



ORA OBAH, ORA MAMAH

Case Study Gender in the Informal Sector
during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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This infographic is a summary of study report published under the same title "Ora Obah, Ora Mamah: Case Study Gender in the Informal Sector during the COVID-19 Pandemic" by the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung.



INTRODUCTION

Background: Gender has become an important dimension that contributes to the vulnerability but is also often overlooked in various relief efforts including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, gender issues are not a priority in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the unequal gender norms during crisis could exacerbate the existing gender inequality. It is thus imperative to implement a gender-based approach to understand the pattern and distribution of the vulnerability in order to form an effective response to pandemic that caters the different needs between women and men.

The study objectives were to:

- Identify response and resilience of women and men during the pandemic.
- Formulate recommendations in regard to addressing COVID-19 with a gender responsive approach.

Methodology: The research was conducted in Yogyakarta using qualitative approach through phone and direct interviews between 1 April – 24 June 2020 during which strictly following the COVID-19 health protocols.

Research Questions



What are the differences between men and women in perceiving the pandemic?



What are the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 from a gender perspective?



What are the economic impacts of COVID-19 on informal sector?

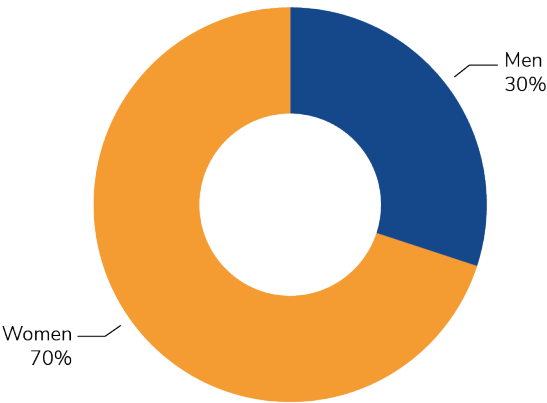


How do women respond to the role of care work/hurture care and productive roles during the pandemic?

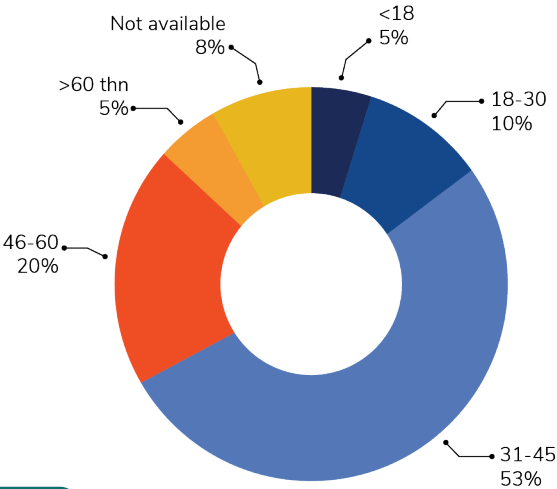


How do women as agents of change manage a crisis situation and remain productive?

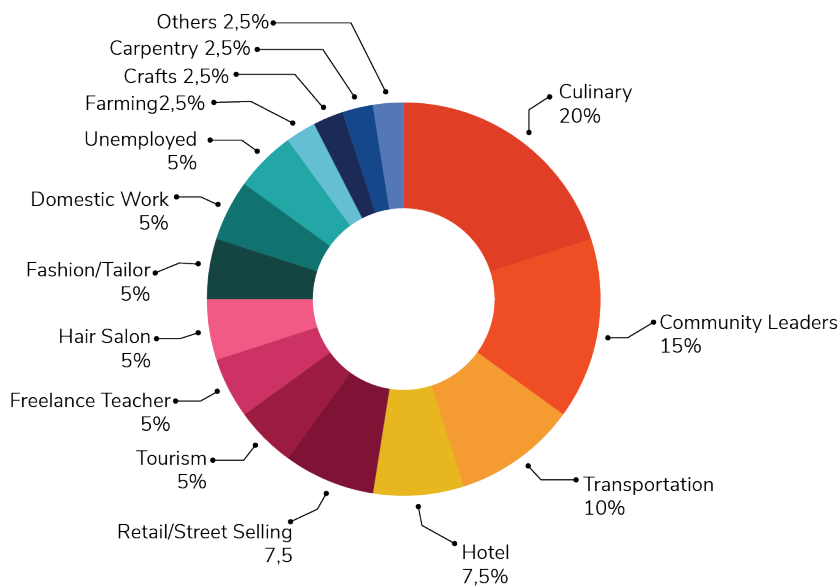
Profile of Respondents



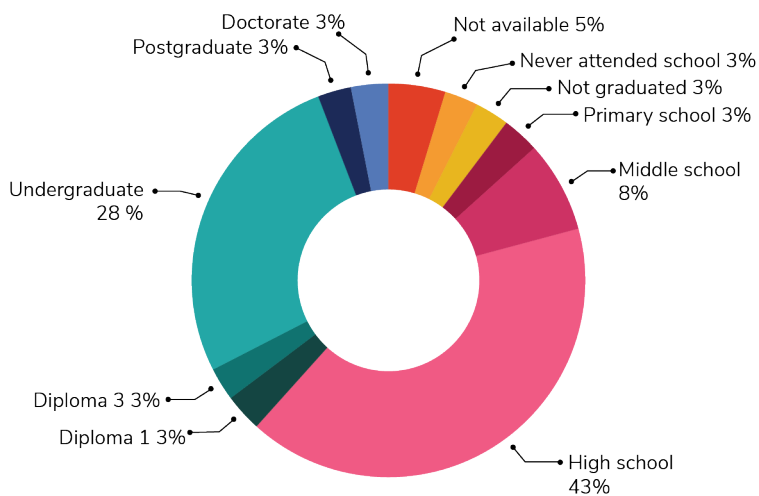
Based on gender



Based on age



Based on occupation



Based on educational background

Women and Men Perspectives on the COVID-19 Outbreak



- "Never had a plague before and never had any advices from parents."
(Elder farmer)
- "This pandemic is the will of God and the earth needs to refresh through its own way, so humans can come out better after the pandemic." (Volunteer of food donation)
- "I was confused. Is the COVID-19 a disease; is it a conspiracy, or a business? In the beginning I saw this as a pandemic to self-reflection, but lately I have doubts." (Pre-school teacher)
- "[I am] not afraid because [I] see this pandemic as a moment of trial from God. Surrender [to God] to prevent feeling stressful, because if we are stressed out, we would be sick. Keep following the health protocol."
(Laundry worker)
- "It's hard, [I] could not celebrate my graduation, no graduation either, and I don't get my pocket money. It is so horrible without pocket money."
(Student)

- "Sad, worried, and thought about school. It doesn't feel good not going to school, different when on holiday."
(Student)
- "Corona is like a disaster. It ruins my life order. I used to have a planning to do this and that – this month I must do this, next month I must do that – but then it was all scattered. I had my own [travel] brand. Have [my] own unit, suddenly..."
(Travel car driver)
- "[This is] a disaster so the government's protocol must be followed in order to curb the virus spread. Although this disaster is considered different to other previous disaster such as earthquake. This pandemic is different because we could not directly feel it." (Housekeeper)
- "Corona brings virus. I am actually scared. Now I ride my pedicab about three times a week. For me, what's important is to be careful."
(Pedicab driver)



The Social Impacts of COVID-19 and Gender Inequality



- **Double burden.** During the pandemic, the burden of nurturing and caring that are socially attached and socialised as a responsibility of women has been increased along with the major shift of public activities to homes.
- **Limited mobility.** When the responsibility of nurturing and caring are mostly concentrated at home, women's mobility becomes increasingly limited.
- **Anxiety** has become a frequent issue when confronting with uncertainties or crisis and can affect health condition. In women respondents, this anxiety brings implication to psychic and reproductive health issue. There needs to be a further study on this aspect.
- **Risk of violence against women and children.** According to the data released by the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection and the National Commission on Violence against Women, the risk of violence against women and children increases when activities are concentrated at homes, which has been the locus of violence cases.
- **Limited space and access to technology.** The shift from offline to online during the pandemic has made access to digital technology crucial. Many women voice their concerns about the high cost of access to digital technology, which in the pandemic situation is felt as pressure since it has implications for family spending priorities and allocations..
- **Stagnation of space and communal schemes.** The interruption of all social activities and institutions (such as communal help in traditional occasion (rewang), communal celebration (hajatan), integrated community for family and children health service (posyandu), family welfare development/PKK) due to the pandemic is heavily felt by women. These communal activities become a space for social interaction and encounter for women to share living space and support each other..
- **Vulnerability of the elderly.** In vulnerable groups, the pandemic can also expose them to severe situations. In the elderly, for example, the adaptability of the elderly requires different adjustments from the other age groups, since it is often more difficult to change habits that have been passed down through generations.

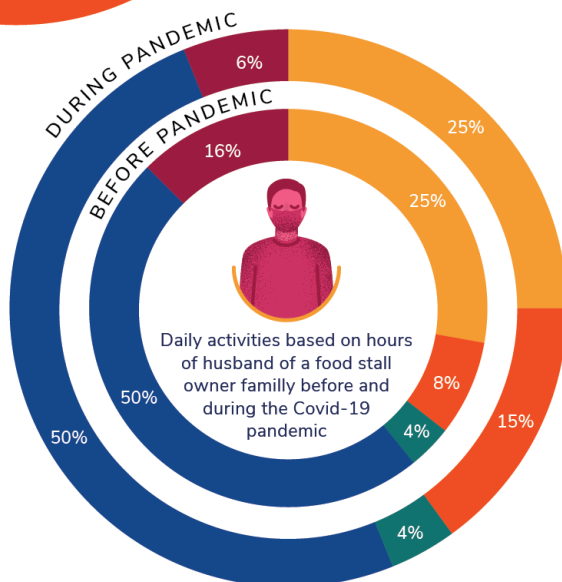
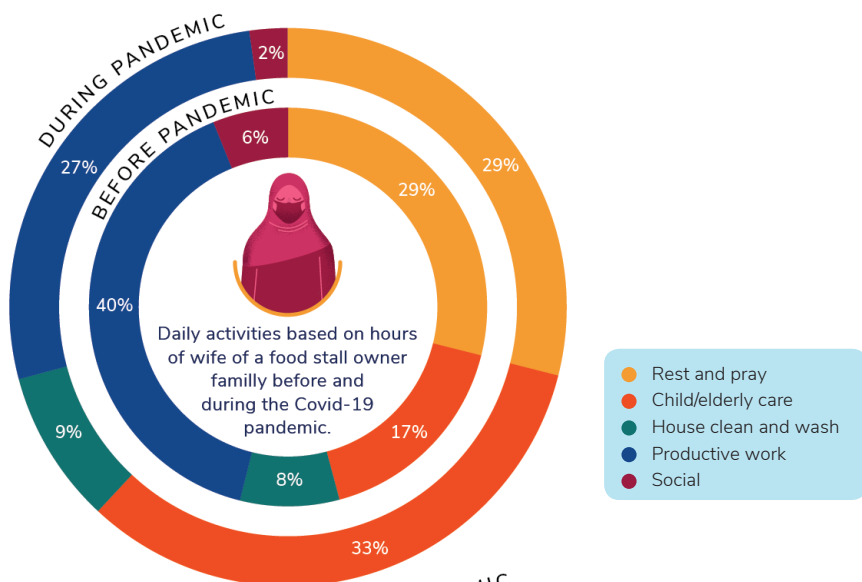


Daily Activities and Double Burden for Women during the Pandemic

For Atik, living in a pandemic era is not easy. She who runs a vegetable stall has to face pile up problem due to the changes caused by the pandemic. Her husband, Jono, who works as a travel driver stays at home more and loses his income. In mid-March, when the pandemic emergency status was announced, her husband immediately took the status of 'people under monitoring' (ODP) after returning from driving customers to Jakarta, which is a red zone for the spread of positive cases of COVID-19. This status incited harassments from local residents, because he was automatically assumed as a person with COVID-19 positive. This social stigmatization has led to exclusion, as well as fewer people shopping at her stall. Even though this label is painful, she tries to ignore it and stays focused on her daily business.

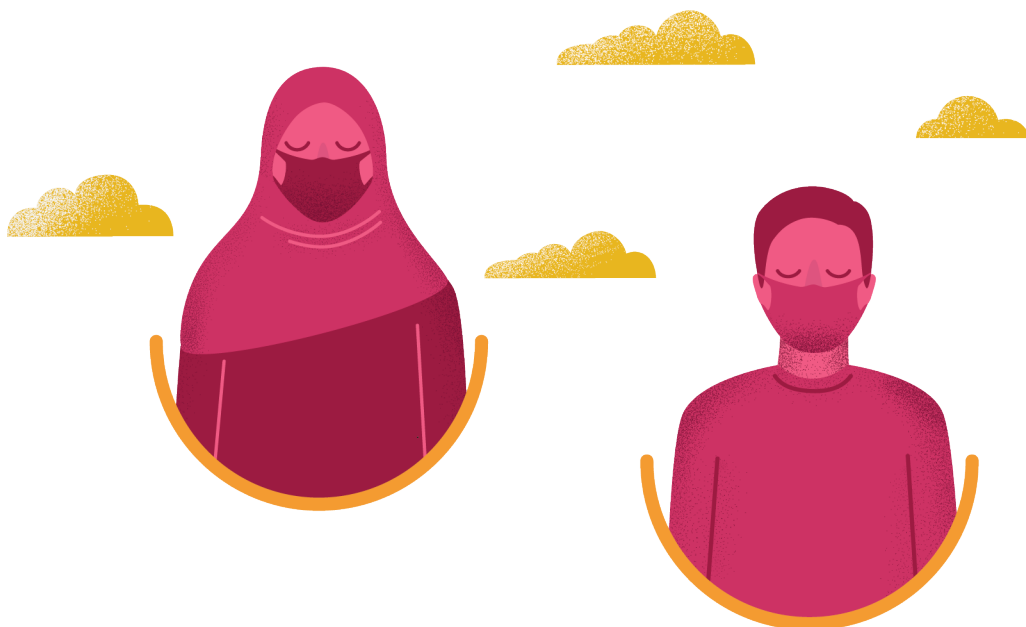
Before the pandemic, Atik was also very busy with various activities of taking care of her stall, children, father and house. During the pandemic, her activities increase. Besides having to take care of her husband who for 2 weeks has the status of ODP, everyday through Whatsapp application she has to report the progress of his husband's condition to the community health centre (puskesmas). Then they have to rearrange the stall to minimize the risk of transmission, arrange shopping time when there is a disinfectant spraying process in the market, accompany children and nieces who are studying at home, and take care of their infant child. This series of activities does not include the obligation to take his father to the hospital for regular check-ups. During the pandemic, the procedure to get health services in hospitals has become longer and takes even more time.

Example of Daily Activities of a Food Stall Owner Family



The Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and Gender Inequality

- **Limited space and work opportunities:** The economic impact of the pandemic is felt by both women and men, because the various sectors affected are also the life support of women and men. However, the type of work affected is influenced by the gender-based profile of participation and control between sectors.
- **Skills for survival:** The impact of job and income loss, the distribution of skills that no longer have economic benefits and are not used by the labor market is affected by the gender-based distribution of work.
- **Productivity implications due to heavy double burden and anxiety:** The pandemic that extends the time allocation needed for care work makes women are increasingly considered unproductive.
- **Low access to social protection programs:** The informal sector, which is dominated by women, has a number of obstacles in accessing social protection programs. The main obstacle is informality, so the data, problems and needs are not recorded and are not recognized in various social protection programs.





Loss of Work and Revenue due to the Pandemic

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism activities in Drini beach, which is located in Banjarejo Village, Tanjungsari District, Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta, have been closed as an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, there are no tourist visits to this beach. This situation has an impact on Sri who usually sells food in the area around the coast. In order to survive, Sri then used social media to sell and was limited to her friends. In this way the income she got were minimal. The turnover of selling food fell to only 10-20% of normal income. There is indeed a loan facility in the Mina Lestari group of which she is a member, but the group's capital is only IDR 10 million. Each member can only get a maximum loan of IDR 500,000..

The hotel sector, which is closely related to tourism, is one of the most affected sectors by the pandemic which has implications to job losses. One of them is Anto, who works as a contract security guard at a national hotel chain in Yogyakarta. As of May 1, 2020, Anto was laid off without any severance pay, and then only received a small religious holiday allowance (THR) and the remaining money from company's closing process. Before he was sent home, since April 2020 the management has made plans to reduce employees gradually by observing business developments. When the workers were finally sent home, the management only informed that there were no more guests staying at the hotel, thus most workers were sent home to reduce operational costs. Of the total 11 security guards, 7 of them were laid off, including Anto. It is also difficult for him to find work elsewhere, as the sluggish business in other hotels also occur.

Tracking the Gender-based Social-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic



- **First:** Differences in exposure and vulnerability to the pandemic are the result of a process of socialization and strict gender role standardization, which makes women and men try to fulfill social norms about being male and being female. In various cases it appears that unequal gender construction and social norms can have equally detrimental implications for women and men, albeit in different ways and in different depths. For example, because of the socialization process and different behaviors, men are vulnerable from the health aspect and are more exposed to or prone to be victims of COVID-19. In the health sector, the feminine role of which women are the majority of health workers, makes them face daily threats in the form of risk of transmission when working with weak personal protection equipments and policies.
- **Second:** The work and study from home policies have different implications for women and men. Women have to do a great deal of time-consuming care and nurturing activities. This condition is different from men, because socially there are no obligations and roles for men in caring and nurturing activities. Indeed, there are examples of the involvement of men/husbands in childcare such as accompanying children to study or play, but socially the main responsibility is still attached to women.
- **Third:** Although it is not clearly illustrated, the economic implications of the pandemic is inextricably linked to gender issues, where women have to spend a lot of time and energy on 'productive' work with care and nurture work. The implication is that women's opportunities to maintain mental health, rest, and develop their potential are increasingly limited. From an economic point of view, this could also have implications to the lack of recognition of women's economic productivity, due to the amount of time and energy women must endure to fulfil social norms.



Women's Contribution to Strategies and Alternatives in Managing the Socio-Economic Crisis during COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Resilience in responding new habits:** There are similarities between men and women in adaptation efforts. However, in some cases, the adaptation of new habits by women is still mostly done at home and related to people around her. This shows how the existing dichotomy of public/private space influenced the behavior patterns of men and women during the pandemic.
- **Family economic resilience:** Study shows that women have a huge role in anticipating greater economic risks, especially at the family level where some of them try to develop new strategies or change jobs. This experience shows how the daily dynamics of women deserve to be considered as a basis of knowledge in mapping survival strategies in crisis situations.
- **Community resilience:** The pandemic also raises public awareness to share. Many women participated and even initiated donation movements. Several donation movements initiated by women, for example #Jogjamaskeran and food solidarity.

Adaptation to New Habits



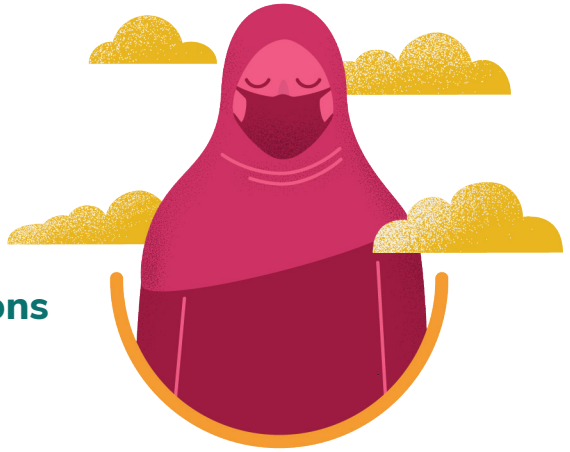
- ◉ Attending religious activities more regularly, for example attending mass through television or congregational prayers at home.
- ◉ Light exercise at home such as sit ups, push ups, squats, and planks.
- ◉ Talking and joking with other family members, such as children.
- ◉ Cook and try new recipes.
- ◉ Play online games.
- ◉ Home gardening and planting some plants, such as chilies, papayas.
- ◉ Providing assistance to those who are more in need.
- ◉ Attend online classes or seminars.

- ◉ Chatting and joking with friends at the COVID-19 post, which is usually set up near the village entrance.
- ◉ Play with children.
- ◉ Play online games and listen to music.
- ◉ Watch television.
- ◉ Breeding bonsai, which both entertaining and can also be a new source of income.
- ◉ Taking care of pets that were already at home before the pandemic.
- ◉ Trying new activities such as gardening.



Learning from Women's Resilience in the Time of COVID-19

- **Development of alternative economic activities that go beyond the public/private dichotomy:** The strategies that women respondents employ show that public and private functions must be viewed in a balanced manner so that the sustainability of economic productivity at the family level can be managed properly.
- **Negotiations on more fluid gender roles:** All work or public activities usually share the same space and time as daily activities in the domestic sphere. Husband and wife have the same opportunity and ability to survive both economically, socially, and psychologically.
- **Support system and solidarity for women in the informal sector:** Solidarity-based resilience schemes include activities such as food donations, mask donations, or plant seed donations. As a solidarity scheme, these actions lead to meaning and spirituality that moves women through acts of sharing.
- **Development of the idea of flexibility in work and the use of technology:** This idea of flexibility is shown in the way women use technology when they have to work during the pandemic. Some have succeeded in utilizing digital technology to maintain business continuity in the midst of the pandemic. Some were even able to take new economic opportunities when the old source of livelihood was affected by the pandemic.
- **Development of women's leadership ideas:** In the context of disaster, women's attitudes and choices of actions can be seen as an agency that is contributive to the development of disaster studies itself. This means that women's experiences in managing crisis can be a meaningful input for a more comprehensive disaster management strategy. Therefore, the involvement of women in disaster management policies is very relevant.



Recommendations

1. Capacity to absorb (absorptive)

- a. The provision of a social safety net in the form of direct cash assistance (BLT), a living allowance (jadup), and insurance that is sufficient to help the poor and those who suddenly have to lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. It is important to consider a more inclusive social safety net delivery mechanism.
- c. Social safety nets are channeled through groups that have been characteristic of women in maintaining their social capital.
- d. This social safety net also needs to be strengthened with a security in supply chain system, especially for basic needs, raw materials for production and marketing of products produced by the informal sector.
- e. Socialization and optimization of online counseling services for mental health in adapting to the pandemic for the informal sector.

2. Capacity building and adaptability

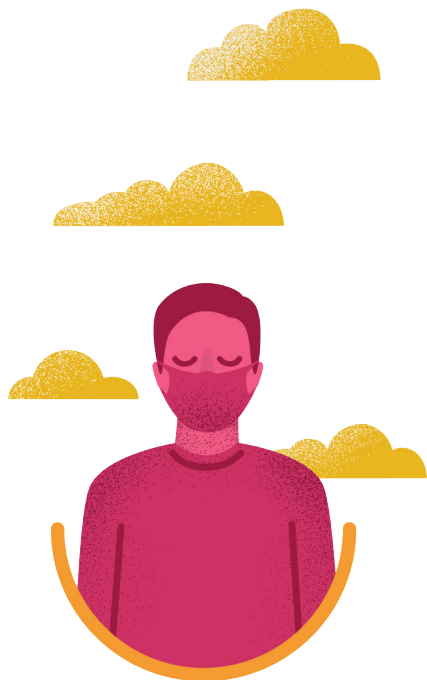
- a. Strengthening the adaptive capacity of informal sector actors to apply healthy living protocols in the context of pandemic.
- b. Strengthening knowledge and financial literacy, management, women's leadership in business and business communication strategies using social media.
- c. Increasing capacity of informal sector to diversify its business.
- d. Technology literacy, especially digital technology.
- e. Gender awareness and perspective in the distribution of social roles in daily life, so that risks such as the double burden of women during the COVID-19 pandemic can be anticipated early on.

In this context, the state can intervene through:

- a. The equal distribution of technology infrastructure development, especially in relation to the quality and accessibility of the internet network so that it can be accessed by women in the informal sector.
- b. Recognition of women's leadership and care works.
- c. Strengthening the social role of state agencies in times of crisis. For example, changing the function of the post office as a distributor of state aid, both in cash and logistical support for products produced by the informal sector.

3. Capacity building and alternatives for transformation

- a. Strengthening the capacity and strategic position of women's informal businesses in shorter supply chains and more equitable benefit sharing. For example, through a collective scheme (groups, cooperatives) so that they take a role in distribution, are closer to the end-customer, and can have a better bargaining position.
- b. Capacity building related to access to and use of digital technology for informal sector actors, as a medium to shift traditional buying and selling activities to e-commerce.
- c. Strengthening economic access for informal sector actors, such as access to capital. Credit relaxation policies and schemes are an important option to push forward.
- d. Strengthening and protecting the domestic market by providing incentives for local products.
- e. The government can facilitate mentoring from large business actors to informal sector business associations.
- f. The state through its policies and programs can also encourage flexibility in gender-based roles and spaces. Inclusive infrastructure development to accommodate care work needs, such as childcare centers, as well as campaigns for men's involvement in care and nurture work could be in the government's agenda.



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