“WE ARE HUNGRY”

FOOD VENDORS IN FORT PORTAL COUNTING THE COST OF COVID–19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

MAY, 2020
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“WE ARE HUNGRY”

FOOD VENDORS IN FORT–PORTAL COUNTING THE COST OF COVID–19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

Fort Portal Food Change Lab

Supported by:

Hivos

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APRIL, 2020
Summary

Globally, food vending in developing countries and mostly in the urban areas is a source for affordable food and employment for the urban poor. In the town of Fort Portal (Uganda), food vending is a lifeline for over 28,000 people daily, mostly low income earners who buy their meals prepared by food vendors because they find it affordable, easily accessible and available at the time1 it is needed.

This study is a result of interviews conducted in April 2020 in Fort Portal with 20 food vendors who were randomly selected to illustrate the variety of views on how food vendors have been affected by the COVID-19 government lockdown restrictions and how they were coping.

The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions by government of Uganda have left the streets of Fort Portal no longer buzzing with food vending activity. The once busy streets are today silent. Almost all food vendors left the streets, except for some who are violating the rules to survive the economic wrath imposed by the COVID-19 restrictions.

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1 Before COVID-19 restrictions, Food vending was available past midnight and therefore people would get food at any time of their convenience.
Before the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, food vending on average earned 450 food vendors scattered all over Fort Portal a combined a daily income of UGX 6,783,000 (USD 1,833). These food vendors sold chapatti, hot drinks like teas and porridge, roasted meat/chicken, chips, and traditional foods like Katoogo. The food vendors had collectively invested approximately UGX 157,500,000 (approximately USD 42,000) in the food vending business. COVID-19 restrictions have eaten away this investment and their daily income. This study estimates that by May 5, 2020, food vendors in Fort Portal will have lost an estimated income worth UGX 237,405,000 (approximately USD 64,000.)

Food vendors are among the low-income earners in Fort Portal. Without a daily income, meeting essential household needs is not possible unless there is assistance from the government, NGOs, family and friends. This study revealed that 80% of the food vendors in Fort Portal are mostly single mothers and 20% are youth. Many of these food vendors have faced difficulties, especially economic hardships that led them to drop out of school and seek early marriages. On average, a food vendor looks after two children.

Testimonies from food vendors reveal how hard it has been for mostly female-headed households to provide food for the children and their immediate families. By the time this study was carried out, most of the vendors had spent their capital and savings on food buying and several were spending their last resources. Out of the 20 food vendors that were interviewed, only five had attempted to change business to selling mostly fresh foods. These vendors said that they were losing money because there were no customers but also vegetables were rotting away quickly. Other vendors were begging for food from friends, receiving family donations of food and money, and doing some piecemeal manual jobs on farms near Fort Portal.

With the uncertainty on how long the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions will last, food vendors in Fort Portal fear that they will starve in their crowded rented rooms. Furthermore, food vendors are worried about how they will pick up the pieces without any economic stimulus to find new capital. Most food vendors may not be able to pay for the rent or school fees. Others will not be able so service loans.

Going forward, policy makers need to work very closely with food vendors and their association to put in place measures to not only prevent the spread of COVID-19 but also to enable food vendors to recover from the economic impact inflicted by the lockdown restrictions. For example, food vendors could be allowed return to work but put in place innovations on how best to do their business without exposing the population to contracting COVID-19.
Introduction

In many parts of the developing world, vending of cooked food is an informal arrangement. In some cases food vendors are in conflict with the local authorities, while in others more collaborative arrangements are found despite this informality, food vending is a lifeline for thousands of urban poor people in the developing countries. Food vendors are themselves part of this urban poor population that is dependent on a daily income to meet essential domestic needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt had a direct negative impact on the global economy and this is also true for food vending. In Fort Portal, the streets that were previously very busy every evening with different food activities are all silent and deserted.

As of May 31st 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the global number of COVID-19 pandemic confirmed cases had exceeded 5.9 million, and had caused over 300,000 deaths. Governments all over the world reacted by putting in place restrictions on movements and issuance of social distancing guidelines. WHO has since warned governments not to quickly relax these measures to avoid a second wave of the virus.

Uganda discovered its first COVID-19 patient on March 21st, 2020 and the
situation then started evolving very rapidly to the point where the government put in place lock-down measures. These measures have significantly impacted businesses, including food vending. As of 20th May 2020, there were 264 COVID-19 cases detected and 65 recoveries had been registered and no COVID-19 related deaths recorded in Uganda.

In a bid to control the spreading of COVID-19, the government of Uganda on March 18 reacted by shutting down businesses, restricting movement, and asking all Ugandans to stay home until June 2. As in other countries, this policy of lockdowns has impacted on global and local economies of individual countries and Uganda is no exception. These lockdown measures have impacted on the economic, food security, and social welfare of Ugandans, and women in particular have felt a bigger brunt of it.

Food vending in the city of Fort Portal (Uganda) provides a living to over 400 food vendors. About 80% of these food vendors are women, and 20% are youth. Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, their overall investment capital was estimated to be UGX 157,500,000 (USD 42,000). On average each individual food vendor before the COVID-19 situation earned USD 6 per day. This income is gone. This study estimates that approximately 28,000 people would eat on the streets of Fort Portal each day. Street food in urban areas of Africa is attractive to people who have little money, no place to cook, or no time to prepare food (HIVOS, IIED & KRC: 2016. Pg.14). Some of the foods sold by vendors include, but are not limited to chapatti, traditional foods, hot drinks like teas and porridge, roasted meat (Muchomo), chips and roasted maize/plantains/cassava/potatoes. These food vendors mostly sold food to mostly and low-income earners living in the suburbs of Fort Portal. They used this money to pay for their essential household needs including rent, school fees, and food for their families. Some who have been in the food vending business for long had achieved important milestones, such as paying school fees, buying plots of land and starting the construction of family homes. The COVID-19 government restrictions have meant that this income is lost, forcing most vendors to use up their limited capital and savings.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in Uganda, KRC-UGANDA responded by a) engaging local leadership on the vendors’ situation during the lockdown restrictions, b) providing some food assistance to the vendors, and c) documenting the situation of food vendors. The latter intervention is the basis for this document. In what follows, we present the experiences and coping mechanisms of food vendors in Fort Portal, identify emerging actors in the food vending sector in Fort Portal, draw insights and lessons learnt, and suggest policy recommendations for decision makers on the situation of vendors during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.
Methodology

The goal of this study was to document the stories in the informal food sector as part of the Fort-Portal Food Change Lab\(^2\) which KRC facilitates in Fort Portal. To achieve this goal, a sample of 20 food vendors was selected in consultation with the vendors’ association to take part in this exercise. These food vendors were randomly selected around Fort Portal and were interviewed to gather their views. The vendors were asked to tell their individual stories on how they have been impacted by COVID-19 and how they were coping during the pandemic. However, due to the need to observe COVID-19 guidelines and particularly the need to observe social distancing, this research was limited to vendors who were in their homes.

\(^2\) The Food Change Lab is an innovation of KRC, IIED and Hivos in Fort-Portal that brings together stakeholders across the Food System in the region to deliberate and converse about ways forward on the challenges within the food systems. The Lab brings together the local leadership, Civil Society Organisations, Faith based Organisations and the Coalition of the Willing-Aghikaine Food Consumers Advocacy Forum. The Lab was first initiated in 2016 and has since made commendable milestones towards the development of a sustainable and inclusive food system in Fort-Portal.
My name is Komuhendo Harriet, I’m 39 years old and I have 3 children. The eldest is in senior 1. I have been a food vendor in Fort Portal town for 8 years selling tea, Katoogo and porridge. This business helped me buy a plot of land and also build a house on it. From the money that I made, I would pay school fees and also service my loan of UGX 2 million from PRIDE Microfinance here in Fort Portal. By the time of the COVID–19 restrictions I had only paid UGX 110,000 on my loan. I’m not sure how I will continue servicing this loan.

During this COVID–19 restrictions, I sold my pig at UGX 300,000 and changed business. I started by selling charcoal, but it did not work. I went into selling vegetables but that also didn’t work. I’m now selling silver fish in Kabundaire Market. Being new in this business, I’m not conversant with it and I’m making many losses. I can only make money for food.

Harriet is one of the over 450 food vendors in Fort Portal municipality who are today struggling to survive in the COVID–19 lock–down restrictions and will continue to suffer post COVID–19 restrictions. There are hundreds of food vendors like her in Fort Portal who share the same experience, trying to meet many household needs including getting food, paying for rent and paying for school fees post COVID–19.
Below is a summary of the impact of COVID–19 restrictions on food vendors in Fort Portal, Uganda.

**Here below is a summary of the impact of COVID–19 restrictions on Food Vendors in FORT PORTAL, Uganda.**

**Disrupted daily incomes for food vendors**

For most of the food vendors, their incomes have been severely disrupted and for some it’s all gone. It should be noted that food vending in Fort Portal is an informal and micro level business attracting hundreds of people to earn a daily income. In Fort Portal, there are 450 food vendors registered by the food vendors association; each vendor earns on average USD 6 per day. This income, which vendors used to provide food for their families, pay rent and, in some cases, service their loans, is gone. Those with loans now fear that they might lose their painfully acquired assets to lenders.

**Women food vendor – impacted more than men**

The food vending business in Fort Portal is dominated by women. The majority of these women are single mothers who carry the burden of looking after children and also educating them. On average, a single–mother food vendor has two children while others have up to 5 children to look after. Without a daily income from food vending, these single mothers have to provide for the children and their immediate family relatives like parents. The COVID–19 restrictions seem to have further accelerated their struggles to look after children where their fathers are not present.

**Food insecurity among food vendors – hungry food vendors**

The majority of food vendors are not from within Fort Portal town and therefore have no gardens of their own and are dependent on food buying for their families. A food vendor can only buy food using their daily income. Without this daily income during COVID–19 lockdown, many food vendors are left with no food and are hungry. Notably, this hunger has a greater impact on their children. Because the COVID–19 restrictions were sudden, many food vendors were not
able to return to their village homes and therefore remained holed-up in their small rented and crowded rooms without food. They are now dependent on food aid from NGOs like KRC and the District Task force on COVID–19. Such food has also not been enough and was also one-off assistance. Food vendors who were interviewed said that only 70 out of the 450 registered food vendors were given food by Kabarole District COVID–19 Task force. The rest of the members could not get any assistance, because the food was not enough.

“I have been donating food to some of my Food vendor friends from my business. I couldn’t stand to see them starve especially the small children”. said Komuhendo Hariet, a food vendor.

Food vendors who have managed to work and/or change business during the COVID–19 lockdown are not making enough money to sustain themselves and their families. Those who are working say that they are only working to get money for food.

“The money I’m making in my new business of selling vegetables, it is for buying food for the children.” Kobusinge Elizabeth, Food Vendor.

Depleted capital and savings

Nine out of ten food vendors that were interviewed said that their capital and savings had been depleted during the COVID–19 lockdown. Most of the money has been spent on buying food for the family. Many of the food vendors are not sure how they will start over. The state of uncertainty among food vendors post COVID–19 is very high. Many are not sure how they will get new capital to start over let alone find the money to pay rent arrears and loans.
Individual food vendor stories – Coping in the Lockdown

For some, coping in the COVID–19 lockdown has meant that they break the rules of the lockdown. When lockdown restrictions were issued in Uganda, enforcement officers took to the streets chasing all those who were considered to be violating the guidelines. Food vendors in Kampala and Fort Portal got caught in cat and mouse games. Some were seriously injured while others lost their merchandise and money while running away. After two weeks of the lockdown and off the streets, several food vendors had returned to the street. While some changed business, others went back to the food vending that they were familiar with. The vendors who went back to food vending were aware that they were breaking the rules but they would rather take the risk for the sake of their children and their own survival. Below are the stories of vendors taking the risk to change business but also breaking the COVID–19 lockdown rules.
Kobusinge Elizabeth, food vendor – Fort–Portal municipality.

My name is Kobusinge Elizabeth, I'm 33 years old. I have two children, both girls. The eldest is in senior 2. I have been in the food vending business for five years selling chips and chicken. From this business I have been paying school fees for my two children. I'm the father and mother at the same time. I don't have any extra hand in supporting my children. I'm very sure that the situation is going to be very challenging for me. I lost money when we were violently chased away from the street because of COVID–19.

I changed business ever since we were chased away from the street. I now sell vegetables and other fresh foods at Kabundaire Market. I only work two days in a week because I don't have a permanent space in the market. I'm new there. Today I'm only working for food. That is all. The profit margin is too small and I'm not even able to make a saving. I don't know how I will be able to pay for rent.

Kemirembe Generous, food vendor Fort Portal municipality.

My name is Kemirembe Generous, I'm 38 years old. I have a family and 5 children – 3 girls and 2 boys. The girls dropped out of school because of school fees problems, it's only the boys who are going to school. The boys are younger and are still in lower classes. Before the lockdown, I used to vend in porridge and Katoogo. I have been a food vendor for 8 years. From this food vending business, I contributed to the buying of a plot of land and building a house with my husband. We are now not able to complete the construction of the house.

I stayed at home for 2 weeks and I found myself eating into my capital and savings. It's then that I decided to start a new business in Kabundaire farmers market, selling fresh foods like vegetables but I'm making losses as I'm still learning about the business. I'm worried because am losing my money. I'm not in position to save any more. Before the lock down, I could save UGX 20,000 per day.
My name is **Tumuhaire Ronald**, I’m 25 years old. I have been in food vending for three years. I sell chapatti at Mpanga Market. From my business I used to pay for rent, and also meet my household needs like food at home. Following the lockdown, I’m not able to save any more. I used to save UGX 15,000 per day but now it’s impossible.

I changed business, and I’m selling Tangawuzi (ginger) but I don’t have customers yet and my sales are very low. I don’t have any experience in this new business and I’m still learning. I’m only working for food.

My name is **Lubega Abrahani**. I’m 38 years and I have seven children. I have been a chapatti vendor for six years. I come from Iganga District. I’m the only child to my parents. The other siblings died. I now have the responsibility to look after my parents as well as my own children. I decided to come to Fort Portal on invitation by a friend who said there are opportunities in the food vending business.

I have been forced to violate the lockdown conditions because of the pressure at home. I have to find food for the children. I also have a loan that I have pay. Staying at home means that I can’t pay for this loan or buy for my children. Also rent is in arrears.
My name is **Katusiime**. I’m 21 years old. I have been in food vending for two years. I joined food vending after dropping out of school. My parents could not afford to pay for my school fees, so I decided to take on food vending to take care of my diabetic parents and also look after my two siblings by paying their school fees. They are in Primary 6 and Primary 3. I also used the money earned from food vending to paying for rent and providing food to my siblings. During the COVID–19 lockdown, I took out my savings from the group and this is what we have been using to buy food and paying for rent and assisting my sick parents. I now don’t have anything else to do to earn an income.

My name is **Kabasinguzi Immaculate**. I’m 29 years old. I have been roasting maize in Kisenyi for five years. I have four school going children for whom I pay school fees. I took on this responsibility for the children after I separated from my husband and he doesn’t contribute anything. So, food vending has been the only source of income to look after my children. I used to earn a daily income of UGX 30,000. Since government asked us to leave the streets this income is no more. I have been depending on my savings and these are getting finished. I have also decided to take on manual jobs on farms where I earn between UGX 15,000 – 20,000. I do two to three jobs in a week. So, the income I used to get in one day, I now get it in two days or even a week depending on how easy the job is. With the continued lockdown, those giving us casual jobs might also stop as they might not be able to pay us.
My name is Kobusinge Margret, I’m 45 years old. I have been roasting maize for the last eight years. I have five children and three grandchildren who I look after with money I make from this business. From this business I earn about UGX 20,000 per day and it is this money that I use to pay rent, school fees and buy food for the children. By the time of the lockdown, I had saved UGX150, 000 and I also had a loan of UGX 600,000 from BRAC. I used the savings to buy food for the children and it has since been finished. This is when I decided to forcefully come back on the street so that I can find money to buy food for my children. However, sales are very slow. I don’t know how I will be able to pay off the loan and the rent arrears.

My name is Nyakwera Nester. I’m 32 years old and I have two children. I completed Senior 6 but was not able to continue with my studies due to lack of school fees. I started working in different hotels where I accumulated some savings. While working at these different hotels I met a man with whom we have two children but we separated because he was abusive. I had to find work to feed my two children and this is how I ended into food vending on the streets of Fort Portal using my savings while working in different hotels. I have now been a food vendor for two years. From food vending, I have been paying for rent, buying food and paying school fees for my two children.

When government stopped us from selling food on the street, I changed business. I now hawk fresh vegetables around Fort Portal town. I buy these vegetables from Kabundaire farmers’ market in Fort Portal. In a day I make between UGX 6000–9,000.
My name is Kansiime, I’m 33 years old and I have two children. I dropped out of school while in senior 3. I was married for six years and it didn’t work. I left and went to Kampala to work but couldn’t stay long because I had left my children behind and I came back to Fort Portal. When I returned to Fort Portal, I started working as a hairdresser but there was no money and I decided to start food vending.

The food vending business was helping me to pay school fees for my children, pay rent, and buy food. On the daily basis I earned between UGX 30,000–35,000. Now I have used up all my savings during this lockdown. I have been forced to illegally go back to work because of the conditions at home. I need to find food for my children. In the past I could save 50,000 towards school fees for my children but now I don’t know how I will manage.
Individual food vendor stories – 
Not doing anything at all and are at home.

During the COVID–19 Lockdown, there are food vendors in Fort Portal who have decided to do nothing but stay home and hope that the situation will change in their favour. Some of the reasons they gave for staying home include the following; they don’t want to risk their limited resources, other say that they don’t have the financial capital to try out anything new and lastly others like the leaders of the Food vendors are simply respecting the lockdown guidelines and don’t want to be a bad example. However, all those staying at home say that the conditions are harsh. They have no food and are depending on family donations of food and money.

Katuungi Kiiza, Chairperson food vendors, 
Fort Portal municipality.

I’m 38 years old and the chairperson of Food vendors in Fort Portal. I have 5 children and the oldest is in senior 3. I have been in the food vending business for 13 years. Each day I would make approximately UGX 45,000. Through food vending, I have been paying school fees for my children and providing for other basic essential needs at home. We also bought land and we had started building a house that we are about to complete. The house project has taken us 3 years and we are now not certain how we will complete it. I have been saving UGX 20,000 per day but now I can’t. I’m lucky that we are not renting but the situation would have been very bad. I’m surviving on my temporary structures but also rent from them is not forthcoming. My other brokering and school businesses are also not making any money at this time.

I know for sure that most of our members are seated at home with nothing to do. Some of the members are begging for food from me and yet I don’t have it.
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Basemera Beatrice – Vice chairperson, Food Vendors Association.

My name is Basemera Beatrice, I have been a food vendor for seven years. I have two boys, the eldest is in Senior 3. Food vending has been the source for the school fees and meeting other household necessities. I’m now unemployed. Before COVID–19 restrictions, I had saved UGX 50,000 (USD 13) and it’s all finished. I have used it to buy food.

It has been difficult for me to start a new business – I have to learn anew. Besides, many people are in their homes and there are few customers and food prices have gone up and it’s hard to make a profit.

I know for sure that food vendors are very poor people. About 60% are girls recovering from early pregnancies and are single mothers. Others are sick, and can’t afford medical care. Food vending has been their only source of money to buy the medicines they need.

We fear that some might turn to prostitution and theft because they don’t have enough to eat.

Kemigisa Gorretti

My name is Kemigisa Gorretti, I’m 34 years old and I have five children.

I have been a food vendor for five years selling Katoogo and Tea to travellers on Bwamba road. Food vending has looked after us for all this long. The income from food vending is low and you have to earn daily. Without a daily income there is no way of surviving.

Our children don’t understand the situation, and don’t want to know why the food at home has reduced. Kemigisa Gorretti

We fear that we may not be able to look after our families. We have many dependants who we will not be able to look after.
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My name is **Mutegeki Juma**, I’m 24 years old.

I dropped out of school and started to sell food on Fort Portal streets. From 2016, I used to work for someone else but I later started my own business. This job helped me to pay for rent, buy food and look after my parents and my child. I have also been helping my siblings by paying school fees for them. I’m now unemployed and I don’t know where to start.

I have been surviving on my savings. Sometimes they send me food from the village. My landlord has also been giving me some food as well. I have used up all my capital and only left with utensils. I cannot pay for food and rent any more. I will not have the capital to start over again.

My name is **Tumwesigye Abel**, I’m 28 years old.

I have three children. I have been a food vendor for four years. Before joining food vending, I had dropped out of school in P.7 because of the poverty situation at home. This business had helped me buy a plot of land and built a house in the village. I’m now unemployed yet I have a new–born baby and mother who needs to be taken care of.
Coping mechanisms

After the government issuance of COVID–19 lockdown restrictions, some of the food vendors started to search for survival options. However, alternative business options were difficult to come by because of the lockdown, apart from those considered to be essential services sectors, namely agriculture and selling fresh food. Because of limited options, food vendors had to find coping mechanisms during the COVID–19 lockdown and here below are some of the coping mechanism that the vendors outlined;

Depending on their business capital and savings.

* Most of the food vendors interviewed said that they were either depending on the capital of their business or the savings. The majority of the food vendors had withdrawn their savings from savings groups and this is what they were using to buy food for family members. This research found out that, soon after government announced the lockdown restrictions, vendors immediately withdrew their savings from savings groups. The groups also closed because there was no business to run. By the time of this study, most food vendors had depleted these savings on food expenditure during the lockdown.

Changing business

* Around two thirds of food vendors had changed from vending cooked food to fresh foods. Even then, there are a lot of hardships. These are new businesses and the vendors were still learning how they work. Food vendors who had changed business said that they were making losses but had no choice but to try and finds means of getting food for their households and children.
Receiving food donations from family members in the village

For the food vendors who have villages and relatives near Fort Portal, they were receiving food donations and sometimes money from their close family members and friends. This is how they have been able to provide food for their families in the town while waiting until the lockdown is lifted so that they can send the children to the villages and relieve themselves of the food demand.

Violating the lockdown measures

This study found out that a number of food vendors had decided to violate the lockdown measures and operate clandestinely for the sake of making money to buy food for their families. This of course is risky and could jeopardise measures against the spread of COVID–19 but these vendors seem to have been pushed to the wall and needed to survive. About 40% of vendors dealing in roasted maize, plantain and other roasted foods had returned on the street. They say that conditions at home were becoming unbearable and the only option was coming back and make some money to buy food.

Living on hope

For some of the vendors, they are hopeful that the COVID–19 lockdown will soon be over and the situation will return to normal so they can go back to their business. One of the vendors interviewed said that she was also praying to God for the COVID–19 situation to normalise. Others are hoping that food assistance from the government will come through and will provide some food for their families.

Changing eating patterns

Most of the food vendors interviewed said that they had changed their eating patterns. Previously, they had the luxury of eating three meals a day, but these have since been reduced to two meals. Breakfast and lunch are now combined and then supper. For breakfast and Lunch, they say they eat porridge and wait for the evening meal.

Offering casual labour

Some of the vendors interviewed said that they had opted to offer their labour to others including on farms neighbouring Fort Portal. This is only for survival purposes to provide food to the family.

“My savings ran out and I decided to offer my services to a pork restaurant where I earned UGX 3000 per day. This job is also no more as my employer decided to lay us off because he has no money to pay us.” Busobozi, food vendor.
Emerging food actors in the informal food sector in Fort Portal

**Milk vendors.** What were once spaces occupied by food vendors in Fort Portal have now been taken over by milk vendors. The response of milk vending seems to have been instigated by mention by the president that farming should be treated as an essential service. Some young people including Boda–Boda riders have taken advantage of this position and are now busy selling milk on streets of Fort Portal. Some of the vendors are dairy farmers who took advantage of the lockdown to sell their milk direct from the farm. The coming of farmers onto the street is reducing the price of milk.
Insights and lessons learnt

A food vendor in Fort Portal earns a daily income of approximately 6 USD. However, this is not the case for food vendors who work for others, their incomes are much smaller. This study has found out that about 60% of the food vendors on Fort Portal streets actually work for others and not for themselves. A meagre income means that crisis situations such as with COVID–19 could mean that individuals will struggle to put food on the table. The impact on such low income earners could be dire.

There should be serious concern about economic hardships presented by the COVID–19 pandemic. For example, there is emerging fear that without daily income earned from food vending, it’s likely that individuals might resort to negative forms of making money such as prostitution and theft. Prostitution for example could easily accelerate the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the Fort Portal area.

Food vendors are not only losing their capital and savings by spending it on food during the lockdown but those who are starting new business are also losing more money because of venturing into unfamiliar territories. Starting a new business is not easy as it needs time to take off. It is more difficult to start a new business in the COVID–19 crisis where customers have been locked up in their homes. The majority of the food vendors will no doubt find it hard to change to a new business lest they lose all their little finances. Anyhow, many say that they don’t have the money to risk on new business ventures since they have used up their capital on buying food for their families.

Some of the food vendors are starting to experience domestic squabbles with their partners more than ever before. Domestic quarrels are common, more so in the absence of essential household items like food. Therefore, peace is now a rare commodity in their homes.

“I’m the mother and father to my children. The entire household responsibility is on me. Without a daily income, I can’t provide food for my household and neither can I pay rent.” Kobusinge Elizabeth, food vendor.
Food vending in Fort Portal municipality is dominated by women. That is, three in five food vendors are women. Many of these women are single mothers who are struggling to look after children from failed relationships. Food vending is the only source of money to look after their families and children. Without a daily income, these food vendors bear the brunt of the COVID–19 lockdown. Many of these women are now begging for food to provide a meal for their children.

Uncertainty looms on how low income earners, such as the food vendors in Fort Portal, will continue providing for essential household needs. This COVID–19 is especially impoverishing the poor, and if nothing is done to support the vendors, their children will drop out of school and families will continue to suffer food insecurity post COVID–19.

The Kabarole area where Fort Portal municipality is located already suffers from malnutrition. It’s likely that the lack of food during this COVID–19 will mostly likely worsen the malnutrition situation in the region. This will greatly impact the urban poor among whom are the food vendors themselves.
Suggestions to Policy Makers

1. **Give Food vendors a chance to Innovate:** The COVID–19 situation has indeed been a lesson and for many, a turning point. Food vendors who have tried to venture in new business are suffering and making losses. Many say food vending is the only business that they know and are therefore willing to come up with new innovations. Some are now thinking of selling take away but are also happy to work with ministry of health guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID–19. They say that they will observe hygiene and social distancing rules but also cooperate with the Ministry of health inspection.

2. **Give economic stimulus to food vendors:** Food vending in Fort Portal has been greatly and economically impacted by COVID–19 lockdown restriction and businesses need to be resuscitated through some form of stimulus to enable the over 400 food vendors to start over. It should be in the interest of government to solicit and provide some form of kick start to the vendors as contributors to the local economy and contributors to urban food security. KRC and the food vendors could consider engaging the Ministry of Trade on the vendors’ recovery.

3. **The COVID–19:** task force should sensitize the vendors on health measures that should be to put in place so that they can do business without impacting on their livelihoods as well as the health of the community they serve.

4. The municipal leadership in Fort Portal could for the purpose of easy monitoring and supervision designate a permanent place where vendors can do their business. This will not only help government health inspectors to monitor the implementation of Standard Operating Procedures for COVID–19 but also to organise the food vending business in Fort Portal.

**Conclusion**

COVID–19 is not only having impact on the global economy but it is impacting on local economies and food vending in Fort Portal has not been spared. The cause of the impact are the government restrictions to limit the spread of the virus in the community. These restrictions have meant that food vending on the streets of Fort Portal is halted thereby having a direct impact on daily incomes of food vendors and their attendant needs. Going forward, individual vendor recovery from the negative impact on the vendors will be painstaking and to some extent might require some form of financial stimulus to the vendors to recover from the economic losses created by the COVID–19 lockdown.
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