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# Advocacy Brief

**Three Emergency Social Protection  
Measures to Support Women in the  
Informal Economy in the COVID19  
Crisis**

**UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office**

**As COVID19 spreads in Africa, informal workers are hard pressed to comply with social distancing or confinement measures as they need to work to provide for their basic needs. Here are three things that UN Women Country Offices can advocate for to ensure that women working in the informal economy do not fall through the cracks in the current crisis.**

## **1. EXPAND COVERAGE OF UNCONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS TO INFORMAL WORKERS**

**Income replacement mechanisms are critical and urgent to support informal workers in this crisis.** Expansion of unconditional cash transfers to informal workers is therefore essential. This would allow informal workers to comply with social distancing measures, thus contributing to slow down the spread of the epidemic. Informal organizations in many countries are now calling for such income replacement measures to be implemented as part of a wider package that can support vulnerable workers, WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) report.

**Governments must be supported by donors and the international financial institutions to create the fiscal space to cover this expanded social investment to respond to and recover from the crisis.** The type and design of the cash transfer will depend on existing programmes and the potential to create new mechanisms in each country. Discussions as to how to design social protection strategies to respond to COVID19 in Africa are currently taking place at the country level. UN Women, together with other UN agencies needs to boldly advocate in that dialogue to ensure that unconditional cash transfers are expanded from traditional vulnerable groups to the wider population of informal workers.





## Examples of cash transfer programmes in the context of the COVID19 crisis

Argentina: Transfer of AR\$10,000 to informal workers (3.6 million people)

Colombia: "Solidarity income" includes a one-off payment of COP 160,000 (\$108) for informal workers and their families (3 million households) via bank accounts for those who have them and mobile payments for others

Ecuador: Cash transfer of USD\$60 for informal workers earning less than \$400 per month

Egypt: One-off payment of EGP 500 planned for registered informal workers

Philippines: Under the Emergency Subsidy Program, the government will provide 18 million people (low-income families and households working in the informal economy) with P5,000-P8,000 a month for two months

Tunisia: One-off cash transfer of TND200 (USD68) to 623,000 households working in the informal sector, who are not covered by any social assistance program and who are vulnerable to shocks (households registered in the social security system with low-cost healthcare card)

In South Africa, a coalition of 10 organizations in the informal economy has called for the implementation of a "Living Cash Grant" to be extended to informal workers. In India, the Right to Food Campaign has released a call for the government to urgently distribute food, soap and cash to poor and informal workers.

The Alliance of Indian Waste Picker's has demanded "all waste-pickers and informal waste collectors be given emergency basic income of INR 10,000 per month per household."

## 2. PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN-LED PRODUCTION OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

**Public Works Programmes are one of the main social protection instruments in low income countries.** They provide a wage paid by the State to vulnerable groups in exchange for undertaking certain tasks necessary to provide public services (e.g. rehabilitating infrastructure, working in school canteens, etc.). In the context of social distancing measures to contain COVID19, many traditional 'works' undertaken under PWPs won't be able to take place. However, works that can be undertaken 'from home' will be able to continue.

**The COVID crisis has led to an unprecedented absence of personal protective equipment around the world, masks in particular.** Markets for sanitary equipment are collapsed and it has become virtually impossible and hugely expensive to obtain supplies of protective equipment. This is having an impact in the rates of health personnel infected by the virus, hence making containment of the pandemic even harder. In these circumstances, some countries such as Spain have turned to emergency local production of masks, gowns, and other basic protective equipment for health personnel, organized through home-work networks of women.

**A Public Works Programme to support women in producing masks and other basic protective equipment, can contribute to slow down COVID and provide income to women, especially those in vulnerable situations in the informal economy.** UN Women should advocate for the establishment of such a programme in collaboration with the Government, other UN agencies, donors and stakeholders at the country level. UN Women can also be instrumental in organizing networks of women and women-led businesses and provide advisory services to guarantee quality standards, as well as ensure that labour standards and the rights of women workers are respected.

## Public Works Programmes in the COVID Response

In the context of public works in the Philippines, informal sector workers who have temporarily lost their livelihood due to the enhanced community quarantine, can apply for temporary employment program, limited to 10 days of work involving disinfection/sanitation of their houses and immediate vicinity. Beneficiaries will have orientation on safety and health, payment of 100% of the highest prevailing minimum wage, and enrolled to group micro-insurance.

### 3. GENDER RESPONSIVE PROCUREMENT OF KEY SUPPLIES FOR IN-KIND TRANSFERS

**In kind transfers in the form of food, soap, and other basic equipment to fight and cope with the immediate effects of the pandemic are yet another social protection mechanism to be implemented in the region.** Women working in agriculture, the majority of whom do so informally, will be hard hit by mobility restrictions and close of urban markets. UN Women should advocate for sourcing of food and basic products from women's producer associations and cooperatives in order to support rural economies and guarantee income in rural areas for informal agriculture workers. UN Women can leverage its networks with rural women and agricultural producers, and can play an intermediation role with Governments and other UN agencies, such as the WFP and FAO, to facilitate links and contracts to benefit women farmers and producers.





## Examples of gender responsive public procurement for in-kind transfers in West Africa

In Senegal, UN Women has reallocated USD 150,000 from the climate-resilient agriculture programme to purchase rice from participating women producers. The rice purchased will be used for the COVID19 response, which includes the Government providing basic necessities to vulnerable families receiving monthly cash transfers.

In Mali, UN Women is procuring goods from women-owned enterprises and cooperatives supported by its programmes to prepare survival kits to be distributed to the most vulnerable (an estimate USD 200,000). This will insure business continuity for women-owned businesses and make them more resilient to the impact of this crisis.

