



**Women in Informal Employment  
Globalizing and Organizing**

**COVID 19, CITIES & URBAN INFORMAL WORKERS:  
AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

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# KEY MESSAGES

- Pre-COVID
  - inequities + injustices + indignities faced by informal workers (3 I's)
  - dominant negative narratives towards informal economy
  - misfit between existing legal and policy frameworks and reality of informal work
- COVID
  - exposed fault lines in labor markets, including 3 I's of informal work
  - shone a spotlight on role of informal workers in provision of essential goods and services
- Post-COVID – 3 possible scenarios
  - “Old Deal” - return to old normal which was bad for informal workers
  - “Worse Deal” - reversals of gains made for informal workers
  - “New Deal” - reforms to protect informal workers + promote informal livelihoods

# REMARKS

- ▣ COVID 19 pandemic-cum-lockdowns have shown spotlight on...
  - pre-existing injustices and disadvantages faced by informal workers
  - role of informal workers in providing essential goods & services
  - promising examples of inclusive relief responses for informal workers
    - ▶ opportunity for transformation BUT risk of reversals
- ▣ Two Illustrative Cases
  - street vendors
  - waste pickers
- ▣ Relief ▶ Recovery & Reforms: Opportunity for Transformation + Threat of Negative Reversals

But first recent official statistics on the size and composition of the informal economy in India and elsewhere

# FIRST-EVER GLOBAL ESTIMATES: Informal Employment as Share of Total & Urban Employment

<b>Countries by Income Level</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Urban</b>
World	61	44
Developing Countries	90	79
<b>India</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>79</b>
Emerging Countries	67	51
Developed Countries	18	17

Sources:

Global - ILO 2018; Bonnet, Vanek & Chen 2019

India – PFLS 2017-18, analyzed by G. Raveendran

# FIRST-EVER GLOBAL ESTIMATES: Composition of Informal Employment

<b>Countries by Income Level</b>	<b>Self- Employment</b>	<b>Wage Employment</b>
World	64	36
Developing Countries	79	21
<b>India</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>44</b>
Emerging Countries	63	37
Developed Countries	49	51

Sources:

Global - ILO 2018; Bonnet, Vanek & Chen 2019

India – PLFS 2017-18 , analyzed by G. Raveendran

# STREET VENDORS

- Play a critical role in food security:
  - 70% of households in low-income areas in 11 cities in sub-Saharan Africa normally source food from informal traders: 1/3 buy food from informal traders daily + nearly 2/3<sup>rds</sup> at least once a week (African Food Security Urban Network)
  - 90% of food retail trade in India: street vendors + *kirana* stores (Sudha Narvayan)
- Before COVID...
  - in most cities, faced harassment, bribes, confiscation of goods on a daily basis and evictions on a regular basis
  - in some cities, recognized for contributions + natural markets protected
- During COVID...
  - in most cities, not allowed to operate
  - in some cities, allowed to operate if they sell food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables

# PROMISING EXAMPLES FOR STREET VENDORS

- **South Africa** – 7 days into lockdown, in response to pressure from civil society, government declared informal food vendors essential service workers
  - in consultation with public health experts, WIEGO prepared health safety guidelines & posters for informal traders = water points + sanitizers & bleach + safe layouts + testing
  - public health experts in SA concluded that, as long as health safety guidelines are followed, informal traders can trade as safely as supermarkets.
- **India** - Vegetables on Wheels scheme – Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)
  - vegetable vendors allowed to sell vegetables & milk in neighborhoods
  - drivers of e-rickshaws deployed to transport vegetable vendors

# CREATIVE USE OF PUBLIC SPACE FOR STREET VENDING



Myanmar



Indonesia



# WASTE PICKERS


- Provide essential waste collection services and reclaim recyclable waste ► clean cities & reduce carbon emissions
- Before COVID...
  - ▣ in most cities, denied access to waste and to dumps/landfills; harassed by local authorities
  - ▣ in growing number of cities, granted contracts & infrastructure to collect and recycle waste
- During COVID...
  - ▣ in most cities, faced closed dumps and landfills + decreased demand/buyers and prices for recycled waste materials
  - ▣ in some cities, recognized as essential services providers and allowed to collect waste – but often without protective gear.

# PROMISING EXAMPLES FOR WASTE PICKERS

- **Waste & Citizenship, Belo Horizonte, Brazil**
  - Mapped whether waste pickers are receiving relief measures such as basic cash grants & food baskets
  - Drafted operational manual for resumption of segregated waste collection
  - Designed operational safety measures – during collection, transportation, storing, sorting, processing waste ► 3 levels of protection (72-hour storage of segregated waste at source + safe equipment & processes + individual PPE)
  - Mapped costs, taxes & other operating expenses of cooperatives of waste pickers to resume operations following safety measures - in order to raise funds to meet these expenses
- **SWaCH Cooperative, Pune, India**
  - Negotiated right to continue to provide waste collection and recycling services
  - Provided protective gear and processes for waste pickers

# RELIEF ► RECOVERY & REFORMS: OPPORTUNITY & THREAT

- **Opportunity for Transformation:**
  - Recognition of urban informal workers and their contribution to city economies and societies
  - Integration of urban informal workers into urban plans: e.g. natural markets of street vendors + waste collection/recycling services of waste pickers
  - Extension of social protection to urban informal workers
  - Inclusion of informal worker leaders in urban governance
- **Threat of Negative Reversals:**
  - Permanent displacement from sites of work – through evictions + privatization
  - Increased police harassment and violence
  - Deepened discrimination and stigmatization



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THANKS TO YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST!

For more and regularly updated information, blogs,  
podcasts and other resources on informal workers  
and COVID 19, kindly visit:

<https://www.wiego.org/covid19crisis>