

A Rapid Assessment Report

Impact of COVID- 19 on Women Workers in the Horticulture Sector in Uganda

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Acknowledgement

This rapid assessment report is part of a large initiative led by Hivos East Africa in collaboration with Women@Work partners to promote decent work for women in the global horticulture supply chain and focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the horticulture sector. The rapid assessment was conducted through a phone survey carried out between April 29 and May 11, 2020.

The assessment of the impact on workers presented in this report will inform and shape industry/policy measures that will be introduced to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on flower farm workers, specifically women.

Special appreciation to the team that developed the report, including Ms Flavia Amoding from Uganda Workers Education Association who coordinated linkages with the farms for interviews and Ms Teddy Nalukenge who conducted the interviews for the Luganda speaking respondents.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
FIDA-U	Uganda Association of Women Lawyers
GoU	Government of Uganda
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SACCOs	Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UFEA	Uganda Flower Exporters Association
UHIPAWU	Uganda Horticultural Industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic is making substantial impact on all aspects of life across the world. While the immediate focus and ongoing priority is on public health, it is also becoming increasingly important to address the implications of the crisis on people's livelihoods as the pandemic causes unprecedented disruptions to economies and labour markets.

This rapid assessment of the situation of women workers in flower farms due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was initiated as part of the Women@Work Campaign, an initiative to improve labour conditions for women working in global horticulture supply chains. The study was commissioned by Hivos East Africa and led by Akina Mama wa Afrika in collaboration with a consortium of the Women@Work Campaign partners in Uganda that include: Uganda Workers Education Association and Uganda Women Lawyers (FIDA-U).

The objective of the rapid assessment was to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the situation of women workers in the horticulture sector to inform stakeholders and shape response strategies. The results will also inform the design of new interventions that meet the needs of workers in the sector.

The rapid assessment targeted five flower farms located in various geographical areas around Kampala which provided primary data on the following areas of concern; the impact of the pandemic on work and livelihoods, level of awareness of COVID-19 by women workers; coping mechanisms by those encamped at work and at the household; and the general experiences of women with the pandemic.

Key Findings:

- In response to lockdown measures, and also in an effort to enact social distancing measures, the workforce was downsized with a number of workers given leave without pay. According to the industry union, about 4000 workers had been sent home, most of them without pay. For the 5 farms sampled for this report, 1,360 out of 2,710 workers had been sent home on leave.
- Workers who were retained to work were required to sleep/board at the farms, in a bid to reduce contact with family members and mitigate the spread of the virus, as directed by the Ministry of Health. Issues of increased workload and longer work hours due to reduced number of workers with no commensurate pay and overtime were reported as a result of this at some farms.
- The majority of the workers and key stakeholders have sufficient information on the pandemic, how it is spreads and prevention mechanisms.
- Over 70% of the respondents interviewed felt that the preventive measures provided by the employers were currently adequate to prevent the spread of the virus at the workplace. Some flower farms distributed basic needs relief items to those who were requested to stay home, and all farms who took part in the assessment offered financial support to enable workers access advances and/or loans.

- Women with children, especially single mothers, have borne the brunt of the challenges arising from the pandemic as some of them had to make the difficult decision to stay home and to look after them instead being encamped at work. Some reported increased family responsibilities as both children and spouses were required to stay home because of shelter in place measures, elevating the burden for women who are traditionally expected to shoulder the responsibility of care work.
- Food insecurity and incidence of common illnesses were reported to be high and very costly. Some women resorted to traditional ways of treatment as they could not afford to go to hospitals because of a ban on public transport. The rights to health, education and productive engagement have been affected. The overwhelming response of ‘life being too difficult’ was associated with soaring prices of basic amenities. Government interventions were seen to be inadequate and not sensitive to specific needs of women workers such as energy dense micronutrient requirements, psychosocial wellbeing and provision of basics of daily life in a household.
- In the same vein, the government should revise the existing policies around taxation and debt. A moratorium on loan servicing to financial institutions should be instituted and a restructuring discussed to give relief to both businesses and individuals, allowing them to make payments when a degree of normalcy resumes.
- Price controls on food and other basic goods should be instituted to enable people afford necessities, even as they lose their sources of incomes.
- Continue availing and prioritising, and fast-tracking funding for the Uganda Women’s Entrepreneurship Program which supports small business projects by women to deal with loss of jobs.
- Government agencies under the umbrella of the Justice Law and Order Sector, as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission also bear a duty to condemn human rights violations during this pandemic, as well documenting evidence of violations to enable accountability from offenders.

Civil Society Organisations

- Civil society should hold government accountable on commitments made through robust advocacy campaigns, taking note of human rights violations, advocating for resource allocation to the most critical areas and calling out the government where they fall short. This accountability should also extend to business owners to ensure that measures to uphold workers’ rights are in place.
- CSOs should be a support system to their constituents by negotiating with donors to incorporate elements of humanitarian assistance to provide sanitary materials, masks, and food relief.
- Utilise information and communication technologies to continue providing support to respond to the needs of the women workers.
- Reskill the workers to adjust and cope with the new situation of precarious work by supporting them to find alternative income generating activities.

Summary of recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

Government

- Adopt a gender sensitive and intersectional lens to the pandemic response to ensure that women’s and other marginalized groups’ needs are centered.
- Activate, secure funding for and prioritise social protection systems and social security as key pillars for protecting the vulnerable from shocks. This is not only important for decent work but also helps maintain the dignity of those that are hardest hit by the pandemic.
- Monitor ongoing changes in labour relations to ensure compliance with employment laws and regulations in order to protect workers from potential abuse. Also, provide avenues to dialogue with the Workers Unions and Industry Associations.
- The government bears a duty to maintain a robust economy with productive labour and decent work. It is therefore imperative that a stimulus package is made available to businesses to enable them continue operations and employing people.

Conclusion

As COVID-19 continues to spread across the world with a trajectory difficult to predict and reported confirmed cases in Uganda on the rise, the holistic socio-economic policy guidelines and actions the campaign implements will determine how quickly and strongly women workers are supported to survive and recover from the ravages of the pandemic.

1.0 Introduction

Objectives of the rapid assessment

The objective of the rapid assessment was to carry out a situational analysis on the state of women workers arising from the current global pandemic and propose feasible and realistic response strategies for action by the campaign partners.

Background

The rapid assessment was commissioned by Hivos East Africa to establish the situation of women workers in flower farms under the auspices of the Women@Work Campaign.

The Women@Work Campaign is an initiative established to advocate for women's labour rights as a crucial component for promoting decent working conditions for women who earn their living in global production chains most notably flowers, fruits and vegetables grown for export. In Uganda, the Campaign is implemented by six partners namely; Akina Mama wa Afrika, Uganda Workers' Education Association (UWEA), The Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA-U), National Organization of Peer Educators Uganda (NOPE), Uganda Flower Exporters Association (UFEA), Uganda Horticultural Industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union (UHISPAWU). The Campaign's main advocacy areas include fair income, security in the workplace, good labour conditions and compliance with international safety standards, freedom to organize and women's leadership.¹ It also aims to build the capacity of women workers to participate in

critical decision-making spaces to demand for and influence changes in policy and practice to enable them to enjoy their economic and social rights both at the workplace and in the wider economy.

The COVID-19 pandemic takes over the world

The Coronavirus that is rapidly spreading across the world first surfaced in China towards the end of 2019, with signs symptoms similar to pneumonia. The World Health Organization (WHO) took cognizance of the outbreak at the end of 2019 and declared it a public health concern, and subsequently announced it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. By May 11, 2020, global cases stood at more 4.1 million infections, with more than 280,000 deaths.² In Uganda cases stood at 122 infections with no deaths reported.³

To alleviate the spread and impact of the COVID-19 crisis, countries around the globe adopted measures such as social distancing, self-isolation, quarantines and travel restrictions. In Uganda, the government responded by treating the pandemic as a war and not business as usual.⁴ The government issued guidelines

1 Akinamamawaafrika. The Women@Work Campaign: Women's Leadership in the Horticultural Sector

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/11/coronavirus-latest-at-a-glance>

3 <https://www.health.go.ug/cause/update-on-the-covid-19-outbreak-uganda/>

4 MFPED Policy Brief March 2020



aimed at stopping the spread of the virus such as suspending all forms of public gatherings, closing schools and putting a stop to cross border movement by closing all land, air and water borders. Furthermore, public and private transport were suspended with the exception of cargo trucks and vehicles delivering essential items. Private individuals and essential workers who needed to move to different places by car needed to get authorization. Essential public workers had stickers on their cars allowing them to go work without encumbrance while private individuals who needed to access emergency services such as healthcare had to get authorization from a local government official. All malls and markets selling non-food items were also ordered closed. Lastly, a curfew starting at 7p.m. and ending at 6:30a.m. daily was instituted. Essentially any semblance of normalcy and all businesses in Uganda ground to a halt, with the exception a few. Although vendors selling food in markets were allowed to continue operating, they were required to sleep on site, and not return home. Factories and large agricultural plantations were also allowed to continue operations, on condition that they could encamp all workers on duty on site for the duration of the lockdown. A number of flower farms adopted this method of work.

The Uganda flower sector employs about 9000

people with about 70% being women. It is the third highest non-traditional export after to fish and gold.⁵ The majority of workers are from rural areas; and about 60,000 benefit directly or indirectly from related jobs such as suppliers, packaging, transportation, storage and handling chains from about 15 firms that export flowers.⁶ Most flower farms are located near the shores of Lake Victoria because of the availability of fresh and quality water throughout the year. This also creates an advantage of being near Entebbe International Airport as flowers are transported by air.

The work on flower farms is gruelling, with long shifts in steamy greenhouses, yet some labourers earn as little as \$25 a month. This amount is mostly paid to women because they form the bulk of unskilled labour attracting low wages; yet the process of nurturing flowers results in bruised hands, aching backs arising from long hours of work (performed while standing or bending), in addition to domestic chores. The devaluation of women's labour and their exploitation is due to lack of power and opportunities (to find alternatives) hence, makes it difficult to negotiate higher pay for work performed.

Internationally, the pandemic has led to the crash of the \$8.5 billion global trade in cut

5 Ugandan flower exporters facing tough times <http://www.intracen.org/blog/Ugandan-flower-exporters-facing-tough-times/>, International Trade Centre, March 10, 2016

6 Uganda's flower exports exceed 200 billion. https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1516644/uganda-flower-exports-exceed-sh200b New Vision March 9, 2020.

flowers⁷ showing how quickly and distinctively COVID-19 is disrupting supply chains, even in places where it is not yet pervasive like Uganda. Countries like the Netherlands, that are the biggest market for flowers expressed fear of surviving the pandemic and similarly instituted measures to limit the spread of the pandemic. These included a ban on mass gatherings, burials, weddings, celebrations, parties; activities that make use of flowers. With disruption of the supply chain in Europe, and Uganda having made high infrastructural investment in growing flowers mainly for export, the country was greatly impacted. Employers in the floriculture sector in Uganda adapted to COVID-19 related directives from the government by downsizing and keeping a few staff on site, incurring extra costs of maintaining them on farms, while sending the rest of employees on leave, initially paid at some farms, which became unpaid as the lockdown continued. . On March 12, the New Vision newspaper reported that exports had dropped by 90%, with an estimate of over \$52 million lost. Uganda Horticultural Industrial Service Providers and Allied Workers Union (UHISPAWU), the sector union, also revealed that they had just started negotiations with auction houses in the Netherlands for better terms and working conditions for workers in Uganda, all of which now hangs in the balance because of the pandemic.⁸

The ripple effect of COVID-19 and response measures being implemented by national and district governments have created psychological, social and economic disruptions that threaten the livelihoods and wellbeing of millions of people and their communities in Uganda. Like other countries in Africa where the

Women@Work Campaign is rolled out, activities related to supporting women workers in flower farms were halted. Business performance has been affected leading to both loss of jobs as well as suspension of contractual obligations. As the number of people with COVID-19 in Africa and Uganda in particular continued to rise, the measures government put in place are discriminatory, both in the way they are developed, formulated, implemented and measured. Response plans that have been rolled out at each stage have limited inclusion of a gender lens.⁹

The COVID-19 taskforce set up by the Government of Uganda to design a response plan has mobilized resources through an appeal for support from the public. This has comprised mainly of cash donations, transport, medical supplies and food relief targeting most vulnerable households in Kampala and the neighboring districts of Wakiso, Mpigi and Mukono who were deprived of their daily income as a result of restrictions that could not allow them access the business district of Kampala.¹⁰

The government's measures to support the economy have included; revision of the Central Bank lending rate and directives from the Central Bank encouraging financial institutions to restructure loans. The government has also put a moratorium on evictions due to inability to meet rent obligations. Lastly, the Labour Directorate in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has issued guidelines on layoffs and paycuts, appealing to employers to lay off workers as a last resort.¹¹

7 The Crash of the 8 Billion Flower Trade, Bloomberg Business Week April 16, 2020. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2020-flower-industry-crash/>

8 UHISPAWU press release, 17th April, 2020 <https://twitter.com/amwaafrika/status/1252213232766529537>

9 Akina Mama Afrika Concept Note, April 2020

10 MoH National Guidelines on COVID19 March 2020

11 Press statement on the social economic effects of the global corona virus pandemic in Uganda, 20th March 2020 http://mglsd.go.ug/Press/Press%20Statement%20By%20Hon%20Rukutana%20Mwesigwa%20on%20Labour%20and%20Industrial%20Relations%20Issues%20in%20Light%20of%20Covid%2019.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3zTwUSOWm-Yb0f_8_juLV41S1YUYUs9QSyZFIBc9Ovat7JoD8F-JI7So8

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

The COVID-19 outbreak is causing global economic slowdown of trade, investment, growth and employment in addition to heavy burdens on health systems. This crisis comes at a time when farmers in Uganda and other East African countries were directly suffering from severe invasion of locust swarms, with more waves of locusts expected if interventions are not put in place. Additionally, in Uganda, a wave of floods has decimated a number of rural communities, and the rise of water levels in Lake Victoria poses a new challenge for communities that live on the shore and potentially for flower farms many of which are situated close to the lake.

2.2 Economic impact

The outbreak of the virus in Uganda has imposed a significant strain on the health sector which necessitated allocation of additional resources to deal with the pandemic. According to the Ministry of Trade and Cooperatives in Uganda, 4200 companies (with an unknown number of workers) have closed because of the virus.¹² Experts have also shared that domestic resource mobilization is going to be impacted as people are not making a living hence not spending/ have no disposable income. Evidence is also emerging that the pandemic is causing disproportionate financial stress on women and girls. On average women earn less than 20% of what men earn, are less likely to own

or lead a company; and none of them owns a flower exporting company.¹³ They are also more likely to work cash-in-hand and off-the-books; moreover women-owned businesses are less likely to receive support during the slow down.

Given the current situation, the projection for economic growth in Financial Year (FY)2019/20 has been revised downwards from 6.0 % to between 5.2 – 5.7% and if the COVID-19 situation worsens, Uganda's economic growth for FY2019/20 may further decline to between 4.6 percent and 5.1 percent. Consequently, an additional 2.6 million Ugandans will be further pushed into poverty, according to the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Development.¹⁴ The biggest impact has been projected to be on

12 4200 companies close over covid-19 lockdown, April 22, 2020. Daily Monitor <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/4-200-companies-close-over-Covid-19-lockdown/688334-5531256-n2gbmkz/index.html>

13 International Trade Centre April 2020. Supporting SMEs through the COVID 19 Crisis, Dorothy Tembo.

14 MFPED, Statement on COVID 19 March 2020

the service sector where women predominate (57.6%)¹⁵ and other businesses that require cross border travel such as flowers. Supply chain disruptions are hampering trade, and this is expected to continue until the virus is contained at the global level. The Ministry of health and other service sectors have sought for about US\$80 billion to help in the fight against the spread and treatment of COVID-19.¹⁶ More financing will be needed for other sectors to facilitate continued surveillance, and containing other emerging challenges such as floods and locusts.

2.3 Economic impact on flower farms

Before the pandemic, Uganda's flower Industry was reporting respectable gains. Export volumes had risen from 7,000 metric tonnes in 2015 and 7,500 metric tonnes in 2018. The revenue from flower exports also grew from \$40m (Sh147b) and \$55m (Sh202.8b) respectively. The Flower Exporters Association, reported that the industry holds great promise as a key export earner and employer in the region. Now the sector is poised to make untold losses as a result of the pandemic.

Measures put in place by the government to contain the spread of the virus have greatly impacted the flower sector as it cannot adapt to remote working with as some other sectors have done. Some employers have had no option but to lay off workers because of their inability to pay salary obligations during the pandemic. With flower exports dropping by 90%, and potentially losing \$84.98m this is not unexpected.¹⁷ This was revealed by the Executive Director of the Uganda Flower Exporters Association, Esther Nekambi.

'All flower farms have laid off 30% of the work force due to inability to pay salaries. If there are no interventions, about 10,000 to 15,000 workers in the horticultural Industry will lose their jobs.'

UHISPAWU, the union that represents the sector further revealed in a press statement that about

4000 employees had been sent home, some without pay.

2.4 Legal and policy environment

The Minister of State for Labour, Employment and Industrial Relations has stressed that COVID-19 has far reaching impacts on labour market outcomes. Beyond the urgent concerns about the health of workers and their families, the virus will impact the world of work across three key dimensions namely the quantity of jobs (both unemployment and underemployment); the quality of work (e.g. wages and access to social protection); and the effects on specific groups who are more vulnerable to adverse labour market outcomes (youth, women, children, persons with disabilities, unprotected workers, migrant workers among others).

The crisis has also created a murky legal and policy environment creating fodder for potential abuse of labour rights and employment regulations. An analysis carried out by Platform for Labour Action (PLA) shows numerous gaps in the Employment Act and the laws governing occupational safety, health and worker's compensation as result of COVID-19.¹⁸ With new working measures, including remote work, contractual working hours may be disregarded, in addition to employees being forced to work with leave or overtime pay. While existing laws give employers a bit of wiggle room to invoke the "Act of God" clause to help them out of contractual obligations they cannot meet because of unforeseen acts out of their control, this very clause could leave workers unprotected. Indeed, a number of workers have been laid off without recourse and compensation.

A statement from the Uganda Consortium on Corporate Accountability recommends that the Government should monitor and ensure respect for human rights especially labour rights amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic containment restrictions and measures. All business sectors' internal measures undertaken

15 UBOS- UNHS 2016/17

16 Soft Power News, Parliament passes sh. 304 Supplementary Budget to fight COVID 19. By Nixon Segawa 8th April 2020

17 Flower exports drop by 90%, prices dip by half. Daily Monitor, 26th March, 2020 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/Business/Commodities/Flower-exports-drop-by-90--prices-dip-half/688610-5505002-ixdf1a/index.html>

18 Impact of the coronavirus (covid-19) on employment in Uganda, <https://pla-uganda.org/impact-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-on-employment-in-uganda>

during this pandemic must be legal as per the labour rights policy and legislative frameworks and that businesses should not use the crisis as an opportunity to unlawfully terminate workers.¹⁹

The pandemic has also led to the abuse of civil liberties in a bid to enforce public health directives. Scores of people have been beaten by state agents when found to be in contravention of directives such as curfew.²⁰ Others have paid for it with their lives. A number of women have reportedly died of pregnancy related complications as result of being unable to access medical care due to bans on public and private transport.²¹ Furthermore, an increase in cases of violence against women has been reported. Between March 30 and April 28, a total of 3,280 cases of GBV had been reported to the police.²² This however is taking place amidst an environment where the right to access to justice has essentially been suspended because of directives to mitigate the spread of the virus.

2.5.A gender dimension to the pandemic

The pandemic has exposed fault lines in society and exacerbated existing inequalities including gender inequality. The suffering in the pandemic has worn a female face, as women have been seen protesting the lack of food relief;²³ seen sleeping out (in the cold) in markets; seen being whipped for vending food on the streets;²⁴ and now making up explosive statistics on violence. There is growing evidence that the response to COVID-19 has led to a marked increase in domestic violence, intimate partner violence and violence in the public space. The imbalance in power relations between women and men has resulted in the exacting of controlling, abusive and violent behaviour as surrounding circumstances of unemployment and confinement put a strain on couples.

The COVID-19 response was gender blind from the onset, harbouring no analysis of how the directives imposed would impact women and girls. The day to day realities of women make them particularly at greater risk of infection. Although women are at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic, including at the frontline in health services, women's representation in policy development and decision making on COVID-19 is limited. Furthermore, women have unequal access to information and communication technologies that would provide critical information about COVID-19.

UN Women has provided guidance on possible actions to reduce the risk of women and girls being left behind as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance is aimed at minimizing the impact of measures on women and recognizes the critical role of women in response and prevention efforts. This effort is also to ensure that gender analysis informs government actions and responses. It provides an outline on human rights obligations in addressing the impact of COVID-19 at the national level.²⁵

The policy and socio-economic environment paints a picture of high vulnerability of low-income people especially women workers whose engagements make it difficult to access and engage in highly profitable ventures. They have limited or no capacity or reserves to cope with emergencies, shocks and crises such as COVID-19 whose effects are likely to last long. Hence the need to take a critical analysis of the situation and derive immediate, short- and long-term interventions based on findings of this study.

19 Ensuring protection and respect for labour rights and during the COVID-19 pandemic <https://ucca-uganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/LabourRights-COVID-19.pdf>

20 https://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1517544/security-personel-arrested-torturing-women-curfew-enforcement

21 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-uganda/in-uganda-mothers-in-labour-die-amidst-coronavirus-lockdown-idUSKCN21R2FA>

22 http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/28/c_139015384.htm

23 <https://chimpreports.com/gulu-hair-dressers-protest-lack-of-food/>

24 <https://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Battered-vendors-narrate-ordeal/688334-5508806-bnggnx/index.html>

25 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Design of the rapid assessment

A rapid assessment is an intensive, team-based research methodology in which a small section of the total population is selected to provide an overall picture of the situation under study to represent the total population of interest. It uses triangulation and review methods of data analysis, as well as additional in-depth data to quickly develop a preliminary understanding of a situation from the insider's perspective.

Some preliminary review had been done by AMwA while the consultant identified other key informants. Seven flower farms with which the Women@Work partners work with were purposely selected. The consultant reviewed information availed from the industry association, the workers trade union.

Primary data was obtained from telephone interviews with a total of 81 respondents (71 females and 10 males). These comprise of 53 women workers and 6 male workers identified in liaison with 5 Human Resources Managers in five flower farms. Representatives of two communities surrounding the flower farms were also interviewed. Other key informants

identified were interviewed. Secondary data was also obtained from reports and policies.

3.2 Approaches to the assignment

Coordination efforts between UWEA and Human Resources Managers provided a list of individual workers to be interviewed. Each respondent was contacted by phone to book an appointment for a suitable time to undertake the individual interviews. The workers were given option to respond in the local language (Luganda) or English for better expression. Key informants also provided time for in-depth interviews.

of the

3.3 Respondents

The assessment was conducted in five flower farms located in various geographical areas around Kampala namely; Fiduga (Mpigi), Royal Van Zanten (Mukono), Royal Van Zanten (Wakiso), Mairye Estates (Gayaza) and Oasis in the very rural area of Mukono. In each of them 12-14 women workers were interviewed and a total of 59 women respondents were reached. This included those encamped at work and those on forced leave. Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with policy makers bringing the total to 81.

3.4 Data collection methods and instruments

Three major methods were used to collect information: Interviews, document review, and in-depth interviews with key informants. Six sets of structured interview guides were administered in English and translated to Luganda especially for some women workers.

3.5 Data summary and analysis

Data collected was subjected to field and desk editing to ensure accuracy, consistency and completeness. Data from short answers

questions were coded and entered into Microsoft Excel while responses from open ended questions were summarized to common phrases, tallied and descriptive statements and figures were used to present them.

3.6 Limitations of the rapid assessment

The assessment was conducted during work hours which limited the amount of time available for interviews. Some women whose phones were off and were only available in the evening. For example, one woman offered to be interviewed while walking home because there was no other free time. In some instances, women postponed appointments and when reached, there were background interferences, sometimes from spouses demanding to know who was calling. This pointed to encroachment into household privacy. Other respondents indicated that the better response to the crisis was to be provided with relief by NGOs instead of being asked questions. Additionally, the study was conducted during Ramadhan which rendered some potential respondents unavailable as they were fasting. Others were simply too emotionally strained to respond.



4.0 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

This section presents views of respondents on key themes identified namely the current working situation for workers, coping mechanisms, current interventions being applied to stave off the impact of the pandemic, and proposals by stakeholders on how to address COVID-19.

4.1 Respondent characteristics

A total of 59 workers (53 women, 6 men), four grassroots union representatives, one production manager and five human resource managers working in 5 Flower farms were interviewed by phone. In addition, in-depth information was gathered from 2 Women@Work implementing partners and another 15 key informants from the social, development, economic/banking and health sectors. The age range of sampled respondents was between 20-40 years with about 6 senior employees who were aged 45-50 years. This was not a requirement but through interactions there were correlations that prompted probing further. For example, possessing alternative skills, engagement in other income generating activities was common with older ages. They also easily quantified their labour, inputs and out puts while majority of younger employees reported employment as the main source of income.

The youthful population working in flower farms are migrants who rent one or two rooms. The average household size is five members. The assessment also revealed that's some respondents had either left children in the care of other family members or had another household to cater for (hence rented small rooms). Those encamped also indicated that their children were under the care of domestic workers, friends, neighbours or relatives. Less than 10 employees of those interviewed own the house they currently live in. Clearly women workers lack adequate resources and space to facilitate

a variety of primary production and income generating activities.

4.2 Knowledge of Coronavirus

Nearly all the respondents referred to Corona as "a new virus that has spread all over the world". The major signs of these virus identified by the respondents included; fever, cough and difficulty in breathing. When asked on what to do to prevent the virus, nearly all the respondents cited hand washing with soap as a means of preventing the spread. Some respondents also stated that practicing good hygiene (for example; through cleaning homes, surfaces, clothes, and environment) and social distancing would help prevent the virus' spread. However, some respondents felt it was important to have adequate, up to date knowledge about the virus in order to prevent its spread because there were various rumours and conflicting messages about how it spreads as well as fears about managing if it breaks out in communities. Nearly all the respondents strongly recommended staying at home as the best preventive measure against the virus.

4.3 Measures instituted by employers

A number of farms were hit hard by the regulations to curb the spread of the virus leading to disruption of business. Reduction in business meant that a number of measures had to be adopted including laying off workers. For example, out of a workforce of 445, one farm retained only 145 workers to be encamped while

the rest were sent home. In total, out of the 5 farms participating in the assessment, about 50% of workers had been sent home on leave, with or without pay. All workers' dues for March had been paid for farms interviewed except in one case, where some workers were yet to receive their pay. Over 80% of workers on leave in all farms were women, with a substantial number being single parents.

Regarding occupational safety and health, some of the flower farms, in adherence to social distancing measures, adopted temporary shelters for workers at the farm. Some of the employers were able to engage medical personnel, resident doctors and nurses to provide information / education sessions on the signs, spread and some preventive measures against contracting the virus. About a third of the respondents appreciated provision of hand sanitizers, gloves, masks, soap, water points, and temperature testing at the entrance and exit points. Employers implemented social distancing by reducing the number of employees and by allocating a separate work area to each employee. They regularly sensitized workers encamped and enabled them to watch television and listen to radio for more information on the virus. Employers created separate dormitories/rooms/

halls with adequate space for each gender. One manager reported that the rooms formerly used as the nursery for workers' children was transformed into temporary shelter.

“I have made sure that I provide some accommodation for the workers and asked those willing to stay in the farm to continue working. We have also designed a schedule for our employees to work in shifts. These measures will ensure that the workers are not exposed to this deadly virus”

**Production Manager Farm 1
HR Manager Farm 4**

Patterns of retention of workers at the farms participating in assessment

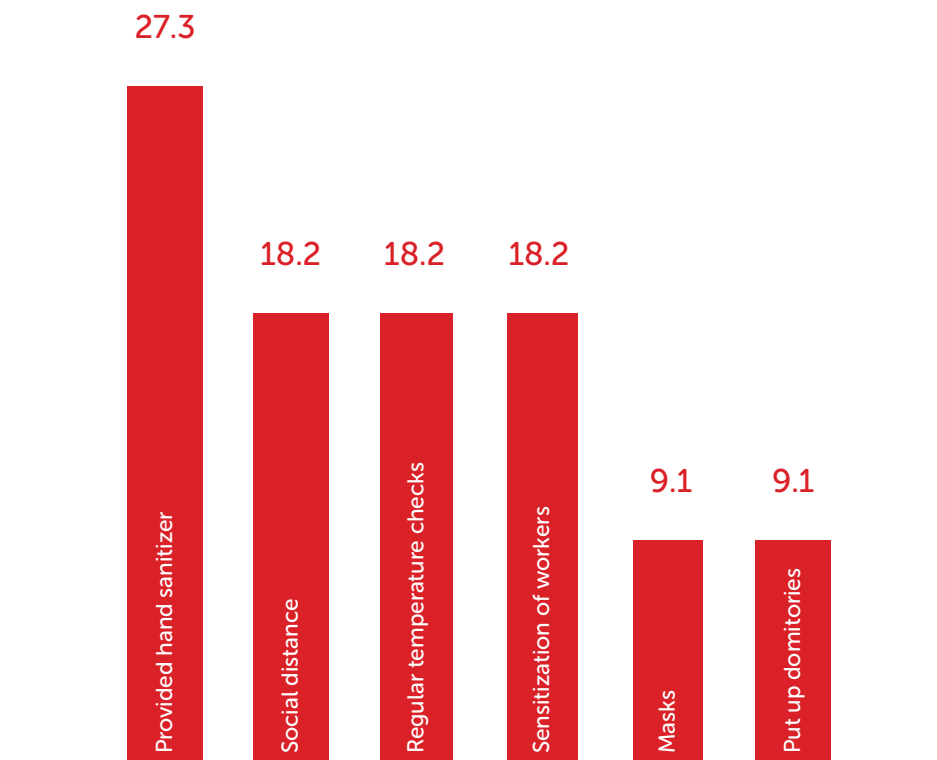
	Number of workers retained	Number of workers on leave (paid or unpaid)	Total
Farm 1	145	300	445
Farm 2	225	330	555
Farm 3	350	445	805
Farm 4	117	65	182
Farm 5	503	197(+23 casual workers)	723
Total	1,340	1,360	2,710

There were however concerns about increased costs because of maintaining workers on the farms. One manager reported that they spend an additional Sh350,000 (about \$90) for daily upkeep of employees which had not been earlier budgeted for. According to the union, other farms also instituted alternating working days in order to reduce on the number of workers at the farm at the same time. Workers were also required to have lunch in small numbers (shifts) to ensure social distancing.

All employees mentioned that there was adequate water at the farm. For those at home,

sources of water include wells, underground pipe and boreholes as the cheaper and most accessible water. As children are at home, they have no problem running trips to fetch adequate water for home use. Very few have access to tap water as it is an extra cost. With an average cost of Sh300-500 per jerry can or at least Sh2000 (\$50) per day, this is a cost flower farm worker cannot afford. Some respondents expressed worry about the safety of the water source. "During this rainy period and with many people dipping containers to draw nature's water, we are not sure of water safety," one said.

A breakdown of measures instituted by employers to prevent COVID-19



4.4 Adequacy of measures put in place by the employer, family and community

The adequacy of these measures as cited by the respondents varied. Over 70% of the respondents interviewed felt that the preventive measures provided by the employers were currently adequate to prevent the spread of the virus at the workplace. They also reported that since no death had been reported in Uganda, the strict measures seem to have worked so far. Some respondents were not prepared to cope with the challenges that followed such as forced unpaid leave and prolonged lockdown that prevented them from searching for alternative sources of income which normally needed public transport. Women workers also reported that the employer or government should have put in place other measures to support citizens during subsequent extension of stay at home measures.

4.5 Impact of the pandemic on livelihoods

At the beginning of the lockdown, most women with children made a choice to stay home when the offer was given. With the extension of lockdown which was not anticipated, leave days expired, and workers were informed they were on unpaid leave. There was no special social support extended by farm management except in some cases where loans and advances were availed on request. This left some women, with no source of income which caused tension in the home. Even when women's rights continued to be violated, they were forced to stay with their partners, some of whom inflicted violence.

“I had just taken two weeks leave and a loan to attend to my sick child who was hospitalized. This situation found me at home. When the extension came, my leave days expired, and I was not one of those recalled from quarantine. I was informed that I am now on leave without pay yet I have no other source of income. Those in camp are cared for in terms of food, sanitizers, medical care, accommodation; they are working and earning while I am not. Life is very, very difficult”

Employee Farm 2

for the people

Moreover, the majority of respondents stated that household expenses greatly increased as a result of the pandemic. Panic due to the coronavirus led to a rush to buy food which led to increased prices. Even workers who were encamped and were being provided food by their employers had an increased burden of extended family outside the farm. The extension of the lockdown after the initial 30 days further stressed the situation. For workers on leave without pay, lack of disposable income meant that basic items they could afford before were suddenly out of reach. This is how a worker described the new strain on income.

“Due to Corona, I had to bring my elderly chronically ill mother, her attendant and two sisters home. Therefore I have to cater for medicine, and five mouths to feed with just one salary.”

A number of people have also had to re-adjust what they eat as they can no longer afford dishes from before.

“Instead of meat I substitute with mukene (silver fish). We manage to create variety by buying eggplants and groundnuts, or green vegetables on another day. Sometimes we cook one main meal a day, filling the gap of other meals with tea and a snack.”

Costs for public transport have also gone up, for those who have no other choice but to use it, albeit illegally. A pregnant woman who used to hire a motorcycle taxi to take her for ante-natal visits noted that it was no longer sustainable for her to keep going to the hospital as she could no longer pay the boda-boda fees. “I do not think I will afford the remaining visits,” she said.

4.6 Coping mechanisms by women and households

With most of the jobs gone, workers are having to be creative in order to continue surviving. Sources of income available for those at home were reported to be limited. For those who retained their jobs, there is limited time to engage in other income generating activities, to make up for reduction in income. Downsizing of employees was reported to also increase the work load for those who were staying at the premises. The range of alternative activities to sustain livelihoods is still limited as women have limited opportunities to earn a living due to historical and prevailing attitudes about women in the world of work, while others have limited capacity in identifying business opportunities in their environment. One woman shared her new coping mechanism;

“After farm work, I help my friend sell items in her shop in the evening while she prepares her supper. Sometimes we share her evening meal; other times she gives me money in appreciation so I don’t worry about my supper. In that way I have company, I relax before I resort to my small room.”

Farm 2 respondent.

Another woman worker shared that things were not too bad for her;

“I have a small canteen where I get money enough to take care of the family. I am in the camp where all is provided- we get food, water, entertainment, so I am happy.”

Farm 1 respondent

Other sources of income

Over ten women workers reported that they had no other source of income except depending on their partner's salary. Only seven mentioned unique sources of income like owning houses for rent, retail shops, food vending, brick laying, selling second-hand clothes, boutiques and poultry. Women workers continued to engage in back breaking activities such as digging (labour for money), hiring land to grow vegetables, and working in tea estates.

“I have started makings bricks. So, I am now able to supervise and also engage other members of the family. I expect to earn about 800,000ugx which will cater for children's needs when they need to go back to school.”

During the lockdown, other possible engagements like making juice, tea, chips, snacks which the women would have resorted to at other times were greatly limited as they involved

moving to trading centres and working late in the night.

It was also reported that due to restrictions, there is hardly much one can do in a rented apartment. In such residences, there is limited space hence most landlords restrict activities to minimize conflicts, wear and tear so that the room serves its purpose-just for accommodation not business. This situation presents a huge opportunity for CSOs to lobby, advocate for and mobilize resources for capacity enhancement for women workers, looking at setting goals, use of technology, and management of environmental resources to make a living.

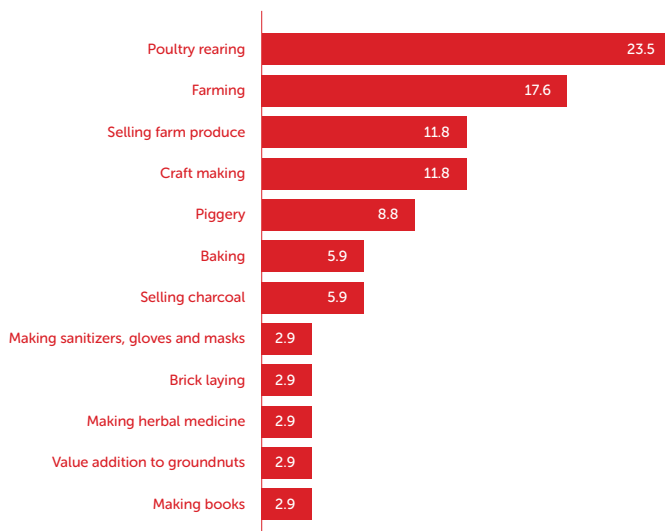
Livelihood activities in the event that COVID-19 persists

A number of livelihood activities were named in the event the COVID-19 pandemic persists. Most common was poultry rearing as suggested by close to a quarter of the respondents. A few stated that they would undertake farming (crop production) for the market. Some respondents said they would engage in trading – buying food from rural areas and selling it in towns and craft making.

“I have learnt from this situation that in emergencies, everything else can be stopped but people must be kept alive. Therefore, the businesses that continue operating are food selling, restaurants, charcoal for cooking and communication. That is what I started doing with my pay for March 2020.”

Respondent Farm 2

Sources of livelihood in the event the coronavirus persisted



Other enterprises include; piggery, value addition to groundnuts, and bookmaking- where a ream of ruled paper is split into smaller bundles, stitched and bound with glue to make a number of counter books. Additionally, some respondents stated that they would engage in making liquid soap, local sanitizers, gloves and masks for preventing the spread of the virus in the community. All these enterprises would need to be explored for their profitability so that target communities/individuals are supported to undertake them for welfare and livelihood.

The table above reveals that women are still engaged in primary production with only a few choosing to engage in trading. Majority are producing with little or no links with markets and marketing. Stakeholders will need to explore pathways to enhance production for the market as well as valuing products and services in monetary terms.

4.7 Job security

The majority of those interviewed were informed that when the COVID-19 crisis ends, their jobs would still be available. Some respondents raised some concerns about their employment if the crisis continued with some fearing the employer may close the flower business or that only those in encamped at the farms would be retained. One respondent captured that fear, thus; “The rest of us fear loss of jobs because the flowers are no longer being exported like in the past.” The Workers Union also visited each farm at the beginning of the crisis, explained and circulated directives from Government to assure employees of jobs security and laws governing employment.

“As leaders, we also received a circular from the Industry Association instructing employers to follow provisions of the Laws of Uganda, and ensure strict adherence to health and safety of their employees,”

Human Resources Manager, Farm 4.

4.8 Care responsibilities in the home

The assessment looked to gauge disruptions in family life looking specifically at finding out if the burden of care had increased for women amidst the pandemic. It revealed that the amount of care work had increased for workers who housed additional people in a single room and workers living in own homesteads with extended family.

The stress of living at home with everyone at the same time is illustrated below;

“Children are at home, in our limited space, of just two rooms for the seven of us. They are frequently disorganizing the house. Their appetite has increased. They are eating too much! We also have to dig in people’s gardens to get money for buying some food and basic needs. This is in addition to the home routine of cleaning, cooking and washing. We use also use lot of water and soap, hence increased expenses and work.”

Woman Farm 1

Another woman shared that the work has increased because now she has to cook for her husband and children who are at home all the time

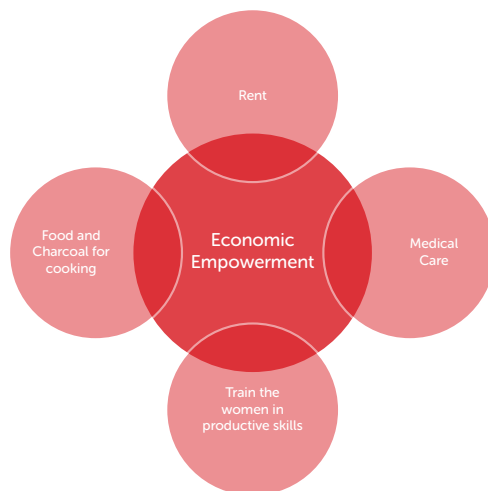
A snapshot of women’s lived experiences with the consequences of the lockdown due to the pandemic

<p>“The people in the camp are not coming out so I have no chance of working to earn money. I am starving! I don’t know how I will survive, only God knows, death will occur as food prices continue to rise.”</p>	<p>“I need essentials at home daily - soap, sugar, water. I wish I had saved my own money instead of paying for school fees, I would have engaged in selling vegetables.”</p>
<p>“I went to my friend for help. She gave me 5000/= which I used to buy fresh cassava, groundnuts and greens. When I got back home, my husband asked me I got the money. The children cooked a quick meal, but this earned me a beating. My husband accused me of roaming the village begging saying that he is irresponsible. I was only trying to save the tension in the house .”</p>	<p>“Men have left the care of families to women; cheildren are looking at me as the mother and each time I ask, It is a violent reply.”</p>

4.9 Priority concerns for women

The priority concerns to be considered immediately, according to women interviewed are food, charcoal, house rent, and medical care. These concerns point to the need for stakeholders to focus attention on practical needs of women. Further confinement with daily demands and with no income further exerts emotional and psychological torture, persistent tension and stress which weigh down women's energy and suppress creativity, and innovation to find long term solutions.

Women's priority concerns



The above figure portrays an intersection of priority needs with the centre being economic empowerment. This implies that if women are supported to generate their own money in addition to employment or engage in businesses that can yield higher profits, then they would afford basic needs. Economic empowerment is critical in times of crisis as expenses usually go higher due to uncertainties, unexpected events, risks and conditions since emergencies do not allow one adequate time to plan. Women must be supported to generate alternative income and save in various ways instead of depending on one source.

4.10 Workers' views on support offered by the government and industry associations

Perception of the Union

All employees who were on duty in March appreciated the role of the Union and the Association because they provided detailed information about their employment status and guidelines on preventive measures. At each farm the union representatives have been present to address the issues faced by workers and also forwarded them to other authorities. Key areas for redress have included: need for job security, prevention measures and access to social security among others.

Perception of workers about government interventions

The major concern raised about government interventions was the discriminatory and gender-blind measures that have been instituted, leaving many women vulnerable. For example, one of the workers shared her story as follows.

“While staying at the camp, my child fell sick. My mother with whom I left the children got onto a bodaboda, but on her way, she was stopped and questioned/harassed by police until other community members pleaded for the old woman to rush the child to hospital.”

This story exemplifies what many other women have faced during the pandemic. As a whole, the government was seen to be corrupt, and failing in its mandate to ensure transport to health centres was possible and being violent against its own citizens which stoked fears about going out at night.

5.0 Implications of the Coronavirus Crisis on the W@W Campaign

The pandemic has interrupted the activities of the Uganda partners of the Women@Work Campaign. The ban on mass gatherings and public transportation meant that the bulk of activities of the campaign, that are in person, were also suspended. As early as March, even before the institution of these directives by the government, out of an abundance of caution and a duty of care to staff and constituents, AMwA was forced to cancel a crucial 5-day residential leadership training for members of the gender committee at the flower farms. Other partners have similarly either suspended activities or moved them online. With a cross section of workers remaining at the farm, and others at home on leave, it is difficult to devise any meaningful interventions while the lockdown continues.

The partners interviewed for the assessment shared how they are maintaining contact with workers. Their main points of contact presently are the gender committees, women leaders, legal volunteers on the farms, and Human Resource Managers. Telephone communication has been used to reach the farms for weekly checks and WhatsApp groups are also being utilised to address issues raised from the field. Major issues received through such communication included unpaid leave, laying off of some casual workers, reduction or non-payment of salary, no overtime, increased demands on women and some cases of violence. There were reports of increased work load on the few in-camp who had to cover all work meant for full capacity without additional pay. In one farm, the manager stayed home hence there were no immediate mechanisms for redress of challenges till after weeks of persistent phone calls.

The bigger challenge is that the pandemic could not have had worse timing as the 5-year Women@Work Campaign is coming to a close. This means that partners are not really in a position to postpone activities or to wait out the storm but must use the two to three months left to rethink pending activities or cancel them altogether.

Reflection and redesign of programme strategies

The partners are keenly aware that this is one of the hardest hit sectors as it is export oriented and therefore beholden to supply chain disruptions. Furthermore, because it is mostly populated by women who had a number of vulnerabilities before the pandemic, the present circumstances present immense challenges for which solutions must be sought. This presents an opportunity for each stakeholder in the horticultural sector to

reflect, review current plans and redirect actions using available resources, with a human rights-based approach.

For partners interviewed, and indeed according to the women workers' priorities, food relief was presented as critical life-saving demand. One proposal was captured thus;

‘Women’s needs revolve on meeting practical needs such as food, providing hygiene and sanitary materials, affording medical care, and paying rent. Programmes should shift from advocacy to humanitarian assistance’

Key informant

Another partner added that it is not easy to teach a hungry person hence the need to mobilize some money, pool it into a basket and devise delivery mechanisms for vulnerable women such as the pregnant, sick or those who care for young children in large households.

Partners generally agreed that this situation presents an opportunity for women to use this time to develop themselves, improve competencies, develop new skills and learn new ways of producing and doing work. There were therefore proposals for re-skilling women to be able to participate in other income generating activities like making liquid soap, water purification and hand sanitizers.

The consortium partners have continued to support and stand in solidarity with the women workers during this period through virtual engagements. Partners are also working towards developing gender specific policies to respond to COVID-19 and to provide support to women workers during this crisis. There are ongoing efforts to develop comprehensive interventions and packages to address issues identified. COVID-19 poses new challenges for partners to reconsider and reflect on the project design, therefore need to negotiate with donors to put in place mechanisms of mass sensitisation on COVID-19, adopt creative ways to support women to deal with overriding practical needs, and shift to digital ways to reach the women amidst social distancing.

Unlimited

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 Government

Adopt a gender sensitive and intersectional lens to the pandemic response to ensure that women's and other marginalized groups' needs are centered. Women should be consulted about their priorities bearing in mind that they have different identities that surface different vulnerabilities that will require tailored approaches. Furthermore, women's leadership within the national taskforces should be instituted to ensure accountability in this regard.

Activate, secure funding for and prioritise social protection systems and social security as key pillars for protecting the vulnerable from shocks.

This is not only important for decent work but also helps maintain the dignity of those that are hardest hit by the pandemic. Social protection can be in terms of food relief which should be distributed to all those who need it without discrimination and in a speedy manner. The government should also listen to the outcry of workers who are demanding for mid-term access to their savings under the National Social Security Fund.

Monitor ongoing changes in labour relations to ensure compliance with employment laws and regulations in order to protect workers from potential abuse.

Government should encourage employers to terminate contracts as a last resort, and should be available to settle disputes that may arise due to layoffs during the pandemic. Additionally, there should be provision of avenues to dialogue with the Workers Unions and Industry Associations to cater for the rights of workers and enable them access resources and programmes for social protection and security.

The government bears a duty to maintain a robust economy with productive labour and decent work.

It is therefore imperative that a stimulus package is made available to businesses to enable them continue operations. It is critical that this stimulus package is worker centred looking primarily at retaining workers in the workforce and not enriching corporations.

The government should revise the existing policies around taxation and debt.

A moratorium on loan servicing to financial institutions should be instituted and a repayment plan devised to give relief to both businesses and individuals, allowing them to make payments when a degree of normalcy resumes. Similarly, the same should apply to rent payments, to ensure that workers are not rendered homeless at a time when having a roof over one's head is critical. Owners for whom rent is the primary source of income should be supported with the stimulus package. Local governments should also work to protect women's property that may have been used as surety and is with lenders—banks, savings groups or individual lenders.

Price controls on food and other basic goods should be instituted to enable people afford necessities, even as they lose their sources of incomes.

Continue availing, prioritising and fast-tracking funding for the Uganda Women's Entrepreneurship Program which supports small business projects by women. With jobs and incomes wiped out, this will support women to continue being productive and living lives of dignity.

Government agencies under the umbrella of the Justice Law and Order Sector, as well as the Equal Opportunities Commission also bear a duty to condemn human rights violations during this pandemic, as well documenting evidence of violations to enable accountability from offenders.

6.2 Civil Society Organizations

Civil society's role is to hold government accountable on commitments made to citizens, and also to push them to adopt more progressive and inclusive solutions to challenges.

CSOs should continue doing this work through robust advocacy campaigns, taking note of human rights violations, advocating for resource allocation to the most critical areas and calling out the government where they fall short. This accountability should also extend to business owners to ensure that measures to uphold workers' rights are in place.

CSOs should provide and be a support system for their constituents and provide humanitarian assistance where available.

Partners in the Women@Work Campaign and other civil society organisations need to negotiate with donors to incorporate elements of humanitarian assistance to the flower farm workers. Furthermore, CSOs should alert taskforces about critical populations being missed from relief responses for example women workers who presently do not have access to current relief.

Utilise information and communication technologies to continue providing support.

Use of technology to facilitate meetings and communication need to be enhanced to respond to the needs of the women workers. Implementing partners are urged to lobby and advocate for actions that lead to food security, financial security and promotion of good working conditions in addition to grooming leaders who represent the voices of women workers.

Reskill the workers to adjust and cope with the new situation of precarious work by supporting them to find alternative income generating activities. This can involve exposing women to new enterprises through trainings on financial literacy. They can also be connected to enterprises such as Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited that nurture women entrepreneurs, and promote increased participation by businesswomen and professionals in public procurement.



7.0 Conclusion



The pandemic has left untold damage in its wake, as lives around the world are upended. And it is far from over. Experts say that there will not be a normal to return to but instead, a completely new reality. It behooves all stakeholders therefore to respond effectively to the critical issues raised herein to enable the achievement of a fairer new reality, when it comes around. This is going to require concerted work that centres the most marginalised, which the Women@Work Campaign has already been doing, by advocating for women in global supply chains of the horticultural sector. This pandemic has exposed what this Campaign has been saying all along, that we are only as strong as the weakest link, and that all interventions should always centre the most marginalized, if we are achieve real change.

Annex 1: Number of Respondents

Employment status in each of the farms we interviewed:

S/No	Name of Farm	Number
1	Farm 1	14
2	Farm 2	12
3	Farm 3	11
4	Farm 4	12
5	Farm 5	10
Total		59 out of Expected 70
6	Human Resources Managers	5
7	Women Workers Representatives	2
8	Partners-UWEA, FIDA-U	2
9	Union Representatives at the Farm level	4
10	Uganda Flower Exporters Association	1
11	Policy Researcher, Development Worker	2
12	Other Key Informants- Banking, Health, Corporate Community, Local Leaders	4
13	UHISPAWU-National	1
14	Managing Partner/Production Director (the second one only referred)	1
Total		22
Overall Total		81

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Fair Society!

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