

Decent Working Time

All over Mozambique you'll see them: women, buying and selling their wares wherever they have an opportunity. This is a booming economy and it is largely informal work – that is, outside, the reach or protection of the law. In most of Africa, informal work accounts for 84% of all employment for women outside of agriculture.

While her family sleeps, Louise Tenbe works through the night baking 400 rolls to be sold in a nearby market. If she sells them all the next day she'll make a ten dollar profit. That will be enough to support her family of twelve who she cares for during the day.

Louise Tenbe:

You have to do something for yourself to make some business, to support the family. That's why women have to carry a heavy burden. I'm not talking about this because it's me alone. You can find 200, 300, 500 women who have this problem of not having a husband and having to feed a family and living a life of sacrifice.

A new report from the International Labour Organisation says that one in five workers worldwide work excessively long hours, up to 48 hours a week, often to merely make ends meet.

The study also says women work shorter hours than men, most likely because they bear the brunt of responsibility for the unpaid work of taking care of the family and household. This not only affects how much they can work for pay, but when they can work as well.

After a night of baking, Louise's friend takes the rolls to the market. Work in the informal economy enables her to quite literally balance work and family responsibilities but it comes at a high price. Her earnings are low and should she fall ill, those low earnings will simply disappear.

Jon Messenger:

Of course some women are working excessive hours but the reason why a lot of women are working shorter hours, and particularly in the informal economy, is because they have such a heavy burden of domestic and care responsibilities, that is they have all this unpaid work that they're doing and that limits their ability to engage in paid work. This situation is not only bad for them but also bad for the economy, as it is in fact limiting the potential of the country's economic growth.

It is a delicate balance between working hours and family life, one that further down the road we may one day get right.