

Tracking the impact of the global economic crisis – 10 things women’s groups can investigate

by **Diane Elson**

We still lack information systems that can track the impact of the economic crisis on human beings in a timely way. Information is available on financial markets minute by minute. Estimates are published on imports, exports, and level of national output on a monthly or quarterly basis for many countries. In addition, in rich countries, unemployment rates are published on a regular basis. But for most middle income and low-income countries, very little information is collected on a regular basis about the impact on livelihoods and well-being.

We can’t wait for improvements in national and international information systems; we need timely data now, so as to be able to advocate for appropriate policy responses. Women’s groups could begin tracking the impact of the crisis in a participatory way at local level, to find out the different ways that women and men, boys and girls, in different locations and social groups, are being affected by the crisis. Here are some ideas of questions that could be asked.

1. Jobs in wage and salary employment

Has any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours been retrenched? What sectors were the jobs in (e.g., retail, tourism, garment production etc.)?

2. Self-employment

Is anyone in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours in self employment? Has it become harder to find customers? Have the prices that are paid for the products or services supplied fallen? Is it harder to get loans for the business?

3. Migrants’ remittances

Is anyone in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours in receipt of remittances from people who have migrated? Has anyone experienced a fall in remittances? Have any of the migrants returned home?

4. Cutbacks in public expenditure

Has any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours, noticed any cutbacks in public services? Has it become

harder to secure funding for women’s groups? Are services that are vital for women’s rights, such as programmes to reduce violence against women, and support those women who have been subjected to violence?

5. Loss of assets, such as homes

Has any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours taken out a loan to buy their home? Are they having difficulties servicing the loans? Have any of them been subject to foreclosure of their loan and loss of their home?

6. School attendance

Are any of the children of members your group, or of any of their family, friends and neighbours, finding it harder to attend school? Have they been forced to drop out? Do they have less time to spend on their school work?

7. Food and nutrition

Is any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours, finding it harder to provide the usual amount of food

for their families? Is anyone buying cheaper food, spending more time making meals at home, growing their own vegetables, or cutting back on meals?

8. Time use and unpaid work

Has any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours, found themselves spending more time on unpaid work (e.g., preparing meals and caring for children) because they have had to cut back on spending?

9. Gender roles

Has any one in your group, or any of their family, friends and neighbours, heard people saying things like: 'Men have more right to jobs in a crisis because they are the main breadwinners'; 'It's women's job to make sure their families get by in the crisis'; 'Men

get depressed when they lose their jobs, so women must take care of them'.

10. Government policies to cope with the crisis

Do members of your group know about what the government is doing to address the crisis? Have there been any bailouts of banks or corporations? Have taxes been cut? Who benefits from the cuts (if there are any)? Has public expenditure been increased - has there been a fiscal stimulus? What kinds of jobs are being protected/created? Are they men's jobs or women's jobs? Are there plans for any increase in public expenditure on care services, water and sanitation and energy? Or are the plans mainly to increases in expenditure on roads, bridges, dams etc? Have any measures been introduced to support small businesses - or only to support large businesses?

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