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Interrogating Intersectionality: Considerations on Critical Inquiry and Praxis for WIEGO's Actionable Research

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Executive summary

This paper aims to expand on the emerging scholarship examining intersectionality as an approach for advancing struggles against global inequality, based on a case study of the research advocacy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). This case study examines WIEGO's general approach to research and its *Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study*, which converge in highlighting the substantial diversity in the structure of informal employment and the interplay among gender, occupation (status in employment) and earnings within informal employment.

In this sense, the case study provides points of alignment with intersectionality and a two-fold methodological reflection of intersectionality's applicability. First, it considers how intersectional methodological tenets such as oppression, complexity, context, comparison and relationality can help shape the design of quantitative and qualitative tools. Second, it reflects on the challenges of capturing lived experiences of inequality in both quantitative and qualitative methods. These discussions provide insights into the methodological challenges of applying intersectionality in research. Overall, the case study highlights how a more nuanced approach of co-producing knowledge aligns with intersectionality's objective of bridging knowledge and action to drive policy change and address complex social problems.

While the Covid-19 crisis study was not framed as intersectional research, it focused on differentiated pathways of impact through both intrasectoral and intersectoral lenses across distinct contexts and geographical locations. It did not seek to analyse all socially constructed dimensions of difference, but rather emphasised how challenges within sectors (intracategorical analyses) and across sectors (intercategorical analyses), at an individual, household and collective level, shaped informal workers' experiences during the pandemic.

Principles that guide research at WIEGO illuminate the direct connection between research and praxis, similar to intersectional tenets that frame critical inquiry. For the past 25 years, WIEGO has been advocating for the official recognition of informal workers in economic analyses and supporting struggles in the informal economy through evidence-based research aiming to highlight the contributions and the unique vulnerabilities of informal workers globally. This aligns with the pursuit of a fair and equitable society – a core aspect of all intersectional research praxis. In addition, central to WIEGO's approach is the value of local knowledge and a plurality of perspectives. Like intersectionality, WIEGO's approach rejects distinctions between knowledge and practice and promotes collaboration among informal workers' organisations, researchers, local authorities and policymakers towards developing new approaches for addressing complex social problems. Hence, for WIEGO, challenging persistent inequalities involves a process of empowerment that supports workers to think critically about their challenges and influence the institutions that shape their experiences within the broader economic and social system. As such, key WIEGO research-praxis principles



include *recognition* of workers' situated experience and knowledge, *trust-building* with long-standing WIEGO partners and membership-based organisations, *ongoing communication and feedback loops*, *relationality*, and attention to *context*. Inextricably linked to these principles is the notion that affect and care can serve as a bridge between critical inquiry and praxis, whereby workers can see their lived stories accurately reflected in research findings.

Designing either quantitative or qualitative tools poses challenges when applying intersectionality. Discussions are needed around which qualitative methods can responsibly capture embodied experiences of inequalities, including the ways in which workers communicate about these experiences. There is a need to explore if and how intersectionality can strengthen historic and context-based analyses of segmentation and risk in the informal economy in specific geographies. Furthermore, it is important to avoid an additive approach to intersectionality that ends up diminishing the potential to understand the complex ways in which inequalities intersect. Overall, it is important to recognise where intersectionality may present tensions in efforts to build solidarity among workers in informal employment at both local and global levels and from an intrasectoral and intersectoral perspective.

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Introduction

The recent global health and economic crises have highlighted the inequality of the global economic system. Evidence suggests that emerging-market and developing economies have been disproportionately impacted by the immediate and long-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic (World Bank, 2022). In addition, some scholars have argued that the sudden valorisation of certain sectors as “essential work” during the pandemic, perpetuated the unequal, gendered and racialised patterns that have historically informed the allocation of work in the economy, exposing some people to a much higher risk than their more privileged counterparts (Mezzadri, 2019; Stevano et al., 2021). As a result, informal workers, migrants and other historically marginalised groups of people have been disproportionately impacted by both the risk of exposure and vulnerability to the effects of the crisis in many regions (Bambra et al., 2021; Berkhout et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021; WIEGO, 2022).

This has led to the proliferation of studies concerned with the varying degrees of vulnerability between countries, within communities and across various sectors of the economy. Central to these studies is the overriding notion that intersecting social, structural and economic challenges have a significant impact on the ability of individuals and communities to build resilience and achieve prosperity under the current economic model. Moreover, vulnerability is determined by where and how individuals are positioned within particular social and economic contexts.

Such critical scholarship has expanded social science research by contributing a more nuanced analysis of the global economy that reflects the dynamics of the social system from which it is created. Intersectional approaches, in particular, have been influential in illuminating material inequalities and the differentiated ways in which the economy has been experienced throughout history by institutionally marginalised groups of people. As a result, these approaches underpin many studies that seek to identify social and economic vulnerabilities with the aim of developing policies that are more targeted and context-specific to meet the needs of those most affected by compounding crises in the worlds of work, economy and society.

For communities in the global South, intersectionality predates the theorisations of Western academic scholarship. This is because the social, political and economic conditions in these countries have always necessitated more complex analyses than those envisioned through the Eurocentric frameworks that have dominated social science research. Shared histories of oppression and domination in these countries reveal an additional dimension for understanding global inequality and the ability of individuals and communities to overcome economic and social problems. Hence, in the global South, intersectionality expands social analysis by recognising the differentiated vulnerabilities of individuals and communities based on where they are located in the broader social, political and economic context. For example, Dalit feminism suggests caste as an additional type of difference which informs the violence and oppression of lower caste women at various levels of the social structure. Based on this approach, it is not only their economic status that makes Dalit

women more vulnerable, but their multiple intersecting identities along several axes of the social structure – caste, class and gender (Arya & Rathore, 2020). The unique marginalisation of Dalit women can be observed at three levels: first, as subjects of caste oppression; second, as labourers, due to social stratification reserving more exploitative forms of work for those most disadvantaged in society; third, as women experiencing various forms of patriarchal and gendered oppression (Arya & Rathore, 2020).

Similarly, decolonial feminism asserts that the differentiated vulnerabilities of women globally exceed the gendered and class-based oppression that has dominated mainstream theories about the status of women in political economy. Its approach is that the unique vulnerabilities of women around the world are linked to the totality of destructive violence generated by global capitalism, including colonialism, imperialism and institutionalised racism (Vergès, 2021). In addition, decolonial feminism responds to the limits of intersectionality by offering a multidimensional analysis of inclusion vis-à-vis marginality that is premised on the belief that systems of oppression not only create precise exclusions where inequalities intersect, but inform and shape the particular kinds of social relations embedded within the social system. Based on this approach, it is thus colonialism that establishes the politics and institutions for an economy that privileges a few at the expense of nature and the majority of communities around the world.

As a mode of social movement organising, intersectionality has been used as a tool for fostering the inclusion of those at the margins and addressing challenging issues in society (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Laperrière & Lépinard, 2016). Moreover, intersectionality offers a critical approach for movements to assess the extent to which their own work adequately reflects the diversity of experiences among their constituents (Roth, 2021) and identifies potential pathways for bridging the multiple and intersecting struggles of the most vulnerable members of society.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to expand on the emerging scholarship examining intersectionality as an approach for advancing struggles against global inequality, based on a case study of the research advocacy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). By examining WIEGO's mission in conducting actionable research with and for informal workers, the paper illustrates how advocacy in the informal economy is shaped by multiple intersecting challenges and dynamics of power in society.

The general objective, then, is to understand if and how intersectionality can bring nuance and complexity to WIEGO's specific framing around how class and gender shape segmentation in the informal economy. In other words, the case study interrogates the circumstances where intersectionality helps illuminate, or obscures, the ways in which power structures and social statuses (caste, race, age, disability) intersect to create different levels of vulnerability and risk within the informal economy. The case study does not seek to subsume class to

a broader framing of identities¹, but rather opens up the discussion on the complexity of overlapping systems of power and the potential tensions in doing so.

The first section of the report seeks to situate the definition, origins and objectives of intersectionality. This reflection looks at intersectionality's applicability as both critical inquiry and praxis, as well as some of the challenges related to applicability. The sections following explore the ways in which WIEGO's general approach to research and its *Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study* (WIEGO, 2022) intersect and align with intersectionality. To do this, the second section provides an overview of WIEGO's contributions to understanding the structure of the informal economy through an analysis of segmentation of the informal economy, along with the purposes that research serves at WIEGO. The third section outlines the objectives and impacts of the Covid-19 crisis study, while the fourth looks more carefully at the distinct phases of the study's research cycle to critically assess its strengths, challenges and limitations from an intersectional lens. Lastly, the paper seeks to highlight how the study aligns with intersectionality's call for critical praxis.

Section 1: Conceptualising Intersectionality as a Critical Inquiry and Praxis

While popular understandings of the concept of intersectionality are commonly attributed to black feminist traditions of the 1970s and early 1980s, the genealogy of intersectionality can be traced to as early as the nineteenth century in the assertions of black abolitionists and women's rights activists such as Mary Church Terrell, Sojourner Truth, Anna Cooper, Amanda Berry Smith and others who began to speak out about their unique oppression at the intersection of race, class and gender in American society (hooks, 1981; Rice et al., 2019). Building on these earlier foundations, twentieth-century black feminists employed an intersectional argument to explain the plight of black women, suggesting that true liberation could not be realised without recognising the experiences of black women as dependent upon their position within the social structure (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

In academic scholarship, intersectionality emerged from a legal context in the late 1980s as a theoretical and analytical concept for capturing the dynamics of difference in social justice movements (Cho et al., 2013). Reflecting on the limitations of single-axis approaches in antidiscrimination doctrines, legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to denote the ways in which race and gendered identities intersected to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). Crenshaw's analysis highlighted that by failing to account for multiple marginalisations in civil rights cases, courts effectively centred the experiences of the most privileged members of a group, namely white women

¹ See Fraser, N. 2013. 'How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden – and how to fix it, *The Guardian*, 14 October. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal> (November 13, 2023); Shoki, 2019 'Back to class', *Africa is a Country*, 4 August. <https://africasacountry.com/2019/04/back-to-class> (November 13, 2023).

and white men, and excluded the experiences of racialised women in conceptualising, identifying and remedying multiple forms of structural violence and discrimination in society. Moreover, Crenshaw (1989: 140) argued that this focus on an otherwise privileged group created “a distorted analysis of racism and sexism”, because understanding about race and sex become rooted in experiences which only capture part of a much more complex phenomenon. Hence, intersectionality proposes an alternative theory that recognises the similarities and differences in the experiences of the most marginalised members of a group that intersect to shape varying degrees of vulnerability across the social structure.

The concept of intersectionality has since been expanded across several disciplines in the social sciences (Cho et al., 2013). In particular, the American sociologist Patricia Hill Collins advances earlier conceptualisations of intersectionality by assessing the experiences of Black women based on the idea of a “matrix of domination”. According to their definition, domination encompasses multiple domains of power that constitute specific sites where intersecting oppressions are constructed, developed and contained (Collins, 1990). Thus, intersectionality can be useful for illuminating the organisation of and interconnections among different forms of power and for developing strategies for addressing a range of social problems.

Based on this approach, four distinctive yet interconnected domains of power can be identified (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Firstly, the *structural domain of power* refers to the fundamental power contained in the structures of social institutions such as the labour market, education and health. Secondly, the *cultural domain of power* refers to the dominant perceptions and expectations of a given society regarding particular social problems. Thirdly, the *disciplinary domain of power* refers to the way in which rules and regulations are applied, which determines people’s inclusion within or marginalisation from a given social structure. Fourthly, the *interpersonal domain of power* refers to how people’s experiences with multiple forms of power shape their intersecting identities and vulnerabilities to various forms of oppression in society.

As a critical inquiry, intersectionality suggests a multifaceted approach for investigating how complex power relations converge to shape social relations, which in turn constitute the diversity of human experiences and varying degrees of marginalisation within a given society. While the term intersectionality invokes a plurality of ways for doing intersectional research, Collins and Bilge (2020) suggest six core themes for doing intersectionality in the social sciences. First, intersectional research is concerned with analysing *social inequality* as arising out of unequal power relations which intersect to form patterns of domination among members of a given society. Second, intersectionality highlights different dimensions of *intersecting power relations* based on how systems of oppression converge at various points across multiple domains of power in society. Third, intersectional research is context specific, uncovering experiences of oppression and marginalisation within a specific *social context*, such as those related to the nation-state or certain segments of society, e.g. workers in the informal economy. Fourth, intersectional research is not only concerned with highlighting differences in society, but with examining the *interconnections/relations* of multiple categories or points of inquiry. Fifth, studies that use intersectionality as a framework often incorporate multiple forms of

analysis to reveal the *complexity* of social problems. Finally, with its origins in movements for *social justice*, the pursuit of a fair and equitable society lies at the core of all intersectional research and praxis.

According to Bilge (2013: 405), the vision of intersectionality is to generate “counter-hegemonic and transformative knowledge production, activism, pedagogy, and non-oppressive coalitions”. Hence, as critical praxis, intersectionality has been defined as: “the application of scholarly or social movement methodologies aimed at intersectional and sustainable social justice outcomes” (Luft & Ward, 2009: 11). Therefore, a key concern of intersectional praxis is moving beyond academic inquiry to develop strategies for addressing complex social problems. However, Collins and Bilge (2020) argue that intersectional praxis rejects the binary conceptions that see knowledge and practice as separate. Rather, intersectional praxis sees these two processes as intricately linked and mutually informing.

Given its broad definition, a major consideration in the literature has been on intersectionality’s applicability and empirical validity. Since there is no one way of doing intersectional research, it is often viewed as imprecise and lacking validity compared to traditional research approaches (Collins & Bilge, 2020). However, Rice et al. (2019) argue that the flexibility associated with intersectionality makes it adaptable to a variety of social analyses and methodological applications. Moreover, with social change as its key driver, intersectionality is associated with a number of activist research traditions that seek to guide this process. These include action research, participatory action research and knowledge co-production.

Building on these earlier activist traditions, knowledge co-production has emerged as one of the key approaches for promoting intersectionality as a critical praxis. Like action research and participatory action research, knowledge co-production involves the collaboration of diverse actors to produce new knowledge and transform social relations towards a more equitable and just future (Mitlin & Bartlett, 2018; Norström et al., 2020). Based on this approach, Norström et al. (2020) propose four key principles for high-quality co-production. First, co-production processes must be *context-based* and situated within specific social, economic and ecological contexts. Second, knowledge co-production must be *pluralistic* and accept the validity of multiple perspectives and forms of knowledge. Third, knowledge co-production must be *goal oriented* and aim to address complex social problems. Finally, knowledge co-production must be *interactive* and involve the active participation of all members throughout the co-production process.

This paper provides an empirical basis for promoting intersectional development research based on WIEGO’s *Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy* study. While intersectional frameworks were not used in the initial design and conceptualisation of the study, a reflection on WIEGO’s general approach suggests possible areas of alignment with intersectionality as both a critical inquiry and praxis. Thus the following sections examine how WIEGO approaches segmentation in the informal economy as a way to make visible the differentiated vulnerabilities in society and advance struggles for the improvement of livelihoods in the informal economy.

Section 2: WIEGO's Mission and Approaches to Research

WIEGO is a global, research-action-policy network committed to supporting informal workers in securing their livelihoods. WIEGO supports, strengthens and connects organisations of the working poor to enable them to amplify their collective *voice* in the policy making and rule-setting bodies that affect their work and lives. Through research, WIEGO supports the development and improvement of official statistics on informal employment and on the informal economy to raise the *visibility* of workers across distinct occupational working groups. WIEGO also promotes the *validity* of workers in the informal economy as economic agents who contribute to the overall economy and are legitimate beneficiaries of economic and social policies. Underpinning this mission, WIEGO seeks to advance workers' incorporation into policy-making and rule-setting processes.

This section looks specifically at three relevant questions: *what* helps explain segmentation (the hierarchy of employment and risks in the informal economy), *how* research helps unearth the layers of constraints on work in the informal economy, and *why* knowledge co-production serves as a framework to produce actionable data that raises the voice and visibility of informal workers.

Segmentation in the informal economy: understanding sources and complexity of risk

WIEGO has long framed its approach to understanding disaggregated livelihoods in the informal economy through a stylised pyramid of risk. First published in the 2005 *Progress of the World's Women* report (Chen et al., 2005), the pyramid illustrates the sources of risk (of poverty) by gender and status in employment. While largely a conceptual tool, a growing body of statistical evidence suggests that the hierarchy of employment in the informal economy (as depicted in the pyramid in Figure 1) is relevant to the structure of labour markets in many contexts. More specifically, the pyramid suggests that informal economies are highly gendered. Employers in the informal sector tend to earn more than other types of informal workers and are predominantly men in most contexts.

Figure 1: Segmentation of informal employment



Source: Adapted from Chen et al. (2005).

In each descending category in the pyramid, the share of women in each type of employment is greater, as are the risks of poverty (that is, earnings are lower towards the bottom of the pyramid where women are over-represented among groups such as homeworkers and unpaid family workers). Such an approach highlights the way in which gender very clearly intersects with occupations and status in employment within the informal economy.

One of the innovations of this conceptualisation is that it demonstrates that the informal economy is not simply a homogenous residual category. There is substantial diversity in the structure of informal employment, and the interplay among gender, occupation (status in employment) and earnings within informal employment is a dominant feature of informal employment which, in turn, is the dominant form of employment globally. Understanding this diversity requires an approach that recognises this segmentation and the way that gender cuts across some of the key categories or segments of employment in the informal economy. For its part, WIEGO's statistical programme, for the past 25 years, has been advocating for statistical definitions of informal employment that reflect the important distinctions between different types of informal employment. The key categories, as depicted in the pyramid, are based on status in employment and, as such, WIEGO has been advocating for an international statistical framework that, inter alia, promotes the collection of data on place of work. Such an approach allows for the analysis of intersecting and overlapping labour market constraints while positioning gender as a key variable that cuts across different types of risks.

In line with the concept of intersectionality, WIEGO's approach to segmentation and risk shows how informal workers' identities within the social structure intersect with their positions within the economic structure and shape their experiences in the global labour market. For example, marginalisation is particularly gendered in the informal economy. As such, weak structural power intersects with systemic gendered inequalities and social norms, making women more vulnerable to the conditions of work in the informal economy. Similarly, ethnicity, race, caste and citizenship continue to inform vulnerabilities in labour markets globally. Thus, in line

with intersectional understandings, informal workers face multiple marginalisations that intersect to shape their varying degrees of vulnerability across multiple structures of the social system.

Raising voice and visibility: producing actionable evidence through research

WIEGO has historically employed diverse approaches to raise the visibility of the informal economy. Drawing from activist research traditions under a broader umbrella of knowledge co-production, which can include action research, participatory action research and conventional research methods, WIEGO's belief is that informal workers have critical knowledge about the challenges they face and the solutions they need to secure their livelihoods (Ogando & Harvey, 2020). Not only does this represent WIEGO's stance on what constitutes valid knowledge and where it lies, it also represents an intrinsic value that the generation of data is never an end in itself (Ogando & Harvey, 2020).

For WIEGO, knowledge co-production holds the potential to generate grounded knowledge and highlight bottom-up solutions (Gupte & Mitlin, 2021) that are often invisibilised in policy discourse. Another fundamental aspect of co-production is that it centres a relational approach to generating robust knowledge through an accompaniment process among all actors involved, including academics, researchers, practitioners and communities. By valuing a plurality of perspectives, co-productive processes seek to establish more horizontal relationships among all actors involved, while recognising the existence of power and dimensions of privilege. More importantly, co-production is both a mobilising and a political tool that can strengthen the capacity of informal worker organisations to leverage claims-making opportunities with the state and relevant stakeholders (Alfers et al., 2016; Mitlin, 2018).

What connects WIEGO's approach to intersectionality and the various approaches to research for social change is the notion that knowledge is generated with and for informal workers, versus a research process *on* a marginalised group. In considering these research objectives, it is important to mention several principles that guide research at WIEGO, as these particularly illuminate the direct connection between research and intersectional praxis.

Recognition of workers' situated experience and knowledge is the first key principle of implementing research at WIEGO. This also reflects the understanding that different workers will experience inequalities and express agency in distinct ways across space and time.

Trust-building is the second key principle, where value is placed on the long-standing relationships between WIEGO and membership-based organisations (MBOs) and networks of workers in informal employment. Trust underscores the notion that workers are not subjects of research, but equal partners, contributing at crucial moments of research from design to collective sense-making stages. A sub-dimension of trust-building is

embedding an *ethics of care*², where listening with care and attention are conscious actions taken by researchers. Ultimately, creating the space for deep listening serves as a bridge linking critical inquiry with workers' experiences and solutions.

The use of *ongoing communication and feedback loops* is another principle that helps both WIEGO and partners strive for the most effective ways to translate knowledge and evidence. The ability to capture contextual and sectoral nuances helps workers see their stories and lived experience reflected in the data being presented. This continuous sense-making can lead to collective knowledge generation with the objective of building community, capacities and solidarity linkages.

Relationality is the fourth principle and is intricately linked to the principle of trust-building. Since WIEGO holds a function of scanning policy and academic landscapes to map spaces for workers to make their voices heard, attention must be given to the ways in which privilege and power cut across these different landscapes. While WIEGO can facilitate the opening of spaces for workers, it needs to simultaneously avoid power imbalances and undemocratic practices (both within worker organisations and between WIEGO and worker organisations).

Context is the fifth principle of WIEGO's research work. As a result of WIEGO's direct engagement with organisations of workers in informal employment, its research and policy agendas strive to reflect workers' contextual needs and demands. Contextual analysis of historic and contemporary negative narratives and policies about informal workers is fundamental.

Ultimately, a focus on these two elements of WIEGO's research – segmentation in the informal economy and tenets of knowledge co-production – resonate with an overarching goal of intersectionality, which is to analyse what hierarchies create dimensions of power and difference and which of these differences are fundamental to consider (Cho et al., 2013) for research that supports advocacy in the informal economy.

Section 3: Overview of Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy study

The *Covid-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy* study was designed to assess the impact of the pandemic and city lockdowns on the working poor, particularly with regard to effects on their lives, livelihoods and health. These assessments were deemed important to inform: (1) the relief and recovery efforts and advocacy of the global networks and MBOs of workers in informal employment; (2) the relief, recovery and stimulus responses

² An ethics of care is used here to connote the ways in which research practice allows for other relational ways of knowing and doing. It is a practice that allows for subjective dignity, connects care with the political, and does not erase the particular struggles and agency of workers themselves. It is ultimately about how research practices can reveal interconnectedness. See Lynch et al. (2021), Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) and Ogando (forthcoming).

by governments, and (3) the policy and academic discourse on the pandemic and responses to it at different stages of relief and recovery.

The study therefore aimed to identify how pre-existing structural conditions exacerbate the negative impact on the work, earnings and health of informal workers. A sectoral approach helped strengthen a disaggregated analysis on impacts. The interactions between the Covid-19 crisis and pre-existing structural inequalities were traced through three key pathways:

- *Health*: interaction of virus exposure and pre-existing deficits in health coverage for informal workers;
- *Employment*: interaction of lockdowns and pre-existing deficits in opportunities, rights, protection and voice (the four pillars of decent work) for informal workers;
- *Policy environment*: interaction of government policies and practices in response to the crisis, including police violence, and pre-existing biases in the policy/legal environment against informal workers and pre-existing exposure of informal workers to abuse by local authorities.

The research design created a common structure for all selected cities, while maintaining flexibility for comparative analysis on the basis of occupational sector, geographic location and stage of crisis. The cities include: in Asia, Bangkok (Thailand); Ahmedabad, Delhi and Tiruppur (India); in Africa, Accra (Ghana), Dakar (Senegal), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), and Durban (South Africa); in Latin America, Lima (Peru) and Mexico City (Mexico); in North America, New York (USA); and in Eastern Europe, Pleven (Bulgaria). Since no lockdown or restrictions were imposed in Tanzania, the data from the twelfth city, Dar es Salaam, were excluded from analyses. Research design was also largely shaped by two key factors:

1. WIEGO has long-standing relationships with the study partners in each of the cities. These organisations consist of both local MBOs of informal workers and global networks of worker organisations³. In consulting with study partners in each city, the research capacity of the partners was also assessed by the WIEGO Covid-19 crisis study team. In each of the cities (see appendix 1), the local study partners either had in-house research capacity or strong links with local researchers (typically based in universities or non-governmental organisations). In many cases, WIEGO had partnered with these local researchers in the past.

³ StreetNet International is an alliance of street and market vendors, cross-border and other informal traders launched in 2002. HomeNet International is a global network representing more than one million home-based workers around the world and was founded in 2021. The International Domestic Workers' Federation is also a membership-based global network of domestic and household workers and was founded in 2006. The International Alliance of Waste Pickers is a networking process supported by WIEGO that includes thousands of waste picker organisations in more than 32 countries, mainly in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

2. WIEGO has experience in conducting large-scale research in multiple cities and countries. Most notably, the Global Economic Crisis Study (WIEGO, 2009) and the [Informal Economy Monitoring Study](#) (WIEGO, 2011) were similar in design to the Covid-19 Crisis Study.

The Covid-19 crisis study included a large-scale survey of nearly 2 000 informal workers through mobile phone interviews, semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of the survey respondents and key informant interviews. The study focused on four groups of informal workers: domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors and market traders, and waste pickers, plus a further category of other workers relevant in certain city contexts, which includes moto-taxi drivers, newspaper vendors, musicians and head porters or *kayayei*. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the sample size by city and gender distribution by sector for Round 2.

Table 1: Survey sample, occupational sector by city

	Domestic worker	Home-based worker	Street vendor / Market trader	Waste picker	Total
Accra	0	0	98	49	147
Pleven	55	73	46	0	174
Dakar	0	0	0	94	94
Ahmedabad	61	55	77	53	246
Delhi	58	64	75	59	256
Mexico City	73	0	58	43	174
New York City	0	0	62	65	127
Lima	54	0	67	61	182
Durban	0	0	151	105	256
Tiruppur	0	61	0	0	61
Bangkok	55	41	64	61	221
Total	356	294	698	590	1938

Source: Sample for Round 2 of the Covid-19 Crisis Study (WIEGO, 2022).

Table 2: Gender distribution by sector (%)

	Women	Men
Domestic worker	98	2
Home-based worker	89	11
Street/Market vendor	63	37
Waste picker	50	50
Total	70	31

Source: Sample for Round 2 of the Covid-19 Crisis Study (WIEGO, 2022).

Section 4: Intersectionality, Research Design and Methodological Practice

While informal workers represent a majority in developing countries, most social protection laws and policies target formal workers and formal enterprises. These include sectoral policies, infrastructure services, social protection, child care and occupational health and safety systems. Added to this is a long-standing bias in institutions for collective bargaining, policy-making and rule-setting.

To overcome these structural barriers, WIEGO emphasises that women informal workers need to be organised and their organisations need to be legally recognised and officially represented in collective bargaining, policy-making and rule-setting processes. Through its work with MBOs, WIEGO has learnt that increased access to resources without the ability to influence broader external factors will not necessarily translate into more secure and remunerative livelihoods.

For WIEGO, challenging dimensions of inequalities involves a process of empowerment, which refers to the process of change that gives working-poor women – as individual workers and as members of worker organisations – the ability to gain access to the resources they need while also gaining the ability to influence the wider policy, regulatory and institutional environment that shapes their livelihoods and lives.

The Covid-19 crisis study was designed to support informal workers – especially women – experiencing added vulnerability due to the pandemic, a voice in the policy processes that affect their lives and livelihoods. Four broad research questions shaped the design of the study. These included:

1. What explains variation in the impact of lockdown measures on the earnings and livelihood security of different segments of informal employment, such as occupational sector, place of work and status in employment?
2. How does the impact of lockdown measures on earnings and livelihood security vary by gender within occupational sectors?
3. Under what conditions do crisis-related government interventions exacerbate long-standing decent work deficits, and under what conditions do they open possibilities for reducing them?
4. What explains variation in the reach and effectiveness of crisis-related government interventions – what is working?

Case selection

The aim of the sampling process *within* each city and sector was to identify groups of workers with characteristics broadly reflective of the membership of their organisations. Since no sample frame was available from which to draw a probability sample, we used a stratified purposive sample, which aimed to ensure that the realised sample reflected the key observable (and known) characteristics of the sample universe (the memberships of the worker organisations in each sector and each city).

Partners were encouraged to consider gender, in the first instance, as the key stratification variable to ensure that the study sample represented the gender distribution of the worker organisations. The second stratification variable was based on considerations such as the characteristics of the membership, likely variation in impacts of the crisis, and the extent to which the variable was associated with vulnerability (both pre-existing and in relation to the crisis).

Samples in each city were expected to have more than 50% women, and the analysis of the data collected during the first round of the study focused on identifying which groups of workers (by gender, age, status in employment, place of work and product market, and migrant status, for instance) experienced the most severe shocks to their livelihoods as a result of the onset of the crisis.

At the time of designing the research, WIEGO did not explicitly use the concept of intersectionality. The research questions, case selections and samples, as well as the emphasis on gender, sought to incorporate interests from its city partners. Nevertheless, the study design, methods and analysis interrogated the interaction of key variables in determining the impact of Covid-19 on the livelihoods and health of informal workers.

Overview of data collection, methods and data analysis

Round One of fieldwork was conducted during June and July 2020. In Round One, interviewees were asked about their situation in February 2020 (as a pre-Covid-19 reference period), April 2020 (the period of peak lockdowns or restrictions in all study cities) and the current period, which was mid-year, 2020. This baseline round of research explored working conditions, including earnings, before the pandemic and measured the impact of the lockdowns and the pandemic itself during the height of the crisis. The first round of research also identified impacts, if any, of government measures to mitigate economic effects of the crisis on workers.

Round Two of fieldwork was conducted from June to early August 2021 in nine of the eleven cities. Due to the severe Delta variant outbreak in Delhi and Ahmedabad, interviews could only be conducted during September and October 2021. Round Two of fieldwork sought to measure short to medium-term impacts of the crisis on livelihoods, key support measures that assisted in recovery, and gaps in support affecting the most vulnerable informal workers.

Leaders of informal worker organisations and local researchers with whom WIEGO worked were expected to:

- administer structured mobile phone interviews with a sample (n= 2 009 workers in Round One, n= 1 938 workers in Round Two) of informal workers from each of the four sectors with which WIEGO works⁴. The interviews included a core module for all workers, a set of sector-specific questionnaire modules, and four open-ended questions at the end of the interview.

⁴ Of 1 938 total respondents, 1 391 (72%) were included in both rounds of the study. Three hundred and thirty-four respondents interviewed in Round One (17%) could not be contacted in 2021, prompting the study teams to add 213 (11%) new respondents in Round Two. Findings that compare Round One and Round Two data consist of unbalanced panels, meaning that they include all respondents from Round One and Round Two. For this reason, they are not perfect representations of changes experienced by the Round One sample (WIEGO, 2022: 4).

- conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of the survey respondents and key informants. The semi-structured interviews sought to explore key issues affecting sectors of work in greater detail and probe some of the pathways through which the health and economic impacts of the crisis were experienced by different groups, and the demands and responses of informal worker organisations to the crisis. Research teams conducted nearly 90 semi-structured key informant interviews in Round One and more than 100 in Round Two. Qualitative data was analysed using NVivo software.

The first round of data collection (both qualitative and quantitative) explored key pre-existing inequalities and conditions that exacerbated the negative impacts of the crisis and reduced resilience. Some of these pre-existing conditions were expected to be related to the characteristics of workers themselves (status in employment, sector, place of work as well as gender and migrant status) while others were likely to be related to other structural conditions such as poverty, poor quality housing, limited access to basic infrastructure services, or high levels of exposure to violence and discrimination.

The second round of data collection allowed for a more detailed analysis of which types of vulnerabilities were associated with underlying inequities and injustices or the impacts of the crisis (both anticipated and unexpected) on informal livelihoods, over the course of the pandemic and through various stages of government responses. In particular, a second qualitative interview tool was designed after reflections among the Global Study Advisory Team where city partners and researchers pointed to the need for a more detailed knowledge of individual workers' experiences during the pandemic.

The shorter interview guide was developed for workers to recount their experiences during the pandemic, while the worker-leader interview guide focused on broader themes relating to the sector dynamics and organisational strategies, similar to Round One. The open-ended questions in the survey (Rounds One and Two) and the interview guides intended to give workers the space to describe ways in which their positionalities, as defined by them, held particular relevance for how they experienced risks during the pandemic. In many ways, these methodological decisions reflected an understanding that the "drivers" of inequalities and the subjective experiences of these inequalities would be multiple (Wheeler et al., 2020). In addition, from the perspective of research design and analysis, open-ended questions in the survey in Round One 1 helped to nuance the trends emerging from the survey with regard to the city-level contexts. These answers powerfully described the multidimensional impacts and fears workers were experiencing, which supported the collective sense-making process of data at both the local and global level.

The analysis of the data focused on identifying which groups of workers (for example, by gender, status in employment, place of work and product market, and migrant status) experienced the most severe shocks to their livelihoods. It was envisaged that negative impacts of the crisis on livelihoods (dependent variables) would be measured through, inter alia, inability to work, a reduction in hours worked and reduced earnings;

and on the lives of informal workers (and their households) by exposure to health risks, food insecurity, reductions in access to basic goods and services, an increase in the amount of unpaid care work, and exposure to new or greater levels of violence (within the household and from police or other local authorities).

Two examples illustrate the way in which the intrasector and intersector analyses revealed pathways of impacts on different groups of informal workers.

First, when looking at the effects on street vendors and waste pickers – two sectors that have a greater gender balance between women and men – attention was given to the ways in which workers in these sectors were (1) experiencing distinctly the adverse economic repercussions of the pandemic and lockdowns, (2) their ability to access relief and (3) their ability to recover.

Analyses in Round Two showed that the economic repercussions were more pronounced for women than men. In mid-2021, for example, women waste pickers were more likely to miss work for two months or more and were likely to report increased competition and greater difficulty in accessing waste. These latter two dynamics have a direct impact on the ability to recover earnings and reflect gender-based vulnerabilities, which are inherent hierarchies within the waste value chain. For women street vendors, analyses point to the fact that women were more likely than their male counterparts to report that their lack of capital – which was more acute than that of men even before the pandemic – constrained their ability to work.

Second, when considering whether or not unpaid care responsibilities had increased for men and women informal workers, attention was given specifically to the relation of unpaid care work on the ability to carry out paid work (Ogando et al., 2022). This linkage calls for a paradigm shift in the design of policies, infrastructure and services to address the interrelated economic, health and care crisis experienced by women at the base of the economic pyramid.

Research practice and points of alignment with intersectionality

Misra et al. (2021) put forth a blueprint for applying a more intentional intersectional methodological lens when designing research. Drawing on Collins and Bilge's (2016) theoretical tenets of intersectionality, Misra et al. (2021) look at the application of key tenets such as oppression, relationality, complexity, context, comparison and deconstruction. These tenets resonate with feminist research methods, action research and participatory action research, to name a few. Moreover, they help trace the tenets' applicability in qualitative and quantitative research.

Table 3 explores how several of the intersectional methodological tenets explored in Misra et al. (2021) align closely with methodological choices taken in both WIEGO's general research and during the Covid-19 crisis study. It is worth noting that the methodological tenets overlap with and are informed by key WIEGO research

principles, as discussed in Section 2. Furthermore, the column that presents reflections on WIEGO’s general research should be understood as connected to and not distinct from the Covid-19 crisis study.

Table 3: Applying intersectional methodological tenets to research

Tenet	How this manifests itself	General application to methodologies	Application in WIEGO’s research	Application in <i>Covid-19 Crisis and Informal Economy</i> study
<p>Oppression is the understanding that each person fits into a complex “matrix of domination”.</p>	<p>Hierarchical power relations; policies; ideologies; bureaucratic processes; daily lived experiences; research practices.</p>	<p>Develop questions that empower.</p> <p>Emphasis on workers’ and worker organisations’ agency in contexts of oppression and inequality.</p>	<p>Oppression by class, informal sector, status in employment, work arrangements, gender, age, nationality.</p> <p>Emphasis on workers’ and worker organisations agency in contexts of oppression and inequality.</p>	<p>Oppression by class, informal sector, status in employment, work arrangements, gender, age, nationality, migrant status, caste.</p> <p>Open-ended survey questions on daily lived experiences, government support, and support provided by informal workers’ organisations.</p> <p>Semi-structured interview questions relating to lived experiences, urban policies, government support, and support provided by organisations, including their organising and advocacy strategies and policy wins during Covid-19.</p>
<p>Complexity recognises that inequality expresses itself in complex ways, where socially constructed differences are always interlinked and relational.</p>	<p>Experiences of privilege and disadvantage are not fixed, but depend on the relational dynamics and context.</p>	<p>Avoid oversimplification that a given group will always experience oppression and disadvantage.</p>	<p>An analysis of intrasectoral and intersectoral differences and dynamics as they relate to status in employment, working arrangements, products or services provided, gender and age.</p>	<p>Sector-specific survey module.</p> <p>Sector-specific interview questions.</p> <p>Analysis of multiple forms of vulnerability across different structures of society, e.g. institutional, economic and social.</p>

<p>Context recognises that inequality expresses itself according to time, space and place.</p>	<p>Experiences of privilege and disadvantage are not fixed, but depend on the relational dynamics and context.</p>	<p>Attention to when and where a specific set of overlapping conditions matter most to explain inequalities.</p>	<p>Contextual analysis of historic and existing negative narratives and policies towards informal workers.</p> <p>Overview of movement building.</p>	<p>Contextual analysis of historic and existing negative narratives and policies towards informal workers and specific groups in society.</p> <p>Contextual analysis of pandemic stages, national government policy responses and access to health systems.</p> <p>An analysis of the sources of support provided by MBOs, shifts in organisational and advocacy strategies, and organising/ movement-building challenges.</p>
<p>Comparison looks at the outcomes or impacts on diverse groups.</p>	<p>Experiences of privilege and disadvantage are not fixed, but vary by group.</p>	<p>Consideration of which intersections matter most for the research question being posed.</p>	<p>An analysis of intrasectoral and intersectoral differences and dynamics as they relate to status in employment, working arrangements, products or services provided, gender and age.</p>	<p>An analysis of intrasectoral and intersectoral differences and dynamics as they relate to status in employment, working arrangements, products or services provided, gender and age.</p> <p>Regional analyses where applicable.</p>

<p>Relationality refers to the understanding that oppression for some groups is connected with opportunities for others.</p>	<p>Privilege and advantages are directly linked to another's experience of oppression and disadvantage.</p>	<p>Avoid universalising categorisations, hypotheses or analyses.</p>	<p>Examines intrasectoral power relations and differences to understand implications for access to public services and spaces for negotiation</p> <p>Examines sector demands to understand ways to support and build cross-sector solidarity linkages.</p>	<p>Analysis of intrasectoral differences in vulnerabilities based on worker leader/worker interviews and gender.</p> <p>Analysis of common and differentiated policy demands by sector to build worker solidarity.</p>
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Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Misra et al. (2021)

Of these key methodological tenets, the idea that “comparison” in intersectionality does not necessarily entail a “detailed analysis of *all* potential socially constructed dimensions of difference” (Misra et al., 2021: 13) is a valid distinction. It is this understanding of the application of an intersectional lens that aligns with WIEGO’s objective of mapping challenges within (intracategorically) and across (intercategorically) sectors at an individual, household and collective level. Moreover, these choices permit a deeper investigation of the structural forces that shape experiences of inequality and oppression. Contrary to the notion of casting the net wide or embracing an “additive misunderstanding of intersectionality” (Misra et al., 2021), the specific tenets of complexity, context and comparison can present a more comprehensive narrative of both informal workers’ lived experiences of structural oppression, as well as the ways they have leveraged power. Ultimately, these intersectional methodological tenets help answer three interconnected questions: What are the trends, threats and opportunities for informal workers within and across sectors? How do these trends, threats and opportunities vary across geographies and contexts over time? And what can we learn from the stories of resistance?

Bearing witness in a time of crisis

During the Covid-19 crisis study, WIEGO adopted a fundamental function of “bearing witness,” defined as a process of listening to workers’ stories, connecting with them during periods of isolation, and reflecting their lived experiences through knowledge translation. For the last to occur, spaces needed to be created to both value local knowledge and critically reflect on lived experiences.

What this fundamentally reveals is how “relational, other-centred ways of knowing the world”, or mediating fieldwork through affect, even if virtually, can lead to robust and highly contextualised data that shapes discourse, practice and policies (Bonu, 2022; Lynch et al., 2021; Ogando, forthcoming; Puig de la Bellacasa,

2017). Ultimately, affect and care can serve as a bridge between critical inquiry and critical praxis, where workers can see their lived stories accurately reflected in study outputs.

Section 5: Challenges of Applying an Intersectional Lens

In this section, we consider some of the challenges of applying an intersectional lens, considering the Covid-19 crisis study was not framed as intersectional research but focused on differentiated pathways of impact through both intrasectoral and intersectoral lenses.

Design of tools

One particular challenge was the development of questions for the qualitative semi-structured interview guides that would be capable of capturing embodied experiences of inequalities through workers' own ways of communicating about intersecting dimensions of these inequalities. In other words, asking workers which particular groups could have been more affected by Covid-19 (women, men, older workers, specific castes, migrant workers) did not yield the depth the question anticipated. Finding a contextually sensitive and comprehensive way to ask about intersecting identities remains a methodological challenge. One hypothesis about this is that, given the workers' identification of their occupational sector, they may have felt that targeting specific groups within the sector would undermine their overall sector demands. It may have been that interviews reflected an "emphasis on group formation" (Wheeler et al., 2020) as a way to collectively present demands.

Linked to this challenge is the centrality of race in the formation of many economies around the world. For example, Neville Alexander (1979: 253), theorising racial capitalism in his seminal contribution *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa* (published under the pseudonym, No Sizwe), explains:

It was therefore in the interests of capital to maintain, indeed to entrench rigidly, the pre-existing colour-caste system, since it provided the ideal basis, in the light of the structural conditions of the mining industry, for the most rapid development of capitalism in South Africa. The enduring drive of capital here has been to define as unskilled as many jobs as possible, since this permits the employment of more blacks, whose labour power within the colour-caste system is reproduced more cheaply.

Hence, racism created the conditions for the creation and long-term survival of South African capitalist political economy, central to which has been the exploitation of racialised groups throughout history. Thus, in cases where class and race intersect due to the historical and social context, the binaries of oppression may not be as clearly delineated as in other contexts. As a result, workers may find it easier to articulate their struggle based on one or more of their multiple identities (such as black or working class) because the intersections

are inherently implied. The challenge is to avoid an additive approach to intersectionality that ends up diminishing the potential to understand the complex ways in which inequalities intersect.

From a survey design perspective, there was less time to carefully construct questions regarding race/ethnicity in Round One. Balancing the need to begin fieldwork with concerns about providing extensive online training that would be attentive to all contextual sensitivities, the Global Study Advisory Team did not include a question on race/ethnicity in the survey.

WIEGO usually holds participatory focus groups in its action research and global studies, where consciousness-raising can emerge more organically. The inability to carry out in-person participatory focus groups and data validation workshops with worker leaders and workers limited the potential for more engaged critical reflection to support collective action. Nevertheless, the attention to accessible and timely outputs counterbalanced this challenge.

Data analysis

With smaller city sample sizes, there were moments where it would not have been methodologically appropriate to make inferences regarding differentiated impacts. Related to this, the smaller city sample sizes did not allow for an explicit intersectional analysis from both an intrasectoral and an intersectoral angle. More broadly, however, quantitative approaches, almost by definition, do not account for particular nuances. In this sense, there were clear limitations on the ways in which the quantitative data could be interrogated.

In addition, in attempting to capture data on various themes from a complex survey and a lengthy interview guide, some depth was lost on particular dimensions of inequalities.

Section 6: Intersectionality and Praxis

Perhaps one of the strongest alignments of intersectionality and WIEGO's research is with regard to the understanding of the relevance of praxis. As discussed, WIEGO's research supports movement building and local-global advocacy processes. On movement building, Cho et al. (2013) underscore the importance of intersectionality as a communal project wherein collaborations among several actors aim for communal gain. In addition, Cho et al. (2013) call attention to how power operates in distinct ways at the local, regional, national and global levels. Hence, for the authors, understanding these complexities and intertwined dynamics is fundamental to fulfil intersectionality's radical potential of bridging knowledge and action. In this respect, WIEGO's research objectives can also be understood as a communal, collaborative project that maps the ability to leverage power from the bottom up at multiple levels. It is the ability to translate local-global needs into policy wins that is the virtuous cycle WIEGO aims for in building solidarity among workers globally.

Driving research for policy action

Contributing a complex analysis of impacts at the city level helped MBOs and networks of informal workers in two ways. First, intrasectoral analyses allowed worker leaders to get a better sense in Round One of which workers were struggling most. Consequently, they were able to shape their mobilising efforts to channel immediate relief – including food, personal protective equipment (PPE) and, to a lesser degree, small cash grants from worker-led mutual aid crowdfunding campaigns and government sources – first to these workers. The Street Vendor Project in New York City, for example, raised funds from individual donors and foundations to provide relief in the form of cash cards, while the Federation of Informal Workers in Bangkok used their crowdfunding campaign to distribute baskets with essential food, goods and PPE (WIEGO, 2022: 35).

Emotional support and legal advice provided by worker organisations was another fundamental way in which worker leaders used early findings on the mental health strains experienced by workers. In Lima, the Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Trabajadoras del Hogar (IPROFHOTH) provided an in-house psychologist. It also secured funds from the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) to provide members with food and money for basic needs (WIEGO, 2022: 35). In Mexico City, Centro Nacional Para La Capacitación Profesional y Liderazgo de Las Empleadas del Hogar (CACEH) organised groups that served the double purpose of sharing information about defending rights at work and accessing legal protection, and facilitating mutual aid among group members (WIEGO, 2022: 36).

Secondly, organisations and research teams at the city level had timely data that could feed into policy opportunities. This dynamic was fundamental in opening space for WIEGO's partners to have greater control (Wheeler et al., 2020) over their use of the findings and how they could best communicate about these in their claims-making processes. One illustration is the fact that the Covid-19 crisis study data also looked at structural issues such as lack of social protection for workers. This particular angle was useful for some of WIEGO's partners to make gains with national governments. For example, in Thailand, HomeNet Thailand and the Federation of Informal Workers held a protest in December 2020 at the Ministry of Labour that was attended by hundreds of informal workers. The Ministry included the Federation's representatives in two ad hoc committees that were formed following the demonstration, and eventually agreed to several of their recommendations. These included temporary reductions in both voluntary social security contributions and interest payments for borrowers from the Ministry's Homeworker Fund (WIEGO, 2022: 36).

Co-producing content for target audiences

With the objective of generating actionable data for local and global advocacy, WIEGO, city partners and research teams, along with the WIEGO communications team, envisioned and co-produced several outputs in both rounds of the study (see Appendix 2). It is worth calling attention to at least three ways in which dissemination goals link to building a stronger intersectional approach that connects research and praxis.

First, WIEGO worked to disseminate analyses that centred on how the pandemic impacted specific groups of workers. [City fact sheets](#)⁵ were produced with key findings by sector and specific policy demands. These were used in city research launches and as a way to engage relevant stakeholders at the local level. Another example involved the production of rapid analyses on thematic issues through [Policy Insights](#)⁶. Second, WIEGO worked on an [infographic](#)⁷ with key global findings from Round Two. This user-friendly format highlighted themes and data points for workers to disseminate. Third, WIEGO ensured worker representation in several webinars to provide space where workers could raise their policy demands.

Research and relationships⁸

It is important that WIEGO always asks itself if the research it is producing is appropriate and useful for informal workers and is contributing towards addressing the challenges that informal workers face.

One example is from Accra, Ghana, where WIEGO has a long-standing history of working with the [Accra Focal Cities](#)⁹ team. In debriefs with the Accra Focal Cities team and worker leaders to understand the impacts of research during Covid-19, WIEGO was able to map how research can be a tool for workers' alliance-building, particularly with the trade union movement, academics and policy-makers.

Anass Ibrahim Hille, who chairs the Informal Hawkers and Vendors Association of Ghana (IHVAG), said the Covid-19 crisis study helped informal workers in Accra understand the situation and context in a difficult time. It connected them to each other, to workers in other parts of the world and to allies. Also, it exposed the full extent of crucial issues at a time when organising and communication were difficult.

⁵ WIEGO. n.d. COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study: City Fact Sheets. www.wiego.org. <https://www.wiego.org/covid-19-crisis-and-informal-economy-study-city-fact-sheets> (accessed 14 November 2023).

⁶ WIEGO. n.d. COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy Study: Policy Insights. www.wiego.org. <https://www.wiego.org/covid-19-crisis-and-informal-economy-study-policy-insights> (accessed 14 November 2023).

⁷ WIEGO. n.d. Long Economic COVID for Informal workers. www.wiego.org. <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/file/long-economic-covid-for-the-world%E2%80%99s-working-class-infographic.pdf> (accessed 14 November 2023).

⁸ The following section draws on an internal WIEGO impact story written by Kate Heartfield (June 2023) with inputs from the Accra Focal Cities team, worker leaders, local stakeholders and the Global Study Advisory Team. WIEGO's Impact Stories are a narrative evaluation tool WIEGO uses to document the results of its work and the change processes required to get there. The Impact Stories collect evidence of what has been achieved and work backward to ascertain how WIEGO's actions and choices contributed to the change, in positive or negative ways. As an internal learning tool, the stories focus on the impacts and influence of WIEGO's contributions and actions, but results and achievements may not be solely or even primarily attributable to WIEGO.

⁹ WIEGO. n.d. Accra. www.wiego.org. <https://www.wiego.org/accra> (accessed 14 November 2023).

When asked what was surprising and valuable in the study results, Anass Ibrahim Hille said that the study revealed the extent of the gaps in grants and sanitation support, and put that into a global context, which was very useful for the informal workers of Accra.

The Focal Cities team in Accra, unlike the teams in all the other Covid-19 crisis study cities, was able to meet in person with workers across sectors in a multi-day workshop to analyse results. This increased engagement and ownership over the research and ensured that the results were highly accurate and reflective of local workers' concerns. This stage of analysis and validation after the information was collected was a crucial point, as it involved worker leaders in contextualising the results and using them to generate proposals.

In 2021, after the first round had been completed, the Focal Cities team and worker leaders presented the study results during a policy dialogue attended by the mayor of Accra and other high-level public officials. Anass Ibrahim Hille said the presentation of the results helped informal workers from different sectors in Accra to understand each other better and, with shared issues, increased their solidarity:

It was a great occasion, where we had all the relevant authorities with us, and the WIEGO team, and each and every one was able to speak to the research. And the fact that the research was not only focusing on Ghana, but other countries as well, exposed us to many experiences. We realised that we are not alone in this, but it's a global issue.

When research is grounded in local concerns and realities, with a high degree of local ownership, it can be a visible demonstration of the power of the knowledge held by informal workers and their organisations. Such research can be a catalyst to transform existing relationships and deepen existing alliances between informal worker organisations and others in their communities.

Conclusion

When evaluated against the key tenets for intersectionality, this analysis reveals areas of alignment between WIEGO's disaggregated livelihoods approach and intersectional research praxis. Like intersectionality, an overriding objective in WIEGO's approach is the pursuit of a fair and equitable society. This is achieved through actionable research centred on the experiences of workers in the informal economy. Further, with an economic agenda centred on improving livelihoods in the informal economy, WIEGO's principles of recognition, trust building, ongoing communication and feedback loops, relationality and attention to context align with intersectional research praxis.

However, there are several areas for further exploring the connection between WIEGO's established research approach and praxis and intersectionality. First, there is a need for continued debates on how and if intersectionality strengthens historic and context-based analyses of segmentation and risk in the informal economy in specific geographies. In this regard, it is important to recognise where intersectionality may

present tensions in organising solidarity among workers in informal employment at both the local-global levels and from intrasectoral/intersectoral perspectives. Forging consensus on how to address these organising challenges is essential to avoid weakening or fracturing organisations. The goal should be to raise awareness of the differentiated experiences of inequalities as a pathway to build organisations' internal democratic capacities. Moreover, attention must be given to the ways in which workers recount their lived experiences and what narratives or identities they use in doing so.

Second, there is practical discussion of additional methods of training around qualitative tool design and analysis. Such training would help expose researchers to different techniques that translate, in a responsible and ethical manner, the forms in which embodied lived experiences of inequalities play out in distinct ways across time and space. This also involves recognising that any attempt to translate such experiences, even within a co-productive framework, will have gaps and be incomplete to some degree.

Last, attention should be given to the ways in which the concept of intersectionality has travelled across distinct academic and policy spheres, either limiting its radical potential or obscuring global South contributions. With neoliberalism's capacity to co-opt emancipatory discourse, it is fundamental to centre the ways in which economic and political structural forces entrench unequal power dynamics for multiple intersecting identities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Organisations and researchers involved in the Covid-19 crisis study

Location	Partner and collaborating organisations	Researchers
Accra, Ghana	Greater Accra Markets Association (GAMA); Informal Hawkers and Vendors of Ghana (IHVAG); Kayayei Youth Association; Kpone Landfill Waste Pickers Association	Owusu Boampong, Kweku Kyere, Lydia Boateng-Pobee
Ahmedabad, India	Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA); SEWA's Indian Academy of Self-Employed Women; and some grassroots researchers from the SEWA Union	SEWA Academy Team: Namrata Bali, Bansari Buha, Archana Dave, Jignasa Dave, Basanti Khanayat, Shanta Koshti, Gita Naila, Jayshree Panchal, Ramesh Parmar, Jasu Rathod, Khyati Shah SEWA Union Team: Rashim Bedi, Anjana Koshti, Mayuri Baldevbhai Parmar, Niruben Ashokbhai Parmar, Mumtaz Shaikh, Rekhaben Vaghela
Bangkok, Thailand	Federation of Informal Workers Thailand (FIT); HomeNet Thailand; Jaravee Association for the Conservation of Thai Massage	Pakavadee Boonkacha, Punjaree Duangngoen, Jantana Ekeurmanee, Puttinee Gopatta, Wanida Kotcharsarn, Wichaya Komin, Puttinee Kophatta, Boonsom Namsonboon, Walee Naksuwan, Indira Oonjaoban, Kantarose Pinthong, Borvorn Subsing, Poonsap Tulaphan
Dakar, Senegal	Bokk Diom	Aida Ba, Maguette Diop, Adama Soumare
Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU)	Paulina Alex, Christopher Gallus, Geoffrey Mayombo, Leyla Mohamed, Erick Shigela, Said Wamba
Delhi, India	Delhi Roundtable of Waste Pickers (DRT); Janpahal; SEWA Delhi	Malavika Narayan, Avi Maijithia, Shalini Sinha, Ankit Jha, Aamir Sherwani Khan Additional research support from Indo Global Social Service Society, Janpahal, and SEWA Delhi
Durban, South Africa	Asiye eTafuleni	Richard Dobson, Sarah Heneck, Misiwe Maphumulo, Sithulisile Moyo, Patric Ndlovu
Lima, Peru	Asociación La Parada; Central Única de Autoempleados de La Victoria, Rumbo a la Formalización (CETRAFOR); Confederación de Instituciones de Ambulantes y Afines de la Región Lima y Callao (CONFIAR); Federación Nacional de Recicladores del Perú (FENAREP); Federación Nacional de Vendedores de Diarios, Revistas y Loterías	Edith Anampa, Themis Castellano, Guillermo Perez, Carmen Roca

	del Perú (FENVENDRELP); Frente Nacional de Recicladores Ambientistas del Perú (FRENARA); Instituto de Promoción y Formación de Trabajadoras del Hogar (I PROFOTH); Red Nacional de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores Autoempleados (RENATTA); Sindicato de Trabajadoras del Hogar del Perú (SINTRAHOGARP); Sindicato de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar de Lima (SINTTRAHOL)	
Mexico City, Mexico	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar (SINACTRAHO); Trabajadores Voluntarios y Desempleados de la Ciudad de México (TVDCM); Unión de Aseadores de Calzado de la Ciudad de México (UACCM)	Jesús Bedoya, Yuleina Carmona, Tania Espinosa, Erick Serna Luna, Natalia Torres
New York City, USA	Street Vendor Project; Sure We Can	Mohamed Attia, Charla Beauvais, Stefany Cielos, Chicago Crosby, Taylor Green, Luo Guannan, Chris Hartmann, Christine Hegel, Ana Hernandez, Rafi Islam, Beki Kabanzira, Zulfa Kaid, Sari Kisilevsky, Clay Martin, Kelly Martinez, Nasif Mia, Rosa Mite, Ling Ren, Talia Salas, Camila Salvagno, Nora Swift, Husam Zaid, Irlanda Zea Marino
Pleven, Bulgaria	The Bulgarian Trade Union of Self-Employed and Informal Workers (UNITY)	Svetla Ilieva, Plamena Tsonova, Cvetelina Velichkova, Violeta Zlateva
Tiruppur, India	Social Awareness and Voluntary Education (SAVE)	S. Anandhi, Aloysius Arockiam, R. Chitra, M. Pandeewari, Mary Viyakula

Appendix 2: Covid-19 crisis study outputs

Round One Outputs	Round Two Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – thirteen fact sheets in eight languages (eighteen total) – seven Policy Insights in three languages (seventeen total) – One Working Paper – One Global Report with Executive Summary in three languages (four total) – One Global Summary of Worker Demands – One video summarising findings – Blogs, op-eds, Social Protection podcast – One global launch through blog, webinar and press release in November 2020 – Six city launches (at least) – Three workshops on communications, advocacy, and media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Thirteen fact sheets in five languages (fifteen total) – Two Policy Insights in three languages (four total) – One Working Paper with Executive Summary in three languages – One Infographic available in three languages – Five blogs in three languages, Social Protection podcast – One global “soft launch” through Policy Insights, webinar and pitching in December 2021 – One online launch of Flagship Working Paper and infographic in July 2022 – Fewer city launches (Mexico City, Lima, Accra, Dakar) – Two internal media trainings