

HOME BASED WORKERS NETWORK UGANDA

**OPEN STATEMENT ABOUT IMPACTS OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC ON
HOME BASED WORKERS IN UGANDA**

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Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives

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Hon. Vincent Ssempijja
Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries

Hon. Raphael Magyezi
Ministry of Local Government

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We represent the women and men who work from our homes or in collective spaces near our homes sewing garments, weaving baskets, stitching shoes, doing other craft work, agri business, preparing and selling food and assembling electronics amongst other activities for our livelihood.

In Uganda home based workers are part of the 94% workforce in informal employment according to ILO statistics 2018 on the size of informal employment globally. The ILO statistics further confirm what we already know and see in our network that the majority among us in informal employment are women 96% women and 92% men. Although we make a vital contribution to the well-being of our families and to the national and global economies, we are largely invisible, unrecognized, unheard and unacknowledged as for our economic contribution.

The products and services that we provide are to the local and global market, our crafts and baskets have been sold internationally for many years yet we still remain poor and unrecognized. When the COVID 19 pandemic struck Europe and the USA we began to see a decline in orders for crafts from international customers and many of us turned to our gardens in the urban areas and villages to plant beans, maize, bananas, sweet potatoes, cassava and more to feed our families. When the pandemic reached Uganda, our lives changed completely.

COVID-19 impacted on different spheres of home-based workers' lives in Uganda:

Health and safety

- Domestic Violence and Gender Based Violence increased
Family negligence mostly by men, leaving all responsibility to women
- High cost of medical treatment and in some cases not getting treatment at all, as health facilities are hard to reach due to the ban of public transport.
- Poor accommodation space as some of us had to sleep at work places like in the markets and building sites if we wanted to continue working.

Income and food security

- Some of Home Based Workers members did borrow credit to access basic needs like maize and beans
- Accessing relief packages provided by the government become a toad's walk where it managed to reach
- The burden of rental payment, debt payments taxes and loans weighs heavily on us.
- Those of us who are employed by intermediaries suffered a loss of income as workplaces were closed while at the same time the price of all basic items increased.
- We were forced to reduce the price of our goods as buyers, mostly the formally employed, take advantage of the situation that we have nowhere else to sell.

Employers and contractors

- The orders and contracts that we had were halted with no clear terms; we are not sure if they will be resumed. This threatens hope of economic stability and any future chance of employment.

Financial services

- Money that had been saved from cash rounds in our groups' saving Schemes was withdrawn to cater for daily livelihood. Most of the saving for the previous year had already been used to pay school fees.
- Members ability to continue saving at this time is difficult and some groups have stopped saving completely until the end of the lockdown.

Communication and information

- Public transport was banned leading to no access to buy raw materials, to reach customers in order to sell what we had already produced.
- Home Based Workers were not mentioned among the ‘Essential Workers’ in the country therefore we are not able to access official backing document for transportation to move around to continue our livelihood.
- Without our daily income we cannot buy airtime and affordable internet data to continue communication among members of our network to share skills and experiences during the lock down so that we can earn something.
- The messages about Covid 19 prevention measures are not in our local languages hence the majority Ugandans are missing out on much needed reliable information about the pandemic.

Agriculture

- The small-scale farmers were kept busy in the fields and this helped to reduce incidents of domestic violence in some regions.
- However, due to reduced income our members who do small-scale farming faced a challenge of accessing the correct and most affordable pesticides for crops like beans, maize, vegetables, coffee and passion fruits they are now experiencing the loss of these crops threatening their own food security and those that they normally supply.

Education system

- As home based workers we are complimenting government’s programme of teaching children. We are also using the lockdown period to pass on basic skills like farming, making briquettes, kids flame, weaving and knitting to our children.

Changes that we want to see as home based workers after the COVID 19 lockdown:

Health and Safety

- Monitoring and follow up on the dedicated gender based violence toll free line provided by the Child and Family Protection Department under Uganda Police, to ensure that people do receive help when they call the number. Experienced personnel should be employed to come to the communities and sensitize families, communities and essential service providers about domestic violence and gender based violence.
- Sectoral platforms to be put in place for home based workers especially women to raise their particular concerns so that they are responded to officially and on time.
- Accessibility to medical facilities and stable supply of utilities to prevent the spread of COVID 19 such as the distribution of free masks, detergents and sanitizers to all vulnerable poor who cannot afford buy such items but can use it sparingly.

- Parliament to urgently return the 20 million Uganda shillings that was received from Covid -19 supplementary budget from which each legislator got 20 million, the motive of the money was however unclear since several legislators continued to give uncoordinated justification for it; this should be returned and used for the production of masks for the vulnerable poor.

Income and food security

- Government should guarantee safe employment and social protection like paid sick leave for all workers.
- Home- based workers must be contracted on fair and decent terms and conditions to produce scrubs and masks with no discrimination when it comes to bidding.
- Creation of a fund by government for informal workers to access credit with interest free government loans to boost and also restart their businesses.
- More sensitization and support about urban agriculture for urban dwellers to improve the food sector.

Communication and information

- Empower women's organization to share appropriate local language messages with women in local communities to know if they are experiencing domestic violence and how they can call for help.
- Government to scrap 'over the top taxes' on internet data so that home-based workers can easily communicate at an affordable price.

Employers and contractors

- Protection of our jobs and incomes by reinstating and improving the contracts that were in place before the lockdown.

Financial services

- Create a special financial committee at the districts to support informal workers in their communities especially home- based workers to access credit to restart our livelihoods.
- The special financial committee should issue official backing document concerning resolutions about loans and rent payment to ease the financial burden on home-based workers.

Agriculture

- Recognizing small-scale agriculture and providing support including access to the correct and most affordable pesticides at a community level.

Education system

- The ministry of education and sports should embrace co-curricular activities to benefit students by providing learning materials for skills, handcrafts and physical education to enhance what we are teaching our children at home now.

- Reduce the costs of electricity, information technology and devices to make it affordable for the vulnerable poor to access information and learning. Newspapers, radios, televisions, smart phones are all too expensive for the vulnerable poor to afford. Identify and distribute at least small radios to vulnerable poor families to ease learning at home/home schooling.
- Send qualified teachers to the communities for surveys, implementation and monitoring of the e-learning programme.
- Government to train and sensitize local leaders about the use of briquettes that are safe for the environment. Provide the education and equipment that will enable us to produce briquettes for home use and for government institutions especially hospitals, prisons, displaced and refugee camps that are currently accommodating more people than their usual capacity.

Statement issued by the Home-Based workers network of Uganda

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