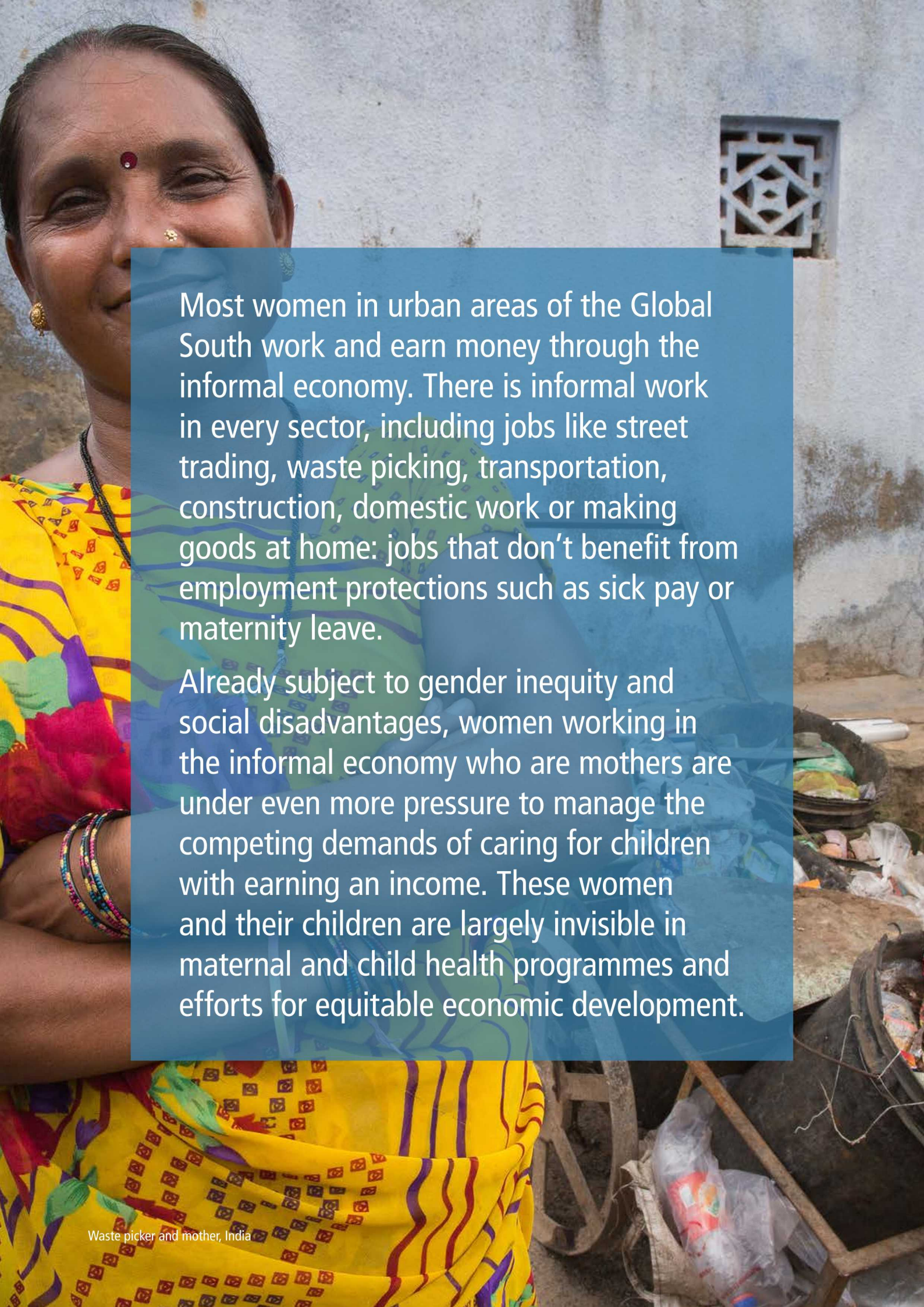


Urban informal economies that work for mothers and children

Supporting women working in the informal economy to sustain their livelihoods, protect their health and nurture their children





Most women in urban areas of the Global South work and earn money through the informal economy. There is informal work in every sector, including jobs like street trading, waste picking, transportation, construction, domestic work or making goods at home: jobs that don't benefit from employment protections such as sick pay or maternity leave.

Already subject to gender inequity and social disadvantages, women working in the informal economy who are mothers are under even more pressure to manage the competing demands of caring for children with earning an income. These women and their children are largely invisible in maternal and child health programmes and efforts for equitable economic development.

Why the urban informal economy?

61% of the global workforce earn their livelihoods in the informal economy. 86% of employment in the African region; 88% in India; 68% in Asia and the Pacific and 40% in the Americas. In 55% of countries more women are involved in informal employment than men.

Without the benefits of formal employment, many working mothers are forced to choose between losing out on income or compromising the care they provide their children. Managing this difficult decision on a daily basis can be detrimental to their own and their child's health.

Almost **1** Billion

women are engaged in informal work

2 Months

The time when mothers commonly return to informal work after childbirth

3 Weeks

The time when some mothers need to return to work in order to financially support their households

44 Hours

a week is the average paid work time for women, but many work 60–65 hours



It is commonly assumed that the woman should contribute to the household income



Working mothers report high levels of stress due to their circumstances

*Information from formative research done by partners in New Delhi, India and Durban, South Africa.

An urban focus

Our focus is on cities because that is where working mothers are. Over the next 25 years, Africa and Asia will have the largest populations and highest rates of urbanisation.

- Today, 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas and will increase to 68% by 2050
- Around 2028, Delhi will become the most populous city in the world
- By 2034, Africa will be predominantly urban
- In 2050, 41% of the world's births will be in Africa and in cities
- The urban informal economy will increase until at least 2057



Street trader and mother. Ghana

Why focus on the first 3 years?

Mothers and caregivers shaping children's futures

Breastfeeding: the best start to life

Exclusive and continued breastfeeding over the first 24 months of life provide the best start to any child's life. However, without employment protection policies to allow for maternity leave, paid breastfeeding breaks or opportunities to express breastmilk, many mothers have to either stop breastfeeding, or forfeit income to care for their child.

Responsive caregiving for lifelong development

Child development is a basic right. Yet, an estimated 250 million children are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential. Simple ways of interacting and playing with infants and young children in the first years of life can profoundly influence and improve their motor, language and socio-emotional skills. For mothers working in the informal economy it is difficult to keep their child physically close while working or find care that is safe, affordable and decent.

Protecting the health and well-being of working mothers

Mothers working in the informal economy commonly experience high levels of stress and anxiety. Work and childcare decisions may be made at the expense of their own physical and mental health. Pregnant women and mothers who are working need support to manage their complex lives and protect their health and well-being.



Caregiver with child drawing, India

What is our approach?

Partner with major cities

We will focus our efforts on 4-5 cities in the Global South, working with government departments, municipal authorities, informal workers' organisations and local communities.

Engage multiple stakeholders

Overcoming existing structural restrictions to redesign systems that support women workers in the informal economy needs multi-level stakeholder engagement. We will work to create partnerships and encourage cross-sectoral understanding and cooperation.

Increase opportunities for mothers to care for their children and themselves

We will investigate ways for working mothers to manage the competing demands of childcare and work, including enabling mothers to continue breastfeeding for as long as possible and to directly interact with their children.

Leverage technology

We will promote learning and skill sharing through new digital platforms to build skills and connect women to other community members.

Expect recognition and rights

Mothers working in the informal economy and their children have been overlooked. We will raise awareness to encourage governments and NGOs to proactively address their needs and increase opportunities for these women and their children.

Prove economic value

Policy change, structural reform and social protection methods will help to ease the burden of competing demands. We will show the benefits for human capital when the needs of working women and their children are prioritised.

Establish collective responsibility

Women should not be expected to do it all. Yet childcare and supporting households is commonly assumed to be the responsibility of mothers. We will engage fathers, families and communities so that the care of children and improving the health and well-being of mothers is a collective enterprise.

Pilot, evaluate and scale up interventions

We will pilot and test solutions to improve the time, space and support for women to sustain their livelihood and care for their children. And then scale-up what works.

Mainstream positive attitudes towards informal economies

We will sensitize public officials and employers about the needs of pregnant women and mothers working in the informal economy and try to shape media and public opinion to recognise their rights.

What we can do



Safer spaces

Areas designed for play and early learning both in work and public areas. And places for mothers to rest, breastfeed and nurture their children.



Enable mothers to be close to children

Design and implement local solutions for childcare e.g. portable cots and other solutions for on-the-go care and play.



Effective knowledge for practise

Improve effective knowledge on staying healthy in pregnancy, continued breastfeeding and interacting with young children.



Help mothers to better manage stress and complex lives

Offer simple life-skills training to strengthen problem-solving capacity and decision-making.



Financial support mechanisms

Enable women to delay their return to work after childbirth e.g. through saving schemes or cash transfers.



Informal worker communities

Inspire informal worker communities with a shared goal for improved childcare.



Orientate health services

Provide, and connect pregnant women and mothers to health services delivered in informal work settings.



Policy improvements

Advocate for maternity leave agreements and laws which support working pregnant women and mothers.



Mother playing with her child. Senegal



Seamstress and mother. India



Children playing, with mother. Senegal



Informal traders and mothers. Durban, South Africa



Mothers and informal work. India



Waste picker and mother. Johannesburg, South Africa



Home-based informal work. India



Community worker with mother and child. India

What is uLiNCs?

A collaboration of not-for-profit and membership-based organisations, informal worker networks, government departments, academic and development partners, and international agencies aiming to identify approaches to improve time, space and support for women working in the informal economy to sustain their livelihoods, protect their health and care for their children

uLiNCs: Urban Livelihoods & Nurturing Care projects

A collaboration to enable mothers and children
to thrive in health, development, well-being
and livelihood.

Current partners



Government departments in
Ghana, Kenya and South Africa

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