TACKLING DATA INEQUALITY THROUGH THE GRASSROOTS

The world of work has been steadily transitioning to a data-driven economy where development priorities, policy advocacy, and socio-economic strategies are being generated and extracted at a high level with minimal input or ownership from worker organizations on the ground. Multiple barriers have prevented informal workers and grassroot organizations from playing a central role, foremost of which has been the limited capacity of the informal sector to collect, assess and disseminate essential information to development advocates and policy-makers.

Global Fairness Initiative believes that local, grassroots-based entities have the right to set the standards for data collection. By working with partners in anchor locations, GFI is instituting a model of data collection that is worker-centric and locally produced and owned. We work within the local context to empower organizations to define key issues and create sustainable solutions rooted in equity and women's empowerment. With knowledge building being core to the model, we use a bottoms-up, comprehensive Trainer of Trainer (TOT) strategy to augment the internal capacity of community partners, research enumerators, and worker unions. In collaboration with regional data specialists, grassroot entities have hands-on experience learning and using proper methodologies and research techniques, planning implementation strategies, conducting questionnaires and facilitating focus group discussion, using data collection software, compiling information, and analyzing results to enhance awareness about workers and their rights. This responsive, real-time data is retained by those closest to the issue to provide them with targeted information necessary for effective bargaining power with government and external stakeholders, thus leading to more effective and sustainable changes for workers. Engagement at the grassroots level serves to bridge the 'data divide', and engenders local communities to make informed decisions and fosters social and economic development driven by workers themselves.

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Organizing and Labor Trends of Informal Workers in Kenya

Since the pandemic, workers within the informal economy have steadily increased in Kenya yet trade union membership continue to stagger. GFI worked alongside the Amalgamated Union of Kenya Metal Workers (AUKMW) and the Boda-boda, Tuktuk and Taxi Workers Union—Kenya (BOTTAX Kenya) to understand the barriers and opportunities of women informal workers to joining and participating in trade unions and worker associations in Mombasa and Nairobi.

In November 2023, AUKMW and BOTTAX-Kenya worked with the Self-Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) grassroot researchers on a research framework to address the issue of membership, and learn how to galvanize more women to join. In January 2024, SEWA's trainers conducted a TOT session in Nairobi on data collection methods, survey software (Kobo Toolbox), and administration of pilot surveys and focus group discussions. Dataworld Research Ltd., a Kenyan based research company, provided expertise to enumerators on data quality, monitored responses, and strengthened interviewers' understanding of data collection. By February, newly trained AUKMW and BOTTAX-Kenya enumerators completed 8 focus group discussions and surveyed 787 participants across Nairobi and Mombasa county.

Study findings indicated informal workers did not have complete or sufficient information regarding the union registration process, the role of trade unions, and the benefits associated with union membership. Inconsistent income to pay union dues, unclear governance strategies, and waned confidence in leadership abilities pose additional and significant obstacles to growing memberships. Finding recommendations for unions to improve membership engagement include: building stronger awareness about union registration and benefits; offering trainings programs and skill-building to members; increasing access, collaboration, and trust with stakeholders and advocacy leaders on behalf of workers' rights and fair wages; and applying a gender lens and perspective to design and implementation of initiatives.

AUKMW and BOTTAX-Kenya will present research to higher leadership, government authorities, CSOs, and local partners in 2024.

STRATEGY FOR GRASSROOTS DATA COLLECTION

DEFINE Informal workers and grassroot organizations identify needs and challenges, and establish the mission and vision by determining research priorities.

DESIGN Build a team, and work with grassroots organizations to develop a research plan collaboratively.

PILOT Conduct enumerator trainings on methodologies, and provide training in the field to collect initial data and ensure research team is comfortable using the data tools.

REVIEW Review pilot information, and make adjustments to research approach, framework, and data tools.

RESEARCH Facilitate the decentralized collection of data, and gather community-led information and recommendations.

INTERPRET Analyze results through a local lens, and provide a clear, comprehensive report.

REPORT Engage with grassroots organizations and enumerators for feedback, and build upon the core vison of the grassroot research.

OWNERSHIP Maintain ownership and responsibility with individuals and grassroot organizations, and use data for organizing and advocacy to create sustainable improvements.

ACCESS Promote access to research findings in-person and online to influential community leaders, the private sector, businesses, government, regional partners, international donors, and multi-lateral stakeholders.