



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

MBO NEWSLETTER

March 2021

A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations  
of Informal Workers

Produced by: WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme

# MBO Responses to COVID-19

## Reviving the WIEGO MBO Newsletter

**Sharing good stories of organizing**—so that informal worker organizations can learn from one another across sectors and across the globe—is what this newsletter is about. In reviving the newsletter after a year, we have changed the format in favour of shorter and more focused stories.

Where possible we will provide links to longer articles, for those who want to know more.

In this edition we share five stories from Colombia, India, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uruguay, and show how membership-based organizations have responded to the COVID-19 crisis.

**Please send story ideas to Sope Ogunrinde at [sope.ogunrinde@wiego.org](mailto:sope.ogunrinde@wiego.org)**

## Countries we are focusing on in this newsletter:



*During the pandemic, many MBOs in WIEGO's network "have actually seen their membership numbers increase, as workers realize that the only way to overcome their challenges is collectively. As a result, they are facing a new set of challenges with growing membership and growing needs."*

**- Sally Roever, WIEGO's international coordinator**

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## Recovery Starts with Us! Informal Workers in Thailand Make Their Voices Heard

**On December 7, 2020, informal workers united to demand recovery measures from the Thai Government.**

More than 500 home-based workers, street vendors, domestic workers and motorcycle taxi drivers gathered at the Ministry of Labour to present their demands. These included providing selling space for street vendors; revising and extending the relief fund; including a 30 per cent quota of public procurement for small entrepreneurs and home-based workers; and revising the social security scheme to include informal worker needs. After a three-hour meeting, the government committed to hold monthly meetings with informal worker representatives, set up a sub-committee to revise the social security scheme, and to provide an economic recovery loan for informal workers.

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***Mrs Panisara Adiraklarpnukul, a massage therapist. Like other workers in her sector, Panisara was unable to work due to COVID-19 restrictions and has struggled to recover her livelihood.***

*Photo credit: Pattarapon Virat*

## Experience of El Sindicato Unico de la Aguja from Uruguay

**El Sindicato Unico de la Aguja SUA-PIT-CNT organizes factory workers and home-based workers in the garment sector.** When COVID-19 arrived on March 13, 2020, SUA Women's Commission "Rosita Iglesias" immediately began making life-saving reusable masks ("barbijos" or "tapabocas") in consultation with medical and occupational health researchers.

By March 19, SUA's work was featured on television and orders increased, including 30,000 masks for the Montevideo Police Union and 120,000 for the Montevideo Municipal Intendency. By late April, 60 home-based workers were producing masks while SUA ensured that workers received the minimum wage. The union also donated close to 4,000 masks to those who could not afford them. The Vice President of the Republic of Uruguay personally contacted SUA representatives to thank comrades for their work.

**Flor de Liz Feijoo, General Secretary, explains:**



***Union organization is essential. For us, this crisis marks a before and after for SUA. Now it is being shown that homeworkers do important work, they can be suppliers of the state and companies, and they can receive fair wages.***

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# Bangalore's Waste Pickers Hope the Decade Will Be on Their Side

**2020 had a significant impact on all sectors of the economy, especially the informal sector.** The pandemic and lockdown destroyed the livelihoods of those working in informal recycling and the Hasiru Dala mobilized to support waste pickers and other informal workers across three different municipal authorities in the city of Bangalore in India. The collective ensured that food was provided for those who could not feed themselves, and that no one was evicted from their place of residence due to lack of income. They also created community programmes to ensure that health and educational needs were met. Hasiru Dala strengthened itself as a key ally to informal workers during the pandemic and has plans to expand its reach in Bangalore.

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*This icon is among a set developed by WIEGO as a tool for waste-picker organizations.*

# Waste Pickers in Colombia Facing the Pandemic

**Early Colombian government responses to the COVID-19 crisis included mandatory lockdowns and insufficient or non-existent relief measures. Informal workers saw their livelihoods cut off.**

In response, the National Association of Waste Pickers of Colombia (ANR) took on the task of asserting the recognition of recycling as an essential service and waste pickers' right to work as public service providers. ANR and affiliates continued to support members by:



- Providing training to grassroots workers in the mandatory use of protective equipment, plus safety protocols on safe distancing between workers, disinfection and protection in the warehouses.



- Educating on procedures for safe handling of recyclables, such as storing materials for up to four days before sorting to ensure any coronavirus was inactive.



- Organizing access to water and soap or disinfectants on collection routes.



- And, perhaps most importantly, continuing to support members who could not go out to work: older people and people with existing health issues.

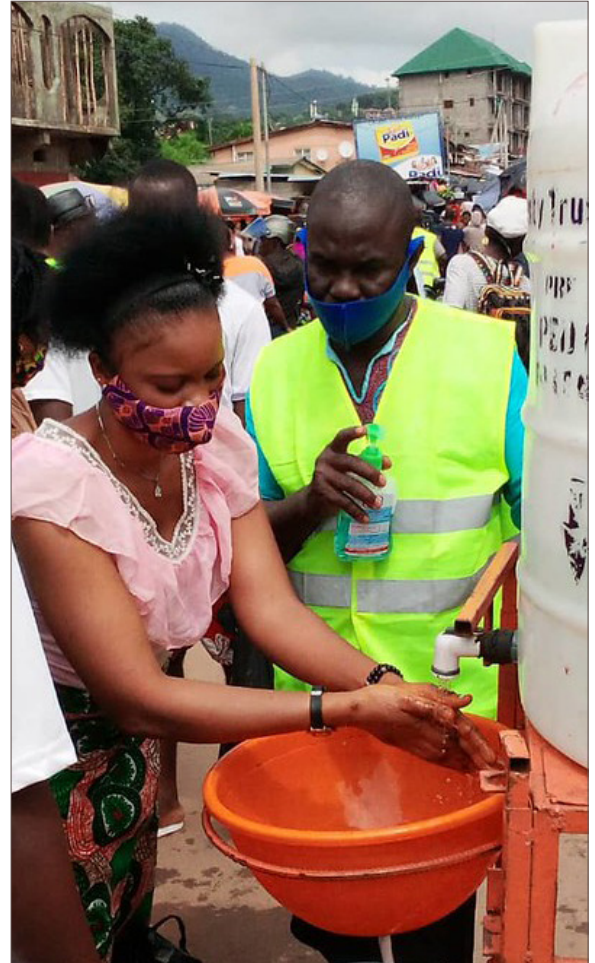
[→ Read more](#)



## Sierra Leone Traders Union (SLeTU): Using Organizational Structures to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis

When the COVID-19 crisis struck in early 2020, SLeTU took advantage of their organization's structure—from markets to city branches to the national level—to communicate safety measures to their members. They also negotiated with mayors and city councils to provide water and sanitizers for use in public trading spaces and monitored the implementation. In an interview published by Streetnet International, Aaron A. Boima, National Secretary-General of SLeTU, explains the measures taken to respond to the crisis and keep vendors (and customers) safe. He also explains the challenges of adapting to digital means such as GSM money transfers to continue trading.

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*Photo credit: Streetnet International*

## MBO Resources

→ Recommendations and shared experiences from waste pickers' organizations around the world on COVID-19

→ Informal worker demands during the COVID-19 crisis

→ COVID-19 safety and prevention resources for waste pickers, domestic workers and street vendors

→ The Only School We Have: Learning from organizing experiences across the informal economy

### Webinar(s)

Cash grants: In this webinar, WIEGO Social Protection Programme Senior Advisor and cash grant expert Francie Lund makes the advocacy case for cash transfers.

[ENGLISH](#) [FRENCH](#) [PORTUGUESE](#) [SPANISH](#) [RUSSIAN](#) [BULGARIAN](#)

### Blogs/Articles

In Colombia, despite the nationwide lockdown, waste pickers have successfully advocated for their right to continue collecting waste from the streets to keep cities clean. Federico Parra interviews three waste pickers from different unions and collectives:

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