

WOMEN’S VOICES AND LEADERSHIP IN ORGANIZING AFRICA’S INFORMAL ECONOMY

The Context Surrounding Women in the Informal Economy

In Africa, close to 85% of the workforce relies on the informal economy for their jobs and economic livelihoods. While conditions are harsh for informal workers, women face gender inequalities and societal barriers that create additional hurdles. Women informal workers often work long hours to earn minimal income, and live in environments where essential services are not guaranteed. Overall, women’s workforce participation remains lower than men’s. These conditions create barriers to women’s economic empowerment which are multi-faceted and not easily untangled.

Research Approach

The *Women’s Voices and Leadership in Organizing Africa’s Informal Economy* study aimed to:

1. Ascertain the barriers that prevent women informal workers from accessing leadership positions in organizing movements
2. Identify factors that support women’s participation and uplift women’s voices
3. Learn how unions, organizations and governments can address these challenges to promote equity to women informal workers

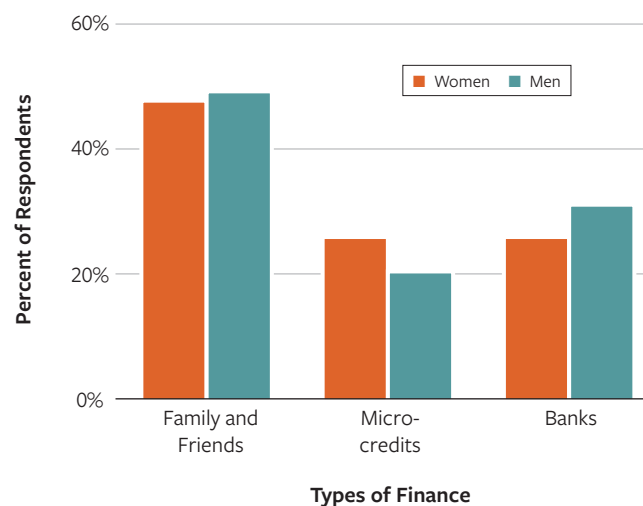
Conducted in partnership with informal worker unions in six African countries— Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tunisia—the study equips unions with evidence to promote women leadership opportunities in worker-led organizing, and guides partners, researchers, and decision-makers in their efforts towards gender equality and equitable labor participation. Results are based on a sample size of 3,000 respondents who participated in surveys and focus group discussions.

Selected Findings

Barriers to Leadership

Access to finance allows workers to expand and succeed in business, and improve their livelihoods. As the study finds, business success is linked with participation in leadership so access to finance is critical, yet women struggled to acquire such financing. In a side-by-side comparison, countries such as Rwanda and Côte d’Ivoire improved access to credit for informal workers, yet

Sources of Financing



Percentage of Respondents Receiving Credits from Micro-credit Associations and Banks by Country

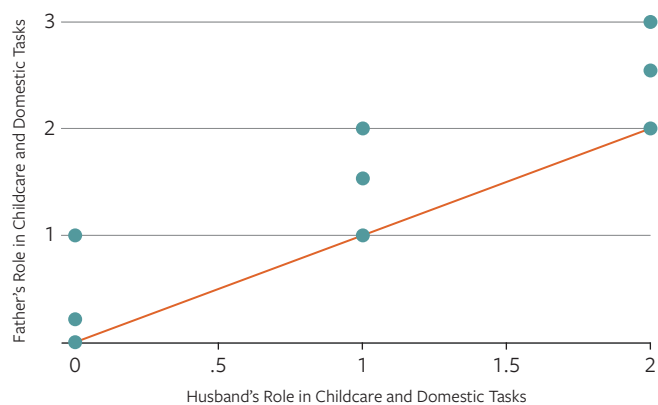
Country	Micro-credits	Banks
Cote d'Ivoire	28.38%	17.86%
Ghana	19.62%	51.41%
Liberia	25.83%	38.33%
Rwanda	50.00%	15.83%
South-Africa	13.27%	18.33%
Tunisia	18.97%	6.47%

informal women workers continue to lack capital, underscoring the importance of financing options for women’s economic empowerment and propelling women to leadership positions.

Importantly, the study found that expectations about women’s skills are a significant barrier preventing women from attaining leadership positions. One third of respondents stated that women are not skilled enough for leadership despite respondents, regardless of gender, strongly indicating that women do have the necessary skills for leadership such as communication and trustworthiness.

The predominant gendered distribution of tasks remains in favor of men. Women reported spending, on average, more than 3 times longer on domestic tasks than men, at the expense of career and leadership opportunities. Beliefs about gender roles were found to be passed down intergenerationally, through behaviors in the home. If respondents' father shared household tasks, the respondent did too, and if respondents' father never or rarely shared household tasks, neither did the respondent.

Intergenerational Transmission of Social Standards



Personal autonomy was another key factor to understanding why women fall behind in leadership. When asked why women don't join organizing movements, 40% of women and 48% of men responded that women would not be allowed to participate freely in any activist movement; they would need the permission of their husband or father. As this study has found, cultural expectations and deeply rooted beliefs on gender norms hinder women in acquiring leadership positions.

Drivers of Leadership

Returning to the central question, the data finds that business success, income, and communication skills are highly significant factors which lend themselves to women's participation in leadership. The higher the value, the more likely an individual will be active in organizing, and eventually become a leader.

Other key factors include autonomy and freedom of movement, the distribution of power within the family, and freedom from sexual harassment and violence. Additionally, a person who is more aware of inequities is more likely to be active in organizing and to become a leader, presuming that awareness leads individuals to want to effect positive change for women informal workers through leadership.



Recommendations

From these findings, the analysis draws three main recommendations. First, **education should be reoriented towards providing informal workers with the technical and personal skills needed for leadership**, and towards a stronger awareness of injustice against informal workers, particularly women.

Second, unions and worker organizations, governments, and NGOs should continue to **improve women's access to external financing** and other resources needed to succeed in business and improve their livelihoods. To address the multi-dimensional challenges facing informal workers, unions will be more effective if they can form strategic coalitions with other movements serving the same cause.

Lastly, **raising awareness about women's rights should be a shared responsibility** and integrated in all unions and organizations' activities. The results support the conclusions of prominent gender equality organizations, and recommend advocating for:

- Fair distribution of domestic and childcare tasks at home,
- Equal pay for equivalent work,
- Full protection against violence and sexual harassment, and
- The continued need to uplift women's voices, particularly those of women informal workers, to promote a deep change of attitudes and social norms.

Partners

Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses de l'Économie Informelle du Côte d'Ivoire (FETTEI-CI)

Petty Traders and Informal Workers Union of Liberia (FEPTIWUL)

South Africa Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU)

Syndicat des Travailleurs Domestiques et Indépendants de l'Économie Informelle du Rwanda (SYTRIECI)

Tunisia Inclusive Labor Initiative (TILI)

The Informal Economy Workers' Forum Ghana (INFORUM)