Request for research proposals

Transforming informal work and livelihoods

Background

United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) is assembling a journal special issue and a book volume focused on understanding the constraints to livelihood enhancement of informal enterprises, self-employed and wage workers in the informal sector as part of the Institute's new project 'Transforming informal work and livelihoods'.

With 'premature deindustrialization' and the growth of the informal service sector, it seems likely that the trajectory towards informalization in low- and middle-income countries may be intensified in the future. The challenge for policy makers is then to find ways to encourage the movement of workers from the relatively unproductive lower informal sector to the more productive formal sector and at the same time, provide opportunities for more dynamic informal firms to grow, and for those working in these firms to achieve decent and remunerative work, even while remaining informal. However, in this effort, policy makers are constrained by the lack of available evidence on the causes of informality and the most effective mechanisms to reduce informality and strengthen decent work in the sector.

This research project aims to address this gap. First, it attempts to characterize the livelihoods of workers in different segments of informal work and provide a better understanding of the drivers that cause workers to engage in these activities, exploring elements choice and compulsion as well as context factors. Second, it intends to detect the main challenges and constraints that prevent workers in each segment from transitioning to a higher earning and more stable livelihood stream. Third, it seeks to provide guidance on how to foster these transitions and enhance the livelihoods of those in informal work.

Given these overarching research objectives, six key research questions can be formulated:

1. What do we know about the legal and policy constraints that hinder the enhancement of informal livelihoods? What policy interventions that can contribute to livelihood enhancement for informal workers and households?

2. How frequent is the movement of workers from informal wage or self-employment to formal work, and vice-versa? What explains such a movement? What are the livelihood implications of such movements?
3 What is the likelihood of lower tier informal workers moving to the upper tier of the informal sector? How transformative is this move with respect to livelihood enhancement and reduction in vulnerability?

4 What kind of policies and institutional environments hinder or favour movements from lower tier to upper tier informal work? How can urban planning processes provide a more enabling environment for the growth of the more dynamic informal enterprises?

5 What is the likelihood of lower tier informal firms and households making a transition to the formal sector, and what kind of policies are more likely to help in this transition?

6 How can women workers in informal wage employment increase the returns to their labour and move to better paid jobs in the formal sector? How can women in self-employment grow their businesses and increase productivity?

Offer and expectations

UNU-WIDER invites proposals from qualified researchers for papers examining the constraints to the growth of informal enterprises and livelihood enhancement for the working poor in the informal sector. The aim is that these papers will culminate as articles in a special issue of a journal. For papers that may not be suitable for publication in the special issue of the journal in consideration, they may be published in an edited book volume instead. While the emphasis is on empirical papers using panel data, theoretical work as well as papers using qualitative or mixed methods will be considered as well.

Proposals from individuals (or groups of individuals) as well as non-profit organizations are welcome. Applications from suitably qualified women and developing country researchers are particularly encouraged. Proposals may address one or more of the research questions. Please read the concept note behind the project carefully before submitting a proposal.

Individual researchers will be issued UNU Consultant Contracts (CTC), while non-profit organizations will be issued a UNU Institutional Contractual Agreements (ICA). A total research honorarium in the range of USD 6,000-10,000 will be paid upon delivery of a working paper and a one-page summary of the main research findings, depending on the qualifications of the lead researcher and assessment of the proposal. Both of these deliverables must be deemed acceptable by the editors before payment will be made. The honorarium is expected to cover all expenses associated with the conduct of the proposed research (including data collection, research assistance, etc.). It is not required to submit a budget.

The working paper will be considered for publication in the WIDER Working Paper series. The working paper needs to be written in English and should be limited to 10,000 words or less as this is likely to be the requirement of the journal/book volume.

All successful applicants are expected to attend a 1–2 day workshop in 2020 (date and venue TBD) where work in progress will be presented to other contracted researchers. Costs of attending this workshop will be borne by UNU-WIDER in accordance with United Nations University travel policy.

UNU-WIDER will formally pursue publication options after the selection of accepted proposals. The editorial team will draw from accepted proposals in order to develop a journal special issue and/or edited book to submit to a publishing house.

While payment of the honorarium will be made upon delivery of the working paper and one-page summary discussed above, the final version of the journal special issue will not be complete at that point. After payment has been made, researchers may be asked to:

1 Respond to reasonable requests by the publisher and editors with respect to finalization of the journal special issue/book volume.

2 Participate in at least one knowledge-sharing event around the launch of the journal special issue/book volume.

1 In case of co-authorships the honorarium will be divided equally among the contributors.
**Dates (EET – Eastern Europe Time)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 June 2019</td>
<td>Final opportunity for questions on the request for research proposals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 July 2019</td>
<td>Proposals due.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 August 2019</td>
<td>Target date for informing on funding decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 October 2019</td>
<td>Target date for completion of necessary administrative procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 January 2020</td>
<td>Target date for submission of first draft of papers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March – April 2020</td>
<td>Target window for work-in-progress workshop.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 June 2020</td>
<td>Target date for submission of final papers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 July 2020</td>
<td>Target date for submission of special issue to journal editor.</td>
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Knowledge-sharing events will be planned subsequently.

**Evaluation process and criteria**

Proposals will be scored along the following criteria: technical merit (40 points), technical capabilities of the research team (30 points), and policy relevance (30 points). Based on this assessment, a pool of suitable proposals will be determined. From this pool, accepted proposals will be drawn by a decision panel. The decision panel will consider additional criteria such as overall coherence of the journal special issue and the book volume, diversity of topics addressed, and geographic diversity. Only the final decision on whether to fund the proposal or not will be communicated to applying researchers.

**Other considerations**

For successful proposals:

1. Researchers or their institutions (non-profit) will sign a consultant contract or an institutional contractual agreement with UNU-WIDER that follows the UNU conditions of service for Consultant Contracts (CTC), or Institutional Contractual Agreements (ICA).

2. Researchers/institutions will transfer copyright of research produced under the contract to UNU-WIDER. The purpose of this copyright transfer is to allow UNU-WIDER to effectively negotiate with editors of journals and book publishers in order to seek the most desirable possible publication outlet for a related set of papers. If no (further) publication is to be expected by UNU-WIDER, the copyright can be transferred to the author(s).

**Proposal submission details**

1. The technical proposal should be no more than three pages of A4 paper in length, excluding cover page and references. Please use 12 point font, 1.5 line spacing, and standard margins. The proposal should clearly state the research objectives, study design, data sources, and policy relevance. The cover page should contain the complete contact information of researcher(s) and a 200-word proposal abstract, which should summarize the research question, main method, data, and expected contribution to policy debate.

2. Submission of proposals is done electronically by using a form on the RFRP announcement page. There are three forms to select from; one for individuals, another for groups of individuals, and a third one for non-profit organizations. Details (such as address, gender, nationality, date of birth) of all researchers involved will need to be entered to the form and the cover page, the proposal, and short CVs (five pages or less) of researcher/s uploaded. Please familiarize yourself with the form in advance.

3. Submission of a budget is not required for the proposal.

4. Any questions on the proposal process should be sent to researchproposal2@wider.unu.edu by 15 June 2019. All queries and responses will be published on the RFRP announcement page. Selected answers will be updated on a rolling basis.