

Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Skilling (WWES) Initiative: Open Request for Proposals

Deadline: February 12, 2021

Focus Countries: Kenya and Bangladesh

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Overview

IPA's RECOVR - Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Skilling (WWES) Initiative aims to **improve and deepen the existing data and evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls**. The goal is to **provide evidence-based insights and policy recommendations to address gender inequalities in the context of COVID-19 policy responses** during the immediate crisis and extended recovery period.

The WWES Initiative combines data collection efforts, research projects, and policy work, around **two key themes: (1) women's work, entrepreneurship and time use and (2) youth skilling and school-to-work transitions**. You can find a detailed list of driving research questions at the end of this document. The **focus countries** of this initiative are **Kenya and Bangladesh**.

Through the initiative, **funding is available to support piloting, data collection, analysis, dissemination, and policy engagement activities**. For each theme, the Initiative will consider **two types of projects**:

- **Diagnostic studies** to understand the effects of COVID-19 and related containment efforts on women's work, entrepreneurship, and skilling, and how the crisis exacerbates gendered risks and existing gender inequalities. The initiative will support a small number of descriptive studies to collect and share urgently needed information to key decision-makers responding to the evolving crisis. Clear policy relevance and demand needs to be demonstrated for this type of projects, as well as lack of existing descriptive data available.
- **Policy and program evaluations** generating actionable insights to identify and scale effective approaches to address and mitigate the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and related containment measures on work, entrepreneurship, and skilling issues, both during the immediate crisis and the longer-term recovery period. Strong preference will be given to randomized controlled trials, but technically strong quasi-experimental designs will also be considered.

Given the amount of existing data already available and the strong need for evidence on effective approaches to address the gender issues raised or exacerbated by the COVID crisis, **evaluative projects will be given priority over diagnostic projects**.

There is a **total of \$260,000** to be allocated among a few exciting projects through this selection round. While there is flexibility in terms of award size, we encourage projects of between **\$10,000 and \$120,000**.

Process and Timeline

The selection process will be led by a committee integrated by IPA's SME Program Director, Director of Sector Programs, Associate Director of Policy, and Chief Research and Policy Officer. Proposals will be peer reviewed by the Initiative's Scientific Advisors.

The following **criteria** will guide the selection of projects to receive funding from this Initiative:

- Relevance to address the initiative's key research questions
- Technical strength of the research proposal
- Partner's commitment to use results for gender intentional programming and/or clear potential for policy impact (ideally, indicated through letter of support from policy partner)
- Project timeframe

The estimated **timeline** for the selection process is as follows:

- Open RFP: December 15, 2020
- Deadline for submissions: February 12, 2021
- Awards announced: March 12, 2021

Please note that **all funded activities need to be completed before the end of August 2021**. Projects with results that will become available within a short timeframe will be prioritized.

Application Materials

You can [download the application form here](#) and [budget template here](#). Submit your application by **February 12, 2021** to sme-fund@poverty-action.org.

Please work with the corresponding IPA country office (if applicable) to make sure the budget captures project costs accurately:

- **Bangladesh:** Mohammad Ashraful (Ashraf) Haque, mahaque@poverty-action.org
- **Kenya:** Phebeans Oriaro Weya, poweya@poverty-action.org

All budgets must be approved by the corresponding IPA country office before submission.

Driving Research Questions

The list below illustrates the types of questions the WWES Initiative is hoping to address through this call. It is not an exhaustive list: any technically sound and policy-relevant project that addresses the key themes listed above will be considered.

Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Time Use

DIAGNOSTIC

- What are the differential impacts of COVID-19 on women's work and businesses *vis à vis* men's? To what extent are female labor or women-led enterprises disproportionately affected by COVID-19 due to:
 - the type of businesses they work for/operate (e.g., sectoral choice, legal status, etc.);
 - increased family responsibilities (e.g., domestic work activities, family care, etc.);

- decreased mobility and ability to access markets and services; and
- limited safety nets, lack of access to digital platforms or restrictions in access to financial services?
- What are the main channels through which the COVID-19 crisis has impacted women-led businesses?
- How are women-led enterprises responding and adjusting their business models to comply with social distancing and other restrictions imposed by governments to contain the spread of COVID-19? Which adaptations prove most successful in preventing business contraction and loss of income?
- How are female workers affected by the negative shock on economic activity? To what extent has it led to salary cuts, unemployment, migration, overindebtedness, using savings to cover living expenses, etc.?
- How has female workers' productivity been affected (compared to male workers) due to increased family care responsibilities and remote work?
- What policy responses do female workers and entrepreneurs believe could help them navigate the crisis and beyond? What challenges do women-led businesses report in accessing government programs?
- How do changes in women's income and work situation on account of COVID-19 affect household consumption and welfare, intra-household bargaining and decision-making, and women's health and well-being?

EVALUATIVE:

- What COVID-19 recovery policies can governments and other agencies undertake and how effective are they to:
 - mitigate the adverse impact on the viability and profitability of women's work and enterprise (e.g., flexible/subsidized credit, shift to remote services, tax deferral/forgiveness, loans and loan deferrals, wage subsidization, facilitating participation in e-commerce programs, bargaining programs for female entrepreneurs; special assistance for female migrants; digital coaching and networking programs)
 - reduce and distribute added and unequal care burdens between women and men (and girls and boys) (e.g., childcare facilities and services, couples counselling/messaging campaigns)?
- Which previous interventions have prepared women-led businesses and female workers to navigate the challenges posed by this unexpected economic shock? Do psychology-based interventions like soft skills training and stress management techniques make women-led businesses more resilient and able to adapt to unexpected shocks? Does prior exposure to training and mentoring programs help?

Youth Skilling and the School-to-Work Transition

DIAGNOSTIC:

- How do COVID-19 restrictions / lockdowns and subsequent decreases in employment opportunities affect the ability of youth to make the school-to-work transition (STW) and how can these be mitigated?
- What new barriers are introduced into this transition period (e.g., inability to participate in internships and additional skills-training; lack of access to information, services, and resources to facilitate starting new businesses; inability to fully leverage networks to search for employment opportunities, etc.)

- How does access to information and technology differ between male and female youth and what role does it play in increasing agency, connecting to the labor market, and being able to develop employable skills?
- Does the crisis disproportionately affect young women's and girls' agency, self-efficacy, and emotional well-being, including psychological stress, mental health, and future aspirations?

EVALUATIVE:

- What STW program adaptations are most successful to help mitigate the impacts of these barriers and promote youth employment and entrepreneurship (e.g., providing adequate resources to allow for remote internships and jobs, developing remote modules for soft skills and leadership development, provision of remote mentorship etc.)?
- What youth programs are able to increase women and girls' resilience during the COVID-19 recovery period?
- How have increases in agency, self-efficacy, emotional well-being and socio-emotional skills as a result of past programs increased women and girls' resilience, ability to cope, and leverage additional opportunities during the COVID-19 crises? Are the returns greater for female youth than for male youth?
- How effective are demand-side government policies such as wage subsidies and financial incentives for employers at promoting greater employment and on-the-job skilling for young women?
- As governments switch to remote education strategies, could the introduction of SWT skills modules and opportunities (e.g., remote mentorship, soft-skills development techniques, business skills-training, etc.) help prepare students for a more successful transition into the labor force?

In addition to the two priority themes of women's work and youth skilling, the initiative will also explore cross-cutting themes of **gender norms, agency and self-efficacy**, and **intra-household dynamics**. Finally, we will give particular attention to the measurement of concepts within each theme, leveraging commonalities in questionnaire design and (where appropriate) indicator harmonization to better aggregate cross-portfolio learning.

Contact

If you have any questions related to this RFP, please contact the SME team at sme-fund@poverty-action.org.