



Investing in Equality for Working Poor Women

**A Global Project of WIEGO & Partners
Funded by the Dutch MDG3 Fund**

**Summary of Impact Findings
from an External Evaluation**

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

From January 2009 to December 2011, under a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the WIEGO network and partners around the world were engaged in a project called “Investing in Equality for Working Poor Women” project. Project activities were implemented in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America through several partners and sub-grantees. The project partners included researchers, Fair Trade organizations, an international federation of trade unions, and membership-based organizations (MBOs) of the working poor in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. The project was designed with and for working poor women in the informal economy in the developing world: domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors and women producing and marketing commodities and crafts through small producer groups. As outlined in the original project proposal, the project objectives were:

- to strengthen MBOs of the working poor to address issues of organizing, market access, networking, policy influence and policy change
- to support women informal workers in articulating their needs and concerns to policy-makers at all levels (e.g. municipal, national, regional, global)
- to improve the quality of information available to both informal workers and policy makers re. the identified needs and concerns of the working poor
- to achieve positive policy changes to improve the lives of women informal workers
- to share key success factors where women informal workers have improved their livelihoods to achieve a multiplier effect through the movement of the working poor

These objectives were to be achieved through the implementation of five discrete projects:

1. Voice for Domestic Workers
2. Fair Trade for Women Producers
3. Organized Strength for Home-based Workers
4. Market Support for Street Vendors
5. Occupational Health and Safety for Working Poor Women

REPORTED IMPACTS

Sub-Project 1 – Voice for Domestic Workers

“Voice for Domestic Workers” has been a partnership, under a sub-grantee agreement, between WIEGO and the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF), a global federation of trade unions representing workers in different sectors, including domestic workers. The aim of this project element was to support the organisation and representation of domestic workers and, in particular, to support their efforts to gain recognition and rights as workers through their campaign for an ILO Convention and associated national legislation. The objectives of this project element were:

- to support domestic workers in articulating their common needs and concerns
- to help strengthen the existing networks and organizations of domestic workers

- to support the creation and ensure a sustainable structure of a global domestic workers' network
- to strengthen linkages between domestic workers' networks and other support structures (i.e. trade unions, church organisations, women's networks, human rights organisations etc.)
- to ensure the needs and concerns of domestic workers themselves are incorporated into the process of formulating an international Convention on Domestic Workers at the International Labour Conference in 2010 and 2011

The International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) was created to help strengthen the organisation of domestic workers globally and to ensure representation of domestic workers in international policy forums that affect their work and lives, with the ILO standards setting process towards a Convention being the initial focus.

In terms of impact, notably the empowerment of domestic workers, one of the most significant was the development of self-assurance and self-confidence of domestic workers, especially those who participated in the ILO Conferences. Having domestic workers participate in the ILO process and project activities raised their profile and inspired organizations, including trade unions, to encourage domestic worker activists.

Of course a principal impact was the recognition of domestic workers as workers through ILO C189. Another key impact has been the development of new and the growth of existing domestic worker MBOs and networks that will, among others, play an important role in lobbying for the ratification and implementation of ILO C189. For example, the first-ever regional network of domestic workers in Africa was established under the project. Through the campaign for the ILO Convention, the MBOs and networks of domestic workers came to realize that, unless they are united, ratification and implementation at the level of individual countries will be very difficult.

Sub-Project 2 – Fair Trade for Women Producers

The “Fair Trade for Women Producers” sub-project was implemented through seven partner organizations in seven countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The objectives of this sub-project were:

- to assist women informal producers in targeted countries to improve their livelihoods through trade
- to highlight the key success factors in organizing women informal producers for export production and how other informal workers can learn from those successes

The sub-project aimed to achieve these objectives through action research with sixteen collective enterprises of working poor women and their engagement with Fair Trade markets involving the analysis, documentation and dissemination of good practice examples of fair trade for women producers, with women producers being central throughout the process. The specific project element goals were:

- to demonstrate how, when organized in collective forms of enterprise, women can engage with global markets in a way that brings transformational change both economically and politically

- to show that there is a strong alternative Fair Trade movement which is mobilizing for structural solutions/redress to the inequalities of the global trade system
- to expand and strengthen the Fair Trade movement through a process of mutual exchange and learning within and across regions

The sub-project addressed the needs of the partner organizations and women informal producers in several ways that are consistent with WIEGO's mission to support women's economic empowerment with programs and activities that increase their voice, visibility and validity. These include:

- giving women informal producers the opportunity to capture their experiences on film and in photos so that they could be more effectively shared among low-literacy audiences. This process was reported as being empowering in itself.
- undertaking the contextual analysis in each country that described barriers to trade and economic empowerment that were used to formulate "policy asks", which in turn fed into partners' individual advocacy agendas and collective "Agenda for Change"
- providing an opportunity to engage with the market through, for example, participation in the global conference of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) in Mombasa, Kenya, in May 2011

The impact of this sub-project on the empowerment of women informal producers was manifesting in a number of different ways. These include:

- an understanding among women informal producers that they are workers with rights who make a valuable contribution to their household income, community and national economies. In some cases this was reported as leading to improved gender relations.
- a shift in perspective among partners away from a disempowering welfare approach to women informal producers to a rights-based approach
- improved self-confidence and real increases in voice, visibility and validity that can be built upon

A book entitled "Trading Our Way Up: Women Organizing for Fair Trade", which summarizes the case studies and the findings of the action research, was published in 2011. It has been one of the most frequently downloaded publications on the WIEGO website.

Sub-Project 3 – Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers

"Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers" was implemented by a sub-grantee-HomeNet Thailand, which is an institutional member of WIEGO, and was designed and managed by a Coordinator who is based in the Foundation for Labor and Employment (FLEP) in Bangkok. FLEP, in turn, hosts HomeNet Thailand. This sub-project sought to help build a federation of home-based worker organizations in Thailand by focusing on issues of concern to these workers, such as social protection, legal status and labor rights. The specific objectives of this sub-project were:

- to improve the livelihood security of women home-based workers in the informal economy of Thailand through collective organizing in MBOs

- to improve access to social protection programs for working poor women, with an emphasis on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)
- to enhance the economic empowerment of working poor women

Regarding impact, the most notable and widely-cited impact was the adoption by the Government of Thailand of the Home-workers Protection Act, which will protect an estimated 2 million home-workers, as well as the policy development whereby government will provide a 30% co-payment for social security for informal workers, which will reportedly benefit 24 million informal workers in Thailand. The ownership and commitment of HomeNet Thailand members, demonstrated by the fact that more than 3,000 now pay membership fees, is also pointed to as a significant impact related to empowerment.

Sub-Project 4 – Market Support Services for Street Vendors

“Market Support Services for Street Vendors” was implemented in the Warwick Junction (WJ) area of Durban, South Africa, by Asiye eThafuleni (AeT), a support NGO that WIEGO helped to establish. The sub-project aimed to provide a second phase of support services to street traders in the WJ area and to disseminate the experience of WJ to other cities in Africa and beyond with regards to the integration of informal workers into urban planning policies and processes. The specific objectives were:

- to establish a “learning hub” in South Africa for inclusive urban planning policies and processes which address the needs and concerns of working poor women, with an emphasis on street vendors

This objective was to be achieved through a number of communications activities, including poster creation based on lessons learned from original WJ project; workshops to disseminate learning; and web development, among others.

Regarding impact and the empowerment of informal workers, the successful court action thwarting the Municipality’s re-development plans is reported as having empowered the entire community of informal workers. Furthermore, the sub-project has brought about a greater maturity in terms of community organizing. The sub-project required the participation of nine distinct sectors / markets as a unified whole in an environment that had previously, under Apartheid, been characterized by divisions. Representatives from each market were able to form a working committee that eventually elected representatives. From this the South African Informal Workers Association (SAIWA) has emerged. A further impact has been a reversal of the previous perception of WJ as a crime-ridden district to be avoided. Market tours for tourists and students are being hosted by trained and accredited tour guides from the informal sector, sales have increased in some sectors and positive postings on social media are appearing.

Sub-Project 5 – Occupational Health and Safety for Working Poor Women

“Occupational Health and Safety for Working Poor Women” began in 2009 as a three year research program in five countries about occupational health and safety (OHS) for

informal workers. Activities in two of the countries, Ghana and Tanzania, were funded by the MDG3 Fund.

Despite the importance of their contribution to the overall economy, OHS does not typically cover informal workers. The aim of this sub-project has been to find out how to develop OHS in a way that can better meet the needs of informal workers. The specific objectives of this sub-project have been:

- to improve the available information on occupational health and safety (OHS) in relation to women informal workers
- to support women informal workers in their learning about OHS impacts and patterns in their work
- to support women informal workers in articulating their OHS concerns to policy-makers and thereby affect positive policy changes in the medium and long-term

Regarding impact and the empowerment of informal workers, the influence of the workshops organized for informal workers by Institute of Local Government Studies in Ghana and the commitment of the informal workers to applying their learning has been cited as very significant. Also significant has been the use of the project by the Head of OHS in the Ghana Health Service to highlight OHS for informal workers within the health establishment in Ghana. The knowledge gained and shared through the May 2011 Learning Meeting in Durban is also said to have had a major impact through the inter-organizational learning and discussion that it enabled, particularly in the areas of the key role played by local government in determining work conditions; the health insurance model developed by KPPKP in India and the design of better equipment for informal workers are also indicators of impact.