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What do we really know about COVID-19's impact on MSD professionals?



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USAID's Market Systems and Partnerships (MSP) Activity is conducting a [rapid industry survey](#) to understand the impact of the pandemic on MSD professionals

Across the world, women have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the global pandemic. Over the past year, [study after study](#) has reported that women experienced a decrease in employment, working hours and wages, at higher rates than men. [Research shows](#) that women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis than men's.

But what has been the impact on professionals in the development sector? USAID's MSP Activity is conducting a [rapid industry survey](#) to answer this important question.

[Childcare responsibilities, race and age impact women's engagement in the workforce](#)

Research shows that the impact of COVID-19 on workforce participation is both blunt and nuanced. Yes, women are most impacted but research also shows that caretaking responsibilities for children under 13, as well as race and age, also impact workforce participation.

One [study](#) found that after March 2020, parents of young children dropped out of the labour force at higher rates than parents of teens; more than one in ten mothers

of young children (13 and under) left their jobs due to child-care responsibilities and during the pandemic, fewer working mothers with young children are working full time. The same study found that black and Latina mothers of young children are more likely to be unemployed than white mothers of young children demonstrating that they are two of the most impacted demographic groups.

Another [study](#) found that young women of colour (aged 16 to 24) were among the hardest hit in the early stages of the pandemic. More than a third of them lost their jobs between February and April 2020. Again, young Latina and black women were more impacted than young white women.

These broader demographic trends are raising flags for some in the development industry

For this reason, USAID's MSP Activity is conducting a [rapid industry survey](#) exploring the impact of the global pandemic on market systems development professionals.

If COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting women development professionals, then the diversity of the current and future senior leader pipeline for MSD programmes is in jeopardy. Previous [research](#) by [The Canopy Lab](#) on the subject of inclusion and leadership suggests that the playing field was already uneven. Specifically, the years of experience required, and number of criteria listed in key personnel job descriptions, are rising and are likely (unintentionally) limiting the diversity of the senior leaders submitted on proposals.

These findings have been confirmed by new research at The Canopy Lab with development industry recruiters on the real impact of key personnel criteria and diversity (expected June 2021).

What can we do now?

As we are an industry that aims to be guided by evidence, it is important for us to first analyse the gendered impact of COVID-19 on current and aspiring senior leaders.

Who is taking a step back?

Who is benefitting from the changes we are experiencing as an industry?

What are the gender, race and age dimensions?

What is the immediate impact?

What could be the longer-term implications?

These are just a few of the types of questions we need to start asking ourselves so that we can take appropriate action. USAID's MSP Activity's [rapid industry survey](#) explores these exact types of questions.

The data from this short anonymous survey (less than 15 minutes) will be used to understand how the global pandemic is affecting MSD practitioners and specifically their workforce participation and career outlook.

The preliminary findings will be presented at the upcoming [Market Systems Symposium](#) and the full study will be shared in the summer.

› [Take part in the rapid industry survey](#) - **it closes on 5th May 2021!**

About USAID's Market Systems and Partnerships (MSP) Activity

USAID's Market Systems and Partnerships (MSP) Activity is implemented by DAI in partnership with MarketShare Associates (MSA), EcoVentures International (EVI), Global Knowledge Initiative (GKI), TechnoServe and ISF Advisors. MSP's Learning Agenda has six initial Learning Streams including Transformational PSE; Practical Application of MSD; Market Systems Resilience; Social Inclusion; Monitoring and Evaluation with CLA; and Driving Organizational Change.

The Social Inclusion stream seeks to advance the evidence base around the sustainability and ROI of inclusion related to MSD and PSE programming. Under this stream, MSP is conducting a rapid industry survey to understand the gendered impact of the pandemic on MSD professionals.