

Impact of Covid-19 on Women Workers in the Horticulture Sector in Rwanda



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Acknowledgement

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A Just and

Impact of Covid-19 on
Women Workers in the
Horticulture Sector in Rwanda

Fair Society!

List of Acronyms

CESTRAR	Rwanda Workers' Trade Union Confederation
COVID-19	Coronavirus
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HH	Household
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MINAGRI	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources
MoH	Ministry of Health
NAEB	National Agriculture Export Board
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
RWN	Rwanda Women's Network
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Executive Summary

Since 2017, Rwanda Women's Network in partnership with Hivos under Women@Work Campaign (W@W) has been implementing the Women Leadership project in the horticulture sector in Rwanda. The project aims at improving the status of women (in horticulture) through strengthening women's leadership capacity and promoting decent work for women.

No one would have imagined the effect that COVID-19 would have, in almost all sectors across the globe, including horticulture. It is within this context that Hivos commissioned a rapid assessment with an aim to establish the impact of the virus amongst women in the horticulture sector, specifically in Gatsibo, Nyagatare and Rwamagana District, where RWN implemented the Women@Work Campaign initiative in Rwanda.

The assessment used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. In total, 28 respondents from four horticulture farms in the above-mentioned districts participated in the assessment. The study paid special focus on their current employment status, living conditions, changes in their household expenses and their outlook on their future. The understanding of COVID-19 by women workers was also of key interest for the purpose of this assignment.

A summary of findings is presented below:

- Overall, awareness and understanding of COVID-19 and its preventive measures was high among women workers thanks to the efforts deployed by government and employers to sensitize citizens;
- The sting of the virus was felt acutely in horticultural farms, whereby both production and sales have been slashed by half on average;
- 49% of the total workers, of which 41.1% are female, have lost their jobs or are on unpaid leave, while 51% of workers are surviving on a 50% pay reduction;
- As a result, women workers were thrown into disarray, engulfed by fears and concerns about their jobs and lives which pushed them into a hopeless and helpless situation more so, should the pandemic persists;
- Trade union membership is still low among workers in horticulture. However, even for those who are members, the union took on educating the masses on preventative measures of the virus and not much on their labour rights.

1.0 Introduction and Background

Rwanda Women's Network is a national humanitarian non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting and strengthening strategies that empower women in Rwanda since its establishment in 1997. It's mission is to work towards the improvement of the socio-economic welfare of women in Rwanda through enhancing their efforts to meet their basic needs and this is done through five core programs: Health Care and Support, Education and Knowledge Sharing; Socio-economic Empowerment; Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response, and Governance and Leadership.

Over the last three years, RWN in partnership with Hivos under the Women@Work Campaign has been implementing the Women leadership project in the horticulture sector in Rwanda. The partnership was based on a shared belief that "decent work lies at the heart of social progress" and a growing concern for lack of gender equity and eliminating gender based violence in the employment sector. The project aimed at improving decent work through improved women's leadership capacity in horticulture sector and has been implemented in collaboration with Haguruka¹ and Rwanda Workers Trade Unions Confederation (CESTRAR²).

Since December 2019, when a new strain of Coronavirus commonly referred to as

COVID-19 - first struck Wuhan, China, the world has been turned upside down. The strain of the virus whose vaccine is yet to be identified, has seen 5,488,825 people infected and killed 349,095 around 217 countries, areas or territories³, as of July 2020. Just like other in other countries, COVID-19⁴ has affected the socio-economic set-up of Rwanda with direct consequences on the livelihoods and wellbeing of thousands of people.

It is in this context that Hivos, working together with RWN commissioned a rapid assessment to gauge the effects of COVID-19 amongst women in the horticulture sector, under the Women@Work Campaign. The Campaign looks to improve the labour conditions for women working in global horticulture supply chains

1 Haguruka is a Rwandan non-governmental organization registered under Rwandan law. Our organization works towards ensuring that women can claim their rights by empowering them and empowering access to justice across the country. For further information <http://haguruka.org.rw/about-haguruka-ngo/>

2 Rwanda Workers Trade Unions Confederation (CESTRAR) is a trade union based in Rwanda whose main objectives include: to improve the socio-economic conditions of workers while promoting solidarity among workers and involve them in trade union activities.

3 World Health Organization (WHO): Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak situation; latest update: 27 May 2020/

4 The first case of COVID 19 was detected in Rwanda on 14 March 2020

(flowers, fresh vegetables, beans, avocados and chilies) through fair wages, security in the workplace and good working conditions.

Objective of the Rapid Assessment

The overall objective of the assessment was to measure the effects of COVID-19 amongst women in the horticulture sector, under W@W.

The assignment sort to:

- Assess the level of awareness of COVID-19 and its preventative measures among women workers in horticulture;
- Examine the effects of COVID-19 amongst women in the horticulture chain (flowers, fresh vegetables, beans, avocados and chilies) under Women@Work project in the district of Gatsibo, Nyagatare and Rwamagana;
- Identify the challenges being faced by women in the horticulture chain during the pandemic;
- Assess how and to what extent COVID-19 is affecting W@W Campaign stakeholders;
- Propose recovery measures and feasible response strategies that Women@Work partners can undertake in mitigating the impact.



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2.0 Methodology

The assessment was consultative in nature. It involved getting the views of various key project stakeholders and women in horticulture in the aforementioned districts. However, a quantitative approach was also used whereby the consultant quantified, in figures, information from both primary and secondary data.

Target population, sample size and sampling procedure

The target population in this study were women workers in the horticulture sector, under the Women@Work Campaign in the districts of Gatsibo, Nyagatare and Rwamagana. Participants in the assessment were purposely and conveniently identified.

For the sample size, the assessment was conducted on 28 women workers, who included 6 from Akanyenyeri Farm, 8 from Bella Flowers Farm, 6 from Garden Fresh Farm and 8 from Green Best Farm as indicated in the table below.

During the assessment two women were not accessible (from an initial 30), hence only 28 women workers participated in the assessment.

With regard to key informants interviews, it was initially planned to involve four farm owners and managers of the above farms, one representative from National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), one representative from Haguruka and another one from the trade union (CESTRAR). Only three Farm managers (Akanyenyeri, Bella Flowers and Green Best) and the representative from trade union participated in the interviews. The consultant was unable to reach other key informants, despite several efforts and attempts.

Target population and sample size

Farm	District	Type of Production	Target population	Sample Size
Akanyenyeri	Gatsibo	Chili	8	6
Green Best	Gatsibo	Chili processing	8	8
Bella Flowers	Rwamagana	Flowers	8	8
Garden Fresh	Nyagatare	Vegetables	6	6
Total			30	28



Data collection tools and procedure

Phone call interviews were mainly used due to COVID-19 containment measures which restricted movement. A semi-structured interview guide was developed for the various categories of respondents. Face to face interviews were also conducted with key informants, in Kigali in full observance of COVID-19 measures including wearing of face masks, washing hands and social distancing.

Limitations of the study

Following directive by the government to contain movement phone call interviews were used as a mode of data collection. This was a challenge in that, it took time for workers to open up, specifically women workers who were not conversant with data collection, (especially when collected by someone they are not familiar with).

Some identified key informants did not avail themselves for the interview and one farm was not willing to provide the requested information despite consultant's attempts. Time was another major setback. The 10 days allocated to the assignment were not sufficient, mainly because some respondents were not available during the phone interviews or were not accessible due to poor connectivity, which led to delays of interviews as some interviews were started off and completed later or resumed on another day.

3.0 Data Analysis, Interpretation and Presentation

This section provides a profile of the respondents and findings of the study.

Profile of respondents

Below are the key socio-demographic characteristics of respondents which include level of education, marital status, age, Ubudehe⁵ category, size of the household and position/role in the household. This assessment focused exclusively on women. For this reason, sex variable was not taken among the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Distribution of respondents per age and level of education

Age is one of the socio-demographic variables retained in this assessment due to its perceived influence on one's capacity to cope with critical situations such as the COVID-19 crisis. In this regard, the assessment sought to know age groups of respondents.

Majority of the workers fell in the age group of 25-34 and with about five workers above the age of 50.

The level of education of respondents was also considered. The assumption was that this would help determine the level of understanding of COVID-19 and other aspects pertaining to its prevention and attitude to adopt throughout the crisis. From the findings, 43.5% of respondents had completed secondary level education. Respondents who completed primary and university level education ranked second and third with 34.8% and 17.4% respectively.

Those who had completed vocational training were at 4.3%. Based on the education qualifications, in theory, the majority of respondents are equipped with at least basic knowledge to understand COVID-19 and other aspects pertaining to its prevention, as well as the capacity to meaningfully cope with the crisis while making informed judgment.

Distribution of respondents per marital status and size of the household

Household responsibility, division of labour, and support of wife-husband were important determinants with regards to COVID-19 impact on the households of women workers.

From the study 56.5% of the total respondents were married. Single, widow and divorced stood at 30.4%, 8.7% and 4.3% respectively. From the interviews women's quality of life remained hindered, among other things, by heavy household workload. Division of labour was still at the expense of women: child care, food preparation and fetching water remained largely women-reserved activities. Gendered division of labour has a negative impact on women, especially when the household size is large.

The assessment further analysed the size of the household due to its assumed role to magnify and worsen the impact of COVID-19 on the household. Majority of the respondents fell under the category of a medium (4-6) size of the household with 60.9%, followed by households whose size is large (>6) and small (2-4) with 21.7% and 17.4% respectively.

⁵ **Ubudehe:** was drawn from ancient Rwandan history and can be rightly described as an indigenous knowledge and grassroots based approach to community development that has been scaled up to conform to the requirements of modern rural administration and grassroots governance.

Category 1: Very poor and vulnerable citizens who are homeless and unable to feed themselves without assistance.

Category 2: Citizens who are able to afford some form of rented or low class owned accommodation, but who are not gainfully employed and can only afford to eat once or twice a day.

Category 3: Citizens who are gainfully employed or are even employers of labour. Within this category are small farmers who have moved beyond subsistence farming, or owners of small and medium scale enterprises.

Category 4: Citizens classified under this category are chief executive officers of big businesses, employees who have full-time employment with organizations, industries or companies, government employees, owners of lockdown shops or markets and owners of commercial transport or trucks.

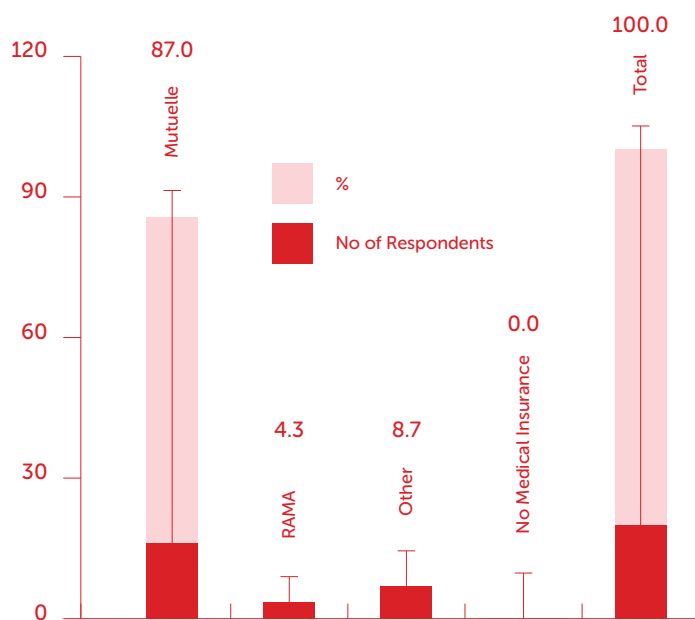
Further analysis revealed that majority (60%) of women workers who participated in the assessment were married, followed by 21.7% who have children living in the household, while 8.7% were female head/single mothers.

Livelihood status of respondents

This section sought to assess the livelihood status of respondents by focusing on Ubudebe categorisation (the Ubudebe categorisation has been expounded in footnote 5) and having medical insurance to facilitate the accessibility of medical services.

With regard to Ubudebe categorization, 73.9% were in category 2, followed by category 1 with 17.4% and 8.7% of respondents were in category 3. This shows that the majority of respondents (women workers) are in category 2 and 1, and still have a certain level of vulnerability with regard to their livelihood status, which might be exacerbated by COVID-19 crisis.

Respondents having medical insurance



Source: Rwanda Women's Network field survey, May 2020

On medical insurance, findings in table below indicate that all respondents have medical insurance; whereby 87% have a community based health insurance scheme commonly known as solidarity for health (Mutuelle de Sante)¹, 4.3% have the government scheme popularly known as Rwanda Medical Insurance Scheme (RAMA) while 8.7% have other private medical schemes.

Having medical insurance from various schemes, is assumed that it, facilitates the workers to have reliable health services.

Awareness and knowledge about COVID-19

About 95.7% of respondents were aware of COVID-19 while only 4.3% reported that they had little knowledge about symptoms, ways it is spread, and its preventive measures. Awareness on the virus could be attributed to government and employers' sensitization. In the words of a participant: "Kubera imbaraga ubuyobozi bw'igihugu, cyane cyane aho dutuye, hifashishijwe itangazamakuru, twasobanuriye ibijyanye na Korona virusi, uburyo yandura, ibimenyetso byayo, uko twayirinda nicyo twakora haramutse ahantu hose no mukazi kacy abakoresha barabidukanguriye kuburyo buhagije"⁶ (As result of intense awareness campaigns carried out by the leadership of the country, especially in our respective area of residence, we have come to understand about COVID-19, how it spreads, its symptoms, preventive measures as well as precautions to be taken in case of suspicious symptoms).

As per symptoms, the women workers demonstrated an understanding of what to look out for. In the words of one participant: "Ibimenyetso bya coronavirus harimo inkorora, gucika intege, guhumeka bigoranye, no kugira umuriro"⁷ (Coronavirus symptoms are dry cough, fatigue, shortness of breath and fever).

⁶ Interview with various women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020.

⁷ Interview with one women worker who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020.

In sum, it was clear that the women workers were aware about COVID-19 and had sound knowledge that would help to protect them and remain safe in their activities

Preventive measures established by employers put at the workplace

Findings revealed that all the sampled farms (employers) had put in place preventive measures in line with the government measures: "regular fever testing, distribution of face masks to all staff free of charge, sanitary measures (hand wash points with soaps and/or hand sanitisers), reducing number of working staff to facilitate

physical distancing as well as strict monitoring of full compliance of the established measures⁸".

Particularly, in Bella Flowers Farm, the HR manager indicated that: "the farm has hired a nurse whose role is to monitor the full compliance of the established COVID-19 preventive measures and sanitary enforcement among workers⁹". In addition, the management of Akanyenyeri Farm indicated that: "heightened vigilance was required from all workers and continue to observe the instructions, particularly wearing face masks, washing hands properly and regularly and physical distancing, among others¹⁰".

Impact of COVID-19 on the horticulture sector

Farms	Production before Covid-19/ month	Production during Covid-19/ month	Variation in Production	Sales before Covid-19/ month	Sales during Covid-19/ month	Variation in Sales
Akanyenyeri	436Litres	236Litres	200 Litres (47%)	11,000,000Frw	6,000,000Frw	5,000,000Frw (45%)
Bella Flowers	3151,035 stems	2,058,990 Stems	1,092,045 Stems (35%)	Export= 2,272,502 (72%) Local= 915643 (29%)	Export= 1,189,070 (58%) Local= 455,450 (29%)	Export= 1,083,432 (48%) Local= 460,193 (50.2%)
Green Best	1000kg	500Kg	500Kg (50%)	2000.0000Frw	600,000Frw	1,400,000Frw (70%)

Source: Rwanda Women's Network field survey, May 2020

8 Interview with Managers of Horticulture Farms covered by the assessment, June, 2020
9 Interview with the HR Manager of Bella Flowers, June, 2020
10 Interview with the Manager of Akanyenyeri Farm, June, 2020

As shown in the table, employers/farms have been significantly affected with decrease in production and sales by up to 50% on average.

The impact had direct consequences on workers livelihood and that of their families as discussed in the subsequent sections.

Changes in household expenses

One of the impacts of COVID-19 especially during the lockdown was the rise of expenses in the household. A 91.3% were of the view that they had to find ways to reduce their household expenses.

For those whose expenses increased representing 4.3%, indicated that the hike was due to the fact that some members of the family had to stay at home, resulting into increment of consumption. For the other 4.3% whose expenses remained unchanged pointed out that they largely depended on agricultural products from their own farm, which was accessible during the lockdown period.

Existence of other sources of income during COVID-19

About 91.3% did not have alternative source of income and relied on their work (in the horticulture farms) as the sole source of income, while 8.7% said to have had options of income

for their household. The latter indicated that they had agricultural activities and small businesses generating an average of >15000Frw per month (>14 Euros).

In the same realm, respondents were asked if they had a sustainable source of income to cater for the livelihood should the situation persists. Most respondents had no clear idea(s) on what to do as a means of alternative source of income, though they all expressed the intention of join small businesses such as agricultural and tailoring activities.

Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on workers' pay

A 73.9% reported that their pay had been chopped, with no corresponding decrease in numbers of hours of work, followed by 21.7% of respondents whose pay remained unchanged, whereas 4.3% of respondents saw their pay put on hold.

Banning of movement led to financial crisis on farms, as a result, farms were compelled to down-size the number of their workers, as well as their salaries up to more than 50%¹¹. According to farm manager at Green Best: "We had to reduce a significant number of workers as the farm was unable to pay their salaries without any income from export¹²".

Employment status in the farms before and during COVID-19

Farm	Number of workers before		Number of workers during COVID-19		Variation		%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	M	F	M	F
Akanyenyeri	7	18	2	8	5	10	71.4	55.5
Bella Flowers	555	324	255	186	300	138	54	42.5
Green Best	25	25	13	22	12	3	48	12
Total	587	367	270	216	317	151	54	41.1

Source: Rwanda Women's Network field survey, May 2020

¹¹ Interview with Farm Managers from 3 farms, May 2020

¹² Interview with the Manager of Green Best, May 2020

The study revealed that 468 workers in three of the sampled farms representing 49% of the total workers comprising 54% of male and 41.1% of female from the selected horticulture farms, were laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

In addition, CESTRAR, the trade union, identified labor abuse cases during the period of the pandemic. These included insufficient PPE (boots, gloves) at the work place, some workers labelled or considered to be "important" and "non important", unpaid extra working hours, staff lay

off without prior dialogue and communication resulting into illegal breach of contract."¹³

The table below shows major concerns expressed by women workers in relation to their work and household. It is important to note that some of these concerns were interrelated. For instance, travel restriction created scarcity of market which led to reduction of work, production and reduction of workers salary (with increased working hours for the retained workers).

The major concerns expressed by women workers

Major concerns expressed by women workers		
N°	Household concerns	Concerns related to work
1	Insufficient food	Reduction of work (number of jobs available)
2	Limited financial means	Reduction of salary
3	Incapacity of loan reimbursement	Slow production
4	Children's education	Reduction of workers hence increased work load
5	Increment of prices of certain commodities	Scarcity of market
6	Increment of care work	Many working hours

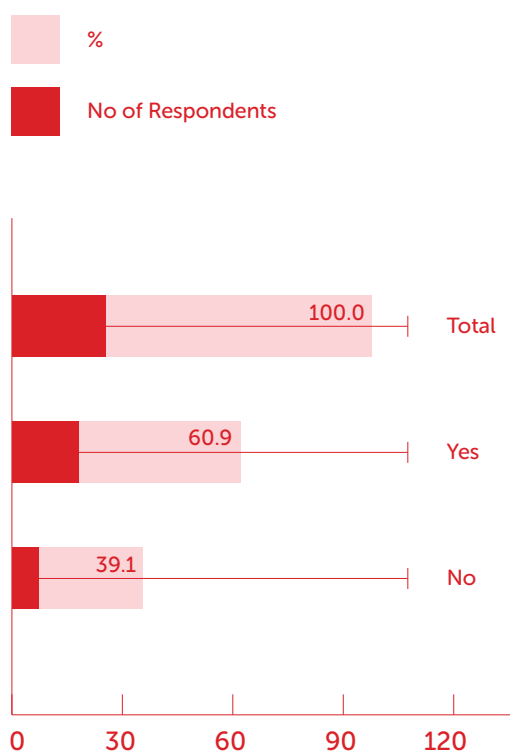
Source: Rwanda Women's Network field survey, May 2020

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¹³ Interview with the a CESTRAR trade union, 19/06/2020

Others raised concerns resulting from the overall situation caused by the pandemic, including school closure that affected children's education, hike of prices of certain commodities which affected household budget and quantity of consumption. There was also increase in the size of households in some families which had a direct impact on the volume of care work and household consumption.

Women workers membership in labour union



Source: Rwanda Women's Network field survey, May 2020

Women workers membership to labour union

Labour union creates a platform for dialogue between workers and employers. Its membership also provides workers with a certain job security especially during crisis. In this regard, the assessment sought to know if women workers in horticulture are members of a labour union¹⁴.

A 60.9% were not members of a union, whereas 39.1% belong to one. This implies that there is less labour union involvement in the horticulture sector to advocate for the betterment of employment conditions.

However, respondents unanimously agreed that the union, sensitized both employers and workers to observe and comply with government measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and comply with the existing labour legislations.

A trade union representative pointed out that, "Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the union through its representatives has engaged dialogue with employers sensitizing them to comply with the regulations and establish preventive measures to protect employees from the pandemic. He further indicated, "the union has organized sensitization through radio talks, tv show, posters and social media with the aim of raising awareness about COVID-19, how it spreads, its preventive measures among its members."¹⁵

The presence of trade union in given farms, presumes an improved knowledge about employees rights and ways to claim them. In this regard, the awareness and knowledge of workers about the existence of legal remedies in the event of dismissal due to COVID-19, is conceived as a pre-condition for women workers in horticulture to use those channels in claiming their rights in case of violation.

14 The operating Union in this sector is CESTRAR (Rwanda Workers' Trade Union Confederation) which is the most influential National Centre in Rwanda with 16 affiliated Rwandan trade unions. It has established committees in across all farms covered by the assessment.

15 Interview with a representative from CESTAR Trade union, 19/06/2020

From findings a 52.2% were aware of the existence of legal remedies such as in the event of dismissal due to COVID-19, while 47.8% were not in the know. This portion of women workers need legal assistance, especially by checking whether the layoff of some women workers as a result of COVID-19 complied with legal requirements.

Fears expressed by women workers about jobs if the crisis persists

87% of respondents expressed fear of job losses should the crisis persists. Worries expressed include business closure and farm's bankruptcy, which would lead to loss of jobs and its negative impact on the livelihood of households as a whole.

Illustratively, one participant pointed out: "Ikicyorezo nigikomeza, zinzi uko bezamera, ubuzima bwacu buzahagarara, kuko ntituzashobora gukora, amasoko ntabwo azongera kuboneka, akazi kazagahara, ntanikindi washobora gukora, dufite impungenge, twirinde kandi dusenga ikicyorezo gihagarare" (If the pandemic persists, I don't know what will happen, lives will get stuck. We will not be able to work, markets will remain inaccessible, our jobs will be at a standstill, and we will not be able to do anything else. We are seriously worried; we can only protect ourselves and pray that COVID-19 stops).

Access to clean water

In line with the above, the hike in water demand due to the needs of frequent handwashing adopted as a containment measure would contribute to both household care work and house hold expenses.

A slight majority of respondents representing 52.2% indicated that they access water from pipes at home, 34.8% from public water taps and 13% fetch water from the river. Some respondents

indicated that during the lockdown period, water consumption increased, with direct impact on the household budget, especially for those with piped water at home and those fetching from public water taps.

How women workers are coping with COVID-19

It has not been an easy time since the outbreak of the pandemic. Participants unanimously stated that "Life is becoming very expensive. Some of our colleagues have been laid off. Others who stayed at work have their salary decreased up to 50%, yet it was our only source of income for the household. The future is very dark and we are hopeless."

In addition, in the words of one of the participants: "Ubuzima buragoye, ariko tugomaba gukora uko dushoboye to gakurikiza gahunda za leta zo kurwanya icyorezo cya korona, kandi no mukazi nta cyizere, kandi turakora cyane kuko twasigaye turi bake, ntabwo tuzi uko bizagenda"¹⁶ (Life is getting harder. We have to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures and guidelines. Things are not any better at the workplace. We are now working under too much pressure and we are worried in case it persists. We remain very few workers; we have no idea how things will be like in the future).

However, there is another portion among women workers who were optimistic: "Turigukora ibishoboka byose kugira ngo twubahize amabwiriza yashyizweho, tu kareba ibindi twakora nk'ubucuruzi n'ubuhinzi, tukareba uburyo twabaho, kandi tukitoza umuco yo kuzigama na duke dufite, gusa dukeneye ubufasha"¹⁷ (We are trying our best to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures and guidelines, we are also looking at other things we can do such as small businesses, and agriculture to ensure our survival. We need to adopt a saving culture, even with the little that we might have. However, we need support).

¹⁶ Interviews with one women worker from Akanyenyeri farm who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

¹⁷ Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

Other effects experienced by women workers

This assessment sought to find out specific challenges experienced by women workers since the pandemic, particularly focusing on Gender Based Violence (GBV), access/affordability to contraceptives and other medical services among others.

In this regard, women workers who participated in this study did not experience the above challenges as pointed out by all respondents. Generally, women workers experienced similar challenges as other members of the community such as limited mobility due to lockdown and curfew, limited finances and other fears related to their jobs, but nothing related to GBV or any harassment was reported.¹⁸

In regards to affordability and access to contraceptives and other medical services, women workers indicated that these services were available, as they were among the essential services.¹⁹

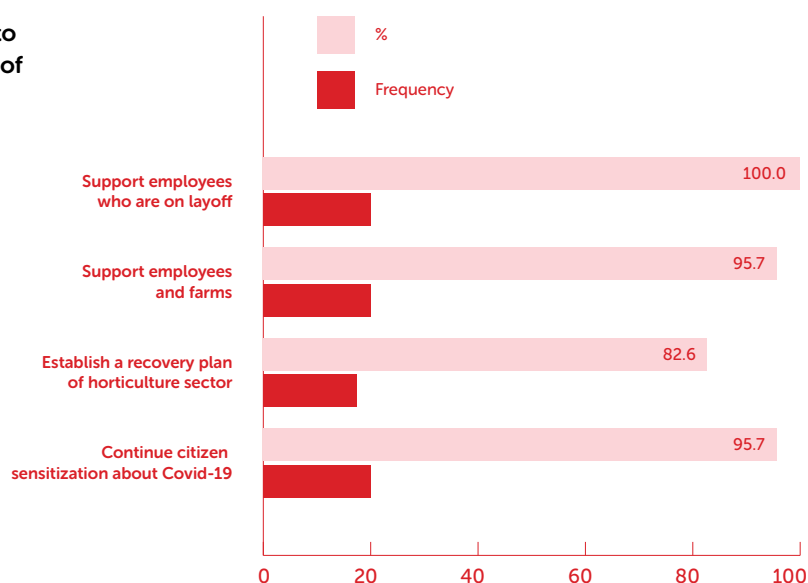
Proposed strategies to deal with the impact of COVID-19

In consideration of the the impacts experienced by women workers arising from COVID-19 crisis, below analysis present strategies as proposed by the respondents.

All respondents advocated for strategies that included supporting employees who were laid off. A 95.7% proposed continued sensitization about COVID-19; another 95.7% proposed supporting employers/farms while 82.6% called for an establishment of a recovery plan of the horticulture sector.

In addition, in regards to support of employees who had been laid off, respondents indicated that there should be legal support to ascertain the legality of the layoffs, the decrease of salary among retained staffs and other violations of workers rights that might have occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic period.²⁰

Proposed strategies to deal with the impact of COVID-19



¹⁸ Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

¹⁹ According to the Cabinet communiqué of 01st April 2020, the essential services included healthcare services, food shopping and banking services.

²⁰ Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020.



Furthermore, participants point out that the support should also focus on the recovery of workers socio-economic conditions whose work had been put on hold, contract terminated or salary decreased.²¹

Further, that the support to employers/farms was also proposed: "Supporting the recovery of the employers/ farms would be the best and sustainable strategy to support employees to regain their employment status and recover their livelihood."²²

Further, that the support to employers/farms would be best channeled in a comprehensive response and recovery plan of the entire horticulture sector, said most of the respondents.

The suggested continuous citizen sensitization on COVID-19 is based on the feeling that: "Though some pandemic preventive measures such as lockdown have been alleviated, COVID-19 is still active. It is still a serious threat, thus it is high time for the community to remain awake, and adopt heightened vigilance and continue to observe the instructions and measures. This requires continuous sensitization."²³

21 Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

22 Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

23 Interviews with women workers who participated in the assessment, May 29-30, 2020

4.0 Recommendations and Conclusions

Key study findings

- Overall, awareness and knowledge about COVID-19 and its preventive measures were high. This could be attributed to the huge amount of efforts deployed by government and employers to sensitize workers and the population at large about COVID-19, how it spreads and its preventive measures.
- The assessment revealed that the sting of COVID-19 was felt acutely in horticulture farms, whereby both production and sales had been slashed by half .
- 49% of the total workers, of whom 41.1% are female, had lost their jobs or are on unpaid leave , while 51% of workers were currently on 50% pay with the associated severe consequences on their living conditions. As a result, women workers were thrown into disarray, engulfed by fears and concerns about their jobs and lives which pushed them into a hopeless and helpless situation should the pandemic persists.
- While the trade union membership rate was still low among workers in horticulture, even those who are members had seen less support from union.
- A range of strategies can help employers and workers, particularly women workers to cope with the impact of COVID-19. These include supporting employees who are laid off, continuous citizen sensitization about the pandemic, supporting employers/farms, the establishment of a recovery plan of horticulture sector and revisiting the existing labour legislation in line with the COVID-19 revelations.

Recommendations

In relation to the assessment major findings and drawing lessons from experience to date, the following recommendations were formulated:

To the Government of Rwanda

- To establish quick policy measures to protect the employment and income of workers while stimulating the economy;

- Establish a comprehensive and gender responsive recovery plan for the horticulture sector that takes into consideration the impact of the pandemic on the small-income earners;
- Through a participatory approach, assess the existing labour legislation in light of the revealed COVID-19 realities;
- Continue citizen sensitization on COVID-19

To Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Engage relevant sector players (government, CSOs and donors) for a comprehensive support of women workers in horticulture through a common basket fund to cater for their socio-economic livelihood recovery, start –ups and training of income generating activities;
- Support women socio-economic livelihoods recovery. As demonstrated in this assessment, many women workers who have lost their jobs, suffered salary cuts or are on unpaid leave would retreat to agricultural and other income generating activities. It is therefore imperative to innovate programs that will support the socio-economic livelihoods development in rural areas as well as start-ups.

Labour Unions

- Labour unions to undertake lobby and evidence based towards policy and practice reforms to prevent them from being challenged hence curtailing the realization of employment rights;
- Provide legal support to ascertain the legality of the layoff imposed to a large majority of workers, the decrease of salary among retained staffs and other violation of workers' rights that might have occurred during the pandemic period.

Horticulture Farms

- Ensure full protection of all workers by providing the Personal Protective Equipment while monitoring the full compliance of established COVID-19 preventive measures;

- Ensure full observance of existing labour legislation, especially dialogue and consultations with workers and/or their representatives and identify areas that need to be revised in light with COVID-19 revelations;
- Review employee welfare policies and practices in light with COVID-19 pandemic internal working policies.

Conclusion

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, its ripple effect is bigger than the disease. Many countries are facing social and economic disruptions that threaten the livelihoods and wellbeing of millions of people and their communities across the globe and across all sectors. Likewise, the sting of COVID-19 is felt in Rwanda across all sectors including the horticulture sector, with farms facing market scarcity, resorting to reduce production and number of workers at the same time.

While COVID-19 created an unfamiliar situation to all actors, trade unions have found themselves in uncommon circumstances that limited their roles to mere sensitisation of both employers and workers to observe the existing labour legislations. This report emphasizes the need for all parties to act in utmost good faith and in full observance of the existing labour laws.

In full recognition of the difficult circumstances caused by COVID-19, the report calls up on various actors (government, private sector, CSOs) for a comprehensive and gender sensitive socio-economic support to women workers in horticulture, while devising a recovery plan for the sector and continuous citizen sensitization about the pandemic.



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WEBSITES

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