women

in the kitchen as a mother and a housewife. To address the challenges, it was established that respondents prefer effective policy changes which are gender responsive and implementable: establishment of a united front to advocate for the rights of women entrepreneurs: restructuring mechanism of short-term multiple loan for women entrepreneurs: creation of a central coordinating body for women's entrepreneurship development: and training and capacity building to enable women entrepreneurs handle complex businesses. In view of this, it was concluded that these challenges adversely affect women entrepreneurs and both policy and cultural readjustments are necessary to improve the capacity of women in their endeavour to engage in profitable business. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Kenya and more particularly in Kandara District. The study findings can assist policy makers who need to put in place measures to improve women entrepreneurs' managerial competence.