

**REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE (I.C.C.)
ON ORGANISING WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY**

June 2004

As decided at the International Conference on organizing workers in the informal economy: “Combining Our Efforts” in Ahmedabad, India, in December 2003, the following members of the ICC participated in follow-up activities in Geneva at the time of the International Labour Conference (ILC) of the ILO in June 2004:

Pat Horn	StreetNet International	(1 – 17 June)
Renana Jhabvala	SEWA	(2 – 10 June)
Manali Shah	SEWA	(2 – 10 June)
Kofi Asamoah	Ghana TUC	(2 – 9 June)

The following members of the ICC were unable to participate:

Linus Ukamba (NLC) – due to a general strike in Nigeria at the time
Guillermo Perez (ORIT-ICFTU) – due to another obligation at the time
HomeNet Thailand – Rakawin Lee has left and a new representative
has not yet been appointed to the ICC

The ICC members were joined by the following:

Dan Gallin	WIEGO Org & Rep Programme	
Chris Bonner	WIEGO Org & Rep Programme	(1 – 10 June)
Shin Hie-Chul	StreetNet International (Korea)	(1 – 9 June)
Misheck Musonda	StreetNet International (Zambia)	(3 – 17 June)
Wahyu NP	Indonesian Migrant Workers Union	(2 – 7 June)
Jose del Valle	CROC Mexico	(2 – 7 June)

The following team participated in the committee on Migrant Workers which started its work in the 1st June and completed with the adoption of its report and “Conclusions on a fair deal for migrant workers in a global economy” on the 16th June:

Shin Hie-Chul
Misheck Musonda
Pat Horn
Chris Bonner
Wahyu NP (as part of the delegation of the Asian Migrants Committee)

The Chair and spokesperson of the Workers Committee was Sharan Burrows of The ACTU Australia, assisted by Elsa Ramos of the ICFTU Equality Department. They were extremely open to our interventions and showed a strong commitment to including migrant workers in the informal economy, including domestic workers and all irregular migrants, in the scope of the Conclusions. StreetNet International used the opportunity that was given to NGOs to address the Migrant Workers Committee to put on record that own account migrant workers, such as cross-border traders, should not be excluded. Misheck and Chris further prepared a written submission on this and the needs of informal cross-border vendors which for incorporation in the conclusions. The final Conclusions are broad, and include irregular migrants and workers in the informal

economy, with particular mention of domestic workers and other women workers and the particular problems which they face. (See Provisional Record no.22 of the ILC Ninety-second Session, Geneva, 2004)

This was an opportunity for StreetNet International to train two members of its affiliates to understand how the ILO works and how its political decision-making takes place at the ILC. It was also the first time that StreetNet International was officially accredited to attend the ILC.

Workshop on organizing in the informal economy

This workshop was held on Monday 7th June as a direct follow-up of the International Conference in Ahmedabad. It was held in a meeting room in the ILO building, and attended by 56 participants (see attached list). The meeting was chaired by Kofi Asamoah, who reported on the Ahmedabad conference of December 2003 where the ICC had been mandated to arrange this workshop in Geneva during the 2004 ILC. Copies of the report of the Ahmedabad Conference were distributed in booklet form in English, and it was agreed to distribute the French and Spanish versions by e-mail to participants.

The purpose of the workshop was as follows:

- to inform organizations about the Ahmedabad Conference and subsequent work which was being done;
- to invite organizations to join the network to combine our efforts;
- to share experiences and ideas on building organization in the informal economy.

Participants introduced themselves and their organisations. Pat Horn explained some of the programmes planned by the ILC for 2004 and 2005, as follows:

- to organize a further International Conference in December 2005 in Ghana;
- to organize a series of regional workshops prior to this;
- WIEGO's Org & Rep Programme is collecting and documenting information on organizations in the informal economy and creating a data-base;
- WIEGO is also collecting and documenting information on labour laws and other laws affecting workers and organizations in the informal economy;
- to arrange exchange visits between unions or other worker organizations organizing in the informal economy, to learn from each other;
- an education manual on organizing workers in the informal economy to be developed and available for organizations.

AFRICA – Kofi Asamoah spoke briefly about the informal economy in Africa and the challenges being faced by unions to organize workers in the informal economy and to protect the unprotected. The Ghana TUC has been actively organizing workers in the informal economy since the early 1990s.

ASIA – Renana Jhabvala explained the extent of the informal economy in parts of Asia. For example, in East Asia over 50% of workers are in the informal economy, and in India it is over 90%. Some of the main issues for workers in the informal economy are:

- recognition;
- social protection;
- co-operatives, markets and employment creation.

In Nepal, GEFONT has been instrumental in ensuring that self-employed workers have rights to organize under labour law.

In Bangladesh, homeworkers have been recognized as workers and their union registered.

In Hong Kong, there are active domestic workers' unions.

In Thailand, the Thai Workers' Solidarity Committee brings together 9 union centres which are organizing workers in the informal economy.

In the Philippines, many unions are organizing in the informal economy, and there is an important organization of informal workers – PATAMABA.

LATIN AMERICA – Jose de Valle from CROC spoke of regional meetings held in Mexico to build solidarity and share experiences. In the Americas the number of informal workers is increasing as formal jobs are disappearing. CROC has created a federation specifically for informal workers – FNOTNA, with 1 million members. The General Secretary of FNOTNA added that there is now a law protecting workers in the informal economy in the Mexican state of Novo Leon – which they believe to be the only one of its kind, and could be used as a model for other unions to work with.

These presentations were followed by discussion from the floor. Participants from Benin, Chad, Hong Kong, Liberia, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Zambia and OATUU (Organisation of African Trade Union Unity) talked about their experiences and about the importance of organizing workers in the informal economy on a greater scale. There was general consensus on working together, learning about new ways to organize in the informal economy through sharing experiences and through the organizing manual which the ICC was proposing to produce, and on working on making governments get rid of legal barriers to organizing informal workers.

Other meetings

The ICC team also held the following meetings to introduce themselves and their mandate, and to report on the Ahmedabad Conference and work which is being done to follow up:

1. JUAN SOMAVIA, Director-General of the ILO
He is very supportive of the work of the ICC. He attended the meeting on street vendors organized by NASVI and SEWA at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, and this made a big impression on him. He wants the ILO to be more involved in supporting organizing work in the informal economy, and believes that co-operatives are important in this regard. He asked the ICC for our ideas, and suggested that we become involved in knowledge-sharing projects, such as the ILO Knowledge Fair which was being organized by the Policy Integration Department. He also suggested the inclusion of an article on the ICC's activities in Geneva in the ACTRAV newsletter.

2. LEROY TROTMAN, Chairperson of the ILO Workers Group
 He is likewise very supportive of the ICC and its initiatives, and assisted by announcing our workshop in the general Workers Group meetings, and encouraging unions to attend it. He sees organizing workers in the informal economy as important in assisting with poverty alleviation/eradication. He expressed an interest in doing some work on the informal economy in the Caribbean region, and specifically in organizing an orientation workshop for sharing experiences on organizing techniques and leadership strategies.

3. JIM BAKER, Head of ACTRAV (ILO Workers Bureau)
 He made the following points in his meeting with ICC members:
 - ACTRAV is focusing on governance and democracy, law, social protection and sees these as most important (more critical than organizing)
 - ACTRAV works with national centres rather than individual unions;
 - Representation should be through national tripartite structures, despite the fact that many new staff in the ILO seem to confuse representation with advocacy;
 - New country studies are being carried out, and law will be on the agenda of the ILC 2005.

4. ANNE TREBILCOCK and the ILO's Policy Integration Department
 This department is charged with promoting inter-office follow-up (a very difficult task in the ILO) on Decent Work and the Informal Economy. The following ILO staff from different departments also attended the meeting and reported on the work they have been doing:
 - Catherine Villaincourt-LaFlamme (Integration)
 - Rafael Diez de Medina (Integration)
 - Ralf Hussmanns (Integration and Statistics)
 - Linda Wirth (Gender)
 - Faith O'Neill (ACTRAV – workers bureau)
 - Christian Jacquier (STEP – social protection)
 - Huseyin Polat (SYNDICOOP – co-operatives)
 - Hermann van der Laan (New Delhi office)

This meeting has been recorded in detail by Renana Jhabvala and Chris Bonner. It was agreed that ILO staff and the ICC would continue to consult on possible areas of work which could be pursued to mutual benefit. Particularly any “best practices” identified by the ILC would be interesting for the ILO to showcase in its Knowledge Fair on Decent Work and the Informal Economy, consisting of an exhibition documenting best practice, which is being produced for a high-profile UN function in 2005 targetted at the development community, UN people and donors. It was also agreed that it would be useful to have a list (with contact information) of the various projects of the ILO addressing the informal economy – and an initial source for this will be through the mapping exercise captured in the data-base.

There was a follow-up meeting by Renana Jhabvala with Anne Trebilcock, where the further follow-up with WIEGO was discussed. In order for the Integration Department to obtain a mandate to work on law and the informal economy, the ICC assisted in getting one of the members of the Workers Group at the ILC to make an intervention to this effect on record in the plenary discussion of the report on “Organising for Social Justice” – now that this intervention is on record, the Integration has picked it up and proposed follow-up research on law and the informal economy.

5. Global Union Federations (GUFs – hosted by IUF)

This meeting was not very successful because only two of the GUFs – IUF and UNI – were represented, as well as Catelene Passchier of the European Trade Union Council (ETUC). So instead the meeting was used to do some brainstorming of ideas. It was agreed that we should focus on practical work and projects rather than theory and rhetoric. It was also agreed to work on a low level campaign for ratification of the ILO Convention on Homework through the ICFTU Women’s Committee, and Catelene undertook to take this up in the ETUC by looking at blockages to ratification and investigating why those few countries which have ratified the Convention have done so.

6. ASSANE DIOP, Deputy Director-General and Head of ILO Social Protection

This meeting was set up as a discussion on social protection between Diop, Christian Jacquier of STEP, and SEWA – also attended by Chris Bonner. However, he was extremely interested in the work of the ICC and suggested that the ILO should support an African regional workshop on organizing in the informal economy, to be jointly organized by the ILO and the ICC in Dakar, Senegal, between January and April 2005. Pat Horn met with Christian Jacquier and Assane Diop to follow up this discussion, and she and Diop also discussed with Mody Guirot, General Secretary of the CNTS national trade union centre, about being one of the host organizations together with the ACTRAV representative in the ILO office in Dakar. It was agreed that the workshop will be held in the last week of March 2005 after the meeting of the ILO Governing Body, and Pat will produce the first draft of a proposal for the workshop, which will be entitled “Organising for decent work in the informal economy: the way out of poverty”. Prior research will be done by means of a questionnaire to be sent in advance to organizations in countries to be considered for participation, and the final participant countries would be determined after receiving the responses to these questionnaires.

7. ICC meetings

The ICC held planning meetings on the week-end of 5 and 6 June, and on 8 June prior to the departure of some of the members of the group, as well as several informal meetings. Arising from these meetings, a funding proposal for follow-up activities was prepared.