



GUIDANCE NOTE

UN WOMEN EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN COVID-19 RESPONSE



1. BACKGROUND

The coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) that was declared a global pandemic by The World Health Organization (WHO) on March 12th, constitutes a significant threat to the fundamental rights and economies across the globe. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not gender neutral, as it affects men and women differently. Therefore, a gender lens is essential to our responses to the pandemic, or else women will carry a disproportionately higher socio-economic cost than men. Globally, women are more vulnerable to economic shocks wrought by crises such as the coronavirus pandemic.¹

Like other regions in the world, COVID 19 pandemic is spreading rapidly in the in East and Southern Africa Region.

As of April 22nd, a total of 4,848 cases have been reported as follows:

South Africa-3,465, Kenya-296, Somalia-286, Tanzania-254, Rwanda-150, Sudan-140, Ethiopia-114, Uganda-61, Mozambique-39, Zimbabwe-28, Burundi-11, South Sudan-4 cases,

according to John Hopkins university. Although the cases might seem low compared to other regions in the world such as Europe, America and Asia, the pandemic is in its early onset and the figures are changing rapidly and on a daily basis. This means that an action-oriented approach is needed to ensure that the needs or women are addressed as it pertains to their socio-economic well-being.



Agriculture remains one of the most important sectors of women's activities in Africa with more than a third of employed women in the agricultural sector.² In ESAR, the COVID-19 pandemic is already disrupting people's livelihoods, with a disproportionate impact on poor households and smallholder farmers and informal businesses and the pace of this disruption is likely to accelerate in the weeks ahead. For instance, it is glaring that there has been an impact on women's abilities to pursue economic empowerment activities.

This impact has taken is a challenge where it can be noted that sectors such as small holder farmers/producers where women are particularly active in the food chain development and trade are faced by the lack of or absence to social insurance measures and schemes to cushion against such pandemics. Small-holder farmers (predominantly women) are likely to face challenges in accessing markets due to travel restrictions and food prices will rise accordingly (in Liberia during Ebola, a market assessment by

The World Food Programme showed a 30% rise in basic commodities prices).³

An initial analysis of COVID-19's economic impact, finds that Africa's GDP growth in 2020 could be cut by three to eight percentage points.⁴ This most certainly will trickle down to the ESAR region and will change the short- and medium-term economic outlook and could potentially have a very significant socioeconomic impact in countries in ESAR. Globally, women represent less than 40% of total employment but make up 57% of those working on a part-time basis, according to the International Labor Organization.⁵ Women who are involved in the formal sector have been or may be encouraged to leave to focus on caregiving, household needs and their employment which likely, risks being affected through dismissal.⁶

Their presence in the household could also present the challenge of increased burden of unpaid care work and caregiving and present a rise in the cases of gender-based violence.

All these challenges subsequently result to aggravation of disparities between genders regarding livelihood means, limit the economic autonomy of women, knowing that this will have an impact on the well-being of all the family.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead in loss of demand and revenue for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in ESAR which subsequently affects their ability to function and cause liquidity shortages. This will also be the case in access to public procurement for Women Owned Businesses where there is a slow in government functions and processes. Many businesses, particularly SMEs, are under significant cost pressure and face potential closure and bankruptcy⁸ and these are the sectors in which women can be found predominantly. That is likely to lead to widespread job losses.

At the same time, the pandemic will impact productivity across many sectors such as the service industry e.g. food, tourism etc. because of higher levels of vulnerability and lower resilience related to their size. Cross border traders, often women, will be unable to continue their trade activities as borders are closed. Informal sector and daily wage workers will also be at risk of disrupted livelihood activities that will negatively impact their subsistence.



A) EMERGING MULTI AND COUNTRY OFFICE ISSUES

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, emerging issues are noted for UN Women's increased engagement in its tripartite mandate of Normative, Coordination and Operational activities:

- Proactive engagement and a contribution to inter-agency work on socio-economic impact of COVID-19 to ensure strong gender analysis is critical. Exploring digital and mobile means of collecting the data including SMS and phone-based surveys are being explored to conduct rapid gender assessments at the multi and country office level.
- Proactive awareness raising on the required measures to prevent spread of the virus across beneficiaries, partner organizations, Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) signatories is on-going as a part of communications outreach and prevention.
- Issues of Gender Based Violence have been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis and all stakeholders across the region require information and psycho-social support to prevent, combat and recover from the gender-based violence actions and its associated economic costs.
- Timely revision of Annual Work Plans to identify activities that can be done virtually and activities that will be cancelled or postponed leading to the need to revise budget accordingly. Time is of essence; thus, revision is required in order to identify new activities/reformulate current ones and engage donors accordingly to be able to redistribute the funds for the activities contributing directly to COVID-19 response. Additional resource mobilization might be required to implement activities that haven't been envisioned earlier in the year.
- In the situation of restricted movement, social distancing and in some cases complete lockdown, the work is being done virtually, thus preparatory stage of the activities can still be proceeded including development of terms of references, conducting recruitments, call for proposals, procurements, preparation for the events, research among others.

2) INTERVENTIONS PROPOSED

In light of the mapping exercise undertaken by the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Unit in UN Women East and Southern Africa (ESARO), it is important to note that majority of the multi and country offices (M/COs) have undertaken or are undertaking the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in collaboration with other agencies. Cognizant of this, the Regional Office would like to propose Programmatic and Policy interventions of the priorities for consideration for the prevention and response to COVID-19 for the Women's Economic Empowerment area. M/COs are also encouraged to develop guidelines on the gender impact of COVID-19 and disseminate to governments and other stakeholders.

A) CLIMATE SMART-AGRICULTURE

As anecdotal evidence shows that women are at the heart of the agricultural labour force and their substantive contribution to food nutrition, security and agricultural income, is critical, M/COs are encouraged to take into consideration pragmatic and policy interventions that will promote women's resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the economic impacts of COVID-19 on both agricultural formal and informal markets, agriculture and livelihood interventions should be informed by gender analysis of these impacts.

Therefore, UN Women M/COs are encouraged to:

I. Work with the existing networks of Women Cooperatives to as a source for food supplies and for in kind transfers for women: As the urban, peri-urban and rural economies continue to gradually absorb the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women M/COs should leverage on their existing network of cooperatives in order to support rural economies and guarantee income in rural areas for informal agriculture workers. While cognizant that this type of intervention cannot be done directly by UN Women, M/COs can collaborate with existing stakeholders with a coordinated approach in the area of Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) to ensure that the rural economies and informal sectors are prioritized among recipients of food transfers.

II. Strength access to markets and financial services through digital trade and digital platforms for agriculture: Use of the BuyfromWomen platform as an existing tool for countries such as Rwanda for women's continued access to information, markets, financial services etc. This will also minimize post-harvest losses and contribute to an increased income to cushion women against economic stress and recessions. Such digital platforms can also be scaled up to ensure they are accessible to the maximum number of women beyond the direct beneficiaries of these Programmes.

III. Participate in any Special Working Groups such as Food Security groups in response to COVID-19 to ensure gender is incorporated in interventions on economic empowerment. Rwanda has been noted to be actively involved among other country offices.

IV. Support governments and other stakeholders in food trade related costs programme and policy interventions. Amidst the economic uncertainties, food trade remains essential to women in the rural economies. M/COs should work with stakeholder to develop and implement measures that provide ease of acquiring and mobility of food commodities, reduce food wastage and promote subsidies for food consumers.

V. Work with stakeholders so that all employment made available through food distributions should, where feasible, be made available on a gender parity basis. share useful materials and documents in a spirit of cross-learning and team building through established Community of Practice.



B) GENDER AND MACROECONOMICS

In the context of rapidly developing crisis and associated measures like restricted movement, social distancing and lockdowns, those dominated in informal sectors are hit by the socio-economic and health crisis the most. Informal workers and informal cross-border traders can't afford suspending their operations, otherwise they will be left with no income and no social protection whatsoever. Due to this reason these categories are most vulnerable to the virus as neither can they comply with stay home recommendations nor are they aware of the seriousness of the situation as well as prevention and protection measures that are required. Additionally, lessons learned from previous economic crises as well as epidemics like swine flu, SARS, MERS and Ebola highlight the central role of employment, social protection and social dialogue in mitigation and recovery policies. Therefore, UN Women M/COs are encouraged to:

I. Explore unconditional cash transfers programming to urgently deploy of funds to most vulnerable female-led households and women in informal sector like small-scale traders, domestic workers, etc. This should be done on close dialogue with Governments, Donors, Partners Organizations and other UN Agencies We already see that informal workers organizations are calling Governments for additional measures, for example, 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. UN Women needs to take a proactive stance and facilitate this dialogue to ensure social protection measures speak to the needs of women and girls. Additionally, a proactive advocacy is required to expand and adapt existing social protection schemes to target women (e.g. social pensions, cash transfers) including waiving of conditionalities.

II. In collaboration with Governments and UN Agencies establish a Public Works Program to engage women in the production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), like protective masks as they are currently in high demand. UN Women can also be instrumental in organizing networks of women and women-led businesses and provide advisory services to guarantee quality standards.

III. Large interventions at scale make a difference, especially when endowed with maximum resources and innovative policy solutions, for example, new and various types of cash transfer Programmes for target groups. Given, that UN Women doesn't typically work on cash transfers - **a partnership with other UN Agencies** that do such a type of programming including WFP, FAO, UNICEF, ILO, World Bank would be critical.

IV. Leverage on gender-responsive budgeting initiatives to ensure they target needs of most vulnerable in the on-going crisis. Examples of measures could include allocation of resources to ensure sufficient and affordable water, sanitation, and hygiene services for vulnerable groups of women and girls in informal settlements, rural areas, homeless, older, with disabilities, migrants, refugees. GRB as a tool will be key for both short-term and long-term responses including in the phase of economic recovery. Continued monitoring of gender responsive use of national budgetary resources allocated to the COVID-19 effort is important for subsequent informed programming and advocacy.



C) ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women that tend to dominate Small and Medium Enterprises across ESA Region will and already are hit the most by the coronavirus crisis. Such businesses typically do not have cash liquidity to go on for over two weeks and are extremely vulnerable to economic shocks. Such businesses are unable to protect their workers economically and offer benefits of social protection, which are typically enjoyed by employees of larger companies. Therefore, to both address the health of workers as well as sustainability of operations it is recommended to:

I. Organize a wide outreach communications campaign to reach companies (WEPs signatories, partner organizations, vendor to UN Women, women-owned businesses and their employees with guidance and recommendations on protective measures (hygiene requirements, teleworking arrangements) as well as guidance on economic support measures for the workers, especially those with heavy domestic care responsibilities. Such measures include flexible working arrangements, paid leave, paid sick leave among others. Few country offices initiated such engagements.

II. Engage with Governments on the design of economic relief packages addressing immediate needs of women-owned businesses and female-led households both in terms of hygiene, health issues as well as financial support. This could include low-interest loans for SMEs, financial support to highly feminized sectors, expanding social protection for all, active fiscal policy, subsidies for SMEs for paid leave for workers, financial/tax relief for SMEs. Additional policy responses shall be put in place to accommodate needs of essential workers that need to work during the crisis, for example emergency childcare solutions due to the closure of schools and measures to ensure continuity of home-based care for older persons and persons with disabilities.

III. Develop database of women-owned businesses in essential sectors of economy in the context of the virus crisis (food and basic supplies, sanitary and personal protective equipment) and share these databases with Partner organizations, WEPs signatories, other UN Agencies to encourage gender-responsive procurement. Many businesses including WOBs are switching to high demand goods production like face masks.

Assistance with such switch and quality standards can be provided to achieve better productivity of entrepreneurs.

IV. Explore the use of digital platforms such as selling space to enable women to continue their operations as well as for non-financial purposes, for example, sharing of critical information. Explore platforms other than BuyfromWomen that go beyond agriculture, possible in collaboration with private sector/WEPs signatories. Training and capacity building shall also be moved to digital spaces in the context of social distancing, restricted movement and lockdowns.

V. Encourage, give guidance, technical assistance and communication on the use of mobile money and internet banking instead of cash. A case example is Mozambique who are supporting Village Savings and Loans (VSL) groups to use MPESA and mobile banking services. They are also informal market vendors to mitigate the effect of COVID-19 in business, social protection measures.

VI. Continue virtual dialogue with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), implementing partners and women entrepreneurs' networks, associations and groups for focused, relevant and targeted response measures.

VII. Monitoring, data collection and analysis; Since the crisis is evolving rapidly, careful monitoring of the direct and indirect effects of all interventions are crucial to ensure policy responses are and stay relevant. A comprehensive **gender analysis of socio-economic impact of COVID-19** at country level is required to highlight and track the impacts in the countries as well as policy responses. Data of such analysis shall be disaggregated by sex to ensure a gender dimension is represented. In countries where there is no sex disaggregated data continued advocacy efforts for disaggregation by sex and age in recording and reporting of COVID-19 related prevalence and mortality rates are required. The analysis shall also have short-term and long-term recommendations for adjustment in UN Women's programming as well as recovery measures to be undertaken at national level. Additionally, conducting **a rapid gender assessment** using mobile phones is recommended given that no face-face data collection can take place.

VIII. Support from the Women's Economic Empowerment Unit at the Regional Office to M/COs will include:

- **Technical support** through review of the ongoing impact assessments, studies, TOR's, programmes etc. to M/COs.
- Support through **development of key messages, communication packages** on WEE.
- **Regional Assessment of socio-economic impact of COVID-19** which will highlight and track the impacts in the countries as well as policy responses, short-term and long-term recommendations for UN Women adjustment in programming.
- **Financial support** of ongoing and/or new initiatives in M/COs as well as efforts to mobilize resources for country offices.
- **Document good practices and lessons learned** from the current situation that can be used in the future. Take stock on the available information.

ANNEX

WEE related links and useful content

- Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on food and agriculture: FAO
http://www.fao.org/2019-ncov/q-and-a/en/?fbclid=IwAR2IUaATf-9w3EOn6sCkjhFpvzAmQXYFBIT-1Se5Yhe_v57MXHGruYHMPkhB
- Socio-economic assessment of COVID-19 impact by ILO
https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf

Footnotes

¹ <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2319>

² <http://www.fao.org/3/am307e/am307e00.pdf>

³ <https://www.wfp.org/countries/liberia>

⁴ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>

⁵ <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2319>

⁶ The consideration of gender in the framework of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in West and Central Africa

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>

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DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.
A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN
AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS
ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE
PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR
NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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