

INCOME SHOULD NOT BE GENDERED: A POLICY BRIEF ON WOMEN IN INFORMAL AND UNPAID CARE WORK

Executive Summary:

The informal sector is an important but unregulated sector of the economy. Globally, women are disproportionately represented in the informal and unpaid care work sector. The informal sector, defined by self-employment, waged workers in unregistered enterprises, and unregistered workers either in formal or informal work systems, accounts for 95% of female employment in Nigeria.

It is important to note that the significant increase in participation of women in the informal sector is largely informed by institutional and cultural barriers and not necessarily interest. However, this sector has not been given the appropriate policy attention due to lack of awareness and poor understanding of their relevance to the economic growth of the society. This policy brief documents needs assessment from two local government areas of Ibadan, components of intervention, results of interventions, and propose recommendations for tailored strategies to support women in the informal sector and unpaid care jobs.

Needs assessment revealed that many women in low-income settings engage in informal and unpaid work, and they contribute significantly to the economy of the family and society. However, these women face immense challenges due to lack of regulation. Some women involved in family business and care of the elderly do not receive any income and thus depend on the partners for sustenance, a situation that often leads to gender-based violence.

This activities for this project included stakeholders engagement, community sensitization, townhall meeting and in-depth interview with women working in informal sectors.

INTRODUCTION

The informal sector is an important but unregulated sector of the economy. Informal work ranges from street trading, domestic work, to farm labour. Despite the importance of the informal sector, they are often left out of policy agenda due to common misconceptions about regulations and policy relevance. Globally, women are disproportionately represented in the informal and unpaid care work sectors, they constitute 60% of informal workforce. Across all regions of the world, women spend on average of three to six hours daily on unpaid care activities, while men spend between half an hour and two hours. Gender inequality, a violation of women's right and an impediment to women's economic actualization, is a major driver for women to seek employment in the informal sector. Many women enter the informal work sector because of motherhood, need to take care of the family, rather than non-interest in working a formal job.

Across the globe, women face inferior income opportunities compared with men. Women are less likely to work for income or actively seek work in a formal setting. The global labour force participation rate for women is just over 50% compared to 80% for men. Women are less likely to work in formal employment and have fewer opportunities for business expansion or career progression.

When women do work, they earn less. Emerging evidence from recent household survey data suggests that these gender gaps are heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though, women participation in labour force increased in the last 10 years, the gender gap in formal employment is not declining, 1 in 20 employed women are in formal employment.

In traditional Nigeria societies, socio cultural norms relegate women to work around the home or be engaged in petty trading. Majority of women in rural communities are engaged in unpaid activities or underpaid for their work. It is also the responsibility of women to feed and care for family members, which takes so much of their time and limits their income-earning opportunities. This leaves them vulnerable and limits the quality of service they can access.

This policy brief assessed the impact of unpaid care work on women's economic empowerment and its intersectionality with gender-based violence. This brief also sheds light on the steps that organization took to advocate for women in informal and unpaid care work sector.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Women in Ibadan, Oyo state are largely engaged in informal sector and unpaid work. This ranges from family business, agriculture, trade, care of the elderly, and domestic activities.
- Most women involved in family business are not paid for their contributions and time spent on the business.
- The informal and unpaid work are mostly unstructured, invisible, undervalued, and lack legal protection.
- Women engaged in this sector face challenges like ;poor payment, income insecurity, lack of social protection, limited access to resources, and gender-based discrimination.
- Some women are restricted by their partners to pick up a formal job because of the need to take care of the home and children/elderly, usually the in-laws. However, these women are not compensated or paid monthly income for the domestic work done.

COMPONENTS OF INTERVENTION

The project was carried out in two urban local government areas (LGAs) in Ibadan – Ibadan North and Ibadan North-East between July 2023 and January 2024. These LGAs were purposely selected, and twenty-five communities were selected in total. The intervention components included both male and female participants and are;

1. Community engagement with community leaders during their monthly meeting to raise awareness about women in informal and unpaid jobs. These leaders were sensitized about the inequality that women face on their jobs, disparity in salary structure for women in informal sector and how it hampers economic actualization for women. In addition, cultural barriers were identified as impediment to women's economic realization.
2. Market outreach and engagement of market leaders in two major markets in the LGAs to advocate for more inclusion of women in economic activities.

In addition, the stakeholders in the different markets were sensitized to hold discussions with business owners to pay women a comparable amount with the men. Highlight of the market outreach was creating awareness for men who own joint business with their wives to pay them a regular income, separate from the family allowance.

3. Sensitization of religious leaders and worshippers in churches and mosques. Advocacy to religious leaders was to ensure that they include issues of women empowerment and economic actualization in their preachings.
4. In-depth interviews and video documentary among 7 women who are engaged in the informal sector and work as unpaid care workers. Most of the women in the unpaid care work were due to marital reasons for them to take care of the home and children/elderly.
5. Town hall meeting to disseminate and discuss the result of the different engagement to key stakeholders from each community.

FINDINGS

- Cultural beliefs and social norms have normalised gender differences in income. It was generally believed that women should earn less than men for the same job and number of hours spent on the job.
- Community members believe that women should not earn an income when involved in family business. After all, the man takes financial responsibility of the home, so all the earnings should go to the man. This situation exacerbates women's financial dependence on their partners and GBV.
- Social norms do not support women's financial empowerment and actualization. There was a general belief that women become uncontrollable when they are economically empowered. Thus, women's economic pursuit should be limited to domestic chores, care jobs, petty trading, support of partners' businesses, etc.

- Women working in informal sector face different challenges such as poor and irregular payment, lack of pension scheme and hazard allowance. These women earn as low as N7,000 (4.4USD) in a month and some contractors still try to obtain a bribe from these women to retain their jobs. Unfortunately, many of these women bear the financial burdens of their homes. They also complained of experiencing GBV, especially when they are not able to provide for the home or insist on getting financial support from their partners.
- Despite women's engagement in unpaid jobs, unemployment, and poor payment, they still bear the financial burdens of the homes. A situation that forced many women to augment their income with other menial jobs like street trading, begging, doing laundry for others, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from this intervention focuses on four key areas;

Recognition

- The government should formalize and acknowledge the economic value of informal and unpaid work.
- Create policy that protects workers in the informal sectors.
- Collect and disseminate data on the contribution of women in informal sectors to the economy.
- Promote public awareness and appreciation for their work.

Protection

- Extend social security benefits and labour protections to informal workers.
- Advocate for the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 189 on decent work for domestic workers.
- Strengthen legal frameworks to combat GBV and discrimination against women.
- Women and girls should be allowed to engage in the work, business or trade of their choice
- Promulgate laws that enable women in family business to earn to be paid by their partners/family

Empowerment

- Provide targeted skills training and micro loans to support income generation and business development for women.
- Facilitate women's cooperatives and access to markets.
- Promote financial literacy and access to financial services.

Access to Services:

- Ensure affordable and accessible childcare and healthcare services for informal workers.
- Facilitate access to land ownership and other productive resources for women.

CONCLUSIONS

Women in informal and unpaid work face a lot of challenges which inadvertently contribute to GBV. Supporting women in informal and unpaid work is not just a matter of equity, but also a critical investment in Oyo State's social and economic development. Implementing these recommendations will create a more inclusive and just society, recognizing and empowering the valuable contributions of women.

CALL TO ACTION

We urge the Oyo State government, civil society organizations, and development partners to adopt these recommendations and work collaboratively to create a supportive environment for women in informal and unpaid work. By investing in their well-being and empowerment, we invest in the future of Oyo State.

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This policy brief was developed by: Omowumi O. Okedare, Omobolanle Adededeji and Wuraoluwa Ayodele on behalf of Women Safe House Sustenance Initiative, with funds from Urgent Fund Africa.

