

# Report Online meeting 'Working with Informality'

**Date: July 1, 2024 13h - 14h30 CET, zoom**

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**1. The online meeting** was attended by 30 participants (out of 50 registrations) with a good mix of gender, age and professional backgrounds. Participants stated their goals are to learn as a community from research and from practice, in order to eventually influence policy. The meeting follows in a series of meetings every half year: read more [here](#).

## **2. Update on WUR research**

In a [previous NFP event](#) (May 2023), WUR (Bart de Steenhuijsen Piters) announced new research into informality and food systems. Today, his research team is sharing the first results.

### **2.1. Resource-poor yet resourceful (see commented ppt 2a).**

Thies Reemer and Ted Schrader (WUR) explained how in 2023, volunteer WUR alumni helped find and develop 15+ case studies. The cases are very diverse and to be described in video and text. The study 'Engaging with informal actors for more resilient food systems and livelihoods' analysed current links between food system context, informal and formal actors and food system outcomes. It added an action oriented analysis, what would happen when informal actors would operate differently: more, less, better or worse? Findings so far confirm the low visibility of informal actors and bias to formal solutions; while informal actors have roles everywhere; display massive creativity and self-generated income; their informal roles are interwoven with the formal world. Additionally the researchers stress the need for gender-sensitive analysis. The researchers found both positive and negative contributions of informal actors to food system outcomes. Read more in the attached ppt. In the near future the researchers will produce a companion guide with do-it-yourself worksheet and tools, such as **the actor mapping tool (see ppt 2b)**. So stay tuned..

### **2.2. Fostering positive food system outcomes with informal midstream actors (see ppt 2c)**

Emma Termeer (WUR) elaborated further on the action perspective of this research, especially geared to informal midstream actors; those connecting consumers and producers. First, an incentives framework was used to understand how drivers in the food system context shape (dis)incentives for these informal midstream actors. The framework was applied to four cases and helped identify common issues (like (dis)trust, credit challenges and price instability) and helped reach overlooked actors. Currently, the research team is using a five step approach to get from analysis to the leverage points for action. In an example, support for onion dealers to reduce post-harvest losses started with mapping all the actors in the system, identifying for each of

them the (dis)incentives. Visualising how these (dis)incentives contribute (or not) to the desired goals helps find leverage points and action points to shape the strategy of the intervention.

While a scientific paper is forthcoming, the research team also aims to build a knowledge base on this topic and welcome contributions for this. They welcome feedback / input from practitioners about needs in working with informality. They are also interested in examples of practical learning. In the chat, reference was made to remittances as a less visible part of the informal economy.

### **3. Other short updates on informality**

**Ranjan Shrestha, SNV Laos**, is working on access to diverse and safe food by promoting home gardens (beans) and backyard poultry. One disincentive is the cheap junk food easily available. SNV collected data on regular junk food intake by children (<2 yr). Promoting local food (peanuts, banana, taro, yam, sweet potato) led to an intervention to increase the supply and shelf-life of local products, train informal women groups and help them access new markets. In this case, informal food turns out to be healthier than the imported food.

**Eliud Njunja, SNV Kenya and 2Scale**, organised an informal change alliance to tackle high pesticide residues in tomatoes. The related health problems are alarming and politically sensitive. Yet, they got authorities, companies and development organisations to work with farmers on good agri practices related to pesticides. They also tracked the tomatoes on informal and formal markets and noted the positive impact of this intervention on tomato quality.

**Johan Robyn, Outreach Foundation** addresses youth unemployment, which is very high in South Africa. They offer a range of skills training, preparing for income generating activities, usually in the informal economy. The training offer is informed by a community mapping and assessment. One concern with informal work for youth and migrants is the risk of abuse and exploitation. Skills training may help avoid this and help them start their own business. It is noted that formal education is not reaching these groups. See <https://www.outreachfoundation.co.za/>.

**Mirjam Schoonhoven, WUR** is doing a postdoc research on informality and food systems. She is currently doing a literature review on the topic of today and mapping whether literature is concentrated in geographies/value chains, looking for gaps. She is also working with the African Food Fellowship on leadership in informal systems. Mid October, WUR is organising a session on informality within this face-to-face conference:

<https://www.wur.nl/en/activity/wcsg-conference-2024-governing-sustainability-transformations.htm>

**Pritika Kasliwal, Brink Kenya** did research on informality, involving 700+ informal entrepreneurs/workers across Kenya to understand context and their needs. After that, they worked with informal workers and 70 organisations to co-design 'a better future of work':

recognizing informality; informal is the new formal, better solutions needed to address current problems. She notes that learning about informality still happens too much in pockets, that informality is cross-sectoral by nature, making programming hard; and there is a lack of innovation/co-creation with informality actors. Pritika would love to see more collaboration and a shared learning agenda. In Kenya, they worked with MESH which is creating a network of informal workers and a data platform for job opportunities and a pilot of social indicators to access finance. See: [www.MESH.co.ke](http://www.MESH.co.ke) and <https://hellobrink.co/early-insights-about-the-informal-economy-in-kenya/>

**Agustin Gonzalez, WUR** who did a quickscan for NFP to look how informality is addressed in national food system pathways of 6 countries. In short, Ethiopia, Kenya and Bangladesh make explicit reference to informal economy. Agustin also developed a matrix, comparing per country what entry points are mentioned in the NFSP documents, either under the given headings of UN action tracks or the free space for entry points in the relevant national policy. See ppt 3e.

#### **4. Towards a common goal**

During registration for this on-line meeting, participants indicated their personal goals and priorities related to this event and the emerging community on this topic. Most votes went to 'improved understanding / learning' and 'improved practice', with 'influence policy and donors' third. In this part of the meeting, participants were invited to make these goals more specific via an exercise in Whiteboard. You'll find all participants' whiteboard contributions in attached pdf #4.

- What should be on our learning agenda in 2024/2025?

A rich inventory of topics such as : informal finance, influence of politics and specifically targeted policies for inclusion of the informal economy, increase positive understanding of informal economies and ways to incentivise the informal sector .

- What approaches/practices do we want to test in 2024/2025?

Among the suggested approaches are: Making the informal sector more visible, What are alternatives to formalisation, how and why have they worked? Collective action between actors in the informal sector. Addressing the negative bias around informality.

- What are opportunities to influence policy in 2024/2025?

Opportunities mentioned are a/o: let's make the platform really work well as a key source also for policy makers. We need evidence that can inform governments about the impact of informality and Research on successfully implemented policies in different countries. Think of their possibilities of extension into different contexts.

The meeting concluded with appreciation of all presenters and the participants

### **Follow-up**

We circulate this report with the invitation to registered participants to vote on priority topics for a joint agenda on informality in 2024 and 2025. This input will inform NFP and partners about next steps. The interest in this topic clearly shows there is a demand for more permanent exchange of ideas on this topic. NFP and partners WUR and SNV will look into the ideas to support exchange and learning in order to improve practice and influence policy. You are welcome to get in touch too.

### **Short reads**

- [Informal Agrifood Markets](#)
- [The hidden economy that employs 7.8 million South Africans – Daily Investor](#)
- [Informality Dashboard: A deep dive into sectoral informality | UN Global Accelerator](#)

### **Upcoming events on informality:**

- 16 Oct NFP World Food Day.
- 16-18 oct Informality session at [WUR Conference 2024 Governing Sustainability Transformations](#)

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