Voices of Women Workers in the Informal Sector: COVID-19, GBV Risks and Livelihoods

Author: ICRW Africa Hub

Presenters: Chryspin Afifu & Serah Njenga

SVRI Forum 2022
Paradisus Cancún, México
September 21, 2022
Women in the Informal Sector

Kenya
66%

Uganda
87%

India
92%

KNBS, 2019
UBOS, 2020
NCT, 2019
 Did COVID-19 and its prevention measures impact exposure to GBV and access to SRH services among women working in the informal sector?

 How did COVID-19 policy responses specifically impact the livelihoods activities of IWW in the service, trading, and food sub-sectors?
Gender norms including notions of masculinity and limiting women's mobility and control over resources—that restrict women's access to skills, resources, employment, access to infrastructure such as toilets, creche and increase labour market segregation, burden of paid and unpaid work, gender pay gap, and risk of gender based violence (GBV) including sexual harassment at workplace and other manifestation of GBV.

COVID-19 SPECIFIC IMPACTS, RESPONSES AND COPING STRATEGIES

Government Policy Responses - social security, relief, economic packages, services for healthcare and GBV survivors

Private Sector Responses - labour retention, payments, social security, conditions of work including addressal of GBV at workplaces.

Community - cooperation, support networks and pressure of civil society actors.

- Access to social-protection and social security including cash transfers and food subsidies.
- Ability to form collectives and bargain.
- Agency and decision making.
- Access to GBV redressal platforms.
- Freedom from multiple forms of GBV.
- Ownership of assets and access to credit and skills.
- Sustenance in paid work (business or jobs) and new opportunities.
- Control over income and expenditure.
- Burden of work (paid & unpaid).
- Food security, access to healthcare including sexual and reproductive health care needs.

Macroeconomic context and policy directives driven by inequality, increase in GBV, privatisation, informalization, minimal access to social protection and social security, fiscal austerity and low expenditure on GBV and its linkages with women's participation in the economy.
REBUILD Study Methodology

1. Study Location
- Kenya
- Uganda
- India

2. Methods
- Desk Review
- Case studies
- Primary data (survey, FGDs, KII, IDI)

3. Ethical Approval
- ICRW IRB
- Local IRBs
GBV: The Shadow Pandemic

- Gender-blind pandemic with gendered effects
- COVID-19 deepened existing social inequalities
- Sexual exploitation in informal workplaces “Sextortion”
- The existing norms & inequalities in the informal sector increase GBV vulnerabilities
- Hampered SGBV services – limited reporting, access and use of preventive & responsive services & referral pathways
Desk Review Findings

- Declined labour force participation e.g., in Kenya from 79% to 49% (2019 vs 2020)
  - Layoffs often targeted low skilled, casual, seasonal jobs
  - Reduced incomes due to loss of jobs and inability to engage in productive work
  - Service sectors where women participate more were severely affected

- Increased GBV risks, reports and limited access to SRH services

- Burden of care increased due to school closures, sick family members etc.

- Women in informal economy were invisible in fiscal and macroeconomic policies intended to mitigate against Covid-19 shocks

- Due to informality, women were unable to obtain financial products to cushion their businesses
Case Study: Hawker- Nairobi

- Physically challenged
- Hawker, in Nairobi City
- Married, with 7 children
- Family breadwinner

During Covid 19 restrictions
- Business affected
- Unable to support family needs
- Unable to pay house rent
- Beaten by husband
- Unable to pay house rent
- Evicted from house
- Divorced by husband
- Did not receive any government social protections
- As a PWD, & woman she felt marginalized, excluded
Recommendations for Policy Action and Programming

- Prioritize gendered dimensions in funding crisis related interventions to cushion women workers
- Intentional inclusion of women in informal sector in policy development and implementation processes
- Further research on what works to shift norms that propagate SGBV
- Review social protection policies to include women in the informal sector & SGBV survivors
Thank you!

More about REBUILD project available [here](https://www.icrw.org)