1. Recognition, responsiveness and reciprocity: what informal worker leaders expect from the state, the private sector and themselves

Sally Roever and Ana Carolina Ogando

INTRODUCTION

More than a year after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, evidence continues to accumulate that its economic impact has disproportionately hit vulnerable populations (OECD 2020). In the world of work, the most severe impact has been felt by workers who lack income security, contracts and access to basic protections, all of which are prevalent conditions in the informal economy. According to estimates compiled by the ILO (2020), workers globally lost $3.5 trillion during the first three-quarters of 2020 as a result of the pandemic, and workers in informal employment—particularly women (Azcona et al. 2020, Lakshmi Ratan et al. 2020)—have been especially vulnerable to income loss and poverty during the crisis.

Policy responses to the crisis across regions have focused primarily on delivering social assistance in the form of cash grants (Gentilini 2020). While as part of short-term relief efforts cash grants have served recipients well as an immediate crisis response measure, many informal workers were excluded from this relief, and where cash grants have been complemented by labour market interventions, they have benefited formal wage workers (De La Flor et al. 2021). The road to a more broad-based recovery for all workers will require a nuanced approach that addresses the inequalities between segments of the labour force that existed prior to the crisis.

Yet the views of informally employed workers themselves are rarely solicited in the design of policy responses or in the co-production of policies more broadly (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018, 355–356). Informally employed workers typically lack access to national tripartite bargaining structures, and their voices are not often heard within discussions of roles and responsibilities associated with the concept of the "social contract." There is "too little understand-

ing about the importance of building dialogue, exploring collaboration and co-producing solutions" (Gupte and Mitlin 2020, 211) in the rush to respond to the crisis, and informal worker leaders have struggled to find spaces where their organizations can exercise meaningful influence over recovery policy design and implementation. But these leaders have much to say about their expectations of the roles that should be played by national and local governments, private sector enterprises, employers and their own organizations.

How do informal worker leaders from different occupational sectors view the roles and responsibilities of institutional actors in the current circumstances? What can their views tell us about mending the fault lines laid bare by the pandemic? What can be learned from their lived experience during the COVID-19 crisis and more generally as workers who tend to be excluded from state protections and from dialogue structures? Lastly, how can these perspectives inform building better state–society and capital–state–labour processes and, ultimately, what can they tell us about recovery pathways that lead to better outcomes for workers once the immediate crisis recedes?

This chapter explores data from the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing-led 12-city COVID-19 Crisis and the Informal Economy study (WIEGO 2020) to address these questions. It privileges the perspectives of informal worker leaders: workers with leadership responsibilities within their organizations who have been navigating the space between the dire circumstances of their members and the responses of institutional actors, including the state.

METHODS

This chapter draws on qualitative data from semi-structured key informant interviews from four cities where WIEGO and local partners researched several occupational sectors: Accra, Ghana; Durban, South Africa; Lima, Peru; and Mexico City, Mexico. The four cities had broadly similar timelines regarding pandemic-driven regulations restricting movement and economic activity: in the first survey reference period, April 2020, all cities had enacted restrictions that impacted the movement of workers and consumers. Of the four cities, Lima and Durban exercised the most severe restrictions. In the second survey reference period, early July 2020, all cities had eased restrictions to some extent. The choice to draw on qualitative data supports the objective of gaining a more in-depth understanding of sector and context-based challenges that limited or facilitated multi-actor engagements.

Responses to key informant interviews were coded according to explicit or implicit references to the roles and responsibilities of different actors: local and national government, private sector and employers, and informal workers and their organizations. Of the 31 worker leaders interviewed, 15 were women.

The chapter proceeds in two sections. In the first section, we discuss respondents' reports of the roles taken on by governments, employers and private sector actors, and informal workers' membership-based organizations (MBOs) across two dimensions of the crisis: relief (including the provision of cash, food and personal protective equipment) and recovery of livelihoods by facilitating a return to work (including the management of public health risks to workers and society). In the second section, we move from roles to relationships, examining how respondents' views of the relationships between the different institutional actors were shaped by perceptions of fairness. The analysis suggests that workers viewed fairness along three dimensions: recognition, responsiveness and reciprocity. These dimensions highlight how important principles of fairness can be for establishing relations of dignity and trust in day-to-day interactions through to engagements in formal institutional settings and policy processes, whereby workers seek access to contested spaces to deliberate on existing barriers of inequalities reproduced by the state and the private sector.

1.   WORKER LEADERS' PERSPECTIVES ON ROLES OF DIFFERENT ACTORS IN RELIEF AND RECOVERY

Relief

The worker leaders interviewed for the study viewed relief from the standpoint of their personal experience with whether and how widely cash grants, food aid and other emergency provisions and subsidies reached their members in the early months of the crisis. In the interviews, MBO leaders in Mexico City, Lima and Accra reported that some workers received relief in the form of cash transfers and/or moratoriums on utility payments (typically from national governments), and/or provision of personal protective equipment or free COVID-19 testing (typically from local governments). Nowhere did worker leaders report that more than one form of relief reached more than a handful of workers, reinforcing findings from the full survey sample (Alfers, Ismail and Valdivia 2020), but indicating that they held an expectation that governments should deliver relief to their sector.

Role of governments
In cities where relief did reach specific sectors of workers, the interviews indicated that most relief was provided by governments, although some came through non-profits or other donors. Worker leaders expressed appreciation for all forms of relief that did reach their members. A domestic worker leader in Lima, for example, noted the appropriateness of a national government cash

grant program even though it did not reach all workers in her organization.[1] In Accra, street vendors and market porters (*kayayei*) recognized that electricity relief had cut costs in half and that local governments helped by providing water buckets for hand washing. Several leaders in Mexico City noted the local government provision of kiosks with free COVID-19 testing.

Where relief did not reach MBO members, worker leaders articulated the need for governments to be more active and more aware of what could help. In some cases, these comments referred to relief measures that did not reach their members, such as national cash grant programs in Mexico City and Lima and small business loan programs in Accra and Durban.

Government attempts to offer relief on rent and utility payments were not always appropriate to the working and living conditions of workers: in the case of utilities, for example, a street vendor leader in Accra explained that the threshold for a subsidy on electricity payments did not work in favor of the poorest workers:

> If the system had for instance an arrangement which gives every room a separate meter it would have really helped the relief on the electricity bill. The informal workers who are very poor do not benefit because about ten people use one meter for separate rooms so the reading of the kilowatts are charged together and therefore exceeds the threshold which qualifies for the subsidy. So if the government would bring an arrangement that every room or household should have its own meter, it would help.

Where relief did not reach workers, leaders suggested that governments should have played a role: as a leader of street traders in Durban said, "I thought that during this time the government would consider us, and support us. The issue of inequality will have long-term effects. People have lost their jobs and the business is really slow."

Overall, with regard to perceptions on relief, worker leaders across all sectors in all cities except Accra reported very few *local* government interventions. They instead associated relief more frequently with the role *national* governments played, though this too was insufficient due to the barriers to access and the amount of relief in relation to the extent of loss in earnings and livelihoods. Thus, while the expectation of worker leaders towards governments' responsibility to provide relief in times of crisis was common across the cities and sectors, governments' willingness and ability to fulfill that role varied considerably and did not entirely meet the needs anywhere.

Role of the private sector

A handful of worker leaders also commented on the role of the private sector and/or employers in relief efforts. One worker leader in Lima said that private companies had donated food to community kitchens, and a leader in Mexico

City said that some landlords had forgiven rent payments. However, far more comments focused on what the private sector and employers did not do rather than on what they did. These comments shed light on how worker leaders view the possibilities for a more constructive role on the part of more powerful actors in their respective sectors or value chains.

For example, a leader of newspaper vendors in Lima said that media companies, who rely on vendors to distribute their newspapers, had contributed almost nothing to protect vendors' health and wellbeing. Similarly, a waste picker leader in Durban said that members of his organization had not received any help from the businesses whose waste they had always collected.

These comments reflect a perception among worker leaders that businesses which rely on informal workers bear some responsibility to contribute to those workers' wellbeing. They also reflect a perception that, like governments, private sector actors had fallen short on meeting this responsibility.

Role of MBOs

The interviews also suggested that an MBO's role is fundamental in times of crisis. In all four cities, worker leaders reported that their MBOs played a facilitating role to link relief with members where possible. They did so by providing information on how to access relief and food rations, assisting workers in applying for relief, and helping produce and distribute food rations and personal protective equipment to those in most need. In Lima, for example, a domestic worker leader highlighted the role her organization had played in distributing food parcels donated by national government ministries and civil society actors to more than 400 individual members, targeting those most in need.

In some cases, MBO relief efforts were also directed to the community at large. In Lima, street vendors donated produce to community kitchens to support their efforts and reduce food insecurity and its associated stress. As a woman street vendor leader noted, "it's a joy to be organized, to be united in order to deliver food relief, masks and even just morally accompanying people … Everyone doing what they can to help each other through." A leader of market traders in Durban noted that the challenges brought forth from the pandemic enabled them to "learn new channels of communication and networks [and] above all [learn about] application processes and how they work in pursuit of relief scheme funds." Indeed, several worker leaders reported that the most important relief role they played was in the emotional support to their members as they underwent the acute stress of suddenly losing their livelihoods.

Worker leaders' expressions of the gap between expectations and reality is an important consideration in discussions of the social contract, particularly when it comes to the need to build trust between the state, citizens and labour.

Worker leaders' sentiments of invisibility and isolation during the height of the pandemic were also met with lack of sufficient support and relief from the private sector and employers, who seemed to abandon the very workers they rely on once the crisis hit. The MBOs' interventions to fill in relief gaps helped, but leaders felt the heavy emotional burden of the limits of their ability to mitigate the impact of such a large-scale crisis.

Recovery

As in the previous section, we began our analysis of roles regarding recovery measures in response to COVID-19 by assessing what interviewees said about their needs in this area. We define recovery measures as interventions that altered or created new rules influencing who could work and under what conditions during the early stage of the pandemic.

Role of government

The interviews with worker leaders revealed a great deal of insight into the effect that recovery measures had on workers' ability to maintain their livelihoods. Worker leaders also commented on the roles they thought governments and employers did not play but should have played in rule-setting and the effect that inaction had on their livelihoods and wellbeing.

Across the four cities, street vendor and market trader leaders had the most to say about the recovery role that governments played to facilitate the return to work, including running shifts among market traders to prevent overcrowding (Accra), closing certain gates or entry points to markets (Durban), and evicting smaller markets to avoid crowding (Lima).

Some recovery measures were viewed positively and as supportive of livelihoods. In Accra, market traders appreciated the spraying of the markets with disinfectant and the safety protocols put into place. One leader said, "I would like to thank the government for the safety protocols prescribed for us." Notably, the role of government in establishing better protocols in markets was not viewed in isolation, but in the context of the dual need for governments to intervene and for traders to comply with such interventions. As one Accra leader said, "As we speak we haven't recorded a surge in the COVID infections in the markets which means that the traders have really done well in complying. I urge the government to factor in all these issues when building new markets considering spaces and water access."

More commonly, however, interview participants discussed interventions that were unsupportive of workers' livelihood recovery, and failures to intervene where measures were needed. For example, the trader in Accra who praised the local government's role in establishing safety protocols also said, "the biggest harm has also been from the same government because of

the imposition of the restrictions and running of shifts which really impacted negatively on the traders"; the limitations placed on hours of work meant that traders could not earn enough to make ends meet in the absence of cash grants or other forms of social assistance. A similar complaint arose in Durban: "People can only recover from this pandemic if they are employed and if the market is fully operational."

Food traders in Durban expressed frustration with local enforcement authorities' lack of knowledge of their designation as essential service providers, which gave them permission to work even while movement was restricted. Despite holding special permits, they reported ongoing harassment and intimidation on the part of enforcement agents who were unfamiliar with what the new permits looked like, which in turn made market traders fear their goods would be impounded. In the face of those issues, one trader said, "we also fear that our businesses will never recover after this pandemic." Another market trader added that the most important role local governments could play is to make the markets hygienic: "sanitation is the biggest issue in this pandemic— no access to water and some toilets are not functioning. If the government can fix that, customers will feel safe to come and purchase goods in the market." This suggests workers' desire for governments to play two roles: to protect public health and to boost demand by creating conditions where customers could feel safe coming to markets.

In Lima, local governments took a more drastic approach to street markets, fueled by negative media portrayals of markets as vectors of disease (Ogando and Abizaid 2020). Rather than working with street vendors' organizations to establish and enforce safety protocols, leaders reported that some municipalities evicted smaller markets altogether. Perversely, these evictions drove customers to a handful of larger markets, which became more overcrowded as a result. According to one leader, her organization drew up their own protocols, put into place plastic barriers between stalls, distributed masks and sanitizer, and presented their approach to a few municipal administrations: "We said: 'Sir, we are going to organize ourselves with one meter in between and we will disinfect everything for our clients,' and he didn't give us the time of day." In her view, local authorities should have supported the organizations in place to operate markets safely, preserving livelihoods while also protecting public health.

At the same time, this leader saw some potential for collaboration between street vendor organizations and local and national governments in the longer term. In her view, local government authorities must build their own capacity to understand the economic logic and consumer patterns associated with smaller markets in the context of the broader urban retail system. While the media's negative portrayal of street markets incentivized police and private security forces to evict street markets during the pandemic, governments could

have built on existing partnerships to develop and disseminate clear plans that would have prevented some of the abuses and evictions that arose in their absence. Waste pickers and domestic workers also saw a recovery role for governments, though they said less about it than did street vendors and market traders.

Role of private sector and employers

Regarding the private sector and employers, domestic worker leaders in Mexico City identified a need for the Ministry of Labour to develop protocols to get employers to comply with labour rights already enshrined in law. In the absence of such protocols, employers created abusive working conditions that domestic workers were afraid to resist for fear of losing their jobs. No additional views on the private sector or employers were recorded, a reflection of other workers' status as self-employed workers and their lack of expectation that private sector and employer actors would play a role in supporting recovery.

Role of MBOs

Finally, for those working in public spaces, particularly street vendors and market traders, several leaders across the cities mentioned that their own organizations had taken a strong lead role in recovery by encouraging compliance with health and safety protocols. This includes enforcing mask-wearing in street markets by both traders and customers, installing plastic sheet barriers between street market stalls, placing hand-washing stations at entry points, reducing the size of stalls to increase space between them, creating one-way entry and exit points to facilitate distancing among customers, maintaining shifts among market traders to avoid crowding, and sanitizing surfaces and currency.

In addition to establishing practices that could mitigate workplace insecurity and health risks, worker organizations also took a lead in being a reliable source of information for members. A market trader leader in Accra stated, "I believe that a strong or a living association is one whose members are strong and healthy so what I have been proud about is the education we provided to our members for them to keep safe and not be affected by the COVID."

Worker leaders also supported recovery by negotiating permits for workers designated as essential workers and supporting workers in the registration and acquisition of ID cards. This advocacy reinforced the fact that informal workers provide essential services and goods, and it helped mitigate the forms of violence and harassment being directed at them. In Durban, for example, market trader leaders helped workers understand the detailed registration processes for permits, which helped workers avoid multiple trips to municipal offices and higher transportation costs.

Viewed holistically, the interview responses outlined in Section 1 suggest that worker leaders in the four cities viewed responsibilities multidimensionally: they saw an appropriate role for governments, private sector actors, employers and themselves as leaders—as well as their organizations and members—in both delivering relief and coming up with recovery measures that would both support livelihoods and establish safer and more decent work conditions. How, then, did they view fairness and justice within the context of those pandemic-related responses? We analyze the interview data in light of this question in Section 2.

2.   INFORMAL WORKERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS: RECOGNITION, RESPONSIVENESS AND RECIPROCITY

Further analysis of the interview data suggests three dimensions along which informal worker leaders view their relationships with key institutional stakeholders. The first dimension is recognition: an expression that state entities, private sector firms and/or employers should be aware of informal workers' existence, their working conditions, and the role they play in economic and social life. The second dimension is responsiveness: the notion that open, two-way dialogue and collaboration are essential components of the desired relationship that MBO leaders wish to build with the state and the private sector. The third dimension is reciprocity: a sense that the roles of institutional actors should be balanced in a way that facilitates the overall functioning of economy and society in order to avoid or eliminate punitive, arbitrary or counterproductive arrangements.

Recognition

Several interviews with worker leaders conveyed a sense that fairness, from their perspective, is fundamentally rooted in a sense of recognition. Worker leaders mostly expressed this sense in terms of its absence: that more powerful actors—specifically, the state, employers and private sector firms—do not even recognize their existence. "I can tell you in all honesty," said one worker leader in Lima, "we continue to be invisible" to government officials when it comes to COVID responses.

A woman waste picker in Accra reported that the lack of recognition by her community and the government made her question whether waste pickers are considered citizens:

> We realize the importance of our work to the community and it's very painful for us, now that we know that the work that we are doing benefits the government and the

community, and they don't see us playing any role. Are we not a part of them, are we not a part of the country, are we not citizens?

In this sense, workers had a heightened awareness of their contributions to their communities, society and the economy, which grounded their claims that governments should understand informal workers' experiences of invisibility and marginalization. As one street trade leader in Accra said, "I work to get all traders to know that whatever they are doing is of great importance to the nation and that they should not belittle themselves or downplay their contributions to the development of the country and that they are a major stakeholder in the nation."

Yet a prevailing theme in the interviews was that the government did not recognize these contributions. As a street vendor leader in Mexico City said, "we are part of the economic engine of the city; this is something that the government still doesn't understand." Workers linked this lack of understanding with barriers to accessing government relief.

Some leaders contrasted government's inability to recognize informal workers' contributions to the general public's understanding: "The government has always had the same attitude: they continue to see us as a sector of little importance, a part of society that they only use from time to time for political expediency," said a street vendor leader in Mexico City. The public, on the other hand, "can see what vendors are doing" to protect public health: "putting up plastic [safety barriers] in between vendors and customers, cleaning everything, taking vendors' temperatures and sending people back home when they are sick."

Most fundamentally, study respondents conveyed a sense of wanting the government to recognize that their livelihoods contribute to the city: "I would like recyclers to be viewed as valuable workers. We are not stealing or littering around; we are trying to make a livelihood," said one waste picker leader in Durban. In fact, worker leaders in several cities demanded that workers in their sectors be recognized as essential workers (Abizaid and Parra 2020, Marchiori and Prandini Assis 2021), and these efforts resulted in their official designation as essential workers in some cities.

Finally, a domestic worker leader in Mexico City called on the government to recognize the unique employment conditions of domestic workers given that they work in private households. In her view, its role as a guarantor of basic rights implies a responsibility to recognize in policy and law how to protect those rights: "The government has a responsibility to see that for domestic workers, the home is not a private place. It is a workplace where they are

experiencing rights violations." As one domestic worker in Peru commented, employers must recognize the rights of domestic workers as well:

> I am calling on all employers to be aware of the domestic workers' movement of Peru … What we are saying to them is that we are not against them as people. We want them to recognize [us] and be flexible—because we are all women. We want them to reflect that we are also part of Peru, we are also citizens.

Considered together, the reflections of worker leaders indicate the extent to which workers feel devalued as workers or citizens in relation to the state, the private sector and society. In response to questions about what they would like to see in the future, several worker leaders mentioned having their work valued appropriately and correspondingly recognized in policy and law. More so, the dimension of recognition as a principle of fairness would seek to reorient relationships between informal workers and, particularly, local governments that are currently based on fear and punitive regulatory environments.

The desire for recognition reflects workers' demands for basic dignity and a sense of equal standing as full members of society (Fraser 2000) and as workers. Worker leaders saw that claims for recognition could redress the historic forms of invisibility and potentially disable the institutionalized forms of violence and stigmatization they experience in the workplace and in their everyday lives. In this sense, the claims for recognition foreground broader claims for both a fairer redistribution of resources and a pathway for participation as peers in decision-making spaces.

Responsiveness

A second dimension of fairness relates to workers' perceptions that responsiveness, as constitutive of open dialogue and collaboration, would pave the path for workers' more direct involvement and engagement with the state and the private sector on decisions directly affecting their livelihoods and work conditions. If recognition is a first step in establishing a deeper mutual understanding of the needs and demands of workers as well as their contributions, responsiveness is a second step in ensuring that fairness is embedded into channels for negotiation. In this regard, worker leaders expressed a need for receptiveness towards their demands on a continuous rather than ad hoc basis. Ultimately, responsiveness reflects workers' two-fold interest: on the one hand, to pressure authorities to give workers access to decision-making spaces to present their ideas and solutions, and, on the other hand, to show their willingness to work collaboratively to establish more enabling work environments.

Interviews highlighted efforts to gain access to authorities to report on the multiple ways in which workers were experiencing harassment and abuse

during the pandemic. In Lima and Accra, worker leaders were able to meet with government authorities and work towards mitigating this harassment and avoiding further evictions. A market trader leader from Accra described the process and outcome of engagement:

> The leadership had to meet with the Deputy Minister for Local Government over this concern [of mistreatment] to get some positive outcomes for the traders. We finally resolved to design ID cards for the traders together with the transport unions who were also affected by this action from the security agencies.

Several worker leaders' strategies involved presenting recovery proposals in the limited spaces for engagement to counter the inaction towards proposals brought forth by informal worker organizations pre-COVID. These efforts were motivated by their view that local authorities and policy makers responsible for local economic development need to have a sense of what the local economy really looks like. According to a street vendor leader in Lima, this lack of ground-level knowledge can lead to further marginalization:

> When I've gone to talk [to municipal officials] about a project, it has surprised me that the Manager of Urban Development is a pure economist. As I discussed and made observations, I realized he was lost in regard to what we were talking about … this is how the administration is run. These guys don't know the realities in the field … this district is really abandoned and our sector even more so.

Leaders also presented examples of workers' efforts to uphold safety protocols. A street vendor leader in Mexico City, for example, described the efforts by the workers' organization to contribute to public health protocols set forth by the government, and a lack of responsiveness to these efforts:

> We have gone well above and beyond what the authorities demanded of us in order to avoid contagion: wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, washing our hands constantly all day long, cleaning our merchandize and structures, and also completely sanitizing the entire common work zone … we have done all this without government support. They've abandoned us to our fate.

Government responsiveness was also lacking in regard to regulating employers' actions towards informal workers. Such was the case noted by a domestic worker leader in Lima: "There is no movement on complaints," she stated, so "we have had to call employers and tell them not to abuse their domestic workers."

Leaders, however, did report a few positive examples of government responsiveness. In Mexico City, domestic worker leaders reported that dialogues with the government had resulted in possible collaborations with Mexico City's prosecutor to support complaints on violence at the workplace and instances of

trafficking. In Accra, a street vendor leader saw the fact that local authorities "have not bothered us" as positive.

Nonetheless, there were few examples of governments exhibiting even a degree of responsiveness to the collective demands of workers to carry on their activities undisturbed, and no pattern of positive government responsiveness across sectors or cities emerges from the data. This gap between expectation and experience is another important consideration in discussions of what a new stronger social contract for informal workers might look like.

Reciprocity

As a third dimension of fairness in the establishment of relationships among workers–state–private sector, reciprocity primarily reinforces the need for rules and regulations to make sense or balance out the relationship between actors rather than reproduce arbitrary or punitive frameworks negatively targeting informal workers. The concept of reciprocity is built upon worker leaders' own recognition of the contributions informal workers in their sector make to the functioning of community, city, society and economy, and their frustrations with the failure of the state to value those contributions and design interventions accordingly—and, in some cases, with the failure of the private sector to value their contributions as essential components on which private sector profit models rely. The concept of reciprocity also builds on the notion of responsiveness in that workers understand they are doing their part, against great odds, in opening and maintaining dialogue channels with more powerful actors—a necessary step towards building more reciprocal and institutionalized relationships—but often with limited responsiveness by the state or the private sector.

Their explicit desire for greater transparency, consistency and accountability by governments in implementing rules and regulations during and beyond the pandemic demonstrates worker leaders' perspective on reciprocity. From worker leaders' point of view, informal workers are doing what they must do to survive by creating their own jobs—something that, in fact, governments could have done better at: "We're the ones creating work," said one leader. Yet despite informal workers' contributions, government actions and responses are inconsistent and incomplete, a sign of lack of reciprocity in the relationship. Along these lines, waste pickers in Lima discussed problems with the national government's attempts to provide support and how delivery appeared to be arbitrarily or unevenly implemented. Workers questioned why certain municipalities implemented relief and others did not, fostering a greater sense of mistrust. This form of inconsistency is expressed at times as a lack of reciprocity or fair exchange of responsibility between institutional actors.

Worker leaders also pointed out that arbitrary violence towards informal workers undermined the very objectives of the government to contain the pandemic. Governments were, in other words, both excluding informal workers from relief measures and preventing them from working, making it impossible for them to meet their basic needs. A street vendor leader from Lima reflected on this situation in her description of what the members of her organization are enduring in the pandemic context:

> Honestly, a street vendor has to go out and work, and keep going out to work [because there is no relief] … the hunger and the necessity are intense. As long as there is no good government program, as long as the municipalities don't do anything to control the [virus], it's going to continue. And it's really hard … we have lost our humanity here. They [the police] throw water on street vendors and beat them with sticks. It's horrible.

Another aspect of reciprocity constitutes the worker leaders' own perceptions that they have demonstrated willingness to comply and abide by government rules and regulations only to be met with a sense of greater marginalization and miscomprehension of the extent of livelihood losses. A street vendor in Mexico City stated: "[we] don't understand why the government is restricting our activities knowing that if we don't work we won't have anything to eat." For this worker leader, one possible explanation for the government strategy was to "make us disappear" by simultaneously limiting access to relief and preventing them from earning income. Not only did this generate a sense of hopelessness given that so many workers had no income at all in the early months of the pandemic, but it also led to asset-depleting strategies (Roever and Rogan 2020).

Worker leaders expressed a similar view in the case of employers and more powerful actors in their particular value chains. Media companies in Peru, for example, rely on a workforce of vendors who collate newspapers in the early morning hours and then sell them on the streets, either in kiosks or on street corners. Vendors did not receive any relief payments and, when restrictions on movement were put into place, suddenly had no source of daily income. As one vendor said: "In these four or five months, the newspaper companies have only given vendors two masks—nothing more. And this is the saddest part … they say they're going to help the vendors to have better [safety] protocols, but it's totally false." Instead, the media companies offered no relief and refused to comply with a commitment to compensate families for lives lost due to their exposure to risks as workers.

A waste picker leader in Durban expressed a similar view that despite waste pickers' many years of service collecting recyclable materials from local com-

panies, those companies had disregarded the relationship once the pandemic hit:

> We haven't received any support from formal businesses. They do not allow us to collect waste in their business after level three lockdown; they now sell the waste. We were surprised that after a long time we have been working with them they did not consider us at all; instead they chased us away.

In a sense, worker leaders' comments about the failures of government and private sector actors to reciprocate workers' contributions reflect a critique of the irrational imbalance of power and resources in these societies. For example, a street vendor leader in Peru pointed out the impossible situation of older workers without pensions in that country:

> The government is issuing one norm after another saying persons over 65 years old may not go to the market, they may not go to the park, they can't go out at all. In street vending maybe 40% of vendors are older workers so what are we supposed to do? A lot of them are by themselves. People have to work in order to sustain themselves.

Governments' irrational expectation that people who rely on day-to-day earnings can somehow survive without work and without relief was at the core of worker leaders' perceptions of nonreciprocal roles. Above and beyond a fairer balance of roles and responsibilities, reciprocity should imply that more powerful actors adhere to agreements and comply with commitments made; without that adherence, a new social contract would be impossible, particularly given the historic marginalization, exclusion and mistrust workers have experienced across cities.

In many interviews, a profound sense of solidarity that organized workers have built over time underscored comments about reciprocity—a sense that workers are bound to help one another when more powerful actors fail to uphold responsibilities. Notwithstanding the relative lack of resources in the sector, several MBOs undertook efforts to pool any resources they could find and to direct food and cash to the most vulnerable of their members. In this sense, where government cash grants never reached the most vulnerable, solidarity contributions did. These expressions also reflect leaders' aspirations for a better society, one that changes its view of informal workers "because [the pandemic] has shown the need for solidarity: if you are okay then I will be okay too."

CONCLUSION: PATHWAYS FOR RECOVERY

What do these expressions of the need for more recognition, responsiveness and reciprocity suggest for building enduring pathways for economic recovery? At one level, recovery plans may represent an opportunity to redress mistrust in highly fragmented, polarized and unequal cities. A new social contract cannot be built if governments fail to recognize and address the extent of misery caused by not only the crisis but also by their own failures to adequately address the crisis's consequences—or even to see and acknowledge those people affected the most. Repairing the mistrust and skepticism may start with delivering benefits that offer a concrete sense of hope to reverse the common view that "government has no interest in us."

The "three Rs" as principles of fairness introduce a pathway for building trust and relationships through a more balanced framework that ultimately seeks to connect and engage workers and institutional stakeholders. Indeed, it is notable that several worker leaders, despite their circumstances, expressed an understanding that their own employers (in the case of domestic workers) and clients (in the case of street vendors and shoe shiners) were also suffering under the circumstances. In addition, worker leaders saw informal workers and organizations as active "social contractors" with rights and responsibilities. The leaders' reflections suggest the need for recognition, responsiveness and reciprocity, ultimately sharing a vision of balance and shared responsibility in society that is achievable when everyone does their part.

Moreover, this moment may also present an opportunity to draw from leaders' demonstrated localized knowledge (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018, Ogando and Harvey 2020), deep social ties and sensitivities to the needs of their fellow workers as they endure the ongoing crisis. Worker organizations' efforts to build relationships and support fellow workers through solidarity, interdependence and mutual aid can present a perspective for foregrounding a new social contract. A paradigm shift within the new social contract that embeds part of this logic and incorporates grassroots knowledge may help address and present solutions to the socio-economic and political crises that will continue to test governments' ability to reduce poverty and inequality.

NOTE

1.   A leader of street musicians in Mexico City also reported that his organization's members received cash grants from the national government.

REFERENCES

Abizaid, O., and F. Parra (2020), "Recycling in Colombia: An Essential Service in the Time of COVID-19," WIEGO Blog, 8 October, accessed 4 October 2021 at https://www.wiego.org/blog/recycling-colombia-essential-service-time-covid-19.

Alfers, L., G. Ismail and M. Valdivia (2020), *Informal Workers and the Social Protection Response to COVID-19: Who Got Relief? How? And Did It Make a Difference?*, WIEGO Policy Insight No. 2, WIEGO. Accessed 28 September 2021 at www.wiego.org/publications/informal-workers-and-social-protection-response-covid-19-policy-implications-2.

Azcona, G., et al. (2020), *From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19*, New York, NY: UN Women Headquarters, accessed 20 September 2021 at www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19.

De La Flor, L., et al. (2021), *Taking Stock of COVID-19 Labor Policy: Responses in Developing Countries*, accessed 21 September 2021 at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35331/Taking-Stock-of-COVID-19-Labor-Policy-Responses-in-Developing-Countries.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Fraser, N. (2000), "Rethinking Recognition," *New Left Review*, **3**, accessed 20 September 2021 at https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii3/articles/nancy-fraser-rethinking-recognition.

Gentilini, U., et al. (2020), *Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures*, Washington, DC: World Bank, accessed 20 September 2021 at https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33635.

Gupte, J., and D. Mitlin (2020), "COVID-19: What Is Not Being Addressed," *Environment and Urbanization*, **33** (1), 211–228, accessed 22 September 2021 at https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247820963961.

ILO (International Labour Organization) (2020), *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work, Sixth Edition: Updated Estimates and Analysis*, accessed 21 September 2021 at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_755910.pdf.

Lakshmi Ratan, A., et al. (2020), *Evidence Review of Covid-19 and Women's Informal Employment: A Call to Support the Most Vulnerable First in the Economic Recovery*, accessed 22 September 2021 at https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/evidence_review_covid-19_and_women%27s_informal_employment_a_call_to_support_the_most_vulnerable_first_in_the_economic_recovery.pdf.

Marchiori, T., and M. Prandini Assis (2021), *The Impact of COVID-19 Laws on Informal Vendors: Trends and Insights from Latin America*, WIEGO Resource Document No. 21, July, accessed 28 September 2021 at www.wiego.org/publications/impact-covid-19-laws-street-vendors-and-market-traders-trends-and-insights-latin.

Mitlin, D., and S. Bartlett (2018), "Editorial: Co-Production—Key Ideas," *Environment and Urbanization*, **30** (2), 355–366.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2020), *Development Co-operation Report 2020: Learning from Crises, Building Resilience*, Paris: OECD Publishing, accessed 22 September 2021 at https://doi.org/10.1787/f6d42aa5-en.

Ogando, A., and O. Abizaid (2020), "How are Peru's Street Vendors Facing COVID-19?," WIEGO Blog, 11 June, accessed 4 October 2021 at www.wiego.org/

sites/default/files/resources/file/Informal%20Workers%20in%20the%20COVID-19
%20Crisis_WIEGO_July_2020.pdf.

Ogando, A., and J. Harvey (2020, "Knowledge co-production with and for organisa-
tions of informal workers: building democratic capacity for social change," in J.
Charmes (Ed.), *Research Handbook on Development and the Informal Economy*,
Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 317–345.

Roever, S., and M. Rogan (2020), "Informal Workers See a Long Road to Recovery
Ahead—Unless Governments Act," 22 November, WIEGO Blog, accessed 22
September 2021 at www.wiego.org/blog/informal-workers-see-long-road-recovery
-ahead-unless-governments-act.

WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) (2020),
"COVID-19: Crisis and the Informal Economy Study," accessed 21 September 2021
at www.wiego.org/covid-19-crisis-and-informal-economy-study-0.