



The Only School We Have Learning from Organizing Experiences Across the Informal Economy

*Compiled and edited by
Christine Bonner and Dave Spooner*

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information see www.wiego.org.

About Inclusive Cities: Launched in 2008, the Inclusive Cities project aims to strengthen membership-based organizations (MBOs) of the working poor in the areas of organizing, policy analysis and advocacy, in order to ensure that urban informal workers have the tools necessary to make themselves heard within urban planning processes. Inclusive Cities is a collaboration between MBOs of the working poor, international alliances of MBOs and those supporting the work of MBOs. For more information, visit: www.InclusiveCities.org.

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WIEGO Secretariat
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
USA

WIEGO Limited
521 Royal Exchange
Manchester M2 7EN
United Kingdom

Phone: 1-617-496-7037
Fax: 1-617-496-2828

Phone: 44-161-819-1200
Fax: 44-161-819-1222

Email: wiego@hks.harvard.edu.

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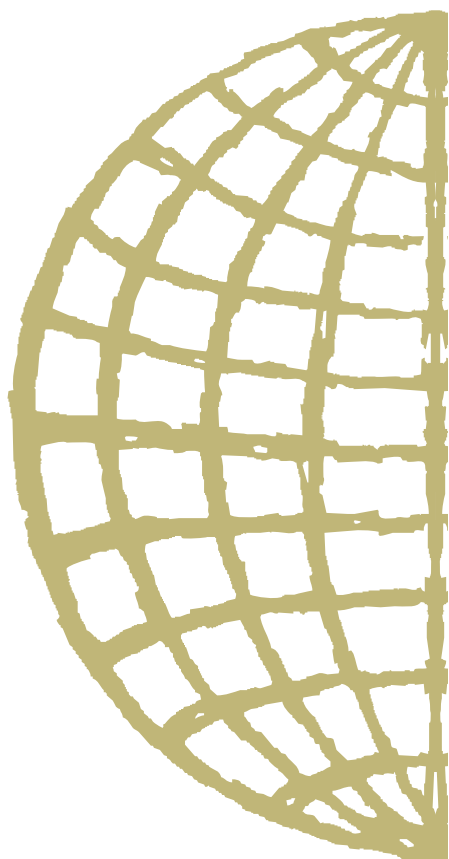
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Acronyms

AIW	Alliance of Indian Wastepickers
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CONLACTRAHO	Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar
CTCP	Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua
FADWU	Federation of Asian Domestic Workers' Unions of Hong Kong
FETTRAMAP	Federacion de Estibadores Terrestres y Transportistas Manuales del Peru
GEFONT	General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions
GAIA	Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives/Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance
GUF	Global Union Federation
HKCFTU	Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions
HNN	HomeNet Nepal
HNSA	HomeNet South Asia
HNSEA	HomeNet South East Asia
IDWN	International Domestic Workers' Network
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITGLWF	International Textile, Garments & Leatherworkers Federation
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers
KKPKP	Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat
KUDHEIHA	Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotel, Education Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers Union
LDC	Ligue pour les Droit de la Femme Congolaise/ League for the Defence of Congolese Women
NASVI	National Alliance of Street Vendors of India
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MBO	Membership-Based Organization
MNCR	Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis
MNRCH	Movimiento Nacional de Recicladores de Chile
NAPETUL	National Petty Traders Union of Liberia
SADSAWU	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers' Union
SAWPA	South Africa Waste Pickers Association
SEICAP	La Red de Sindicatos de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economia Social Solidaria de las Américas
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
SWM	Solid Waste Management
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Introduction

“This is the only school we have: to come together and learn from one another.”

Marcelina Bautista
(CONACTRAHO)

This handbook details the experiences of organizing among informal workers, and provides information, practical ideas, successful strategies, inspiration and resources for organizers.

Globally, a majority of economically active people work in the informal economy. This is especially true in many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. However, work is being informalized in the industrialized countries of the North as well. While both women and men work in informal jobs, women form the bulk of those employed in sectors with the least income, security and status.

Informal workers make up a majority of the world’s working poor. In general, they have low and insecure incomes, and lack legal protections and social security. While they have a great need to make their voices heard by those with the power to affect their lives, their ability to have a strong voice and to challenge their situation is still limited.

Gains are being made, however, because informal workers are organizing in a variety of ways, and at multiple levels, to challenge their situation. Through organizing they are building the confidence and power to act collectively to improve their livelihoods, to secure recognition and rights, and to defend themselves. Through representation in institutions and processes that set policies, laws and rules, they are challenging the hostile environment in which they live and work.

WIEGO supports the organization and representation of workers in the informal economy. In particular, we support the development of membership-based organizations (MBOs) that have democratic structures and are accountable to their membership. These include trade unions, associations and cooperatives, as well as national and international alliances and networks. One way that WIEGO supports organizations of informal workers is through sharing information and lessons. Because WIEGO works with organizations around the world and in different sectors, it can help facilitate sharing and learning, networking and solidarity by organizations across sectors and regions, so that they can strengthen their global profile and collective voice.

To this end WIEGO, with the assistance of HomeNet Thailand, organized a March 2011 workshop for its institutional members and partners called *Organizing in the Informal Economy: Building and Strengthening Membership-Based Organizations (Organizing Workshop)*. Participants expressed an interest in continuing to share information on a regular basis; in delving deeper into some critical organizing issues; and to having more educational resources, with the suggestion that we should produce not only a report on the workshop proceedings, but a handbook drawing on the experiences, lessons and ideas from the workshop that could be a resource.

Purpose and Structure of this Handbook

This handbook is a resource for those organizing informal workers in any sector, though it is based on the organizing experiences in (mainly) four groups: domestic workers, home-based workers, street/market vendors and waste pickers. It draws on the themes, ideas and information generated at the Organizing Workshop, together with additional background materials, case studies and analysis.

It aims to provide useful material that can help you:

- understand more clearly some complex and evolving **concepts**, such as the informal economy and membership-based organizations (MBOs)
- develop a sense of the growing movement of informal workers through looking at the **historical roots** and more recent developments
- share **information and experiences** of informal workers in different sectors of the informal economy
- gain guidance and inspiration from **practical ideas and lessons learned** by organizations
- develop **strategies** to overcome some of the challenges and find **answers** to some of the difficult questions and debates commonly raised.

The handbook is divided into three sections:

Section One gives background information on organizing in the informal economy. It explains what is meant by the “informal economy,” its size and why advocates and researchers like those involved with the WIEGO Network are concerned about it. It describes what we mean by “organizing” and why it is important, and goes on to explain in more detail what we mean by membership-based organizations. We then take a look at the early history of organizing informal workers and at the more recent history of our growing global movement of informal workers.

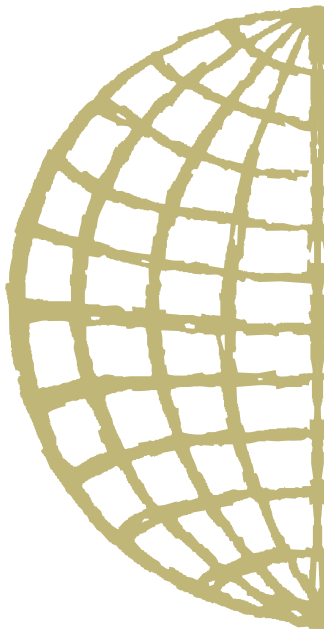
Section Two looks at organizing efforts in four groups of informal workers: domestic workers, home-based workers, street/market vendors and waste pickers. How are the different groups organizing? What forms are their organizations taking, and why? What are some of their challenges and what are some examples of successes and achievements through organizing?

Section Three draws out some of the common organizational development challenges, lessons, issues and debates that need to be addressed in taking forward our organizing agenda.

We hope this handbook will be useful in your organizing and worker education work, and will spark ideas for follow-up activities and new materials.

Chris Bonner

Director: WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme



Section One

Organizing Informal Workers: Key Concepts and Historical Developments



photo: NASVI

Conference of street vendors in India, organized by NASVI, held January, 2011

Understanding the Informal Economy

Street vendors in Mexico City, push-cart vendors in New York City, rickshaw pullers in Kolkata, jitney drivers in Manila, garbage collectors in Bogotá, roadside barbers in Durban – these and others who work on the streets or in the open are the most visible informal workers. Other informal workers are engaged in small shops and workshops that repair bicycles and motorcycles; recycle scrap metal; make furniture and metal parts; tan leather and stitch shoes; weave, dye, and print cloth; polish gems; make and embroider garments; sort and sell cloth, paper, and metal waste; and more.

The least visible informal workers, the majority of them women, work from their homes. Home-based workers are found around the world: garment workers in Toronto, embroiderers on the island of Madeira, shoemakers in Madrid and assemblers of electronic parts in Leeds. Other categories of informal workers in both developed and developing countries include casual workers in restaurants and hotels, sub-contracted janitors and security guards, day labourers in construction and agriculture, and piece-rate workers in small factories.



photo: Morry Chen

Fish vendor at the Makola Market in Accra, Ghana

All informal workers share one thing in common: they lack legal and social protection.

1. What is the informal economy?

The informal economy includes all economic activities, enterprises, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state. Many people think the informal economy includes only the self-employed in small unregistered enterprises. But WIEGO, together with the International Labour Organization (ILO), has successfully advocated for an expanded definition of the informal economy that also includes wage workers in unprotected jobs.

Under this expanded definition, the informal economy includes:

- *self-employed in small unregistered or unincorporated enterprises including:*
 - employers who hire others
 - own account operators who do not hire others
 - unpaid but contributing family workers

-
- *wage workers without worker benefits or social protection including:*
 - unprotected employees of informal enterprises
 - unprotected employees of formal firms
 - unprotected domestic workers
 - casual or day labourers
 - sub-contracted workers (called homeworkers if they work from their home)

2. How big is the informal economy?

In 2002, together with the ILO, WIEGO compiled official data from developing countries on the informal economy broadly defined: this was the first compilation of official data on the informal economy. We found that the informal economy comprised:

- half to three-quarters of the non-agricultural labour force in developing countries
- an even higher percentage of total employment in developing countries: as high as 90 per cent in some countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa

Although comparable estimates were not available for developed countries, we estimated that non-standard jobs and self-employment represented a large (more than 25%) and growing share of total employment in Western Europe and North America.

In 2012, again with the ILO, WIEGO will be publishing updated estimates from even more countries on the size, composition, and contribution of the informal economy. As part of this effort, we are compiling data on specific categories of informal workers – domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers – in specific countries.

3. Why are we concerned about informal workers?

Here is what we know about the links between being an informal worker and being poor:

1. Most of the world's poor – especially in developing countries – are working. But the working poor are not able to work their way out of poverty.
2. This is because the vast majority of the working poor earn their living in the informal economy where:
 - average earnings are low
 - costs and risks are high
3. The root causes of low incomes and high risks in the informal economy include:
 - lack of productive resources and economic opportunities
 - lack of economic rights – as workers and producers
 - lack of social protection
 - lack of organization and representation

4. The key pathway to poverty reduction is:

- to create more “decent work” opportunities
- to increase the benefits and reduce the costs of working informally
- to increase the assets, economic rights, social protection, and voice of informal workers

4. What do informal workers want and demand?

While specific groups of informal workers have specific needs and demands, all informal workers – especially the working poor – want and demand the following:

- **Economic opportunities:** for them to earn incomes and increase their assets, productivity, and competitiveness
- **Economic rights:** including labour, commercial, and property rights
- **Social protection:** through existing or new schemes
- **Organization:** in their own membership-based organizations
- **Representation:** in relevant policymaking, collective bargaining, and negotiating processes

Marty Chen: WIEGO International Coordinator

Resources

See the section on the informal economy on the WIEGO website:
<http://wiego.org/informal-economy/about-informal-economy>

About Organizing in the Informal Economy

Over the past two decades, organizing among informal workers has grown and organizations have strengthened, becoming more visible and vocal. Informal workers are organizing in many different ways: into unions, cooperatives, self-help groups, networks, and at differing levels: local, national, regional and global. The situation varies from country to country and from sector to sector, but informal workers all find organizing into effective and sustainable MBOs very challenging. However, as the growing “movement” shows, informal workers are proving that they can organize and that organizing brings results.

“After coming back from Bangkok I see things in a different way, I understand why it’s so important to remain organized and become stronger.”

Harouna Niasse,
Book Diom Association of
Waste Pickers, Senegal

1. What do we mean by organization and organizing in the informal economy?

When they unite through democratic membership-based workers’ organizations informal workers come together in a structured, democratic and sustainable manner. They unify around their common identity as workers having similar interests, issues and challenges. They aim to use their collective power to challenge and improve their position at work, in the economy and society. Members of an informal workers’ organization may focus primarily on using their collective strength to further the members’ economic/livelihood interests, for example through organizing into a cooperative, or they may focus mainly on defending and advancing their rights and status as workers through a trade union or workers’ association. Often, informal workers’ organizations integrate these two purposes, such as when trade union members form cooperatives, or when cooperatives come together into a social movement organization.

Organizing is the process of building and maintaining such organizations. It involves bringing workers into the organization, constantly developing and maintaining democratic organizational structures, collectively

implementing activities and programmes, providing a voice through representing members in engagements with public authorities, industry and other relevant actors, building leadership and empowering members, both women and men.

2. Why do informal workers need to organize?

All workers need to organize to effectively fight for their rights as workers and to improve their economic, social and political situation, but the need of informal workers is greatest. They are a majority of workers



photo: Chris Bonner

Taking part in democratic elections at StreetNet International Congress 2010

globally, including a majority of all employed women. Women form the bulk of those employed in sectors of the informal economy with the least income, security and status. Most informal workers, women and men, are unrecognized and their contribution to society is undervalued. They are unprotected in their work. Labour laws do not apply, or are ignored; they have little or no social security; their livelihoods and income are insecure and working conditions are generally poor. Even where there are regulations that affect their work, such as many current urban regulations, these usually create more problems than they solve.

Unity is Strength

Informal workers individually have little power to change their situation. Only by uniting into collective organizations and together challenging those with power or authority over them can they make major gains. Those in authority are more likely to recognize informal workers if they have numbers and are well organized. They are more likely to negotiate with them if they speak for many rather than a few. They are more likely to change things in their favour if they believe their demands will be backed by collective action. When united, informal workers can make themselves known, recognized and respected as workers.

Knowledge is Power

Through organization, informal workers can pool their own considerable knowledge and skills. They can broaden this by building contacts with other organizations and by gaining access to new information sources and support. This helps them to bridge the knowledge and resource gaps between informal workers and those with power over them, who come from more privileged backgrounds and/or have greater resources to draw on. It helps build confidence to speak out, to develop strategies and strong arguments.



First Central American Conference of Waste Pickers, February 2012

photo: Lucia Fernandez

“We Shall Overcome”

Women in particular gain through being part of an organization, especially one that supports gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s leadership. By being in an organization, women build knowledge, skills and confidence. Women overcome their fears and lack of confidence, becoming strong leaders and even improving their status and position in the home.

More than the Sum of Our Parts

Together informal workers can collectivize and maximize resources: people, money, materials. They can increase their purchasing and selling power, getting lower prices for the goods they buy, and higher prices for the products they sell to industry. This includes by-passing middlemen with bigger volumes or better access to markets. They can provide services to their members that they could not otherwise easily afford such as child care, insurance, funeral benefits and training.

Solidarity Forever

Informal workers gain moral and practical strength from solidarity with other workers locally, nationally and internationally. Being part of a wider movement gives them the confidence to speak out and to act, knowing they have broad support. It increases their collective power.

Chris Bonner: WIEGO: Organization and Representation Programme Director

Resources

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Organizing in the Informal Economy: Understanding Membership-Based Organizations (MBOs)

What do we mean by *Membership-Based Organizations?*

Over the last few years, the term *Membership-Based Organizations* (MBOs) has been used to describe the wide variety of groups to be found among informal economy workers: trade unions, cooperatives, voluntary associations and self-help groups, with all sorts of hybrid variants and transitional arrangements between one form and another.

This is a new term for many, and a new concept for some. Ela Bhatt, founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, described an MBO as an organization where the members are "the users of the services of the organization,

the managers, and its owners." Martha Chen et al., in "Membership-Based Organizations of the Poor" defines MBOs as "those in which the members elect their leaders and which operate on democratic principles that hold the elected officers accountable to the general membership" (p. 4). They go on to describe Membership-Based Organizations of the Poor (MBOPs), a sub-set of MBOs, "in which the vast majority of members are poor... (with) a common commitment to collective action to change the conditions of their poor members" (p. 5).

In recent workshops and training courses with informal economy workers facilitated by WIEGO, we have been exploring more precisely what we mean by "membership-based organization," and what criteria should be used to assess whether an organization is an MBO or not. First however, what sort of organization are we talking about?

Primary MBOs

Some informal workers are organized into local or national **trade unions**. Some are registered unions; some are unregistered. Membership of some unions is exclusively informal – this would include the Self Employed Workers Association (SEWA) in India, or the National Petty Traders Union



Assembly of members at SEWA Academy, September 2009

photo: Jahn Luckham

of Liberia (NAPETUL). In others, informal workers are included in a wider membership that includes formal workers, such as domestic workers in the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotel, Education Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers Union (KUDHEIHA).

Informal workers also create a wide variety of **cooperatives**. Some are *worker* cooperatives. These might include waste pickers who form a cooperative to process and sell recyclable materials collectively and bid for contracts from local governments or own-account home-based workers seeking to reach new markets for their goods. Others are *consumer* cooperatives. Street vendors, for example, may form a cooperative to buy in bulk from wholesalers, or artisans may pool their resources to buy raw materials or tools. There are many *savings cooperatives* and credit unions operated by informal workers, and a wide variety of cooperatives trying to meet the demand for *social protection and services* – health insurance, funeral benefits, child-care, housing, etc.

There are also large numbers of **voluntary associations** and self-help groups that operate as MBOs of informal workers – community-based organizations, women’s groups, and even NGOs, where they are structured to be democratically accountable to workers. Sometimes it can be more appropriate for workers to form voluntary associations, rather than more formally-structured unions or cooperatives. In some countries, informal workers are legally banned from forming unions. In others, the formal registration of a cooperative can be a difficult bureaucratic process. There may also be hostility from local union or cooperative movements towards membership of informal workers in general (or women informal workers in particular). Some informal workers may be reluctant to form unions or cooperatives where they are de facto under the control of political parties or the state.

Finally, less-clearly defined, are the very many *unregistered organizations* – which may include associations, unions, clubs, societies and cooperatives, that may have no legal or formal constitutional basis but are MBOs nonetheless. Even where the law (or anyone else) does not recognize them, if they are democratic organizations that work to the principles of MBOs, they may represent informal workers, and can have considerable power.

Federations and Networks

There are growing numbers of national, regional and global federations and networks of primary MBOs representing informal economy workers. The members are not individual workers, but organizations of workers.

Some of these are **trade union federations** (local, national or international), with formal recognition as institutions of the international trade union movement. In the construction industry for example, where nearly all employment is precarious or informal, construction workers’ unions are members of the Building & Woodworkers’ International – the Global Union Federation (GUF) responsible for organizing and representing construction workers. In other sectors, many primary MBOs of informal workers are affiliated to the appropriate GUFs – garment unions representing home-based workers who affiliate to the International Textile, Garments & Leatherworkers Federation (ITGLWF) for example, or trade unions organizing domestic workers who are members of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF).

Nationally, many primary MBOs of informal workers are affiliated to their national trade union federations (“national centres”). In some cases, they may affiliate directly, with the same status as traditional unions in the formal

economy. In some countries, such as Ghana and Zambia, informal workers' associations are encouraged to have "associate" membership in the national union centre, where they are entitled to participate in union activities, but with restricted membership rights. Many national trade union centres play a very active role in helping to form and develop primary MBOs of informal economy workers. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions for example, plays a central role in organizing informal migrant workers and especially domestic workers. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the international federation of national union centres, is increasingly supportive of informal worker organizing initiatives among its affiliates.

There are also examples of local city-wide trade union federations which include primary MBOs of informal economy workers. In India, for example, unions in Pune from all informal economy sectors form the city-wide Manual Labourers' Association.

There are also national and international **federations of cooperatives** which include primary MBOs of informal economy workers. SEWA in India has its own federation of over 100 workers' cooperatives, and in Latin America, primary cooperatives of waste pickers (*recicladores*) have their own national federations or movements, for example in Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Peru.

There are an increasing number of national, regional and global **networks of informal economy workers' MBOs**. Networks tend to be less formally constituted and more flexible than federations in the trade union and cooperative movements. While some, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Wastepickers Network, are composed wholly of MBOs, others include NGOs and other supportive organizations and individuals.

The major international networks are those of the street vendors and market traders (StreetNet International), home-based workers (HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet South East Asia), waste pickers (the Latin American and Caribbean Waste Picker Network), and the newly-formed and still developing International Network of Domestic Workers (IDWN) – supported by the IUF and WIEGO.

Principles of MBOs

While primary MBOs and their federations and networks are varied in scope, size, structure and characteristics, they share a number of key principles: democratic ownership, transparency, solidarity, collective benefit, and independence.

Most fundamentally, MBOs are **democratically controlled** by the members – the workers. Each and every member has an equal voice in electing the leadership, determining policy, and setting priorities for activity: in other words the workers own the organization, not just through exercising their rights to vote regularly, but through participatory democracy. The organization is led by a committee or a board drawn from representatives of the workers themselves. It may be an informal local group of a few dozen members, or a complex organization of many thousands, but the principle remains the same.

Secondly, MBOs are **transparent** to their members. This means that every member has the right to see and understand the workings of the organization – its constitution and rules, accounts, budgets and sources of income, decision-making processes (e.g. minutes of meetings), recruitment processes for staff and major contractors, and other key records. Apart from

strengthening the democratic processes of the organization, transparency also ensures the accountability and honesty of the leadership.

MBOs promote and uphold **solidarity** – unity between the members and between the MBO and other MBOs; collective rights (*an injury to one is an injury to all*) and equality – of gender, race, caste and religion. As women form a large part of the informal workforce, MBOs have to pay particular attention to gender equality and the promotion of women in leadership. Many MBOs have constitutional arrangements that guarantee a proportion of governing bodies to women representatives.

MBOs are concerned with **collective benefits** for the membership – serving the interests of its members, not of its leadership.

Finally, MBOs are **independent**. They are not controlled by governments, employers, politicians, or religious organizations. This is not to say that an MBO should not obey the law, or respect the decisions of (democratically elected) governments. Nor that it should not seek to negotiate and reach agreements with governments, employers or other entities through collective bargaining. MBOs and their members are perfectly entitled to provide support for political parties, where it is in the interests of the members to do so, and

they are at liberty to hold whatever religious beliefs they wish. But none of these institutions should have control over the MBO, or override the members' democratic rights.

Relations with political parties can be particularly difficult, and many MBOs determine that they must remain completely independent. In some cases – particularly in countries with repressive governments – it may be illegal for MBOs to support or affiliate to political parties. The principle is that MBOs should be at liberty to express their political demands and opinions without interference.



photo: Sofia Trecino

Members of IDWN unite at a rally in Geneva, June 2011

Financial Contribution of Members

There is a further principle for consideration – **payment of dues** (or other financial contribution) by the members. In traditional (i.e. formal economy) trade unions and workers' associations, one's membership is dependent on making regular financial contributions at a rate set by the governing body. This ensures a steady supply of income to cover at least the basic running costs of the organization. It also ensures that there is a degree of financial independence.

However, most MBOs of informal economy workers are poor. For many it is difficult to collect dues regularly – workplaces are frequently scattered

and transitory. Faced with these problems, some MBOs argue that their members cannot afford to pay any dues, or that it is impossible to collect them on a regular basis. These organizations are then dependent on **external support** from development agencies, NGOs and others, facing threats to their independence and democratic accountability to members. They are also unstable: with the arrival of a substantial grant they can expand dramatically, only to undergo collapse when the donor loses interest or changes priorities.

Many MBOs of informal workers do recognize that a regular financial contribution is not just a precondition of organizational sustainability, but – no matter how small the amounts collected and how difficult it is to collect – that it binds the membership to the organization, and the leadership to the members. This does not preclude seeking and accepting external support, but ensures that the members stay in control of direction and priorities.

The sustainability of organizations is discussed in depth in Section Three.

Reality Check

It is important to recognize that many organizations that claim to be MBOs do not meet all these criteria. In reality, if you were to measure organizations against a detailed list of carefully defined characteristics, you would find it hard to find a single one that ticks every box. An organization may be democratically controlled, but does this mean that each and every member participates in every decision? The organization may be committed to transparency, but does it mean that every member reads and understands the minutes of meetings? The principles provide a signpost towards the standards to which we all aspire, but democratic workers' movements are complicated and messy things, and to judge them on the basis of strictly-defined and verifiable scientific criteria would be impossible.

All MBO federations and networks, whether national or international, constantly have to make a judgement on whether or not a particular organization meets their criteria for membership. In most cases, the stated criteria are very broad indeed – it is left to the governing body or executive committee to determine whether the applicant organization meets their interpretation of the criteria. This means that the interpretation of criteria is always, in effect, a political judgement, so the question becomes: from the evidence we have, is this organization fundamentally democratic and serving the interests of the workers, or not?

Dave Spooner, Consultant: WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme

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Ahmedabad, India: SEWA Academy. Not available online.

Historical Perspective of Organizing in the Informal Economy

Informal workers are workers whose rights are not recognized and who are therefore unable to exercise those rights. In the beginning all workers were informal. When workers (in the contemporary meaning of the term) first appeared at the dawn of the industrial capitalist age in eighteenth century Europe, then later elsewhere in the world, they were all informal.



Workers like the Mondine engaged in significant social struggles in the early 20th century

In fact, the whole economy was informal – an economy where no social rules apply, where the strong prevail by virtue of their sole strength because they do not meet with organized opposition. That was the economy of early capitalism (and, it seems, what some powerful people today want late capitalism to look like as well).

To resist this, workers organized: they got organized into unions. They were informal workers and they had no rights, so they organized to get rights. They knew that their only source of strength was in themselves, was derived through mutual aid and solidarity. Trade unions were, and still are, self-help organizations of workers who, through collective action, seek to regulate their wages and working conditions so as to eliminate the worst forms of exploitation. This, in fact, amounts to first steps towards formalizing an informal situation.

As unions became stronger, a “formal” economy began to emerge, an economy in which the labour movement negotiated regulated wages and conditions through a combination of industrial and political action (by collective agreements and by law).

Beyond wages and conditions, the labour movement, through the unions and through its political parties, influenced social and economic policy. Wherever possible, this achieved a social compromise where State policies would protect, to some extent, the general public interest through social and economic regulation, thus further formalizing society and the economy.

This process sounds simple as a general and sweeping outline, but it has in fact been uneven and complicated. We are all familiar with uneven development in different parts of the world, even within each country, and even within the working class in each country. The advance of the labour movement has also been uneven, differing according to the nature of the economy and the society, but also according to industry and the nature of work.

These differences account for the many political, national, ideological and other divisions that appear throughout labour history. The most important and fundamental division that runs through the movement and through its history is the gender issue. All other issues are historically contingent. The gender issue cuts deeper because it has its roots in the foundation of our human cultures.

In any society the dominant social organization will prevail if it is not met with deliberate and conscious resistance. In patriarchal societies, this translates into a patriarchal organization of work relationships. It is therefore unsurprising that we find mostly women workers occupying the low-income, low-skill occupations. Because of the gender roles in a patriarchal society,

trade unions were dominated by men from the outset, and in many countries even opposed women entering the economy as workers, let alone as trade union members.

When they eventually accepted women into membership, unions often avoided tackling the causes of patriarchal exploitation of women workers, most often confining their struggles to only those shop floor issues common to both men and women workers. This resulted in more workers – primarily men – enjoying regulated wages and working conditions, while more women workers remained in the unregulated informal economy.

This is where the division between the “formal” and “informal” economies, as we know them today, begins to appear: in industrial societies, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mass production industries dominated by men, as well as construction and transport sectors, were the first to get organized and regulated, creating the formal economy. This included the women workers also employed in mass-production industries (textiles, food canning, tobacco). However, the great mass of women workers, scattered in small and isolated workplaces (domestic workers, home-based workers, agricultural workers, vendors, etc.), were left behind and almost forgotten.

Very few unions in what had become the formal trade union movement had the insight or found the courage to include the mass of left-behind informal women workers in their organizing priorities. Those that did were most often found on the radical “Left,” and were themselves embattled minorities.

But the informal women workers organized nonetheless, because that is what workers do. They organized sometimes with the support of the formal unions, but most often without that support – and sometimes even in opposition to formal unions.

When we speak today of the origins of organizing among informal workers, this is the period we mean, actually a fairly late period in the twentieth century, forgetting that once all workers were informal.

The stories of three organizations serve to illustrate this: the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India; Women Workers’ Federation (Federación Obrera Feminina - FOF) in Bolivia; and the *mondine*, the seasonal workers in the rice fields of Northern Italy.

These are, of course, only three among many instances of organizing by and for informal women workers. There are many more recent experiences among domestic workers, waste pickers, street vendors and home-based workers, among others.

The history of **international** organization of informal workers is more recent, and the role of WIEGO and of its Organization and Representation Programme has been crucial in this. WIEGO itself was only founded in 1997. International networks of home-based workers started in the mid-1990s. StreetNet was formally launched in 2002. The first international conference of waste recyclers was held in 2008. The International Domestic Workers’ Network was developed in preparation for the ILO Domestic Workers’ Convention (C189) in 2011 – a very positive product of the cooperation between WIEGO and the International Union of Foodworkers and Allied Workers (IUF).

It has been a short but eventful history, and as we advance there will be many more of us, the internationally-organized informal working class.

SEWA: “an incredible sense of freedom”



photo: Leslie Tuttle

Ela Bhatt founded SEWA, which now has 1.3 million members

SEWA grew out of the Women’s Wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), India’s oldest and largest union of textile workers founded by a woman, Anasuya Sarabhai, in 1920. The inspiration for the union came from Mahatma Gandhi, who had led a successful strike of textile workers in 1917.

The Women’s Wing was established in 1954, initially to assist women belonging to the households of textile workers, and its work was focused largely on vocational training and welfare activities. In the early 1970s, the scope of the women’s wing had broadened significantly; groups of informal women workers (tailors, cart-pullers at the cloth market, head-loaders carrying loads of clothes between the wholesale and retail markets, used garment dealers) approached the union for protection.

By December 1971, to meet the demand by these women workers for an independent structure, the TLA and its Women’s Wing decided to establish the Self Employed Women’s Association. The head of the Women’s Wing, Ela Bhatt, a young lawyer, became SEWA’s first general secretary.

The first struggle of SEWA was to gain official recognition as a trade union. The Labour Department refused to register SEWA on the grounds that since there was no recognized employer, the workers would have no one to struggle against. SEWA argued that the main function of a union was to unite the workers, regardless of their employment relationship. Finally, SEWA was registered as a union in April 1972.

SEWA grew continuously, from an initial membership of 320 in 1972 to over 6,000 in 1981. By then, however, relations between SEWA and TLA had deteriorated. The TLA (male) leadership had become increasingly uncomfortable with an assertive women’s group in its midst – one with its own agenda and its own views on union priorities.

Tensions came to a head in 1981 when Ela Bhatt was accused of “extreme indiscipline” and SEWA was expelled from the TLA, at a meeting where she, and her fellow delegates from SEWA, were treated with derision and contempt. A SEWA rally of solidarity was organized, attended by over 2,000 women. Ela Bhatt later described the event as having “such a sense of liberation that there was no man heading the meeting and telling us what to do or think.”

There was no one we had to be careful not to hurt if we did not pay him enough respect. It was our first meeting without a topee (literally “hat,” but meaning, male leader). We passed a resolution that day that men would not be allowed as members or as office bearers of our union. Although insulted at the way we had been thrown out, really, we felt most powerfully, an incredible sense of freedom.

Kalima Rose (1993) *Where Women Are Leaders: The Sewa Movement In India*, Zed Books.

An “incredible sense of freedom” – that is what organizing is all about.

The Cooks and Flower Vendors of La Paz

In 1927 a group of anarchist women workers created the General Women Workers' Union (Sindicato Feminino de Oficios Varios - SFOV) under the auspices of the anarcho-syndicalist Federación Obrera Local (FOL), at that time the leading trade union organization in the country.

The (male) FOL leadership considered that the basic principle of the First International, that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves," also applied to women and fully supported this initiative. Relations between male and female unions remained mutually supportive, in this case probably because of a serious commitment to a shared anarchist philosophy.

The General Women Workers' Union included cooks working in households, laundry workers, dairy workers, flower vendors and other street and market vendors. As membership grew, separate unions were established for the different categories of workers and the union was eventually reorganized as the Women Workers' Federation (Federación Obrera Femenina - FOF). At its peak, the FOF had 60 unions the most important of which were the Cooks' Union, founded in 1935, and the Flower Vendors' Union, founded in 1936.

Both these unions were the outcome of specific struggles. The Cooks' Union originated in a struggle against discrimination in public transport: middle class ladies had objected that cooks, with their bags of purchases, were taking too much space in the streetcars. The municipality then prohibited the cooks from using streetcars; in response, the cooks held a mass meeting at city hall and got the prohibition rescinded. Subsequently, a raise in streetcar fares was also cancelled after another mass demonstration of the cooks at city hall. The Cooks' Union was organized shortly thereafter.

The main demands of the Cooks' Union were: recognition of cooking as a skilled trade, the eight-hour day for domestic work (later the five-hour day, from 09:00 to 14:00, with cooking only, to the exclusion of other domestic tasks), the establishment of public child care centres, freedom of expression (the right to say what they pleased, at work and off duty, without reprisals), the abolition of the "health certificate" imposed by the municipal authorities, and increased wages.

The Flower Vendors' Union became organized after a flash flood at the end of 1935 wiped out the street markets in La Paz. The flower vendors and, through them, other street vendors became organized to demand the establishment of municipal markets. In 1938, several municipal markets were opened, but they turned out to be far too small, with a capacity of 600 places, although 2,000 were needed for union members alone. On the grounds that "official" markets now existed, the police started repressing vendors selling elsewhere in the city. Violent clashes took place, with police beating and arresting the vendors and destroying their property and produce.

In the early 1940s the women's unions campaigned against police abuses, as well as against the arbitrary conduct and the abuses of city authorities, and demanded municipal price controls of basic commodities. They also demanded that street vendors be recognized as a "social function." They threatened a general strike and obtained the resignation of the mayor.

The women workers' unions not only confronted municipal authorities but as Indian women ("cholas"), also the Creole upper class, in the households and in society, as shown in the streetcar incident, which raised basic civil rights issues. From the beginning, the anarchist trade union women also came into

conflict with the women's rights movement, dominated by women from the Creole oligarchy.

The markets became social spaces where solidarity could be cemented, not only among vendors but also among cooks who would do their shopping there and thus break out of the isolation of their workplaces.

Notably, the women's unions outlasted their male counterparts. In the 1940s the FOL went into decline because of the combined effect of repression by successive authoritarian governments and the competition from new unions led by political parties of the radical Left. By 1947 it had practically ceased to exist. The Women's Federation however, continued, still under anarcho-syndicalist leadership, until eventually joining the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) in 1953.

The *Mondine* of Italy

Women workers' unions as such did not exist in Italy, but some of the most significant social struggles in the first 60 years of the twentieth century were conducted by the *mondine*, seasonal women workers in the rice fields of Northern Italy.

In the early twentieth century and up to the early 1960s, some 150,000 women travelled every year to the rice fields of Piedmont (Northern Italy) to work as weeders (removing weeds from the rice fields) and replanting the rice, from May to July. They were known as *mondine* (from *monda*, weeding).



photo: Marco Dubini

The Mondine fought for decades against harsh conditions in Italian rice fields (Milan, 1938)

The work was backbreaking: 15 to 16-hour days, bent over in the hot sun, up to the knees in water. The wages were very low (and sometimes not paid in full); part of the wage was paid in kind (rice or other grains, sometimes spoiled); housing was miserable and unhygienic, food was inadequate; the *mondine* would catch fish, frogs and snakes from the rice fields to supplement their diet. Widespread occupational diseases included rheumatism, skin diseases, digestive disorders, parasites. Sexual harassment from owners and supervisors was rife.

Local rebellions and strikes started in the 1890s and were put down by police. In 1901 the first general strike broke out, mostly for higher wages but also for better housing and for shorter hours. The *mondine* became organized in the socialist agricultural workers' union, but remained in control of their demands and of their movement. Strikes continued every season in the following years. In 1904 the 10-hour day was made official, in 1906 the 9-hour day, but the *mondine* kept fighting for the 8-hour day, which was finally won in 1909, for the first time in Italy.

Remarkably, the *mondine* maintained their militancy and cohesion throughout the fascist period, for example striking in 1934 against the attempts by the rice field owners to cut their wages and in 1941, in the middle of the war, for a wage increase. In the post-war period, they succeeded in vastly improving their conditions, including by securing the seven-hour day.

However, mechanization of rice cultivation and the use of herbicides, which began in the 1950s, gradually replaced manual labour: from 100,000 at the end of the war, the number of rice weeders went down steadily to less than 30,000 in 1963. Many also went to work as factory workers in the rapidly

developing industries in Northern Italy. By the 1980s, Italian rice cultivation was entirely mechanized and the *mondine* had disappeared.

They left behind a legend and a culture of independence and rebelliousness. Their work songs, many of which were songs of struggle and of derision (against owners and supervisors), have remained popular and are sung today by choirs of ex-*mondine* or their daughters.

But perhaps there is another twist to the story. The *mondine* are back, in the form of tens of thousands of Chinese migrant workers, both men and women, tending to the rice fields of Northern Italy. They are cheaper than machines and also more efficient. Whether they are becoming organized remains to be seen.

This is an edited version of the presentation given by Dan Gallin at the Organizing Workshop. For the original version see http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/reports/files/Organizing_informal_workers_historical_overview_Gallin.pdf

Resources

Dan Gallin and Pat Horn. 2005. Organizing Informal Women Workers. Available at http://www.globallabour.info/en/2007/11/organizing_informal_women_work_1.html

Timeline: Informal Workers Organize Internationally - Key Events

THE 1970s

1972

- Founding of SEWA

THE 1980s

1983

- SEWA affiliates with International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)

1988

- Founding of Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO)

1989

- Founding of National Network of Homeworkers (PATAMABA) Philippines

THE 1990s

1990

- Founding of Asociacion Nacional de Recicladores (ANR) Colombia
- International Conference on Home-Based Workers

1992

- Founding of HomeNet Thailand

1994

- Founding of HomeNet International

1995

- Conference and Bellagio Declaration on Street Vendors , Italy

1996

- Adoption of ILO Convention # 177 on Homework

1997

- Founding of WIEGO
- Founding of HomeNet South-East Asia

1998

- Formation of National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)

THE 2000s

2000

- First South Asia Regional Conference on Home-Based Workers and Kathmandu Declaration, Nepal
- Founding of HomeNet South Asia, Nepal
- Collapse of HomeNet International
- Establishment of Street Net Association, South Africa

2001

- Founding of National Movement of Waste Pickers, MNCR, Brazil
- Formation of HomeNet India

2002

- Resolution and Conclusions on Decent Work in the Informal Economy, ILO
- Official launch of StreetNet International, South Africa
- Founding of the Alliance of Zambian Informal Economy Associations (AZIEA)
- Launch of CTCP (association of self-employed workers in Nicaragua)
- Founding of HomeNet Nepal

2003

- First International Conference on "Organizing in the Informal Economy," India
- Formation of International Coordinating Committee on organizing in the informal economy



THE 2000s (cont'd)

2005

- Founding of the Latin American Waste Picker Network (LAWPN)
- HomeNet Pakistan formed
- Founding of HomeNet Bangladesh
- Founding of Asia Domestic Workers' Network
- Founding of Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT)
- First Regional Conference in Africa on "Organizing in the Informal Economy," Senegal
- Ratification of ILO Convention on Homework Campaign led by Global Labour Institute

2006

- SEWA affiliates to ICFTU /ITUC
- Second "Organizing in the Informal Economy" Conference, Ghana
- First International Conference of Domestic Workers
- First Meeting of Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

2007

- Founding of MRP (waste picker association, Peru)
- Founding of MNRC (waste picker association, Chile)
- Founding of National Domestic Workers Alliance, USA

2008

- First World Conference of Waste Pickers and Third Latin American Regional Congress, Colombia
- HomeNet Srilanka formed
- Founding of National Waste Picker Associations in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Uruguay
- Interim Steering Committee of International Domestic Workers Network set up
- Launch of global project "Inclusive Cities for the Urban Working Poor"
- Launch of campaign for Convention on domestic workers



THE 2010s

2009

- First meeting of developing Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, Argentina
- First national meeting of South African Waste Pickers
- Meeting on organizing informal workers in Central and Eastern Europe
- Consolidation of IDWN and Interim Steering Committee, Geneva
- First African sub regional workshop of IDWN, Kenya
- Waste pickers participate in UNFCCC Climate Change conferences at Bonn and Copenhagen

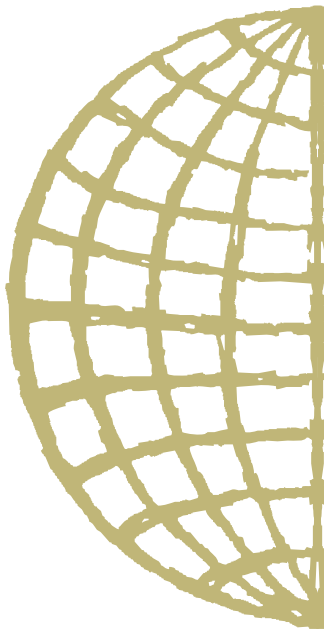
2010

- StreetNet Regional Meeting on Organizing Waste Pickers in Africa, Senegal
- SEWA elected as a Vice President of ITUC
- Fourth Latin American Waste Pickers Congress, Peru
- First National Meeting of Waste Pickers and Collectors in Kenya
- Third StreetNet International Congress, Benin
- IDWN second Africa regional workshop, Benin
- Waste pickers participate in UNFCCC, China and Mexico

2011

- First National Conference of Indian Waste pickers (AIW)
- First WIEGO cross-sector MBO workshop, Thailand
- ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, C189, adopted

This is an edited version of the timeline created by Marty Chen, with additions from the Organizing Workshop participants (available at <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/informal-workers-organizing-internationally>). Photos by Samson Mulugeta.



Section Two

Organizing Informal Workers: Challenges and Successes



photo: Sofia Trevino

Members of IDWN celebrate their successful campaign for an ILO convention with Juan Somavía, Director-General of the ILO

Focus on Four Sectors

This Section offers experiences, case studies and advice on organizing through a focus on four occupational groups of informal workers and their organizations:

- domestic workers
- street and market vendors
- home-based workers
- waste pickers

These groups make up a substantial number of those working in the informal economy, especially in urban areas. All the groups are characterized by a high percentage of women informal workers, with women making up the vast majority of domestic and home-based workers. In recent years, WIEGO has focused on these four groups – although not exclusively – to facilitate organizing and networking and provide a range of support through research and statistics, policy development and advocacy, capacity building and helping to mobilize resources through joint projects.

Common Challenges for Informal Workers

Informal workers face a range of challenges in organizing, building and sustaining organizations. Some of the challenges are similar across different sectors and in different countries. Others are specific to the occupation or the country context, including whether the sector is dominated by women or by men, or workers are own account workers or are in an employment relationship. Below we discuss some of the commonly experienced obstacles to effective organizing and organizations.

Identity

Sometimes informal workers, especially own account workers like street vendors and waste pickers, are not accepted as workers by worker organizations and others. In some cases informal workers do not perceive themselves as workers. For example, women home-based workers sometimes see their work as an extension of domestic duties. Waste pickers or street vendors may feel more closely allied to business associations than to workers' associations.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Informal workers do not have the protection of labour laws. They may be excluded because they are self-employed or their positions are unclear, as in the case of many homeworkers. If they are included, employers often ignore the laws and/or governments do not enforce them. Most cannot register as a trade union and they do not have collective bargaining rights. Also, some groups struggle with unfavourable municipal regulations that lead to harassment rather than protection.

Workplaces

The home, the employer's home, the street, the road or dump may be the workplace. Some workplaces are scattered and individualized. Other

“Every country is a special situation. It is difficult everywhere. Everyone started organizing with few members ... twenty or less. All worker organizations started in the way you are starting now. You have to create an embarrassment. You won't get rights unless you become a problem and inconvenience to the employers and government. That is when they become responsive. You can only do this through organization. That's when they will listen and you will begin to get your rights.”

Dan Gallin, a WIEGO member and the Global Labour Institute Chair, speaking at a meeting with Thai domestic workers, Bangkok, March 2011

workplaces are far flung, mobile, seasonal or insecure. Workers can be difficult to reach, lack a central point where they can meet, or a collective employer which they can unite against.

Internal Democracy, Leadership and Organizational Management

Building a democratic organization, running it effectively and sustaining it are not easy. Often informal worker associations do not have a tradition of democratic functioning. Sometimes the leaders are not elected or are not accountable to members. In mixed organizations, women often are not properly represented in activities and leadership. There are practical problems such as how to get information to members or to report back when they are scattered; these are issues for local but especially for national organizations. Management and financial skills are sometimes limited.

Finally, and most importantly, the organization has to deliver improvements for members. This depends on external factors but also the effectiveness of the democratic structures and operational management. We look more closely at these democratic challenges in Section Three.

Financial and Human Resources

Having sufficient and sustainable financial and human resources is perhaps the biggest challenge of all. Because informal workers are for the most part poor they struggle to raise enough money from their own contributions to hire staff, pay for offices and so on. Some find creative ways to generate income, but often they are dependent on donors or NGOs to support them. This support is easily withdrawn and can interfere with the independence of the organization. We look more closely at resource challenges in Section Three.

Meeting These Challenges

As history shows, the movement of informal workers is growing despite the many challenges to organizing. The four sectors highlighted here are taking a lead in increasing the visibility and voice of informal workers on the global stage through their organizing and networking activities. Street vendors have developed a substantial international organization – StreetNet International – which is recognized by the international union movement, the ILO and other organizations as the voice of street vendors. Domestic workers have achieved recognition and rights as workers through their successful campaign for an ILO Domestic Workers Convention (C189), led by the International Domestic Workers’ Network (IDWN). Waste pickers have increased their profile globally through their informal Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, and are now gaining recognition and respect for their valuable contribution to the environment. Home-based workers have formed regional HomeNets and have been successful in increasing their visibility, and through their advocacy efforts have succeeded in improving policies and laws in some countries.

Below we look in detail at the four occupational sectors, drawing on the discussions at the Organizing Workshop. For each sector we first provide an overview of the sector and its informal workforce. We then look at how workers in the sector are organizing and examine the different forms of organization; and finally we record some of the challenges and successes in organization building and making gains for members using a series of short case studies.

Focus on Domestic Workers

Overview of the Domestic Worker Sector

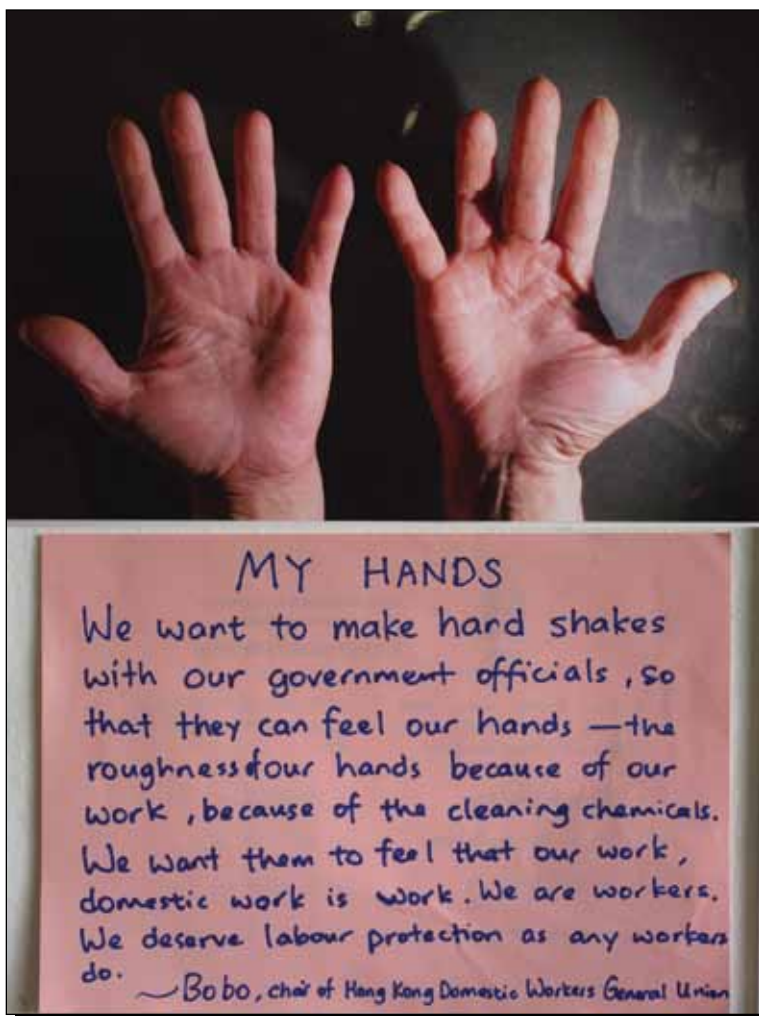
According to the ILO there are, at a minimum, 52.6 million domestic workers worldwide – a more likely figure is around 100 million. Domestic work is mostly, but not exclusively, performed by women, the vast majority from the poorer sections of society. Despite their numbers and their economic and social importance, they are undervalued, lowly paid, endure harsh working conditions and often face harassment or abuse.

Domestic workers are those who work in the homes of others for pay, providing a range of domestic services: they sweep and clean, wash clothes and dishes; shop and cook; care for children or the elderly, sick, and disabled; or provide gardening, driving, and security services. They provide important services that enable others to work outside of the home. Women doing domestic work are concentrated in cleaning and care services, while men tend to have the better paying jobs as gardeners, drivers, or security guards.

Domestic work is a significant source of employment, especially for women. Worldwide, domestic work accounts for 1.7 per cent of total employment (3.6. of wage employment). In many developing countries, it accounts for a far higher share – from 3.5 per cent in Asia to 11.9 per cent in Latin America. According to the ILO estimates in 2011, 83 per cent of all domestic workers worldwide are women, with 7.5 per cent of all women wage earners being domestic workers.

Many domestic workers are migrants, moving from rural to urban areas in their own country or from one country to another. According to the Human Rights Watch, an NGO, in 2006 women made up approximately half of the estimated 200 million international migrants worldwide, with women and girl domestic workers being a significant portion. Child domestic work is widespread. In 2008 the ILO Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour estimated that there were at least 15.5 million children between 5 and 17 years old engaged in domestic work; the majority are girls.

Domestic workers face serious challenges. Many are isolated and vulnerable, especially those that live in their employer's home. They are dependent on the good or bad will of their employer. As women, they are subjected to gender discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping in relation to their work, which is regarded as low status. They risk physical and psychological abuse and sexual exploitation, with migrant domestic workers and children being especially vulnerable. They work long hours for low wages, and usually have



Top: "My Hands" campaign photo of the Domestic Worker's General Union of Hong Kong; Bottom: notes from the campaign's demands written by IDWN during presentation at WIEGO's General Assembly in 2010, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

no maternity leave, health care or pension provision. Living conditions of those who stay on the premises of their employers are frequently very poor. In many countries, they are excluded from the provision of labour law and social security protection, or inferior standards apply. Even where protective laws are in place, these laws are frequently ignored by employers and not enforced by authorities.

Until recently, trade unions have tended to ignore domestic workers. Most are not yet organized, although there are some examples of longstanding domestic workers' organizations such as CONLACTRAHO in Latin America. However, spurred on by the successful campaign to adopt the ILO Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189), organization among domestic workers is growing in many countries – with strong examples in Africa, Asia, Latin America and USA. An important step forward has been the formation of the International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN), which is discussed below.

With the adoption of C189 and its accompanying Recommendation (R 201), domestic workers have achieved international recognition and rights as workers. They now have to struggle to get their governments to ratify the Convention (making its provisions binding), and to change labour laws to conform to the Convention and to ensure it is implemented, enforced and makes a real difference to the lives of domestic workers.

Domestic Workers: Common Demands

- recognition of domestic work as real work, and not simply an extension of unpaid household and care work
- recognition of domestic workers as workers
- recognition and valuing of domestic work and the skills involved
- worker rights in law – equal to other workers, including the right to organize and join trade unions and the right to representation
- decent conditions of work, including limitations on working hours, rest periods, overtime pay, paid holidays, sick leave, maternity leave and a living wage
- social security and protection: health care, pensions and occupational health and safety protection;
- access and right to training
- freedom: of movement, to change employer, from harassment, from physical and psychological abuse and sexual exploitation
- decent living conditions, including housing and facilities
- favourable immigration laws
- regulation of recruitment and placement agencies

Resources

This note is drawn substantially from the WIEGO website. For more details see: <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/domestic-workers>
ILO. 2011. Global and Regional Estimates on Domestic Workers, Domestic Work Policy Brief 4. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_155951.pdf
For more on the IDWN, visit its website: www.idwn.info

How Domestic Workers Are Organizing

Base Organizations

There are many different kinds of organization: informal groups, for example, domestic workers who get together as religious groups because otherwise their employers will not allow them to attend a meeting; associations of many kinds; community-based organizations that organize migrant domestic workers around their national identity; and chapters/branches of national unions.

The advantages of informal associations or groups is that they allow domestic workers to organize where unions are not allowed, or where domestic workers fear to be part of a union. They are more comfortable spaces for women domestic workers. They often provide a stepping stone to a trade union. Cooperatives are less common but do exist in some places and act as non-profit and collective job placement services. The advantage of cooperatives is that they are oriented towards income generation activity and this helps to sustain the membership. It gives ownership to members of their business venture.

At a base level, organizations focus on a variety of issues: working conditions and wages; negotiations with employers; legal and social protection (mainly unions and associations); skills training; employer education; social protection; violence (religious and community based organizations, NGOs); job opportunities; and income (cooperatives).

National Organizations

Most common are unions. These are either unions of solely domestic workers, or formal unions which have domestic workers as one sector – or in the case of SEWA, a union of informal workers with domestic workers as one sector. The advantage of unions is that they increase the strength and bargaining power of members, and that they are legal and structured entities which provide recognition and identity for the worker. They provide a platform for workers to share information, discuss issues and find solutions. The advantage of a union of informal workers in different sectors is that they make organizing easier – workers in different sectors encourage each other and provide inter-trade linkages. For example, domestic workers can run a daycare centre for children of street vendors.

National organizations are concerned with issues similar to those which concern organizations at the local/base level: working conditions,



Domestic workers rally in Bangkok

photo: Chris Banner

social protection, etc. They have a focus on changing national legislation and play an important role in gaining visibility for domestic workers and their recognition as workers.

International Networks (Regional and Global)

There are regional networks of domestic workers, the most established being CONLACTRAHO in Latin America, and the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN). They build regional and global strength, visibility and validity for domestic workers and allow them to speak with one voice. They provide a platform for organizations to network with others working for the same cause, unions, international organizations such as ILO and ITUC, networks such as WIEGO, and NGOs that can provide support and advice. The IDWN had a major focus and organizing issue: the campaign for an ILO Domestic Workers Convention and then its ratification and enforcement.

This summary table was compiled collectively by domestic worker representatives from different countries. It describes the advantages provided by each form of organization, and the types of issues that they address, based on their own experiences.

Table 1: Forms of Domestic Worker Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizing	Advantages of this form	Organizing issues
Base/Local Organizations		
Cooperatives	Stable membership Job opportunities Ownership by workers	Improved income Job opportunities
Associations of many kinds	Can form when DWs are unable to form unions Bring awareness of rights Promote empowerment Enable collective problem solving	Negotiations with employers Human rights abuses Violence & harassment Legal protection Recognition of DWs Social security Wage increases and working conditions
City based network	Able to share problems and experiences Allow for work with social movements and NGOs to strengthen campaigns	As above City campaigns
DW union branch of a National Union of DWs or a mixed sector union	Same as Domestic Workers Unions and mixed Trade Unions, below	
City based chapter of national union of informal workers	Same as Trade Unions, below	
Religious organization supported groups	Provide job matching employment opportunities, services and advice Offer emergency service, refuge centres Provide meeting space Educate employers	Skills training Social security Minimum wage

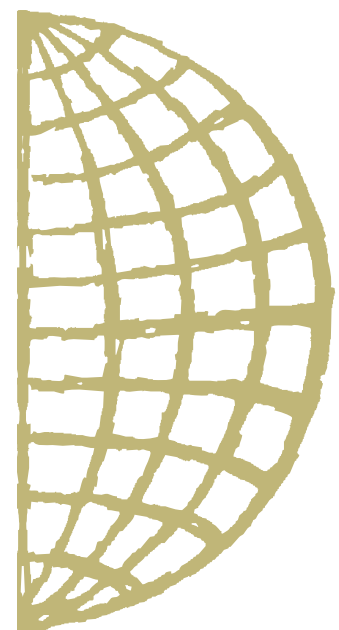
National Organizations		
Trade Union – mixed sector	Build strength and unity Share services with other sectors Facilitate organizing of DWs	Legal protection Working conditions Minimum wages Dignity Social protection Occupational health and safety
Domestic Workers Unions	Build Collective Bargaining strength Gain Trade Union rights	Recognition of DWs as workers
Federations of Domestic Workers unions	Foster solidarity and one voice among local and migrants, different ethnic groups Can deal with policy issues	Policy issues ILO Convention
Regional networks	Promote unionization Facilitate sharing of information and of legal practices	ILO Convention Law and policy issues
Federations of Unions, associations, groups	As Trade Unions, above	Solidarity Building organization ILO Convention
International Organizations		
Regional networks International network (IDWN)	Build global strength Create visibility Facilitate networking with many organizations Offer expert help Provide validity as workers Build one voice	ILO Convention ILO Convention ratification

International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN)

The IDWN is a developing network, made up of domestic workers' unions and associations from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, and Europe. The IDWN is supported by the global union federation (GUF), the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) and WIEGO.

In November 2006, an international conference – called Respect and Rights: Protection for Domestic Workers! – was held in Amsterdam under the auspices of the Netherlands Trade Union Federation (FNV). This marked the first time domestic workers had come together globally to discuss their issues. The Conference decided to work towards establishing an international network of domestic workers' organizations and supporters, and to campaign for an ILO Convention for Domestic Workers. The IUF agreed to provide an organizational base for the network, and with WIEGO's support, set about raising funds and developing a programme.

In March 2008, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) agreed to put the issue of Decent Work for Domestic Workers on the agenda of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2010 and 2011, with a view to negotiating an international standard (Convention and/or

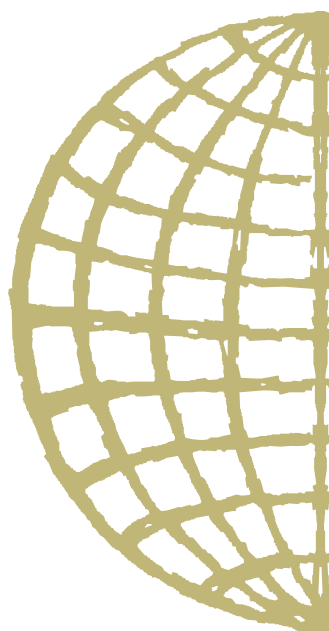




First International Conference of Domestic Workers, 2006

Recommendation) for domestic workers. This created urgency to get the Network up and running so that domestic workers could lead a global campaign for a strong ILO Convention.

In September 2008, domestic workers' representatives from Africa, Asia, Latin America and North America met to plan a programme of action and develop a fund raising proposal. The meeting agreed to an interim Steering Committee and the appointment of regional coordinators in Africa, Asia and Latin America so that they could develop the



network and ensure a strong campaign at grassroots level led by domestic workers. In June 2009, committee members participated in the ILC to prepare themselves for the 2010 negotiations. During this time the network was made more official: the steering committee was consolidated and its office bearers chosen. Roles were clarified, a new interim international coordinator was appointed, the name IDWN was adopted and interim rules agreed upon.

The focus of the IDWN to date has been on winning a Convention. The Network and its constituent organizations have campaigned tirelessly: mobilizing and organizing domestic workers; working with the trade union movement; lobbying governments and employers; building alliances with NGOs, researchers and supportive groups ensuring that the final vote at the ILC was won.

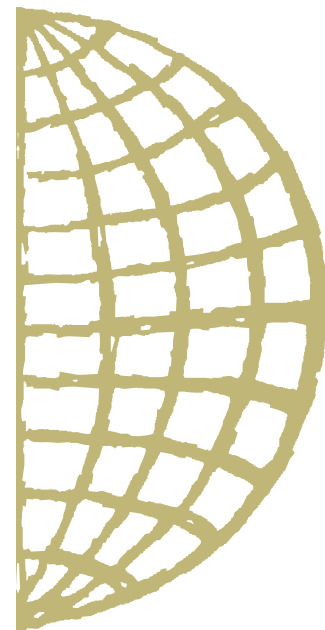
The IDWN now has the task of building the network into a democratic organization with a proper membership base, democratic structures and strong women leadership. It must also find ways to fund and sustain the organization and to keep donors interested now that the Convention is in place.

Resources

- IRENE and IUF. 2008. Respect and Rights. Protection for Domestic Workers. Report of the international conference held in Amsterdam, 8-10 November 2006. Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/RESPECT_RIGHTS.pdf
 IDWN website: www.idwn.info
 See also WIEGO website: <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/domestic-workers>

Domestic Workers: Challenges and Successes

Domestic workers face many challenges in building their organizations and making concrete gains. But they have developed successful strategies to overcome the challenges, and achieved much. In the case studies below, we first look at examples from South Africa and Thailand of strategies for reaching domestic workers and building organization from the ground up. We then turn to building a national federation in Hong Kong, where migrant domestic workers are organized in unions by country of origin. Finally we celebrate the victory of domestic workers in gaining an ILO Convention using the IDWN as a campaign vehicle. As we note in the story of the Thai Domestic Workers, international networks not only play a role on the global stage but are important in helping new organizations develop by sharing experiences and giving advice to grassroots MBOs.



Case Studies

“Workers Make the Best Organizers”: Building Organization at the Base, Renewing and Refreshing the South Africa Domestic, Service and Allied Workers’ Union

Myrtle Witbooi, General Secretary of SADSAWU and President of the IDWN, spoke at the Organizing Workshop, March 2011, and at the IDWN African Regional Domestic Workers Conference later that year.

“The South Africa Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) organizes domestic workers into street committees. These are streets where they work. These streets could be posh localities or localities of middle income groups. Therefore, domestic workers are not organized in places where they live, but where they work. These Street Committees then form Branch Committees, which are ward-level committees. Branch Committees then form Regional Committees or state-level committees. Then these Regional Committees form the National Union,” explained Myrtle Witbooi at the Organizing Workshop in March 2011.

At an African Regional Domestic Workers Conference, held in Nairobi in November 2011, she outlined how the union is renewing and refreshing itself in order to grow and to become sustainable. Spurred on by the ILO Convention victory and the mobilization around this issue, SADSAWU has developed a systematic organizing strategy and a new organizing structure, assisted by local NGOs and researchers, and some additional funding. Myrtle recounted:

We decided that we need to make the union more visible to domestic workers in Cape Town. The union can’t be visible if it is based mainly in the office. So we need to take the union out to the workers. We decided that the workers make the best organizers and looked at how we could build on this. We are lucky because we have many experienced domestic worker leaders who are committed and prepared to give up their time for the workers.

So we set up an organizing committee drawn from this group who have become committee members because they are committed and not for positions. They give up their Saturdays and Sundays to go



Myrtle Witbooi, General Secretary, SADSAWU

out and organize other domestic workers. They take with them newsletters, pamphlets on the union, “Know Your Rights” leaflets and membership forms. The union pamphlet contains the contact details of committee members. We tell the workers they can send an SMS (text message) to the union office or a committee member and that the Union or committee member will call them back. We know that air time is expensive and domestic workers will be reluctant to use their phones and so may never contact the union again or join up unless we provide them with a means to contact us without cost.

In addition to regularly going out to the streets, we call area workshops on Sundays when many domestic workers have some time off. We give out the “Know Your Rights” leaflets and then discuss this in the workshop. One issue we mention in the leaflet is the ILO Convention. Most workers know nothing about this but they become interested when we discuss it. We invite them to join after this. But after you ask them to join, many say they will come back to you – so you don’t push them. You have to be patient and give them time. Having the SMS facility for them to contact us is very important.

We have also started a drama group that we can use to show domestic workers what the union does to help. On a different level, we believe the Department of Labour must hear the direct voices of domestic workers. We have managed to set up a regular monthly forum with the department to discuss issues. This has resulted in us being involved in inspections by the department.

Another important innovation is our new membership form, which captures comprehensive information on each worker. The form acts as a research tool for the union so we can keep track of who our members are, what are their problems, who and how to contact them should they lose their jobs or phone access and so on. It also provides us with ammunition when we talk to employers or negotiate with the government. We can develop strong arguments based on real information.

Resources

For more information on SADSAWU organizing strategies see ITUC OnLine: Spotlight interview with Myrtle Witbooi (SADSAWU-South Africa). Available at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-myrtle.html>

Thai Domestic Workers – No Longer Suffering in Silence

Domestic workers in Bangkok and Thailand have formed a new organization: “Do It! – Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand” (NDWT). They met with representatives of the IDWN and WIEGO in Bangkok. This article was written by Samson Mulugeta, Media Consultant.

The small group of domestic workers, members of the Network of Thai Domestic Workers, that met in a hotel conference room were not used to speaking in public. But they were determined to tell their stories and those of other women like them who remain voiceless.

“I want to share a story of the kind of things that happen to domestic workers in Thailand,” one tearful speaker said. “A 17-year-old girl came to Bangkok and began to work as a domestic worker. She was raped by her employer. She became pregnant and was sent home. Her employer negotiated with her parents to keep the issue quiet and not pursue it. He paid them some money. The girl became depressed and committed suicide. Now there is a funeral going on.”

The story was an extreme example of the hardships many domestic workers face in Thailand and across the globe, and some of these workers wanted to tell the world their stories and find a way to stop the suffering. “The Government in Thailand does not open the door for us domestic workers to speak out,” the speaker continued. “We have been campaigning but the door is still shut.”

The tradition of domestic work is firmly embedded in Thai society, where traditionally women of low socio-economic status worked on household chores or helped with child rearing. However, as the Thai economy has rapidly grown in the last two decades, fewer and fewer Thais are taking these low status and low paying jobs, and immigrants from nearby countries of Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have become more prevalent in the profession, although a substantial number of Thai workers remain in the sector.

The organizing of domestic workers in Thailand is in its infancy and is currently being supported by HomeNet Thailand, a non-governmental organization engaged in organizing informal workers.

HomeNet Thailand started organizing domestic workers, almost all from Bangkok, two years ago. Most joined by hearing about the group through word of mouth. The 150 members have elected leaders and collect a small annual membership fee. “It is hard as well because we do not have a law to protect us,” said one of the leaders. “There is no fair wage and we work more than eight hours a day. In Thailand, we have the Labour Protection Act of 1988 but it excludes domestic workers. The Labour Department does not accept us.”

At the workshop held in Bangkok, representatives of Thai domestic workers detailed their working conditions and their struggle to advance their cause. The workers did not want to be identified but spoke from the heart. They said that workers are often dismissed when they try to negotiate with their employer.

“I am happy to be here because most of our workers cannot speak out,” said one participant. “Employers think they cannot negotiate conditions with their workers. Our conditions are bad. We work long hours, waking up early and only leaving work late – from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.” Domestic workers in Thailand want to negotiate for better wages and working conditions but feel that they

are powerless because they are most often fighting as individuals and not collectively, speakers said. The problem is even harder for those who work outside the capital city of Bangkok.

A glimmer of hope appeared when some of the domestic workers met the coordinator for HomeNet Thailand, an organization that helps home-based workers. Poonsap Tulaphan, the coordinator for HomeNet, made a big impression on the domestic workers she met. "She made me feel I could speak out and through her I got in contact with other domestic workers," one domestic worker said.

The meeting in Bangkok was a chance for local domestic workers to meet their counterparts from around the world, including from Africa, Latin American and other parts of Asia. Ip Pui Yu (Fish), IDWN Asia Regional Coordinator, was one of those who spoke to the Thai domestic workers.

"Domestic workers are coming out. We are no longer crying in our back rooms," she said. "We are coming out to demand recognition as workers and demanding equal rights like other workers. In Hong Kong we are coming together. All the migrant workers unions and local workers unions are

being organized into one federation."

Myrtle Witbooi, the South African former domestic worker who has risen to a position of leadership in her country, told her Thai colleagues, "You are not alone."

"I was a domestic worker all through the years of Apartheid," said Witbooi, General Secretary of the South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) and Chair of the IDWN. "Fighting helped to make me a strong woman. We want to make an impact in our life time so that domestic workers can be truly recognized and valued."



photo: Chris Bonner

The Network of Domestic Workers in Thailand received advice from IDWN domestic worker leaders at the MBO workshop, March 2011

International Solidarity: IDWN Gives Advice to Thai Domestic Workers

Having heard the challenges faced by Thai domestic workers, IDWN members drew on their experience and gave advice to the Thai domestic workers on how they might win their struggle for legal recognition, protection and improved working conditions. Here is a summary of key points.

Publicize, pressurize and embarrass

Get on television when you go to see the Minister.
Make a petition and get lots of signatures.
Demonstrate and influence public opinion.
Shame the government.
Create an international issue.

Don't wait: be pro-active

Draw up your grievances and what you want from Government.
Approach the Ministry – don't wait for them.
Negotiate with employers – start with something small such as having wages on time.
Build your power step by step.

Get support: find partners and allies

Find partners to support you - in Thailand as well as internationally.
Make alliances with different groups. You can't get results only from domestic workers.
Get support from the IDWN. Keep us informed and we can act.

Mobilize members around their issues

Have issues that you are working on and can unite around.
Mobilize members. You need to be seen.
Gather on the streets and start to make the sisters understand their rights.
Organize and build unity.

Be patient and don't give up

Try not to despair.
The struggle is long but you have to use all the media at your hand to raise awareness.
No government agrees first time to demands. Keep going back – don't give up.
Go back and back again until they get tired and have to respond.

Domestic Workers' Unions Unite: Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong

Elizabeth Tang of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), and since August 2011 the International Coordinator of the IDWN. She speaks about the formation of FADWU and the role played by the HKCTU.

The Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong is probably the only registered federation of trade unions of domestic workers who are migrants. It brings together five unions representing five different nationalities – Thai, Nepalese, Filipino, Indonesian and local Chinese domestic workers. The federation was formally launched in Hong Kong in November 2010 with the support and assistance of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).

There are four main points that allowed us to succeed in forming this unusual national federation:

- 1) Since 2000 the HKCTU has been affiliating the individual unions one by one. So by 2008, four out of the six domestic workers' unions were affiliated.
- 2) In 2008 we started to campaign for an ILO convention for domestic workers. We tried to build the ILO process together with the process of federating these unions, so the two processes have been interwoven. We brought members of all of the domestic workers' unions together to discuss our common positions and what we must do to achieve them. At the same time we always concluded by putting the formulation of a federation as a strategy.
- 3) A year or two earlier, the local unions campaigned for minimum wage legislation and we tried to form a network of domestic workers' unions, including those of migrant workers, in order to increase their participation in the campaign. We knew that in our society there was a strong voice for the exclusion of migrant domestic workers from the legislation. The campaign for minimum wages has helped to build unity.
- 4) Our close collaboration with NGOs has been crucial, especially NGOs that work closely with migrant workers in Hong Kong. The main NGO is the Asian Migrant Centre.

We're proud that the HKCTU has been able to support the development of this federation. It was so important that the process of organizing went hand-in-hand with the campaign for an ILO Convention on domestic work, and for the inclusion of domestic workers in the Hong Kong's minimum wage legislation. A final and crucial factor was the development of solidarity between the nationalities. It took many years to build solidarity, not just through meetings but also through "solidarity days" for the union members, building friendship and mutual enjoyment of fun and relaxation.

Resources

ITUC Online. Spotlight Interview with Elizabeth Tang. Available at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-elizabeth.html>

Historic Victory for Domestic Workers Emerges from Geneva Conference

“FREE AT LAST!”

This is an edited version of the IDWN message circulated in July 2011, after the adoption of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention.

Dear friends,

For us domestic workers, June 16, 2011 will go down in history as the day we were finally recognized as workers. At the 100th International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, Switzerland, governments, employers and trade unions from around the world adopted the first Convention (C189) and accompanying Recommendation (R201) on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, establishing global labour standards for domestic workers. Support for the Convention was overwhelming, with 396 voting in favor, and only 16 voting against (Swaziland as the only government against, and 15 employers' organizations), with an additional 63 abstaining (governments: El Salvador, Malaysia, Panama, United Kingdom, Singapore, Sudan, Czech Republic, Thailand; the rest of those who abstained were employers' organizations). The Recommendation passed with 90 per cent approval!

Today we celebrate a great victory for domestic workers. Until now we have been treated as “invisible,” not respected for the huge contribution we make in society and the economy and denied our rights as workers. It is an injustice that has lasted too long. After thirty years of organizing domestic workers throughout the world, The International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN), supported by the Global Union Federation IUF and WIEGO and many others in the international labour movement, became the driving force behind this massive campaign to finally recognize domestic work as real work, worthy of the same recognition and protection of other sectors.



IDWN unfurls a banner at the International Labour Conference, June 2011, signalling that their triumph is just the beginning of the fight

Myrtle Witbooi, SADSAWU and President, IDWN

Getting here has been a long road – some of us have been organizing domestic workers for over 30 years and all of us have been told our organizing and our demands for worker rights were impossible. This process was a powerful reminder of the importance of movements: movements of workers that demand change, movements of women that promote hopeful visions for new ways in which we can relate to each other, social

movements that create progressive governments that can play powerful roles in international arenas. It was the growing movement of domestic workers around the world – and our capacity to capture the imagination of trade union movements and governments internationally – that got domestic work onto the agenda at the ILO in the first place. Over the past 10 years we’ve built our organizing, our networking, and alliance building, and we are so proud that today we have both an International Domestic Workers Network and an ILO Convention for Decent Work for Domestic Workers! The day after the Convention passed we met to lay out our plans to ensure this Convention is widely ratified and implemented, and IDWN looks forward to working with many of you on the road ahead.

Although many ILO Conventions cover all workers, regardless of whether they are formal or informal, the newly adopted ILO Convention for Domestic Workers aims at minimum standards for a sector which is often excluded from coverage of labour legislation and social protection. It will help to lift informal domestic workers into the formal economy and will also ensure minimum standards for those who do have contracts and are registered.

After the adoption of the Homework Convention in 1996 (C177), we regard this as a commitment by the ILO to further ensure protection for the majority of the world’s workers who work in the informal economy. Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, said, “We are moving the standards system of the ILO into the informal economy for the first time, and this is a breakthrough of great significance. History is being made.”

The team at the ILO included a strong contingent of domestic workers’ representatives, who spoke for themselves at the ILC, with the support and backing of the IUF, WIEGO and many NGOs, researchers, trade unions. Strong domestic worker leaders coupled with effective alliances made for a powerful voice and was a key factor in the victorious campaign.

Resources

- For the full text of the Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189), see http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS_157836/lang--en/index.htm
- For R201: Domestic Workers’ Recommendation, see http://www.ilo.org/rome/risorse-informative/servizio-informazione/norme-del-lavoro-e-documenti/WCMS_157906/lang--en/index.htm
- IDWN. 2008. “Domestic/Household Workers Demand Respect and Our Rights!” Pamphlet on mobilizing for an ILO Convention. Available at <http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/pamILOeng.pdf>
- IDWN. 2010. Domestic Workers’ Platform of Demands. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/IDWN%20-Platform-of-Demands-English-2010.pdf>
- IDWN. “Myths & Realities about Domestic Workers: What THEY say and what WE say.” Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/8%20Myths%20english%20FINAL%281%29%20_0.pdf
- IDWN website: www.idwn.info
- IDWN blog: <http://idwnilo.wordpress.com/>

Focus on Street/Market Vendors

Overview of the Street and Market Vendors Sector

Street vendors sell a wide range of goods and services in public places including pavements, alleyways, parks, parking lots. They sell food, fabric and clothing, toiletries, electrical goods, and handicrafts, and they provide services such as phone and hairdressing, among many, many others. Some sell from fixed stalls, others from temporary kiosks or collapsible stands; still others sell from a piece of plastic on the pavement or move



photo: Chris Bonner

Vendors in Cotonou, Benin selling food and household items

around with bicycles or on foot, carrying a mobile container. Although we do not know just how many street and market vendors there are, we know that there are a significant number, making up a large portion of those working in the informal economy, and particularly in cities in the developing world.

Where national level statistics on street vendors do exist, they show that street vendors in non-agricultural employment make up between 2 and 9 per cent of total employment. As a share of total informal employment, street traders generally account for 15-25 per cent in African cities, 10-15 per cent in Asian cities, and 5-10 per cent in Latin American cities. In many countries, women represent the majority of street vendors. This is especially the case in Africa. In only a few countries where cultural norms restrict women's economic activities do women account for 10 per cent or less of street vendors. However, women street vendors typically earn less than men, and in many countries less than half as much as men.

The most pressing challenge that street vendors face, especially those without a permit, is harassment, removal or even arrest by local government authorities, coupled with confiscation of their goods and requests for bribes. This threat, together with fluctuating supply and demand, child care responsibilities, illness without income protection, and other threats means that income is insecure.

Street vendors face many routine occupational hazards as well. Many must lift and haul heavy loads. Their workplaces typically lack proper infrastructure such as clean running water, toilets, and solid waste removal. They may be exposed to pollution and bad weather. Long working hours also add to their health risks. As own account workers, they are not covered by labour laws and have little or no social protection. There are almost no

national policies or laws for street vendors, with India being an exception. They are usually subjected to local by-laws and ordinances. These are often outdated and/or change frequently, and most are inappropriate for the needs of vendors. They are influenced by local politics, but exclude street traders and their organizations from the policy processes.

Although street vending organizations have existed for many years, some new organizational forms are taking shape in response to changing times. An important example is StreetNet International (officially launched in 2002), an alliance of street vendors promoting solidarity and the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors worldwide. There are also many examples of innovative organizations at the local and national levels. SEWA of India and the Red de Mujeres (Women's Network) of Peru specifically address the concerns of women street vendors.

Street and Market Vendors: Common Demands

- legal recognition and the right to use of urban space
- freedom from criminalization of activities and harassment from authorities
- appropriate policies, laws, regulations favouring and protecting vendors
- provision of infrastructure and facilities such as toilets, water, storage space
- social protection including health care, income protection, child care
- fair taxation
- access to credit
- representation in policy processes and the right to statutory negotiation forums

Resources

This note is drawn substantially from the WIEGO website. For more details see:
<http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors>
Sally Roever and Lissette Aliaga Linares. 2010. Street Vendors Organising: The Case of the Women' Network (Red de Mujeres), Lima, Peru. Available at
http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Roever_WIEGO_OB1.pdf
StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za
SEWA website: www.sewa.org

How Street and Market Vendors Are Organizing

Base Organizations

Organizations take many forms. Unions are quite prominent, as are associations organized by local area or productive activity. Unions tend to work in the political arena i.e. fighting for rights, defending members against harassment; cooperatives help with economic issues through collective organization. There is a focus on organizing against harassment, displacement and bribery and for recognition as important contributors to society. The form of organization is not important. What is important is that vendors are united and strongly organized as the only way to change conditions.

National Organizations

There are unions, union federations and federations/alliances of organizations. They focus on obtaining national policy and laws and ensuring implementation. The advantage of national organizations is they can influence government and they are able to strategize for the long term and not just focus on immediate problems. National centres are working to organize at the local level.

International Organizations

There is only one regional network – *La Red de Sindicatos de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economía Social Solidaria de las Américas* (SEICAP) in Central America. It brings together self-employed, mainly but not exclusively vendors, from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama. There is one international federation, StreetNet International (discussed below). In this sector, internationally, there is no one focus issue, but vendors organize around recognition, publicizing their situation, and solidarity. The advantage of international organizing is information sharing and solidarity, making street vendor issues visible and influencing governments. Linking all levels of organizing is important.

This summary table was compiled collectively by representatives of the vending sector from different countries. It is based on their own experiences and organizations.



Vendor, in the Philippines, selling slippers made by home-based workers

photo: Leslie Tuttle

Table 2: Forms of Street and Market Vendor Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizations	Advantages of this form	Organizing issues
Local/Base		
Cooperatives	Facilitate collective buying and improved income Provide collective services Improve solidarity and reduce competition	Income improvement
Associations Unions City Federations Organized by area or by productive activity	All: Build strength Foster mutual support and solidarity Give voice so vendors can be heard Provide protection	Solidarity Bribe avoidance Opposition to displacements and harassment Improved economic conditions Improved working conditions and facilities
National		
Associations Alliances Unions Federations	Influence government Offer ability to strategize long term Work to gain recognition for workers	National policies and law enactment Implementation of national policies at state and country level
International		
International Federation/Network Regional network (LA)	Allow street Vendors around the world to share issues and learn from each other Develop common strategies and workplans regionally, and collective bargaining or dialogue in international forums	Publicity and awareness raising among the international community on Street Vendors' issues Support from national governments by influencing Improvement of work/lives of vendors globally Solidarity

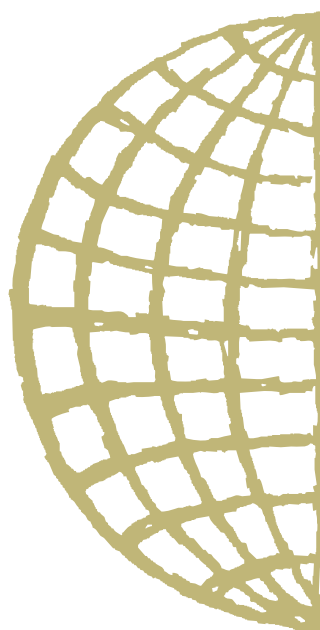
StreetNet International

StreetNet International is an alliance of membership-based organizations (unions, associations, cooperatives) who are directly organizing street vendors, market vendors and/or hawkers among their members. The aim of StreetNet is to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, market vendors and hawkers (i.e. mobile vendors) and on practical organizing and advocacy strategies (www.streetnet.org.za).

Steps in the Formation of StreetNet International

Setting things in motion

In 1995, the Self Employed Women Association of India, SEWA, organized an international meeting of street vendor representatives from 11 countries, to understand the urban space problems faced by them. They identified that they had no forum that could represent their needs and interests. They made a declaration on their demands – the Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors. WIEGO took on the responsibility to raise start-up funds for setting up an international network, and also identified a coordinator to perform that job.



Preparatory work

In 2000 an interim Association (StreetNet Association) with a four-person Steering Committee was set up to coordinate processes leading up to the formal launch of StreetNet International. An office was established in Durban, South Africa, and a coordinator and administrator employed part-time.

The coordinator made field visits to different countries to meet vendor organizations and bring them into StreetNet. As a result, in some countries, new national alliances were formed.

StreetNet Association hosted three regional workshops (Peru 2001, India 2002, Ghana 2002) to consult about four important principles that had to be established: representation and leadership of women vendors; the status of NGOs; political affiliation or independence; and financial self-sufficiency.

Launch

The official launch of StreetNet International took place in Durban, South Africa, in November 2002.

Delegates were invited from the organizations identified in different countries. The delegates adopted a Constitution and the name of the Organization, and elected an Interim Committee to run StreetNet. They also adopted key policies: gender equality, including a constitutional provision for a 50 per cent quota of women on all structures of the organization; NGOs were not entitled to be affiliates but could be service providers; and non- affiliation to political parties. Priority was given to developing national alliances of street vendors in as many countries as possible.



photo: Chris Bonner

StreetNet International Congress, August 2010

In March 2004, the National Organization of Street Vendors of Korea hosted the first StreetNet International Congress of member delegates. The first International Council was elected for a three-year term, consisting of 15 people who come from the membership organizations. Eight have to be women. Many of the affiliates started to be aware of their own gender policies, and some developed their women leadership a bit more consciously.

StreetNet International in 2011

StreetNet has 40 affiliated member organizations, from Africa, Asia and the Americas, with a majority in Africa. It has an international office in South Africa where the International Coordinator, administrative and support staff are based. It has two organizers: one based in Cote d'Ivoire and the other in Guatemala.

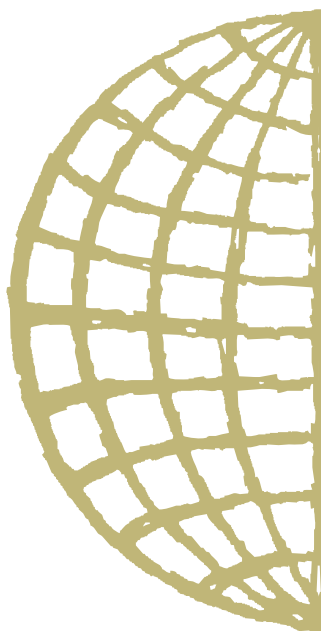
Structure

- International Congress: meets at least once every three years, and consists of members of the International Council and delegates elected by each member organization, based on size.
- International Council: meets annually, and consists of 11 members elected at Congress together with the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, of whom at least 50 per cent must be women.
- Executive Committee: a sub-committee of the International Council consisting of seven members, including the President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, who meet quarterly (in person or by teleconference).
- International Coordinator: is engaged by and accountable to the International Council.

At its 2007 Congress, StreetNet adopted an official demarcation into four regions, and decided to work towards regional coordinating structures based on Regional Focal Point organizations in Nicaragua, India, Niger and Zimbabwe.

Activities

StreetNet reaches out to new organizations and into new regions such as most recently into Central and Eastern Europe. It works to strengthen its affiliates by holding workshops on topics such as collective bargaining; supporting worker education; arranging exchange visits where organizations from different countries can learn from each other. It also uses media tools, such as a regular newsletter, website and mobile phone messaging, to exchange information and encourage solidarity actions. It conducts research that can help build organization, provide information, develop policy to be used in campaigns, negotiations and advocacy. StreetNet International is active on the international stage through its campaigns such as the World Class Cities for All (WCCA) Campaign and through promoting and taking up issues of importance to vendors in forums such as World Social Forum (WSF), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).



Some Current Challenges

- making a more visible impact on urban policy and development planning
- addressing class imbalances in leadership
- keeping leaders accountable
- implementing resolutions
- building internal democracy among affiliates
- striving for gender equality and women leadership in affiliates

Resources

www.streetnet.org.za

Street & Market Vendors: Challenges and Successes

We now turn to the challenges and successes in strengthening organizations of vendors. We start with an example of a base association of migrant street barbers, that has developed innovative activities to enable it to be self-sufficient, an extremely difficult and widespread challenge for informal workers' MBOs. In particular, we look at examples of different forms of organizations and the role they are playing in improving the lives of vendors: a trade union, a cooperative and, importantly, an association of women vendors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), still rebuilding after the ravages of war.

Case Studies

Launching the Siyagunda Association of Street Barbers, in Durban, South Africa

Gaby Bikombo, Chairperson of the Siyagunda Association, prepared this piece about his organization's work.

Siyagunda Association, an organization of street barbers in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, was launched on 16th December 2005 as a result of the decision by eThekweni municipality to manage street vending through a permitting system.

In 2001, eThekweni Municipality created a special department called "Business Support Unit" (BSU) to manage informal trading and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME). In 2003, the BSU implemented a new street trading management system that restricted street trading to demarcated spots in designated areas. Only those street traders who had vending permits were allowed, in accordance with street vending bylaws, to trade. Anyone trading without a valid vending permit was, and still is, called an "illegal trader" and therefore a target of harassment by municipal police.

Many meetings were organized to explain the process that every street trader had to go through in order to "legalize" his/her trading activities. Most street barbers operating in the city of Durban come from other African countries. In this new system, foreign street traders were denied access to a vending permit because they did not possess South African identity documents. This exposed street barbers to constant confiscation of their goods by metro police and prevented them from providing for their households' livelihoods.

With the support of StreetNet and the Durban Legal Resources Centre, an urgent High Court interdict against the eThekweni Municipality was launched in May 2005 to challenge the right of metro police to evict traders from their place of work without an eviction order. Although the vendors lost the court case, the publicity it created forced the BSU to issue vending permits to all foreign vendors who were initially denied the right to trade.

That is when we realized that if we had been organized, we would have had a much stronger case and the verdict would probably have been different – hence the idea of forming an organization with the aim of fighting for the rights and interests of street barbers throughout the province of Kwazulu Natal. Siyagunda Association has made it possible for more than 80 per cent of street barbers in the city of Durban now to possess valid vending permits.



photo: Gaby Bikombo

*Durban's Street Barbers organized to
fight for vending permits*

Unfortunately this success came with a major challenge; as soon as members got their vending permits, they lost interest in Siyagunda's activities. We had to identify other important needs, as well as sources of income for the organization so that we do not depend on membership fees only. We took important decisions on this at our 2008 Annual General Meeting:

- We set up a mini battery centre to charge batteries used by our members in their businesses. This provides our organization with a small income and a livelihood for two families of our members.
- We identified other sources of income for the association such as translation and interpretation services involving English, French, Kiswahili and other languages. We have a signed a translation/ interpretation contract with StreetNet International providing highly needed resources.
- We developed a scheme to support members in difficulties. We run a loan service with an annual interest rate of 10 per cent per year and contribute 500 rand to funerals of active members or their direct family. We also contribute the same amount of money to members who lose their equipment through theft, fire or any other disaster.

For us to be able to continue with these benefits to members, we need to be able to raise enough money. Our translation/ interpretation services are very important and could become a major source of income especially with support from NGOs and organizations.

We are planning to launch a "Financial Cooperative" to enable our members and other vulnerable refugees who have no access to banking, to be able to save money and have access to loans. We also envisage providing other services to members, and hope to gather the necessary support to make this initiative a success.

The Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (CTCP): Street Traders Organizing into a Trade Union in Nicaragua

Sandra Jimenez from the CTCP, talked to Sofia Trevino, WIEGO Global Projects Officer, about the importance of informal workers being part of a union.

The Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (*Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCP*) was founded on 17 June 2002 at a rally organized by informal workers, following the assassination of a deputy commissioner and the detention of many workers. With this detention by police of self-employed workers, it was evident that there was a need for an organization that could represent and protect the interests of the self-employed. This organization started as an association, but it quickly evolved into a union as the only body that could provide a framework for the recognition of workers' rights and demands.

In Nicaragua there are over one million self-employed workers, many of whom work at home, on the streets, as vendors and within the transportation sector. Since its creation, the CTCP has grown to over 28,000 members. Activities aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of joining the confederation, different social projects, and legal/ economic struggles with policymakers at all levels are increasing, resulting in even faster growth today.

The main activities of the CTCP are initiated by seven unions which are organized to represent the predominant sectors of self-employed workers in Nicaragua. First, the moneychangers who work on the streets: they

organized, and then were able to obtain identity cards and consequently gained peoples' trust and increased their businesses. Second was the transport union composed mainly of announcers at the bus stations who have organized. They have the support of the owners and administrators of buses who now rely on their services to attract customers. In addition to this sector, a new and growing union is that of *tricicleros*, a type of taxi service on a tricycle pulling a cart where a person can be transported for short distances at a lower price rate. The growth of this sector is due to high demand. Also within the transport sector are the own account taxi drivers. The fifth union represents street vendors and market vendors. Closely related is the union of vendors at traffic lights, a common and growing activity in Nicaragua. Finally, there is a union classified as "different trades" where all other informal workers, such as carpenters, mechanics, home-based workers and others, can be organized.

Despite the CTCP's achievements in organizing different sectors, there are many challenges due to the high numbers of informal workers, lack of social protection mechanisms and increased poverty. In addressing these issues, the CTCP is working towards becoming self-sustainable and to create a solidarity economy, mainly to provide access to credit which most workers do not have. There is also a need to develop a practice of self-management and savings so that workers can rely on the organization and on themselves when there is a need for credit.

Great progress has been made and the confederation is now recognized at a national and international level. However, this was hard to achieve as there was a need to raise the understanding of the term "worker" among government institutions and among workers themselves. Most informal workers do not recognize themselves as workers, due to the lack of employer-employee relationships. Government institutions did not want to recognize the union at first. The CTCP demonstrated that in most cases informal workers need to work harder than workers employed in the formal sector. They pointed out their contribution to the gross domestic product and to the need for workers rights. Since then, alliances have been made with Managua's Town Hall, the Ministry of Health and other government institutions. The CTCP is working towards the creation of an optional health insurance for informal workers and for collective pricing for medicines.

One of the CTCP's main achievements at an international level is joining RED SEICAP, the Informal Economy Network of Central America, Panama and Cuba. This network is a joint effort to increase the organization, communication and strength of the partners in the alliance. All countries share common interests and values, and are now working together to improve economic opportunities in Central America. Currently, the main focus is to eradicate child labour by implementing a program financed by Intervida, an NGO from Spain which is investing in educating parents about the benefits of keeping their children in school, while creating support programmes and activities at the schools.

The long term objectives are to continue raising the voice, visibility and validity of informal workers internationally and in Nicaragua. Also, to raise the numbers of our affiliates, not just as numbers, but as empowered workers.

Resources

Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (*Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCP*) website: www.ctcpnicaragua.org



photo: CTCP

CTCP is working towards becoming self-sustainable

“In Nicaragua our organization is part of the National Union of Workers. There is an advantage to being part of the National Union of Workers. It can influence the government to take positive decisions such as bettering health and education for persons working in the informal economy. To be part of a National Trade Union helps in capacity building and awareness of unionism.”

Sandra Jimenez, CTCP

Women of Courage: Association of Women Vendors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Sofia Trevino, Global Projects Officer with WIEGO, spoke to Angelique Kipulo Katani, Secretary General, *Ligue pour les Droits de la Femme Congolaise/League for the Defence of Congolese Women (LDFC)*, about her work with women vendors. The LDFC is an association of 2,500 women street and market vendors, hawkers and other informal economy workers, based in four cities in different provinces of the DRC.

“Eighty-five per cent of people in my country are informal workers, and the majority of them are women,” reports Angelique. They often bear the responsibility of supporting and caring for their families and suffer violence against them. They need to be educated about their rights but also helped to find practical ways of caring for their families. That is why Angelique works so hard to help informal women workers in her country.

The women street vendors face daily challenges. “They are constantly harassed and hunted by the police.” Their merchandise is confiscated on a regular basis. The LDFC helps the women to organize themselves into collective groups with a formal structure. It helps them to attain all the required permits and permissions needed to become “legitimate” and thus have some protection. Navigating the bureaucracy is not easy, and there is money required at every step. “It takes time, and if you don’t have courage, you can easily quit.” LDFC accompanies the woman all the way through the process so that they can obtain the rights and privileges needed to conduct their business legitimately (in the eyes of the bureaucracy).



LDFC helps women street vendors fight for rights

The other significant challenge the women vendors face is financing. Women always ask if there is money for micro finance available to buy merchandise and for working capital. “We educate them on how to organize their own financial networks of loans to one another.” This involves making monthly contributions to a collective fund which the group can then draw on to lend money to a single person for a monthly term. Other challenges are found inside the women’s families as “the husbands sometimes do not understand them,” even when they see the benefits of these micro businesses in supporting the family. Women also face many insecurities. For example, the locations used for markets are not secure. Officials can and do come by at any time and claim these areas for other developments, sending the women off.

Angelique sees the growing courage of women in the face of all the difficulties as the most encouraging part of her job. By engaging with them and educating them they are better able to manage their affairs. “When you see these women engaged in the process, they say ‘It’s today or never!’ We have to take control of our work.”

She is now looking forward to the launch of a new training centre they have organized for young women who have abandoned school. There, the women will learn practical skills for employment.

Street Vendors Benefit from Forming the Moo Ban Nakkeela Community Service Cooperative

During the Organizing Workshop held in Bangkok, representatives of MBOs from Africa, Asia and Latin America visited the Moo Ban Nakkeela Community Service Cooperative. This is what they learned during a question and answer session. (Interview notes by Janhavi Dave, Self Employed Women's Association.)

Q.1: Do you have an alliance with other street vendor organizations in Bangkok?

A.1: We are not aware of other Street Vendor organizations in Bangkok and hence do not have any alliance.

Q.2: What are the major issues faced by the street vendor members of your cooperative?

A.2: Security of vending space is the foremost issue faced by members and the second issue is access to credit. The money lenders tend to charge a very high interest rate, which is around 20 per cent per month.

Q.3: Have members tried to get loans from the banks?

A.3: Some members have tried and have even been successful.

Q.4: Filing litigation and fighting a court case is very expensive. How do members arrange for that money?

A.4: We receive funding from foundations supporting such causes. We approach voluntary lawyers and also members contribute Baht 200 per month to run the cooperative and fight for their cause.

Q.5: What is the criteria of the Cooperative to give loans?

A.5: The applicant must be a member and should have saved for six months.

Q.6: Do you provide a loan for purchasing jewellery or for the applicant's daughter's wedding?

A.6: Yes, we do. But, it depends upon the member's savings and the funds with the cooperative. We tend to give loans that are double the amount of the savings.

Q.7: You are a street vendor cooperative. Then why have you shifted your activities to a thrift and credit cooperative?

A.7: We haven't shifted our activities. The aim for the formation of a cooperative was to increase the voice and collective bargaining power of the members and to create access to credit facilities.

Q.8: What is the interest and tenure for the loans provided by the cooperative?

A.8: 12 per cent p.a. and 18 months.



photo: Minty Chen

Vendors in Bangkok benefit from belonging to a cooperative

Q.9: Do you provide loans only from the cooperative savings? Or does the cooperative takes loans from other sources and further lend it to members?

A.9: The loans are provided only from the savings of the cooperative; 80 per cent of savings is used to provide loans, while 20 per cent is kept for emergency purposes.

Q.10: Does your cooperative pay taxes?

A.10: We are exempted from tax, as we are a cooperative. But, we do pay the membership fee to the National Cooperative of Thailand. We also have to pay for the notice board that we put up outside our office.

Q.11: Is your cooperative exclusively for women?

A.11: No, our cooperative has both men and women as members. But for this term, the elected committee is only women, which has 13 members for a two-year term.

Q.12: What is the ratio of men and women membership in the cooperative?

A.12: 80 per cent of members are women as compared to 20 per cent men. The reason for this is that most of the street vendors are women, while men go to work in the factories.

Q.13: Are there any special schemes for women vendors in your cooperative?

A.13: No, it is uniform for all.

Q.14: Who manages the cooperative?

A.14: The 13 elected members have four main roles:

- i. President: the head of the cooperative, arranges meetings and conducts them
- ii. Secretary: supports the president, takes notes during the meetings, helps prepare the agenda and meeting
- iii. Treasurer: responsible for withdrawing money and providing loans
- iv. General Committee Members: they attend the meeting and help decide who should be provided loans

Q.15: Where is the money kept?

A.15: In the bank. And the Treasurer is responsible for withdrawing cash and providing loans.

Q.16: Are all the Committee Members also vendors?

A.16: Yes, they are. Therefore, we don't have our office open every day. The office is open for meetings, collecting savings and distributing loans.

Q.17: What do you do if one vendor starts selling goods at lesser price?

A.17: We haven't faced this situation in the past, as the vendors have known each other for a number of years. But, if there is a situation like this then we won't allow it and stop it immediately.

Q.18: Before 1993, what was the occupation of the street vendors?

A.18: Most of the vendors worked in offices, but there was a recession in the early nineties, which forced them out of their jobs. Thereafter, they became street vendors.

Q.19: Why haven't you tried to unionize further with other street vendor organizations to increase your strength?

A.19: They would love to do that. But, they are full-time street vendors and lack the information and time to do so.

Focus on Home-Based Workers

Overview of Home-Based Workers

It is estimated that there are more than 100 million home-based workers worldwide, the vast majority of whom are women. They do a variety of tasks such as sewing clothes, embroidery, assembling jewellery, making footballs and shoes, baking cakes and making snacks, creating handicrafts and so on. Because they work from their homes they are largely invisible, sparsely organized, often not even recognized as workers. They are among some of the lowest paid workers in the informal economy.

Home-based worker is the term used to describe all those workers who produce goods or services working from their homes (or sometimes adjacent premises). There are two main types of home-based workers:

- **Own Account Home-Based Workers:** self-employed home-based workers who do not hire others but may have unpaid family members working with them. They produce goods and services themselves, and sell them to make a living. They buy their own raw materials.
- **Homeworkers:** those home-based workers who carry out paid work for firms/businesses or their intermediaries. They are usually given the raw materials and are paid a stated amount per piece produced. They usually do not have any direct contact with the markets for the goods they produce. They could be producing for a large or small national firm or for a global company.

Women are over-represented among home-based workers, especially among homeworkers engaged in manual work. A compilation of data from 14 countries found that that the share of women in home-based work was over 75 per cent in seven of the countries, over 50 per cent in another one country,

and over 30 per cent in the remaining six countries. Women are more likely than men to work mainly at home; women are more likely than men to work at home in manual activities; and among home-based workers women are far more likely than men to be engaged in low-paid manual work. From what we know, women home-based workers in manual jobs, especially homeworkers, are among the lowest paid workers in the world.

Home-based workers face many common challenges, as well as challenges that differ according to their employment status. Because of their



photo: HomeNet Pakistan

Home-based workers are largely invisible and among the lowest paid informal workers

isolation, most are unorganized and therefore are not able to bargain with their employers (or intermediaries) for wages, with local authorities for infrastructure and services, or about prices with suppliers. On average they earn very little, especially those working on a piece rate system. Homeworkers are dependent on contractors and intermediaries for orders and for payment. Orders are often irregular and their payments slow to come. Home-based workers generally have little or no protection through labour law or social protection measures. Even where they are producing on order from a business, and should be entitled to conditions equal to those of other workers in the industry, often their real employer is unknown to them and they generally remain without worker benefits and protections. For own account workers the lack of access to capital, as well as technical and marketing assistance makes it difficult to sustain their livelihoods.

As the home is the workplace for home-based workers, inadequate housing and poor services affect their ability to work productively and also affect members of the family. Another challenging issue is health and safety. Home-based workers are exposed to many hazards: some are exposed to dangerous chemicals, others develop posture problems and so on.

However, home-based workers are organizing in some areas, notably Asia and South East Europe. In Asia they have formed national and regional HomeNets to bring together unions, self-help groups, cooperatives, and NGOs so they can build a united voice, raise the profile of home-based workers and advocate for new policies and laws, among other things. There is also already an ILO Homework Convention (C177), which although only ratified in seven countries provides a focus for campaigning and a guideline for government policy and laws.

Home-Based Workers: Common Demands

- recognition as workers and legal status
- recognition of their organizations as worker organizations, and collective bargaining rights
- social protection, including insurance, health, pension, maternity protection and child care
- regular and secure work and income, including at least a minimum wage equivalent
- good physical infrastructure including housing, electricity, water, waste removal
- appropriate occupational health and safety measures
- access to credit
- access to bigger and inclusive markets
- skills training, technology and design upgrading
- capacity building within organizations and leadership development for women

Resources

This material was drawn from the WIEGO website. For more information see <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/home-based-workers>
Celia Mather. 2010. *We are Workers Too! Organizing Home-based Workers in the Global Economy*. WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at <http://wiego.org/wiego/we-are-workers-too>

How Home-Based Workers Are Organizing

There are two types of home-based worker: those who produce work for others working on piece rates (homeworkers or industrial outworkers), and those who are own account workers. They may organize together or separately in their base organizations but their national and regional organizations have members from both groups. While facing some common problems, many of their needs and issues around which they organize will be different, or have a different emphasis.



photo: Sofia Ircino

In Asia, home-based workers have been organizing to overcome their many challenges

Base Organizations

These take a variety of organizational forms, including self-help groups, cooperatives, unions, social enterprises and NGOs. Most of the groups are organized around livelihood issues and social security. An advantage of unions is that they engage in collective bargaining and are more focused on rights than other forms of organization. The advantages of self-help groups, cooperatives, social enterprises, etc., is that they provide a vehicle for improving livelihoods: jobs, loans, access to markets, and regular work. Some are able to negotiate with contractors such as the Thai Fishing Net Group.

National Organizations

There are national unions of informal workers with home-based worker members such as SEWA or national unions of home-based workers affiliated to a union national centre such as the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and country HomeNets which are a mixture of MBOs and NGOs. In Bulgaria there is a national organization which is registered as an NGO but operates like a trade union. The advantage of national organizations is that they can represent workers nationally and engage with national governments around law and policy, share information more widely and collectively improve skills and gain access to markets.

International Organizations

There are two regional HomeNets in Asia: South Asia and South East Asia. At this international (regional) level, much of the focus is on sustaining the networks, accessing funds and promoting solidarity, but information sharing and exchange, joint activities and trainings are also important. And HomeNet South Asia has provided an important vehicle through which to engage policymakers across the region, as well as to build their own trade facilitation organization. International networking gives additional advantages such as the possibility of global representation and recognition, accessing global funds and wider information sharing.

This summary table was compiled collectively by representatives of the home-based workers from different countries. It is based on their own experiences and organizations.

Table 3: Forms of Home- Based worker Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizing	Advantages of this form of organization	Organizing issues
Base organizations		
Self-Help Groups	Regular work and recognition Access to social security, savings schemes Backward and forward linkages in the market place Access to loans Training	Social Insurance Marketing Exploitation by middlemen Wages Political and financial constraints Access to OHS
Cooperatives	Access to loans at lower rates of interest Old age pensions Access to funds Marketing jointly	Policy and law Invisibility / recognition Exclusion from financial, health and other schemes
Social Enterprises	Job opportunities Access to markets Social benefits	Irregular income Migration
Unions of HB Workers	Collective bargaining, with “employer” Policy advocacy Sharing information and experiences Recognition Access to government schemes Leadership building and representation	
NGO-democratic	Voice Marketing opportunities Regular income	
National organizations		
NGOs-democratic Networks Unions Union Federations	Representation at national level Nationwide representation in tri-partite committees Access to productive resources and skills Pressure on government for legal protection Social integration of disadvantaged group Wider dissemination of information Access to technical expertise	Visibility and recognition Policy and laws
International		
Regional Networks	Fund-raising abilities Global recognition Global representation Global networking Wider collaboration: programmes, training, etc. Access to global resources	Retaining of network Funds raising and sustainability Solidarity Regional policy Sharing experiences

The HomeNets

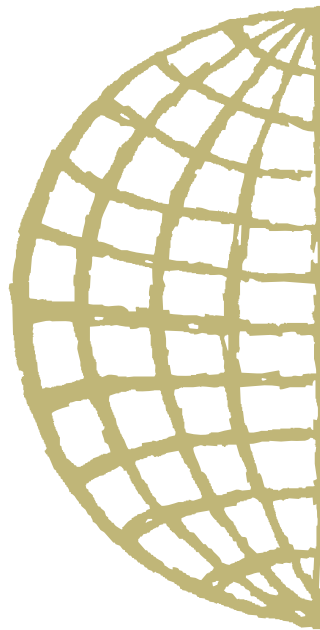
HomeNet International

In 1994 HomeNet International was formed. This was prior to the discussions on, and subsequent to the adoption of, an ILO Convention on Homework (C177) in 1996, at the International Labour Conference. Six years later HomeNet International collapsed. However, organizing and unifying home-based workers has continued through the development and activities of HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet South East Asia and their national affiliates, and more recently through expanding activities in South East Europe and building linkages between home-based workers in Asia and South East Europe.

HomeNets in Asia

HomeNet South Asia is a network of national Homenets from Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and some supportive individuals. HomeNet South East Asia has members in Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia. Both are formal organizations in that they are registered, employ staff and have a governing body.

The national HomeNets in the networks vary in their composition and functioning: some are made up primarily of MBOs while others have a majority of NGOs working for and with home-based workers as their members. Some are not truly organizations of home-based workers but are NGOs that act as a focal point to take forward organizing of home-based workers in that country. The regional HomeNets have active programmes to encourage the development of MBOs at local and national levels. They work to make visible home-based workers, change policies and laws in favour of home-based workers and improve their conditions of work, assist in improving skills, products and market access and develop stronger organizations.



Resources

HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net
HomeNet Southeast Asia website: www.homenetseasia.org

Promoting the ILO Home Work Convention (C177) and the Rights of Homeworkers: A Manual for Workers' Educators and Facilitators by Dave Spooner, edited by Celia Mather: http://www.inclusivocities.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Spooner-Mather_Promoting_ILO_Convention_C177.pdf



photo: HomeNet South Asia

Home-based workers campaign for the ratification and implementation of C177

Home-Based Workers: Challenges and Successes

Despite the many difficulties faced in organizing democratic organizations of home-based workers, starting with their own lack of identity as workers, there are successes. The Association of Homeworkers in Bulgaria have done a remarkable job in gaining ratification of the Convention on Homework, C177, and negotiating a new national law on homeworkers. In Thailand, there is a new law, the Homeworkers Protection Act 2010, brought about through an alliance of home-based workers organizations, NGOs, and activists. These struggles are recorded in the stories below.

An important aim of the HomeNets is to transform themselves into MBOs from their current mixed NGO-MBO format. In the coming pages, we tell the story of how HomeNet Nepal is transforming itself to become an organization where the governance structures are now in the hands of the home-based workers. Finally, in Thailand again, we share the experience of the Two Sergeant's Community Group (cooperative), recorded during the field visit of participants in the Organizing Workshop.

“Cooperation with the union is vital if you are not a union yourself.”

Violeta Zlateva, Association of Home Workers (Bulgaria)

Case Studies

Organized strength of Home-Based Workers in Bulgaria Brings Success!

This case study was compiled from conversations with Violeta Zlateva, President of the AHW, and other files.

In Bulgaria it is estimated that there are at least 500,000 home-based workers, of which a majority are own account workers and women. The numbers are increasing as the economic crisis bites and more and more workers are losing their jobs. Even those employed, or on pension, find it difficult to make ends meet because wages and pensions are low, and so many supplement their incomes with home-based work.

The Association of Home Workers (AHW), Bulgaria, was founded in 2002. It has approximately 40,000 members nationally, the majority being women. AHW has local co-ordinators in all major cities. They are home-based workers themselves and do their association work as unpaid volunteers. Its larger governing body is the Co-ordinating Council made up of 22 coordinators, which meets quarterly, and its executive governing body is the Control Council meeting twice a year. The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body, meeting once per year. All members pay a monthly fee to the association which is retained in the regions and used for activities there. At a national level, once again work for AHW is on a voluntary basis. AHW believes strongly in self-sufficiency and is not reliant on donations, although from time to time money is raised for specific activities, such as the fairs and exhibitions organized for members to market their products. In some of the local areas, AHW has managed to forge a good relationship with the local mayor and local government officials who provide facilities such as meeting rooms free of charge.

The association is registered as an NGO, although it is structured like a union and operates democratically. It is therefore, in practice, an MBO. Unusually, it is also registered with an employer association, the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CEIBG),



*Home-based workers workshop,
Bulgaria, 2011*

photo: Dana Spooner

for tactical reasons such as contact with business, orders and marketing opportunities. It is also an associate member of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CITUB)- KSNB in Bulgarian. Violeta Zlateva, President of AHW explains: "When we tried to negotiate with the government they said we are not unions so we cannot participate. This is why we shifted our tactics and decided to join with the trade union movement." Together with the CITUB the Association successfully campaigned and negotiated with government and employers for the ratification of the Convention on Homework (C177) and finally succeeded in 2009. According to Violeta, "Then it was easier for us to promote changes in the Labour Code which regulates activity and provides protection for homeworkers."

In 2010 the new Labour Code was passed in Parliament, coming into force in 2011. The provisions of the Labour Code cover only those home-based workers that have an employer (homeworkers). Provisions include the obligation for employers to provide a contract of employment and ensure healthy and safe conditions. Workers are covered by the minimum wage, working hours and other conditions applicable to workers employed in factories. But as yet the provisions are not being implemented and government is not attempting to enforce them and the struggle to turn law into practice and improve the lives of homeworkers continues.

Now the association is taking the lead in encouraging home-based workers to organize in other South East European countries: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey. HomeNet South East Europe is a network in making.

Resources

HomeNet South East Europe website: www.homeneteasteurope.com

HomeNet Thailand – Winning Legal Rights for Thailand's Homeworkers

The case study has been reproduced from Celia Mather's "We are Workers Too," with small modifications. The final paragraph has been changed to include up-to-date information.

In Thailand, a survey by the National Statistical Office revealed over 440,000 home-based workers, three-quarters of them women. But in reality there may be up to two million. The country's National Economic and Social Development Board has accepted that the contribution of homework to the national economy is no less than that of the formal economy.

When thinking about how to get improvements in the laws for home-based workers, HomeNet Thailand took a careful look at the existing laws. They found several helpful paragraphs in the country's Constitution, and in legislation on occupational health and safety and welfare rights. They and their allies used this information to lobby for these laws to be applied to home-based workers.

Then, after much lobbying, in 2004 the Minister of Labour passed a special Ministerial Regulation for homeworkers (those who work for others). It contained some good elements, such as a written contract signed by both the employer and employee; payment within 15 days of the work being completed; employers' responsibility for workers' safety; equal treatment for women workers; no sexual harassment; no



photo: Samson Muthigeta

Homeworkers in Thailand make a significant contribution to the national economy

child labour under the age of 15 years; and gave homeworkers' the right to make a complaint to labour inspectors or the courts. There were weaknesses, though: for example, it did not say whether contractors who bring the work to the homeworkers are the employers. And there were many difficulties in getting the regulation implemented.

So HomeNet continued to approach the Ministry for improvements, even meeting with the Minister several times. This led the Ministry to draft the Homeworkeer Protection Act, which was approved by the Cabinet in 2007. Again, it contained some good elements, including many of those above, plus official labour inspection. But the definition of homeworkers was limited, and HomeNet continued to lobby. Then political turmoil slowed its progress in Parliament. However, by March 2010 the Act had been passed by the Lower House.

The Homeworkeer Protection Act B.E. 2553 (2010) was finally published in the Government Gazette on 10 November 2010, and came into force 180 days later, in May 2011. The final Act covers home-based workers who are sub-contracted and not those who are own account workers. It provides for some key protections, such as the obligation to provide a contract, and wages not less than those workers covered by labour law. It also contains prohibitions against occupational health and safety hazards and discrimination, among other things. And it provides for a Homeworkeer Protection Committee which includes worker representatives, and access to the labour court in the case of a dispute. While there are weaknesses in its scope and provisions, it is a big step forward for home-based workers. The challenge now is to implement its provisions and to work towards improvement of the Act.

“Over the past 10 years, we have dedicated our efforts, energy and resources to push for the passage of this law. So its enactment brought us such pride and joy that we would love to give three shouts of delight: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!”

Poonsap Tulaphan,
HomeNet Thailand

Resources

Celia Mather. 2010. We are Workers Too! Organizing Home-Based Workers in the Global Economy, WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at: http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Mather_We_Are_Workers_Too.pdf
For the full text of the Homeworkeer Protection Act B.E. 2553 (2010) see http://www.homenetthailand.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73%3Ahome-workers-protection-act&catid=6%3Ahow&Itemid=8&lang=en
HomeNet Thailand website: www.homenetthailand.org

HomeNet Nepal – Transforming an Organization: Building an MBO

This information was told to Dave Spooner by Om Thapaliya, HomeNet Nepal Coordinator.

HomeNet Nepal (HNN) was formally registered in 2003 as an NGO and in 2008, 174 organizations with an interest or concern in home-based workers had become loosely involved – a wide variety of organizations ranging from grass-roots NGOs to large institutions, such as the ILO.

By 2011, HNN had virtually completed a process of transformation into a network of MBOs, with a new constitution, new structure, and a combined membership of more than 25,000 home-based workers, in 61 member organizations. While this is still a small proportion of Nepal's total home-based workforce of an estimated 2.2 million, it is a significant achievement, and is still growing. HNN can now legitimately claim to be the democratic voice of home-based workers in Nepal. How was this achieved? Is it sustainable in the long-term?

The Inclusive Cities project emerged just at the right time to enable a thorough bottom-up restructuring of the organization. HNN was convinced of the need to have equal involvement of home-based workers in HNN activities and governance rather than an NGO-based client relationship. An organization of workers, not just for workers.

In 2009-10, with the help of HomeNet South Asia and the Inclusive Cities project, HNN was able to undertake the first serious research and analysis of membership-based organizations of home-based workers in Nepal – identifying who was real, and who was sincere. As the result of the mapping exercise, which included the collection of membership data from organizations, HNN built a database of detailed profiles of the 25,000 home-based workers in membership of HNN's affiliates.

HNN decided to use five indicators to determine whether an organization was entitled to claim status as a membership-based organization. In other words, organizations should meet (or plan to meet within a specific time-period) five criteria for HNN membership: a minimum membership of 25 home-based workers; at least one home-based worker should be on the governing body; activities to target home-based workers; explicit reference to home-based workers in the organization's policies; and a constitutional commitment to be for and of home-based workers. Using these criteria, HNN member organizations were allocated to one of four categories, ranging from MBOs (mostly unions) that fulfilled all five criteria, to those who only fulfilled the first – effectively NGOs with some democratic characteristics.

“Strong currents in the river but still the need to cross.”

Om Thapaliya, HomeNet
Nepal Coordinator

There was resistance to change however by some of the NGOs who had been involved in HNN, leading to some very hard debates and difficult discussions. Some were very nervous about the shift towards an MBO approach, and were worried about the sincerity and integrity of some of the MBOs. The main worries were to do with politicization. Would the political parties attempt to infiltrate? Was it too early to move to an MBO strategy? Why not stay in the same structure for another two years or so? Will the MBOs help if HNN hits a crisis, or will they walk away? Other members of HNN were broadly in favour, although all recognized the problems that lay ahead.

“We were all aware of strong currents in the river, but still the need to cross,” recounts Om Thapaliya, HomeNet Nepal Coordinator.

Finally the Board was convinced, and following the National Consultation Workshop on Membership-Based Organizations organized by HNN and HNSA in Kathmandu in September 2010, HNN agreed to a four-month strategy for constitutional change.

After a long process of discussion, a draft new constitution was presented to a General Meeting in February 2011 – with new elections and the new constitution adopted. The new constitution establishes a 15-member governing body, consisting of eleven voting members nominated by membership-based organizations, and four non-voting members: one founding member, two trade union representatives and a legal advisor. This ensured that voting members of the HomeNet Nepal Board were to be home-based workers themselves – MBO representatives directly accountable to their members.

HNN thus completed the first essential steps in building a democratic and representative organization of home-based workers: building a common understanding of what constitutes a democratic membership-based

organization, an agreement on the principles of democratic governance for HNN, and the necessary constitutional changes to make it a reality.

Yet the next steps are challenging. Many of the workers elected to serve on the new Executive Committee will have no previous experience of overseeing a national democratic organization; a new relationship has to be built with Nepal's trade union federations that strengthens solidarity, yet maintains HNN's autonomy; HNN's membership needs to grow, yet, most importantly, the growth needs to be sustainable – especially when external funding cannot be guaranteed beyond a couple of years or so.

In common with home-based workers' organizations (and other informal economy workers' organizations) in other countries, HNN faces major challenges of sustainability. If HNN has its own resources, it can determine its own direction. MBOs which are strong do not need to take a penny from external donors to survive. HNN recognizes that it is essential to keep the basic operating costs to a minimum, with the objective of covering its core budget from self-generated income. Rules of HNN membership stipulate that each organization must collect a minimum of NPR 25 (USD 0.35) per member per year in membership dues. External funds are very welcome and valuable, but not if they become essential to cover the core costs of running the organization. It is at that point that the donor policies begin to overshadow the priorities of the members, and the organization becomes, in effect, just one more of countless small NGOs.

Resources

HomeNet Nepal website: www.homenetnepal.org

Two Sergeant's Community Group: A Community of Home-Based Workers in Thailand

This article was written by Samson Mulugeta, Media Consultant.

On a small side street where children in tricycles played happily, a small army of women sat at small consoles inside their homes, their hands moving rapidly, scooping up cake mix, splashing it on a pancake baker and quickly rolling it into a flaky pastry.

The women laboured up to eight hours a day, as their children played outside. As the hours passed, boxes of the pastries piled up high in the workshops and were soon whisked away to the streets of Bangkok to feed hurried commuters as favourite snacks.

Some workers bought raw material for themselves and produced the Thong Muan, while others worked for others. Most workers earned about \$10 a day for their many hours of toil.

Until recently these home-based workers were on their own, eking out a living without any support or recognition from the authorities. The workers eventually got together and formed a cooperative that formalized their working arrangement. Since 2009, the workers have been organized as a cooperative known as the Two Sergeant Community, which consists of 158 households of 600 people. The group is led by a committee of eight who meet once a month and whose principal duty is to market the group and recruit new members.

The Two Sergeant Community is a member of HomeNet Thailand, which was officially established in June 1998. It is the coordinating



photo: Samson Mulugeta

The Two Sergeant Community is a cooperative member of HomeNet Thailand

centre of the network of home-based producers and homeworkers as well as concerned NGOs in the country. It operates through regional networks of NGOs and home-based workers in the Northeast, the North and Bangkok. Each regional network has its own committee and an office with a regional coordinator who works part-time for HomeNet Thailand. HomeNet Thailand provides the coordination at the national and international levels on policies and issues related to home-based workers. The national committee is composed of two representatives from each region.

The Two Sergeant Community collects small monthly contributions from its members and uses the revenue to offer death benefits to its members and a small scholarship fund for needy students in the community.

Focus on Waste Pickers

Overview of the Waste Picking Sector

Millions of people worldwide make a living collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling materials that someone else has thrown away. Vital actors in the informal economy, waste pickers provide widespread benefits to their communities, their municipalities and the environment. However, they often face low social status and social stigma, have poor living and working conditions, and receive little support from local governments. They are frequently subjected to harassment. Some waste pickers live and work on municipal dumps – as many as 20,000 people in Kolkata, India; 12,000 in Manila, Philippines; and 15,000 in Mexico City, Mexico.

Although we know that there are millions of waste pickers worldwide, mostly found in developing countries, little reliable socio-economic or statistical information exists. A 1988 World Bank study estimated that waste pickers comprised 1-2 per cent of the world's population. A more recent study in India estimated waste pickers in that country numbered 1.5 million people, primarily women and those from socially marginalized groups.

A significant number of waste pickers are women and many are children. They are frequently found in occupations within the recycling chain that provide the lowest incomes and poorest conditions. In Brazil for example, men working as waste pickers earn much more than women in all age groups, with no women among the highest waste picker income groups. In some cities, most waste pickers are migrants, such as in Delhi where waste pickers are often from Bangladesh. In other places, they are likely to be from marginalized groups or rejected from global economic processes.

Although the situation differs across countries, some basic categories of waste pickers exist:

- Dump/landfill waste pickers reclaim recyclables for selling, and organic matter, usually for feeding livestock at disposal sites.
- Street waste pickers reclaim recyclables from mixed waste disposed in garbage bags and bins on streets or in dumpsters; some have



photo: Dana de Brito

Waste pickers in South Africa are beginning to address difficult working conditions through organizing into a national association

arrangements with commercial and/or office buildings and may have access to previously segregated material.

- Doorstep waste pickers collect recyclables as part of door-to-door selective waste collection schemes run by municipalities in partnership with membership-based organizations (MBOs) of waste pickers. Also, cooperatives that enter into formal or informal agreements with commercial and office buildings to collect large quantities of recyclables may have members engaged in the collection of materials by trucks or other vehicles.
- On route/truck waste pickers often designate formal collection crews who segregate recyclables from household waste as a supplement to their salaries. The term can also designate informal pickers who have permission to collect materials alongside collection crews.
- Itinerant buyers collect recyclables from households/businesses in exchange for payment or barter. They generally work on fixed routes and use pushcarts or other collection vehicles.
- Sorters select and sort recyclables by type from conveyor belts or other devices.
- Handlers/processors of organic wastes work in compost plants or biogas plants.

Waste pickers face a number of important risks and challenges:

- Health risks: these include contact with fecal matter, paper saturated by toxic materials, bottles and containers with chemical residues, health residues, contaminated needles, and heavy metals from batteries.
- Risk of injuries: waste pickers work in hazardous and dangerous conditions. Those who work on landfills are particularly at risk.
- Harassment, disrespect and violence: waste pickers are treated as nuisances by authorities and with disdain by the public. They are particularly susceptible to violence by the police. They may face exploitation and intimidation by middlemen, which can affect their earnings.
- Recent trends in waste management such as privatization of municipal solid waste management services, global approaches to climate change mitigation, and the global recession all pose major threats to their livelihoods.

In spite of the significant benefits waste pickers make to public health, the environment and the economy, they continue to suffer poor working conditions without recognition. In addition, the majority of waste pickers worldwide do not have access to any kind of state-sponsored social protection schemes. However, change is on its way. Waste pickers are organizing in many different ways – cooperatives, associations, companies, unions, micro-enterprises.

Some are even forming “women only” organizations in order to better confront gender stereotypes. Research suggests that women waste pickers are more likely to belong to organizations. A small-scale study conducted in Brazil found that 56 per cent of the members of waste picker organizations, cooperatives and associations are women while 44 per cent are men. They are

also building local, national, regional networks as well as networking across the globe.

Waste pickers' membership-based organizations and networks are helping to improve livelihoods and bring recognition and dignity to waste pickers across the globe. They are helping cities recognize the vital role waste pickers play, and encouraging authorities to design more progressive policies that include an important role for waste pickers.

Waste Pickers: Common Demands

- authorized access to waste materials
- payment for environmental services
- health care and social protection schemes
- economical and technical support to unions, cooperatives/associations and micro-enterprises to enable them to enter new niches
- provision of infrastructure for sorting, baling, etc.
- implementation of educational campaigns to help change public attitudes towards waste pickers and also to promote the segregation of recyclables
- extended legal frameworks that enable the hiring of waste pickers as service providers
- provision of identity cards
- preferential rights to work on source segregation schemes
- clear tendering processes for waste collection so that waste pickers can be bidders
- equitable distribution of profits in the recycling chain
- credit lines for equipment and other materials
- provision of work facilities: sorting warehouses, crèches (day care services), etc.
- programs for the eradication of child labour
- participatory channels: platforms for joint planning and implementation of solid waste programs
- capacity building courses on organizing, technical aspects of recycling, etc.

Resources

For a more detailed version of the above see: <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/waste-pickers>

See also the Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivocities.org/organizing/waste-picking/>

Melanie Samson. 2009. Refusing to be Cast Aside. Waste Pickers Organising Around the World, WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Samson-Refusing-to-be-Cast-Aside-Wastepickers-Wiego-publication-English.pdf>

How Waste Pickers are Organizing

Base Organizations

Cooperatives and associations are the most common forms of organization, especially in Latin America. In India there are examples of unions which have also formed cooperatives such as SEWA and KKKPK. The key focus is access to materials, the right to work and defence against harassment.

National Organizations

These are most common in Latin America, e.g. Brazil and Colombia, where cooperatives form federations/alliances/networks, often known as movements. Important organizing issues relate to changing laws, recognition and building a common identity. The advantage of national organizing is that waste pickers can speak with one voice, with their numbers giving them a public profile, and the power to access and influence government and industry.

International Organizations

In Latin America there is a regional network, the Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers Network, and internationally there is a developing Global Alliance of Waste pickers. A distinction is made between those alliances that include workers' organizations and NGOs such as the Global Alliance of Waste pickers and Allies, formed to provide an identity for the waste pickers and allies such as WIEGO and GAIA at the Climate Change Conferences, and those alliances or networks composed of only workers' organizations such as the Latin American and Caribbean Network. International networks focus on influencing international policy but also issues relating to the market functioning at a global level. Their advantage is that they unite waste pickers in different countries and provide solidarity,

help develop a common identity and profile and gain recognition and respect, provide a means to share experiences and information and, at a global level, influence global and national policies.

This table is compiled from a discussion by waste picker representatives from different countries at the Organizing Workshop. It is based on their own experiences and their own organizations.



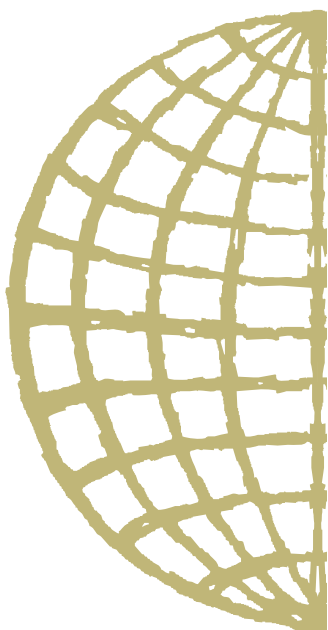
photo: Anil Thirumani

Meetings of MBO members play a crucial role in building unity and strengthening organization

**Table 4: Forms of Waste Pickers Organizations,
Advantages and Issues**

Forms of Organizing	Advantages of this form	Organizing issues
Base/Local Organizations		
Cooperatives (or associations operating as cooperatives)	Offer recognition Allow for processing and selling collectively to get better prices Help get rid of middlemen Allow pooling of resources/ facilities Facilitate negotiation with local governments	Defense against harassment by police, authorities Improved earning capacity Secure access to material Secure right to livelihood/ work Facilities and rights from local government
Associations	Facilitate negotiations with middlemen, dump site manager, local authorities Provide means to self-discipline and work organization Open channels to other waste picker organizations	
Non registered informal organizations	Facilitate negotiations and Provide a means to self-discipline and work organization Provide support for individual problems	
Unions	Offer recognition as workers Serve as vehicle for collective bargaining with authorities, contracts Provide links to and support from other unions	
Local networks of cooperatives	Offer improved income through collective processing and selling Foster moving up value chain Reduce power of middle-men	Better prices
National organizations		
Associations	Negotiate with governments Access donors Foster solidarity Facilitate information sharing Raise profile and public awareness	National level laws and policies Recognition of occupation Building a common perspective
Networks and Movements	As above Build political awareness Offer linkages with other social movements	As above
Unions	Undertake collective bargaining Foster recognition as workers Bring support from union movement Provide access to resources, skills, influential organizations	As above
Alliances	Provide linkages and access to resources	

International Organizations		
Alliances – which includes workers’ organizations and NGOs	Bring in additional skills, knowledge Raise profile across wider spectrum Provide access to additional resources	International policy influence Policies in other countries Global market issues
Networks-only workers’ organizations	Empower worker leadership Offer global and national recognition Provide common worker voice Collaborate with WPs globally	As above Solidarity Organizational skills Sharing information



Waste Pickers’ Global Networking

The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers brings waste picker organizations from Latin America, India and Africa into a networking process. In this way, waste pickers engage in joint activities which are planned by an interim global steering committee made up of waste picker organization representatives from different regions. WIEGO facilitates the networking process, helping with resource mobilization, capacity building, coordination and support through its team of global and regional coordinators, researchers and others. As well as a global programme, there are extensive programmes in different countries and regions in support of waste picker’ organizing activities and livelihood development. Further support is provided through alliances and partnerships, in particular with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives/Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA).

In 2007 waste picker organizations in Latin America and India began the global networking process, and in 2008, in Bogota, Colombia, they held the First World Conference of Waste Pickers, “Waste Pickers without Frontiers.” The conference was organized by an international steering committee

composed of waste picker organizations from India and Latin America, and supportive individuals and organizations including WIEGO and the AVINA Foundation.

Since then, global connections have been strengthened through increased communication, sharing of experiences on common issues and challenges, learning exchanges and visits, global meetings, alliance building and participation in global events impacting on waste pickers, such as the United Nations Framework on the Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations



photo: Leslie Tuttle

First World Conference of Waste Pickers, “Waste Pickers without Frontiers,” March 2008

(this is discussed in the Case Studies, below). Waste pickers and support organizations are also reaching out to new groups in the different regions, to support them and bring them into the networking process.

Through these activities they are forging solidarity and a unified voice, which is increasingly being heard, bringing with it recognition of informal recycling as a valuable occupation and waste pickers as important environmental players who bring benefits to all.

Resources

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org

Building a Regional Movement: The Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers Network

The Red Latinoamericana y de Caribe Recicladores/Catadores (Red Lacre), or Latin American Waste pickers Network, is a network that brings together democratic, waste picker organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean – primarily national movements formed by cooperatives.

“In 2005, in the City of Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, I had the opportunity to help gather a few leaders of waste pickers’ organizations from four Latin American countries. Who would have imagined at that first meeting that, eight years later, those same leaders and countries would be part of a network that, to date, gathers organizations from Asia, Africa and Latin America?” said Lucia Fernandez, WIEGO’s Waste Pickers’ Global Coordinator.

During 2006 and 2007, cooperation increased and more countries became involved. Despite resource and other challenges, “the will was always stronger than the difficulties, and support from some allies came swiftly,” Fernandez says. They succeeded in holding several meetings and exchanges, with the assistance of the AVINA Foundation. Thereafter the Network grew and at their Third Conference, held in conjunction with the First World Conference, “Waste Pickers without Frontiers,” in 2008, representatives from 15 Latin American countries participated.

The Network’s key objectives are recognition of waste picking as an occupation, to help create and strengthen national waste picker associations, share information, promote public policies and laws that include, formalize and dignify the work of waste pickers, as well as global policies that recognize their work and bring benefits to waste pickers and society as a whole such as climate change, poverty mitigation.

“We are a social movement and so the objective is constant movement and change,” noted a participant in a meeting held between the Network and WIEGO in June 2011. Hence bureaucracy is avoided; leadership and administration is decentralized, with the Secretariat being split into Communication (Chile), International (Colombia) and Administration (Brazil), all of which are subject to rotation from time to time. However, there are no formal structures, nor does the organization have office bearers such as a President or General Secretary.

At the moment a majority of the leaders are men, but there is a recognition that this has to change and plans are underway to support the participation and leadership of women waste pickers within the Network. This move comes at an important moment. In late 2011, waste picker leaders from six

“ ... there is already a global network as we pass information to each other. It is not necessarily necessary to have meetings. But we know what is happening to each other.”

Nohra Padilla, quoted in *Refusing to be Cast Aside* (Samson, 2010)

countries carried out a mapping exercise in more than 20 cities in Central America. One important finding was that there is a huge percentage of women waste pickers working in those countries, reinforcing the need for a serious approach to gender equality, and women's full participation in the movement.

Resources

- Melanie Samson. 2009. *Refusing to be Cast Aside. Waste pickers Organising Around the World*, WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Samson-Refusing-to-be-Cast-Aside-Wastepickers-Wiego-publication-English.pdf>
- Lucia Fernandez. "Towards a Global Network: Waste Pickers without Borders" *Inclusive Cities Newsletter*, August 2011. Available at <http://www.inclusivecities.org/blog/inclusive-cities-newsletter-index-august-2011/>
- RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net

Waste Pickers Challenges and Successes

We look here at two different national networks of waste picker organizations – from Brazil and from India. They have a different history, come from different cultures, have different structures and differing achievements. We also focus on a local association in Senegal that has made major gains for members but is under threat as the dump on which it is based is scheduled to be closed down. We then get advice from the KKP KP on organizing women workers and an example of a technique they use to educate women waste pickers about the Union. Finally we record some of the achievements made by waste pickers and allies in their struggle to influence the global Climate Change negotiations.

Case Studies

Organizing Brings Achievements. National Movement of Pickers of Recyclables (MNCR), Brazil

Article written by Sonia Dias, WIEGO Waste Sector Specialist.

The year of 2001 marks a landmark in the history of Brazilian waste pickers (*catadores de recicláveis* or pickers of recyclables). In this year the MNCR was formally created in a Congress in Brasília, the capital city of Brazil, attended by around 1,600 *catadores* and their supporters. *Catadores* delegates issued a manifesto – the "*Carta de Brasília*" – where they set out their demands.

The MNCR is a social movement whose main purpose is to organize the *catadores*, promote their recognition and ensure public policies that integrate them into formal solid waste systems. It is guided by democratic principles that ensure collective decision making, political autonomy from parties and industries, direct action to promote the *catadores* and the building of solidarity with the struggles of other marginalized groups. The movement is formed by associations and/or cooperatives.

Ten years after the creation of the MNCR, what have been the main achievements as a result of being organized?



photo: Dora de Brito

MNCR works to promote the inclusion of "catadores" into formal solid waste systems

VOICE: There has been a large increase in the number of *catadores* organized into cooperatives and/or associations – around 500 collectives of which 300 are affiliated to the MNCR. Participatory stakeholders’ forums were created for drafting inclusive recycling programs. This has contributed to greater recognition of the *catadores*, and amplified their ability to voice their interests. The formation of an Inter-ministerial Committee for Social Inclusion of *Catadores* (CIISC), where MNCR is represented, is an indicator of the public status they have achieved.

VISIBILITY: The *catadores* managed to get their occupation included in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) in 2002 making them visible within the official statistical system in Brazil, thus improving their social status and image. Brazil is the only country in the world that can provide numbers, socio-demographic data, etc. on informal waste recyclers.

VALIDITY: Recognition of the *catadores* as legitimate economic actors is demonstrated by the level of support for their associations/cooperatives and national movement from different sectors. This has resulted in the integration of *catadores’* collectives in local recycling, such as in Diadema municipality, where a Law was passed allowing *catadores* organizations to be contracted as service providers for the municipal recycling scheme.

Additionally, national government has a strong commitment towards developing favourable policies for the sector, indicating that *catadores’* organizations are recognized by the political system as a legitimate actors. Some examples of the many achievements are:

- The Ministry of the Cities in 2005, created a National Training Program in cooperation with universities to address the need for capacity building in SWM.
- The Ministry of the Environment opened up, in 2003, a special line of funding (US\$2.6 million) for waste pickers’ cooperatives.
- Presidential Decree 5940/06 made it mandatory for federal buildings to donate recyclables to the *catadores’* collectives.
- The Brazilian Bank for Economic and Social Development created a social fund for *catadores’* collectives to use for infrastructure such as warehouses, meeting places, equipment, etc.
- The 2010 National Solid Waste Policy obliges municipalities to draft plans stating alternatives for *catadores’* inclusion in solid waste systems when closing an open dump.

The MNCR has strived towards self-reliance while fighting for public policies. It has encouraged and given support to the creation of local networks of cooperatives for bulk selling and/or processing of recyclables allowing for less dependency on fluctuating recycling markets.

The MNCR is conscious that is only through organizing and social mobilization that the *catadores* can make their voice heard, achieve visibility and recognition of its validity as a legitimate actor in solid waste systems.

Growing Organically: Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

This case study is an updated and edited version of "The SWACHH National Alliance of Waste Pickers, India," in Melanie Samson (2009) Refusing to be Cast Aside. Waste Pickers Organizing Around the World; updated with the assistance of Nalini Shakar, AIW Coordinator, and compiled by Chris Bonner.



The Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) is an alliance of over 30 organizations working with waste pickers in cities across India. AIW estimates that there are more than one and a half million waste pickers in India.

In the late 1990s trade unions, NGOs, university departments started to work with waste pickers in different parts of India. Each group approached organizing and advocacy activities from their different orientations and philosophies: gender justice, caste discrimination, worker rights and the environment. Interaction between the different groups was informal and happened organically according to the member needs.

It was only in March 2005 that eight organizations met together and decided to forge an alliance and form a network. The network was originally called SWACHH, but changed its name to the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers to better reflect the alliance aspect of the work.

The Form

The AIW is not a registered body, since as a strategy the groups decided to allow the national network to grow organically. The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers in Pune functions as the secretariat for AIW, and in 2008 hired a coordinator. There is no written constitution or membership fee although individual organizations contribute by, for example, paying for their own transport to meetings.

Membership

The membership of AIW includes more than 30 organizations. Some are MBOs of waste pickers like trade unions, or cooperatives, most are NGOs registered as public trusts or societies. Some of the organizations have set up cooperatives or companies that complement their activities as a trust, society or union.

Activities

The agenda for working together is driven by the needs of the day and includes responding to changing environments that affect the waste pickers' work. AIW is engaged in highlighting the contribution of waste pickers. It strives to integrate waste pickers into the solid waste management systems in the different municipalities; advocates for inclusion in social security schemes and opposes the setting up of waste-to-energy projects that take away the livelihoods of waste pickers. Activities include:

- supporting organizations to strengthen their capacities to organize waste pickers and integrate them into solid waste management systems
- organizing learning workshops and exchange programmes
- organizing events that bring together a large number of waste pickers on one platform at city, state and national levels

photo: KKPKP

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers is engaged in highlighting the contribution of waste pickers

- building support and solidarity among AIW members to effectively address challenging situations at local levels
- hosting and participating in international exchange programmes
- facilitating participation of waste pickers in the UNFCCC (climate change) processes

Successes

AIW is gaining recognition by government officials as an authentic representative of waste pickers. As a result of AIW advocacy efforts the Urban Development Department in Delhi has sent a circular to all State Principal Secretaries advising on the various methods of integrating waste pickers in the solid waste management systems and recommending that they be given identity cards. AIW has been on a government task force to help draft a social security scheme for waste pickers and is represented on a committee established by the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry to examine the Municipal Solid Waste Rules (2000) with a view to integrating waste pickers.

Resources

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers. 2010. "Livelihoods with Dignity." Available at <http://wiego.org/publications/livelihoods-dignity>
 Alliance of Indian Wastepickers newsletters are available at <http://www.inclusivocities.org/current/media/>

Challenges and Inspiration: Book Diom, Association of Collectors and Recyclers of Mbeubeuss, Senegal

Compiled and written from a variety of sources by Chris Bonner.

Book Diom is an Association of waste pickers who collect and recycle materials at the Mbeubeuss landfill in Dakar, Senegal. The Association was set up in 1995 as a result of waste pickers' frustration with the lack of recognition for their work. They saw that an organization could help build solidarity, provide a place where they could talk about landfill issues, and a vehicle through which they could address their problems.

The objectives of Book Diom are to promote the economic, social and cultural development of their members with support from development partners. Since its creation more than 15 years ago, Book Diom has made many gains in improving the situation of its members and their families. For example, they now have facilities on the landfill such as a health centre, a literacy centre and a credit and savings coop. Training is also provided on important issues such as e-waste.

Book Diom is a registered association. It has a membership of 800 waste pickers among the 1,200 workers on the landfill. It is a membership based organization, with a democratic structure that allows for regular meetings of members and regular elections of its office bearers: president, vice-president, secretary and deputy, treasurer and deputy. It works with a number of NGO partners. Resources to run the organization come from contributions from waste pickers and from partners working at the site.



Book Diom member Harouna Niasse speaks at a press conference at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP17), Durban 2012

photo: Demetria Tsoulouras

But the waste pickers of Mbeubeuss face an enormous challenge. In 2002 the Senegalese government decided to shut down the landfill, but have not yet implemented this as they have yet to find a suitable site for the new dump. The threat still hangs over the waste pickers.

Through the Association, waste pickers have engaged with the authorities and private companies involved around the closure. So far, they have been offered pensions for those over 55 and educational programmes for children under 16, and some small compensation. At the new recycling centre a restaurant, housing and health centres are promised, but yet to be seen. The biggest issue for the waste pickers is the loss of jobs and livelihoods and the divisive way in which the authorities propose to move forward. They have offered jobs to only 350 waste pickers at the new recycling centre. This leaves the majority of members without work and a means of livelihood. It pushes their families into poverty. It breaks down the solidarity built up through their organization. However, the struggle is not yet over.

They are encouraged by the solidarity and support given to them by waste pickers from India, Africa and Latin America and organizations like WIEGO. They are inspired by the visit to India in June 2011 by Book Diom leaders, and the success stories of waste pickers in Pune, India. They have already met with the authorities to put forward ideas for creating more jobs, drawing on these success stories.

Resources

Fanny Chantreau. 2011. "Learning from India." *Waste Picking in Africa*, newsletter Volume 1.1, September 2011. Available at <http://globalrec.org/2011/11/13/learning-from-india/>

Organizing Women Waste Pickers: "Always start where the women are"

The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers in Pune, India has a strong history of organizing women waste pickers. Surekha Gade, waste picker, and Mohan Nanavare, President of KKPKP, provide the following advice on how to organize women workers.

Always start where the women are. We have to identify the issues of concern, problems they are facing, their culture, traditions, and their livelihoods. Take up the issues and try and show successes. They need to be interested and motivated to join by seeing real benefits of membership. We have to enhance their capacity.

Use methods, language and actions that are familiar to them and with which they feel comfortable. Men should not patronize women. A man should not think he is handing down rights to a woman. Make men aware of gender inequality. In Pune, India, there was a campaign to get men to do the washing in their families.

KKPKP finds that using educational games helps women understand about their situation, and about the importance of the union, organizing and struggle. Here is an example shown in the Organizing Workshop.

The Chained Elephant: Educational Game

(Put into words by Laxmi Narayan, KKPKP)

Objective

To show that:

- Each individual is capable of getting out of her situation and breaking shackles that bind her.
- Sometimes where we are is partly because we choose not to struggle enough to get out of it.

Material required

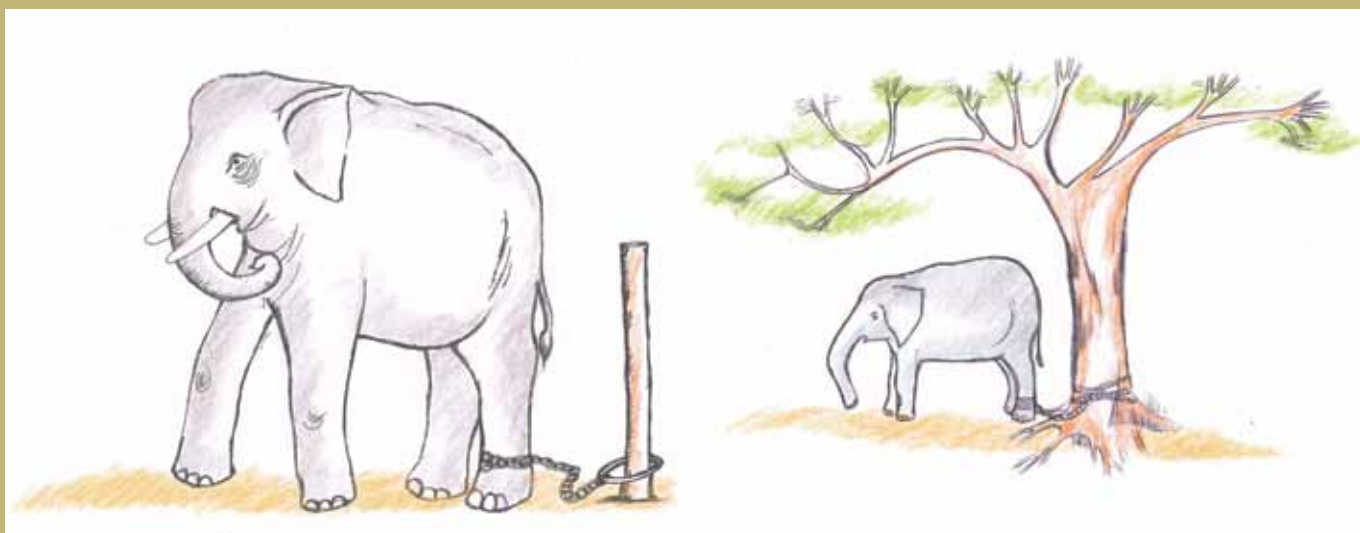
Flash card or a drawing showing an adult elephant tied with a rope to a small stump and a baby elephant chained to a huge tree.

Methodology

- The facilitator starts by asking participants to describe what they see in the picture and to try and analyze the anomaly in it, i.e. why do you think the baby elephant is tied to something so much bigger than the adult that is tied to a branch/stump?
- Participants are encouraged to think creatively of why this must be so. Usually they will come to the “answer” or reason themselves, which is:

Baby elephants are usually tied up to trees by their handlers (mahouts), so they can't escape. Try as they might, and whatever pressure or force they put they do not manage to get free. When they grow up and become adults, they stop trying to escape because they don't realize that they can easily get free. Only the symbol of bondage is needed. The chains are not really needed any more.

- The facilitator then asks participants to compare the adult elephant's situation to their / our own. There are so many instances when our strength (physical, numerical, moral or emotional) is actually so much more than that of the “oppressor,” whether it is a drunken husband beating his wife, upper caste exploiting dalits or waste pickers being cheated by numerically fewer scrap dealers.
- The facilitator concludes by saying a lot of the shackles that bind us are only in our heads, and if we choose to break free, we can.



Waste Pickers Mobilizing at the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations

By Mariel Vilella, GAIA Climate Change Campaign Coordinator, with files from and Leslie Vryenhoek, WIEGO, Writer/Editor.

Waste pickers are fighting for their livelihoods against privatization of waste management and “waste-to-energy” schemes that favour corporate incinerators and which burn up their potential earnings. Since 2009 waste pickers around the world have been working with WIEGO and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) as the “Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and Allies” to raise their voices on the world stage and struggle for recognition of their significant environmental contribution.

The Global Alliance has been participating in the United Nations Climate

Conferences (COPs) and making interventions around Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) policies – one of the most important UN financing mechanisms for “waste-to-energy” projects – and the development of a Green Climate Fund. Through these activities, waste pickers have developed a strategic understanding of international climate policies that affect their lives. This has enabled groups from different regions to work together and advocate for their rights in a high profile international arena, building unity, raising their visibility and gaining recognition and validity for their work.



The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers has attended climate change conferences to engage on issues of “waste-to-energy” projects and a Green Climate Fund

One of the important achievements of the Global Alliance’s collective organizing and participation in the UNFCCC processes has been their ability to change the conventional wisdom around waste pickers’ issues with the public and among decision-makers such as government officials, scientific and technical experts, and negotiators. Interest has been created by the waste pickers’ presence at climate meetings, their media exposure and by publications focused on their environmental contribution. As a result, many more NGOs and some government officials and development agencies now better understand and even support the waste pickers’ cause. Critical analysis of the CDM, along with intense campaigning to gain recognition, has contributed to the CDM Executive Board’s agreement to revise the rules applying to the waste sector (this revision is in process).

Some Highlights

Bonn Climate Change Talks - June 2009: Formulating the Demands – Waste picker organizations, GAIA and WIEGO met and set up the foundations of their common agenda for the UNFCCC negotiation process. They produced a waste pickers’ statement of demands that was widely publicized.

UNFCCC Conference, Copenhagen (COP15) December 2009: Reaching a Global Audience – At COP 15, waste pickers shared their experiences and advocated for alternative funding mechanisms to support fair and just solutions to climate change. They gained extensive media coverage and reached a global audience, setting the stage for future gains.

Tianjin Climate Change Conference - September/October 2010: Speaking for Civil Society – A delegation of three women leaders and an activist from the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) spoke at the Conference, including at the inauguration plenary where a waste picker was selected to speak on behalf of civil society as a whole.

UNFCCC Conference, Cancun (COP16) December 2010: Solidarity Action for Waste Pickers’ Rights – During COP16, 15 waste pickers (pepenadores) in Northern Mexico were detained for protesting the closure of a dump and the potential privatization of the Solid Waste Management system there. The Alliance members in Cancun quickly planned a protest to show their solidarity and highlight waste pickers’ rights. The high media attention increased pressure on the authorities and the pepenadores were eventually released from prison.

UNFCCC Conference, Durban (COP17) November-December 2011: Public Profile and a Forum for Women – At COP 17 the Global Alliance delegation was boosted by a large number of waste pickers from different parts of South Africa – members of the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) – who took the opportunity to strengthen SAWPA and raise their national profile. The delegation made its presence felt at many conference events, including the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice march, the CDM Executive Board Meeting, and at a new forum focused on women and climate change where women waste pickers from India were able to express their views on the role of women waste pickers.

“The wonderful part from my travels has been that other waste pickers have started to recognize the value of what they do. None of us really knew that we played such an important part in protecting the environment and mitigating climate change, including me.”

Sushila of KKP KP, as told to Maitreya (KKP KP)

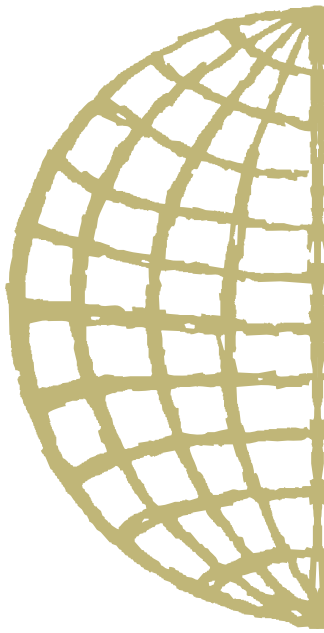
Resources

WIEGO website: <http://wiego.org/wiego/waste-pickers-united-nations-climate-change-conferences>

Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/climate-change/>

GAIA website: www.no-burn.org

Mariel Vilella. 2011. “False Solutions to Climate Change.” Waste Picking in Africa, newsletter Volume 1.1, September 2011. Available at <http://globalrec.org/2011/11/13/false-solutions-to-climate-change-cdm-incineration-and-landfill-gas-systems/>



Section Three

Organizing Lessons & Debates: Learning from Each Other



photo: Julian Lueckmann

Meetings and conferences provide an opportunity for informal workers from different countries and sectors to learn from one another – WIEGO General Assembly 2010

Organizational Development Challenges

Through coming together and sharing organizing experiences, informal workers are learning lessons within and across sectors and countries. Despite differences in occupations and country contexts, they have found much in common: in their situation as informal workers and in their organizing challenges and strategies.

Drawing on the experiences shared at the Organizing Workshop, this final Section is structured around a selection of the practical organizational development challenges that were highlighted for base MBOs and for networks. The subjects covered are:

- formation and transformation
- developing international networks
- maintaining democracy
- sustainability
- making gains

The material draws out similarities and differences between the four focus sectors, poses questions for debate, and pulls together some emerging lessons and ideas on how to overcome problems.

“These contacts bring shared knowledge and experience that are valuable in and of themselves”

Angelique Kipulo Katani
(LDFC)



photo: Ricardo Valencia

Domestic worker organizers share their experiences, Organizing Workshop, 2011

Challenge 1

Formation and Transformation: Building Democratic MBOs

Building a new organization, transforming or extending an existing organization, whether at the base level or at national or international levels, involves a group of workers, or a group of existing organizations, with a shared interest. They must come together and agree on the need for an organization that can achieve an improvement in their situation through collective activity. This means establishing the purpose, processes, plans and principles that will enable the organization to be sound and sustainable. Most importantly, the process has to be participative, democratic and follow a realistic timetable.

“There is no single way of organizing – there are many ways of organizing to achieve our goal.”

Workshop participant

Against the complexities of the real world, however, an ideal process is not always possible. Often informal workers respond to a crisis, to burning issues or an unusual opportunity with spontaneous and informal organization. In these circumstances they do not carry out careful planning or follow neat steps, but they may harness this initial energy and turn it into something lasting.

It is also never easy to transform an organization, such as from an NGO structure to an MBO (as in the case of some HomeNets in Asia), or from a religious group into a trade union (a route followed by some domestic workers). Established ways have to change, new skills need to be acquired and resources found. There may be resistance from leadership, members or from a supportive NGO due to fear, suspicion or protection of vested interests.

Lessons and Guiding Questions

When forming an MBO or when transforming an existing hybrid or mixed structure into an MBO, some key questions have to be answered. These apply regardless of the sector or level.

A preliminary and essential consideration is how the group members perceive themselves. Do they see themselves as workers? This will determine whether or not the group organizes into a workers' organization or in some other form of association, for example a business association or a for-profit company. Within the informal economy, identities are not always clear.

DEBATE: Are We Workers?

Informal workers often struggle to be recognized as workers: own account workers such as vendors or waste pickers are often labelled by the public and even trade unionists, as “businessmen” or “entrepreneurs” rather than as workers; domestic workers and home-based workers are seen as “doing what women do.” Sometimes informal workers don't recognize themselves as workers. Home-based workers often say that, “they are doing a leisure activity or doing it for a hobby,” and do not recognize their home as a workplace.

The line between being an employer and an own account worker is often blurred as many own account workers, for example vendors, have assistants who may be unpaid family members or those looked down

upon because of caste, gender, or origin. Some employ workers on a more regular but informal basis and under poor conditions. They claim that they are poor themselves and cannot afford to provide minimum wages, social protection and so on. At what point does a worker cease to be a worker and cross to employer status?

Once this identity is established, then the following questions need to be addressed.

Do we need a new organization?

Is it necessary to create a new organization, or is there already an organization in place that we should join?

A group of informal workers may wish to create their own organization, specifically designed around their circumstances, but many groups of workers may prefer to join an organization that already exists if it provides support and democratic structures appropriate to their needs. It might involve forming a new branch or section of an existing trade union or cooperative, for example. There may be some sacrifices in autonomy and self-identity, but larger organizations are often more financially sustainable and can benefit from shared resources. Before establishing a new organization, it is worth exploring what other options are available. Unity is strength!

What are the key objectives of the organization?

The overriding purpose is always to act with, and on behalf, of the members in their role as workers – own account (producers, service providers) or waged workers – and to improve their position in society, in particular, their economic status.

Within this, it is important to decide on the primary objective: Is it to advance the members' economic/livelihood interests or to struggle for rights and improved working conditions? Is it to challenge local or national government or to have an international voice? This will guide the basic organizational form, e.g. a cooperative or a union; a tight international federation, or a loose alliance.

Who are the members?

Be clear who the organization is of and for: Who will it serve? What common interests bring the potential members together and what might divide them?

Other considerations are whether the members are individuals, existing associations or groups, or a mixture; if associations or groups, is there a minimum membership requirement? Is membership restricted to pure MBOs or will individuals or organizations (NGOs) outside of the constituency be admitted as members? And if so, what is the status of their membership? These latter questions particularly apply when establishing federated organizations.

What are the issues we want to organize around?

Burning issues are often what bring workers together in the first place. Having an immediate issue or issues around which to organize is important. These lend urgency and energy and will form some of the initial specific objectives of the organization, but are likely to change over time. So, the initial motivation for organizing may be around savings and credit but over time, the motives will shift to collective forms of organizing for production or for advancing or defending rights as workers.

“There is a difference between capitalists and workers. In many countries the idea of a worker is confused. They don't see us as workers, when in reality we are workers. If we are not workers then what are we? We see ourselves as workers but government and other organizations are pushing us to see ourselves as entrepreneurs. It is important to make people know that we are all workers and we all have rights”

Guillermo Onofre Flores,
FETTRAMAP

What principles underlie the kind of organization we want?

It is good to have an understanding of the principles on which to base the organization early on. Again these will develop, but principles such as democracy and membership control, accountable leadership, gender equality, and financial independence will guide how the organization is established, what form it takes and how leadership should behave.

What form of organization will be most appropriate?

The primary objective(s), the scope, and the principles will all guide the form of organization which is most suitable. But a combination of other factors will determine the actual form: legal frameworks, political situation and history, organizational space and support, occupation of members, culture and gender composition, as well as founding leaders. (See below for different organizational forms.)

What structure will best help us achieve our objectives?

Choose a structure that is capable of effective decision making, and one that is based on democratic principles. Accountability and control by members is easier to achieve at a local level where direct member participation is possible, but becomes more complex with national and global organizations where representation is through leaders. Requirements for regular election of leaders and their recall when necessary; provisions to enable full participation of women; obtaining mandates from, and reporting back to, members; financial contributions, controls and transparent reporting are all essential features to be built into the structures. Legal requirements and the particular organizational form and scope will influence the details.

What resources and support are available to us?

Assess what resources are needed to form, run, sustain and make gains for members. This includes financial resources – self generated and from outside sources – human resources, and other forms of support from members themselves, from NGOs and supportive individuals. With this goes the need to plan for strong systems to look after resources and to make sure resources – both people and money – are controlled by the members for the members.

What do we call ourselves?

Name the organization carefully. Your name should make a statement to the world about who you are. The name is the headline or a quick introduction to the members, potential members and the world at large. But naming is not always straight forward.

DEBATE: Naming Ourselves and our Organization – A Political Issue?

Waste pickers, waste collectors, reclaimers, recyclers? Domestic workers, household workers, helpers? In different countries names have different connotations. In some countries where “informal” is equated with “illegal,” organizations do not want to use “informal workers” to describe who they are. Groups of workers are often given derogatory names, reflecting the low status accorded the group by society. A stark example is the use of the word “scavenger” to describe those that collect and sell recyclable materials. Struggles around naming are struggles about recognition, respect and valuing of the work. At a local level, it is easier to agree a name

for the occupation; at a global level it becomes much harder as language barriers and interpretation, cultural norms have to be accommodated.

As well, the name of an organization can tell us a lot about the organization and its members, or it can tell us little. It can be neutral or it can have political connotations. It can disguise the true purpose of the organization for tactical or legal reasons. The names of international organizations (referred to as the “Nets”) are discussed under Challenge 2.

What is the context in which we are organizing?

It is very important to analyze the context for the organization. How favourable for organizing is the environment? How favourable are the interest and motivation of potential members, the laws, policies and regulations, the political situation and allies and enemies?

Many organizations run informally, especially in the beginning. But, if the organization is to continue, then there comes a point when the objectives, rules, structures, procedures have to be agreed and recorded in order to ensure democratic control by the members. Usually this takes the form of a constitution. When an organization wants to register (more about this, below) then a constitution becomes a necessity.

Key Elements Required in a Constitution

Constitutions differ according to the type of organization, the degree of formality, legal and registration requirements (if applicable). However, constitutions of democratic worker organizations normally include as a minimum:

Name:	Who are we?
Status:	What kind of organization are we? What is our legal status?
Principles:	What are our underlying values and orientation?
Objectives:	What is the organization aiming to do and achieve?
Membership:	Who is eligible to be a member? What are the different categories of membership? What are the membership procedures, rights and responsibilities?
Governance:	What are our structures, leadership, roles and responsibilities, procedures?
Finances:	How do we ensure financial accountability? What are our financial procedures and controls?
Dissolution:	What happens to assets if/when the organization closes down?

DEBATE: Should We Register?

Deciding to register or not, and what to register as, is a strategic decision on the part of any organization. Some organizations resist registration for political reasons believing by registering they may be co-opted or controlled by authorities or employers. Some are not in a position to register as they do not have a formal constitution or strong governance structures in place, by choice or for practical reasons. Registration is usually a requirement for receiving funds, opening bank accounts and for legitimizing the organization. Non-registration can provide an excuse for authorities or employers not to deal with an organization. Some trade union and cooperative federations

“Registration does not define us....

The form of registration does not determine whether or not we are an MBO.”

Organizing Workshop participants

may insist on seeing registration documents before accepting an organization into membership. Non-registration can also make the organization reliant on registered organizations, usually NGOs, to receive and administer funds, with the potential to jeopardize independence.

How and what to register as is often circumscribed by the legal situation in the country. While an MBO may act, look like and even be named as a trade union, it may be registered as an association because, as a union of self-employed workers whose members are deemed “employees,” it is excluded from the right to register as a union. Registration as an association rather than a cooperative may avoid tight bureaucratic rules and financial disadvantage.

“Independent of the type of organization, it is important to get united and strong. Only through the organizations it is possible to really have some influence to change conditions.”

Monica Garzaro-Scott, StreetNet

Across the Sectors: Focus on Organizational Forms

Although there are many different organizational forms, waste pickers, domestic workers, street/market vendors and home-based workers show some remarkable similarities in the way they organize and the reasons they choose a particular form of organization. However, choices about the particular form are influenced by local circumstances, sector specific factors, challenges, employment status and so on. Table 5 compiles the information from the tables in Section 2 to identify the most common organizational forms found across the four sectors, what advantage each form provides, and in which of the sectors it is most commonly found.



photo: Julian Luckman

KPKP convenes educational meetings such as this Patient's Rights Forum, 2009

**Table 5: A Comparison of Organizational Forms
across Four Sectors**

Type of organization	Advantages: What it does well	Sectors where most common
Trade Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective bargaining strength Access to resources and solidarity support Access to decision makers – governments and authorities Recognition as workers and legitimacy in the eyes of public and authorities Representation and collective bargaining Provision and sharing of services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic workers Street/market vendors
Cooperatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective purchasing and/or selling for better prices The cutting out of the middlemen or exploitative agencies Collective ownership of productive resources Sharing of skills and infrastructure Pooling of financial resources and loans Collective learning of skills Provision of services to members Stable membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste pickers Home-based workers
Associations (formal or informal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of rights Defence against harassment Collective action/negotiation for space, access rights and facilities (municipalities) Solidarity support Social and welfare schemes Collective purchasing/selling/services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vendors Waste pickers
Self-help groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Savings and credit schemes Production support and access to regular work Social and welfare schemes Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home-based workers Waste pickers
Migrant worker groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solidarity and comfort Social and cultural activities Legal support Empowerment Development of collective worker identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic workers
Religious organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space to meet Education of employers Skills training Social and cultural activities Shelter/emergency facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic workers

Social enterprises	Help to improve product quality Access to markets and marketing opportunities Business skills collectively learned	Home-based workers Waste pickers
NGO or CBO with organized groups	Sharing of experiences Skills development Resources	Home-based workers Domestic workers Waste pickers
National federation, network, alliance, association or movement	National recognition and representation Access to policy makers/government Solidarity National policy advocacy Long term strategy development Building of common perspective and identity	Street Vendors Domestic Workers Home-based workers Waste pickers
National union	Resources and information National recognition Access to collective bargaining and tri-partite committees Solidarity Legal access	Domestic Workers Street Vendors
Regional federation, network, alliance, movement	Wider recognition Access to regional policy makers Access to knowledge, resources Wider collaboration and solidarity	Waste pickers Domestic Workers Home-based workers
Global federation, network, alliance or "networking"	Sharing of experiences, information and solidarity across the world Voice in global forums and with policymakers Access to global resources Influence over issues related to the market at the global level	Street Vendors Domestic Workers Waste pickers

A summary from Sector Analyses: Organizing Workshop

In all sectors, it is important to understand the relationship between base organizations, national organizations and international organizations.

Base organizations are limited to local geographical location or workplace, and focus on the immediate needs and issues of the members. Members can easily participate in activities and decision making. The results of activities and actions are directly experienced or closely observed, making benefits of membership easily understood.

National organizations, whether primary or federated structures, focus on changing national policies, laws and their implementation, or collective economic and social demands. They provide a vehicle where informal workers can formulate common positions and speak with one voice; raise their profile and public understanding, and gain national recognition (formally or informally); engage with policymakers and national governments through advocacy or collective bargaining through their elected representatives. They may have access to information and skills, larger funding sources and support from unions or other influential organizations. Where informal workers form a sector within a national organization – specifically within a trade union –they gain the advantage of established

infrastructure, access through the trade union to government, employers and other influential bodies.

International Organizations (federations, alliances and networks), including regional organizations, help provide recognition; increase visibility; allow informal workers through their representatives to influence international policy and thus national policy; and promote information exchange, learning and solidarity across the sector globally. They also can provide practical support to national organizations by assisting with fund raising, access to international supportive groups such as WIEGO, and education and capacity building.

Every democratic workers' organization experiences tensions between the local members and their representatives at local, national and international level. Each movement develops its own culture – how much it is governed “top-down” by the leadership, how much national and international bodies are given restricted coordinating or networking' functions; how much the “right of recall” is held by the grassroots membership in base organizations, and how much power is delegated to the elected leadership of national and international structures. The issues are generally brought into sharper relief as and when power over financial resources is concentrated in national or international structures.

Resources

Christine Bonner. 2009. “Recruiting Informal Workers into Democratic Workers' Organisations.” *Organising in the Informal Economy – Resource Books for Organisers*, Book 1. WIEGO/StreetNet.

Christine Bonner. 2009. “Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers.” *Organising in the Informal Economy – Resource Books for Organisers*, Book 2. WIEGO/StreetNet.

Jan Theron. 2010. Options for Organizing Waste Pickers in South Africa, WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Theron_WIEGO_OB3.pdf

Stirling Smith. 2006. *Let's Organise! A SYNDICOOP Handbook for Trade Unions and Cooperatives about Organizing Workers in the Informal Economy*. ICFTU, ILO, ICA. Available at http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_094047.pdf

Activist Toolbox on Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/building-organizations/>

Challenge 2

Building Democratic International Networks

“When they join the network, they want to know what they will get out of it.”

Sapna Joshi,
HomeNet South Asia

We take a closer look here at the international – global and regional – “Nets” represented at the Organizing Workshop. As informal workers are increasingly combining into larger organizations so that their voices can be heard by national and international governments and policymakers, they are asking critical questions and experimenting with different organizational forms.

DEBATE: Networks or Networking?

What form should our networks take? Should we in fact be talking about networking rather than networks? Do we need a formal organization or should we base our global connections around common objectives and demands, rather than focusing on building formal structures?

The Arguments Against

Loose Networks?

If we have weak formal structures, how are the members to ensure democratic oversight over the activities and policies of the organization – especially if it includes the oversight of money? Who would represent the organization to the outside world? Who would benefit most from the activities? Who would be able to prevent domination by self-appointed leaders? Without open and transparent election procedures, governed by an agreed constitution, decisions will inevitably be taken by those with the strongest voices and deepest pockets.

Formal Organizations?

Building formal organizations would automatically create expensive and time-consuming bureaucracies, dominated by technical experts and (probably male) professionals, removed from the immediate needs and concerns of grass-roots workers. They inevitably become centralized, rule-bound, inflexible and obstruct genuine participatory networking. We need open, non-hierarchical structures that learn from the new social movements and that exploit social networking technologies to the maximum.

All democratic international organizations have to ensure accountability to their membership, and have the ability to coordinate resources and policies. They have to delegate power from grassroots organizations to representatives. On the other hand, their constituent organizations are independent local and national groups close to the grass-roots, and may be perfectly capable of working together as a decentralized network without any need for elaborate structures.

The balance largely depends on two issues: finance and external representation. If the network is responsible for centrally managing significant amounts of money, there is a stronger need for formal, accountable and transparent decision-making structures, with external donors demanding evidence of good financial governance. Similarly, if the network is to represent the interests of its members to external institutions, such as inter-governmental organizations, the representatives need democratic structures in place to ensure that their negotiating positions have the support of the membership.

Across the Sectors: Comparing Network Models

What is most striking about the 'Nets' is how different they are in structure and in the ways in which they have developed or are developing, but how similar in their objectives, challenges and concerns. Key questions are: What kind of network should we build? What are the different organizing models and strategies? How can they be sustained? Drawing on information from Section Two and questions raised at the Organizing Workshop, we have developed a tentative classification of the different models emerging.

The Trade Union Model: StreetNet International

All StreetNet Internationals' members are **MBOs**. NGOs may provide support but cannot affiliate to StreetNet. StreetNet encourages **affiliation by national organizations** where possible but is flexible depending on circumstances. Membership applications are strictly vetted to ensure authenticity and affiliates pay annual **membership fees**.

StreetNet has a **formal structure and constitution**, with **formally elected leadership** (President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.) from among their affiliates and accountability structures based on representative democracy. Congress is the highest decision-making body and is responsible for policy and constitution making. Delegations are based on proportional representation. Its structure and processes are similar to those found in national and international trade union bodies, such as the Global Union Federations (GUFs).

It has **no formally constituted regional structures**, although it



StreetNet International, launched in 2002, has a formal structure and constitution, with formally elected leadership

photo: StreetNet

encourages a regional spread in electing its leadership, and since 2007 has it been working towards regional coordinating structures based on Regional Focal Point organizations (borrowing the idea from HomeNets).

It has a strong emphasis on **gender equality** and has a built in **quota** for women in leadership.

Its **Secretariat is centralized**, through its International Coordinator and administrative office, but has organizers located in different regions.

The Social Movement Model:

Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers' Network

The Network describes itself as a **social movement**. Its “members” are mainly national networks (movements) of cooperatives. It does not have formal affiliates and membership. It is anti-bureaucracy, and **does not have formal structures** and formal leadership positions such as presidents or general secretaries. It does **not have a written constitution** although there are documents setting out its objectives and policy statements and demands.

It operates on an **informal system of democracy** through consultation and through regular conferences with mass participation. The **Secretariat** is approved at the regular conferences and is **decentralized** (from 2010) and subject to **rotation**.

Until recently gender equality and promotion of women leadership was not a key concern but this is beginning to change. It is very strong on ensuring that representation is by waste pickers (or those who were waste pickers) and not employed technical experts or NGOs.

The NGO Model: HomeNet South Asia

HomeNet South Asia is formally constituted as a **charitable trust**, overseen by a voluntary board composed of nominees with a background in support for home-based workers in various South Asian countries. National HomeNets from South Asian countries come together through HomeNet South Asia.

The composition of the National HomeNets themselves is varied but most often they are composed of a **mixture of NGOs and MBOs**. In many cases **NGOs are the dominant members**, although in some cases, such as HomeNet Nepal and HomeNet Pakistan, there is an agreed process to transform national HomeNets into organizations where a majority of the leadership are democratically accountable to home-based workers (see Case Study on HomeNet Nepal, page 64). In the longer term, it is hoped that all national HomeNets, and HomeNet South Asia itself, will have majority representation of home-based workers on their governing structures.

Networking Model: Global Alliance of Waste Pickers

The Networking ‘model’ describes an approach that does **not** focus on the formation or maintenance of a **formal organization** but emphasizes information sharing and joint activities. It is **programme-based**, rather than structure-based. It is an evolving concept born from learning by doing. Because of the very uneven development and extent of base organizations in different regions and countries, forging a common agreement on the type of global organization has yet to be achieved.

Trade Union-Supported Model:

International Domestic Workers' Network

The IDWN model is one that is **aligned to the trade union movement**, having its base in the Global Union Federation, IUF. Its status is as a **project** within

the IUF, ultimately reporting to the IUF Executive. Not all the domestic workers' organizations associated with the IDWN are trade unions, and not all those that are trade unions are affiliates of the IUF, nor are they forced to become so. This flexible approach on the part of the IUF is very unusual among the formal GUFs, but provides a very interesting model for structures that work to the benefit of fledgling international networks.

The IDWN is currently **run primarily by women** domestic workers (or former domestic workers) through its Steering Committee, having **representatives from most regions**. Although the representatives are not as yet formally elected, the **Steering Committee** runs on semi-democratic principles, with some representatives mandated by a clear membership structure and others consulting as widely as possible in the absence of established structures. Representation is **by region**, either by a regional organization (Latin America, Asia), a national organization (USA), or by (the most) representative trade union(s) where no regional organization exists (Africa).



photo: J.Fish

The IDWN model is aligned to the trade union movement but not all organizational "members" are trade unions

The IDWN's focus has been, in its first years, on campaigning for the ILO Convention, which was a major global mobilizing issue, producing a focus and a unifying activity. Only now, with the Convention adopted at the ILC in 2011, are they turning their attention to what sort of international organization they want to become.

Naming the 'Nets' and other Federated Structures

In naming 'Nets' there seems to be no agreed term to describe different models or forms.

StreetNet, a formal organization, calls itself an Alliance but includes Net in its name. Waste pickers call their loose formation of MBOs an Alliance, but in the Organizing Workshop concluded that an Alliance included NGOs, but a Network was made up of MBOs only. Some national federated structures call themselves associations, while others refer to themselves as movements. There are no hard and fast rules about naming an organization. We interpret names differently.

Most commonly, however:

“**federation**” implies a permanent, formal and structured organization, although each member retains its own autonomy and identity (“confederation” is a federation of federations)

“**network**” implies a less formal organization which is more flexible, and less tightly structured – often accommodating MBOs, NGOs and individual supporters

“**alliance**” typically used when a variety of organizations come together temporarily to campaign around a single issue of common interest but, as we see, it is used to describe more permanent structures as well

“**movement**” is used particularly in Latin America and implies a social movement (see box) rather than a permanent and formally structured organization

“**association**” is a generic term for any voluntary membership organization (not only MBOs) and tells us little about the organization

Social Movements – Various Definitions

“...a type of group action. They are large informal groupings of individuals and/or organizations focused on specific political or social issues, in other words, on carrying out, resisting or undoing a social change. Social movements are not eternal. They have a life cycle: they are created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist.” *Wikipedia*

“ ... something that people create to press for social change. They are spaces that are made by people to allow relationships between them that can challenge power.” *Benita Roth*

“those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non-institutional forms of political participation.” *Doug McAdam*

“ ... is determined more by informal response of the members than by formal procedures for legitimating authority.” *Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian*

Sources

Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_movement.

Benita Roth. 2001. “What Are Social Movements and What Is Gendered About Women’s Participation in Social Movements? A Sociological Perspective.” Essay written for website Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1820-1940, <http://womhist.binghamton.edu/socm/intro.htm>, coordinated by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin.

Doug McAdam. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 25.

Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian. 1972/1987. *Collective Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, USA: Prentice Hall, p. 223.

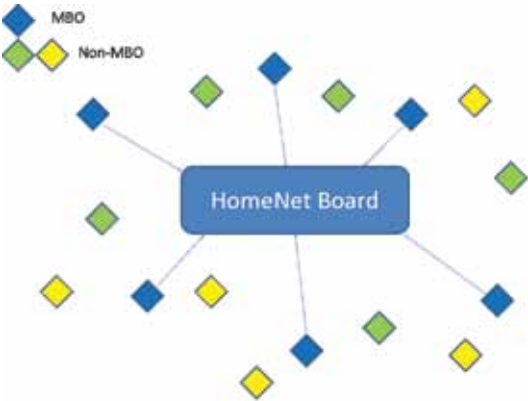
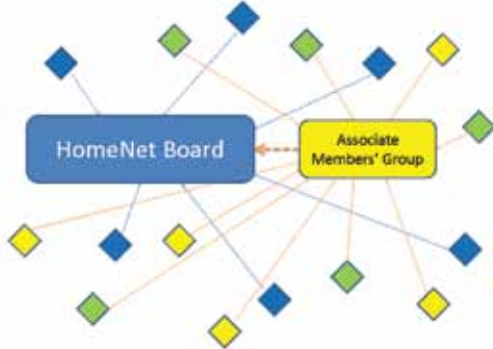
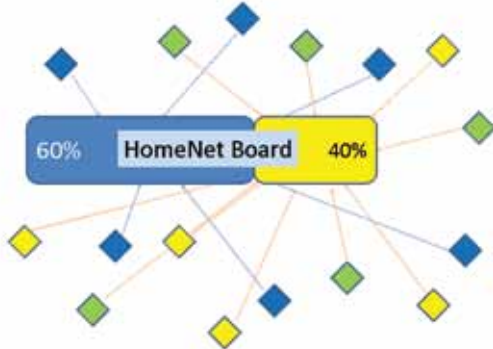
DEBATE: What is the Role of NGOs in ‘Nets’?

NGOs play an important role in supporting the development and activities of informal worker MBOs and their national or international networks. Some networks include NGOs among their membership and in their decision making structures, while others are strictly made up of MBOs. Some organizations allow for NGOs or even supportive individuals to become associate members, with restricted rights and powers. Should NGOs be included as members in networks? If so how? There are differing viewpoints but there seems to be

consensus that if NGOs are accorded membership in a network, then control and decision making should be in the hands of the MBOs.

The underlying question is whether or not an organization is representative of workers, and seen to be representative through its constitution and structures. An organization dominated by representatives of NGOs cannot be truly representative. On the other hand, many MBO networks of informal workers are fragile and unstable, at least in their formative stages, and need the close support of trusted NGOs to build strength and capacity. How can these tensions be constitutionally reconciled? HomeNet South Asia grappled with this at a 2010 regional Strategic Visioning Workshop. The three model examples of HomeNet Board structures below were suggested as a basis for discussion.

NGO Representation on HomeNet Board: Three Model examples

 <p>Example 1</p>	<p>Example 1. Many organizations can be active or supportive in the activities of the network – MBOs and non-MBOs – but only MBOs are represented on the Board.</p>
 <p>Example 2</p>	<p>Example 2. Only MBOs are represented on the Board, but it is advised and supported by a group of “associate members” of non-MBOs, who may be invited to attend meetings in a non-voting advisory capacity.</p>
 <p>Example 3</p>	<p>Example 3. A majority proportion (e.g. 60%) of Board members are elected from MBOs, but non-MBO members of the HomeNet are entitled to elect their own representatives as minority (40%) Board members with voting rights.</p>

Source: Strategic Visioning Workshop for HomeNets in South Asia, December 2010

Lessons Emerging

We are still learning about how best to form and sustain international networks, but lessons are emerging as we develop our networks and networking approaches across the sectors. We have learned:

1 - It is necessary to build an understanding of different traditions, cultures, politics, stage of development and to have patience with language difficulties while making a particular effort to ensure good translation. This indicates an approach that is slow and flexible, able to accommodate differences while building unity.

2 - There is no one developmental path towards an international network: some networks develop a regional presence first and others bring national organizations into membership and then work towards regional structures. There is a need to be flexible on how representation is structured, especially in the early stages, as base organizations are very diverse.

#3 - Experience suggests that global networks are more effectively based directly on a membership of national organizations, rather than a federation of autonomous regional networks. On the other hand, regional structures, activities and profile are very important, especially as a means to develop MBOs in those regions which may be weaker than others.

#4 - It is important to build organization at local, national and regional levels in order to build an international network. However, we cannot wait for strong local organizations to exist everywhere before working together globally.

#5 - All forms/ models need to strive for democratic functioning in which worker leaders are decision-makers and women are full and equal participants in this – even if in the beginning structures are imperfect.

#6 - NGOs can and do play an important supportive role in facilitating the initial development of international networks, as well as providing ongoing support. What is important is that the NGOs understand their role as supporters and not decision makers, and know when and how to step back and continue support without holding power.

#7 - Where trade unions are supportive, such as the IUF or the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, they can provide the organizational base and ongoing practical and political support, provide legitimacy and respect, and open doors to important institutions like the ILO and the international trade union movement.

#8 - Networks must be built around clear objectives and principles and deal with issues that can have meaning and achieve results for the members. They should consciously link global and local activities.

Linking Global with Local: Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

“When we went to UNFCCC in Copenhagen the Indian Environmental Minister didn’t want to talk to waste pickers. He was very dismissive. But we worked on him when we got back. He came to our conference where we had waste pickers from all over the country. Now there are two pieces of legislation on waste coming from his office. In one he specifically mentions how to integrate waste pickers. In another on municipal solid waste rules it says that waste pickers must be integrated. Our approach – strategically we did not give up.”

Nalini Shaker, AIW

Resources

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org

HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net

IDWN website: www.idwn.info

Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivecities.org>

RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net

StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za

Challenge 3

Maintaining Democracy

“Ensure that those who are leaders are those who are living the problem.”

Severino Lima Junior, MNCR

What key lessons have we learned about ensuring that democracy and accountability are embedded in the culture and practice of the MBO?

Membership

Maintaining a Strong and Committed Membership

If membership dwindles then power is lost – the head remains but the body is weak. This can lead to all kinds of political manipulation and corruption as leaders turn to others to maintain their position and status and to find resources. So constantly bringing new members into the MBO is important, either through individual membership as in a union, or through building the alliances and networks as among cooperatives, or both. On the other hand, large membership brings its own difficulties and challenges for democracy: divisions may occur, leadership power struggles develop, administration and financial management may weaken. Perhaps the most critical undertaking is to develop and evolve responsive structures, communications and educational programmes that continue to meet the existing and new needs of members.

Full Member Participation in Activities and Decision Making

This is something that an organization tries to build into its structures and procedures, based on mandates from members and reporting back widely. Democracy is always an imperfect process since not every member can directly participate in every activity, decision making meeting, and so on. The difficulties increase with national, regional and international organizations where members have to rely on their representatives to carry their voice, and to report back to them.

“SEWA has 1.3 million members and has grown fast. How do we sustain this increasing membership? How do we meet all their needs? It seems impossible. Some short term needs must be met like micro finance, but linking them all together is difficult.”

Sapna Raval, SEWA Academy



photo: Julian Luchman

SEWA Academy helps women members develop confidence and leadership skills and understand the power of collective struggle and organizing

Our organizations have found many different and creative ways to increase participation in activities, decision making and information sharing: dealing with real issues and making activities useful; creative activities and techniques to get across messages; use of electronic communication especially cell phones and e-mail; participatory research; accessible media; empowerment through educational and capacity building activities; visits by leadership; mass activities; and so on.

Leadership

“If leaders are not willing to take responsibility and be fully accountable to our members then we have a system of recalling and replacing those leaders. The Constitution is very important in this”

Gaby Bikombo, StreetNet

Accountable Leaders

Leaders should be elected, a majority from the workers, using clear rules. Elections should be held at regular intervals. Active and informed members are able to hold their leaders to account and ensure they fully represent their issues, demands and views. Because they participate they can give clear mandates to their representative leaders, and demand full report backs and transparency on all aspects of the organization, including finance.

DEBATE: Who Can Represent Informal Workers?

All agree that workers must control their organization and leaders and representatives must be accountable. But there are different traditions and opinions on who is eligible for a leadership position, who can represent the members and what is meant by worker control. For example, the Latin American waste pickers insist that “those who are leaders are those who are living the problem” – in other words, leaders have to be practising or former waste pickers still close to their communities and they must be always represented by such leaders. In India it is common for elected committees to include a minority of paid staff members and/or other persons who are not workers in the sector.

Internationally, representation by paid officials, acting on a mandate from the members, is more common for practical reasons. So IDWN representatives to the ILO and other forums included both former domestic workers who are now full-time paid officials of their union, practising domestic workers and paid staff elected or unelected. At the StreetNet Congress delegates are chosen by their organization and include vendors and paid staff members. Is it important who the actual representatives are if the elected leaders are primarily workers and there are procedures in place to hold representatives fully accountable?

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

No organization with men and women as members will be truly democratic unless women fully and equally participate in organizational activities, including playing an equal role in leadership. A first rule says that “women will not participate unless it addresses their needs” and so making sure the organization takes up the issues and concerns of the women and fully supports them in their struggles is crucial. Again this is easiest at a base level. Networks need to find creative ways in which the concerns of women

members at base level are reflected in national and international activities, through solidarity action, legal struggles that women can easily identify with and see relevance in, campaigns to raise women's recognition and voice, etc.

Women often benefit from having a safe space, for example a women's group or committee, within a mixed organization where they can express themselves freely, gain information and practise skills so they can take up and debate issues with confidence within their organization.

Appropriate worker education activities can

help build understanding and confidence in a fun way (see KKPKP example, page 79). Learning by doing is perhaps the strongest way of ensuring the development of women who can lead and speak for themselves. When given the opportunity, women emerge as strong leaders who can make an impact, including at an international level, as illustrated by domestic workers at the ILO, or women waste pickers at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences.



photo: Samson Mlunguza

Participants at the Organizing Workshop exchange ideas on organizing and democracy

DEBATE: Quotas – The Most Effective Way of Ensuring Gender Equality and Women in Leadership?

Some organizations have a quota system to ensure that women are represented in the leadership of mixed organization. The StreetNet constitution demands that the leadership consists of no less than 50 per cent women. This means that 6 out of the 11 Executive Committee members must be women and at least two out of four office bearers must be women. PATAMABA, Philippines, stipulates that 60 per cent of their elected leaders should be women. SEWA is an all-women's organization – another solution to ensuring leaders are women!

DEBATE: Class Divisions Within Organizations

StreetNet has identified that most of its leaders are from the upper segments of the sector, i.e. they are often those who employ others. It can be an issue in families when someone employs family members. In a democratic organization, how do we ensure our leadership is representative of the members and particularly the poorest workers in our sectors?

Independence: Politics and Government Relations

Getting Political

Attempts by MBOs of informal workers to effect serious and long-lasting change for their members will inevitably have to confront the question of politics. A fundamental characteristic of MBOs is independence from governments, employers, religious organizations, donor institutions and political parties. In other words, such institutions (and all others) should be unable to dictate the work of MBOs. Only the members themselves, through democratic procedures, have the right to determine their own organization's policies, programmes and procedures. But what if the members democratically agree to support a particular political party, or develop their own political programme? Or even create their own political party?

In countries with limited political freedoms, it may be that some forms of MBO are banned from political activity. In others, with corrupt political systems, MBOs may decide that contact with political parties can be counter-productive or dangerous.

In some sectors, such as street vending and market trading, the members of MBOs are important political constituencies and potentially have considerable political power. In the context of corrupt political processes this can be very dangerous for MBOs, as the leaders may face the temptation of personal financial gain, power and prestige if they do the bidding of political party leaders. Close alignment of MBOs with political parties can also increase the danger of splits in the movement along party lines.

Relating to Governments

When campaigning and/or negotiating for informal workers' rights and livelihoods, contact with government departments and agencies is inevitable and necessary, and it is often advantageous to have the sympathetic support of government officials, politicians and political parties. Cultivating a relationship with governments and politicians is an important strategy, but the type of relationship has to be carefully thought out, agreed by the organization and transparent at all times.

An effective MBO of informal workers will inevitably be drawn into political (not necessarily party-political) activity. Promoting the rights and raising the public profile of the poorest in society is a fundamental political activity which will almost certainly find opposition among those with power, influence and wealth.

Resources

Christine Bonner. 2009. "Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers." *Organising in the Informal Economy: Resource Books for Organisers*, Book 2. WIEGO/StreetNet. Available at <http://wiego.org/resources/building-and-maintaining-democratic-organisation-informal-workers-icc2>

Challenge 4

Sustaining Our Organizations

“Members used to say we are very poor. We had a meeting and said money from outside comes and goes, but for the sustainability of the organization it is only the membership fee that we can fall back on. Our membership fee is \$1.1 per year. We also tell our members how the organization has helped them in their work, and how important organizational sustainability is. We do not pay money for anyone to come to a meeting. If money is needed for travel, then half of the money must come from the community. Each member must contribute. When we give them food or tea at meetings we make it very simple. We don’t provide elaborate food which we may not be able to sustain. In order to reduce expenses and increase participation of people we get training and we train other people. In this meeting WIEGO has spent a lot of money to bring us here, accommodate and feed us. We need to make sure that this does not become a problem for WIEGO.”

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

What do we mean by sustainability? In the Annual Learning Meeting of the Inclusive Cities Project, held in Ahmedabad in 2010, participants agreed that sustainability is not just about money but involves “people, plans and money, and links strongly to the ongoing development of democratic membership-based organizations.”

The costs of democracy are high, involving financial and human resources. Compromises are made when resources are limited – for example less participation, delegation to small group of leaders, poor translation, etc.

Many MBOs of informal workers rely to a greater or lesser extent on donor funding. This is especially true for national, regional and global networks. Their costs are high and contributions from member organizations generally only cover a small percentage of budget. StreetNet International, looking ahead, took a resolution at its Third Congress to find ways to generate funds and help sustain the organization. Ideas tabled in the Resolution include, firstly, recruiting more members to generate more membership fees; accepting paid advertising in, and selling of, the StreetNet newsletter; organizing revenue generating activities such as fairs; creating an income generating micro finance institution; and, finally, reducing costs of country activities.

Self-generated financial resources, coupled with careful spending and cost effectiveness, strict financial controls and accountability are key to organizational sustainability. In the Organizing Workshop and the Fund Raising Workshop held the day before, participants emphasized the critical importance of membership contributions for financial sustainability, as well as building an attitude of self-reliance and ensuring the commitment of, and control by, members of their own organization. Other ideas for independent financing include: accessing local resources (not necessarily money) such as from local government, as is the case in Bulgaria where home-based worker local committees have secured free facilities; acquiring rights to provide services via tenders or commissioned work, as in the MNCR or KKPKP examples; providing services to members at a fee, such as in the example of the Street Barbers in Durban, South Africa; and income generation projects.



photo: Julian Luckham

Members of KKPKP contribute financially to the organization through a yearly membership fee

Human resources are equally important in achieving sustainability. Staff and elected leaders need to develop their organizational skills, including technical skills like budgeting, writing, using technology; otherwise there is an inevitable dependence on professionals who are either expensive, or may come at the price of lack of democratic control. It is important, as well, to actively find sources of support such as donors, NGOs, unions and union federations, cooperatives and coop development agencies, governments, and other informal economy MBOs.

DEBATE: Should the Payment of Fees be a Condition of MBO Membership?

Most informal workers earn little, earn erratically, and are vulnerable to external economic shocks. This is often the reason why some MBOs do not attempt to collect membership fees from the workers – and some networks do not demand membership fees from their affiliated organizations. These MBOs are wholly dependent on financial support from donor organizations.

Most MBOs recognize that membership dues are essential, even if they are small. The regular collection of fees and accounting for income and expenditure helps bind together members and leaders, and helps hold the leadership to account. If sufficient attention is given to the collection of membership dues, even though the total amounts may be relatively small, it may at least enable the organization to function during periods of scarce external funding – albeit perhaps without paid staff or offices.

DEBATE: Is Unity Strength?

Historically, democratic workers' organizations have frequently found that sustainability is best achieved through combining strength with others. By building larger organizations, major savings can be achieved through economies of scale (offices, paid staff, education programmes, etc.) and – in effect – the financially strong can support the weak. This of course assumes that workers' organizations (unions, cooperatives, etc.) representing the more financially stable workers are prepared to accept a level of subsidy to the poorer workers on the basis of solidarity and unity.

There are many national and international examples of MBOs which include membership from among both informal and formal workers, or the relatively financially secure alongside the poorest of workers. Often,

procedures and structures are in place to ensure that specific groups of workers have a high level of independence within the larger combined organization, and/or have guaranteed representation in governing bodies.

On the other hand, merger or integration of informal workers' MBOs into larger organizations will obviously lead to at least some sacrifice of autonomy, and it is not always easy to maintain the distinct culture and responsiveness that can be achieved in a wholly independent structure.

Despite the emphasis on self-reliance, raising funds from external sources is usually a necessary part of sustaining an organization. In the box below are some ideas and tips about fund-raising and proposal writing generated through WIEGO workshops on fund-raising.

Fund-Raising Challenges and Success Factors

Challenges

- appropriate donors in different regions hard to find
- heavy and complicated requirements for proposals/reporting
- language requirements for proposals
- organizations competing for same donor funds
- donor focus on numbers and measurable results
- donors' reluctance to give money for organizing
- donors' imposition of their own agenda that takes us away from our real work
- donor limitations on countries that can apply and on giving to grassroots organizations
- unrealistic expectations about who can co-fund
- donors' desire to give to organizations run by professionals, disempowering workers
- donors' refusal to provide meetings where you can put forward your case
- large amounts of money that are too much for some organizations to handle
- NGO control of funds
- divisions in the organization resulting from successful fund-raising

Success factors

- building donor trust by ensuring that funds are used to achieve the purpose of the organization
- demonstrating that the money will make a difference: using arguments of fairness and using research to show the cost savings made by the groups (e.g. waste pickers)
- understanding donor psychology and using this to advantage
- working in partnership with large and established institutions such as unions, universities
- publicizing international connections and getting international support
- receiving support and assistance of sympathetic "experts" for help with proposal writing
- ensuring that your organization has a good reputation

Participants at the Fund-raising Workshop, Bangkok, March 2011

Preparing Fund Raising Proposals: Do's and Don'ts

DO's

- Find the right donor.
- Adapt to fit donor requirements BUT
- Make sure that you are not compromising organizational independence and needs.
- Create a Proposal Template – then modify as needed.
- Be clear about who you are.
- Be clear about the need and your proposed solution.
- Build a budget.
- Gather supporting materials.
- Ensure you can demonstrate a strong, accountable organization.
- Consider sustainability.
- Be exact.
- Write well.

DON'Ts

- Don't submit after the deadline and expect to be given special consideration.
- Don't send a generic proposal template without adapting it to the specific needs and requirements of the donor.
- Don't send more pages/ words than the application calls for.
- Don't use acronyms or jargon without explaining them.
- Don't get the email or mailing address incorrect. Don't send something by email when hard copy is requested, or vice versa.
- Don't leave your organization's survival in the hands of one donor or project proposal.
- Don't compromise the needs and independence of your organization; rather, do not use that donor.

Rhonda Douglas, WIEGO Global Project Director

DEBATE: Money – A Double-Edged Sword?

Given that the overwhelming majority of informal workers are poor, it is extremely difficult to run an organization on membership dues and self-generated income alone. Some of the most basic organizational facilities available to unions and associations of better-paid workers, such as offices, computers, and telephones (let alone paid staff), are difficult to afford unless the MBO has access to external finances. Hence the importance of enabling informal workers' MBOs to apply for, manage and account for money from international development donor organizations.

Yet some claim that there have been more workers' organizations destroyed by money than those who have been assisted. Even modest amounts of external funding can create competition and division between leaders and struggles for control over resources. Money attracts the attention of others, perhaps less honest and scrupulous, individuals and organizations. It can create an enormous strain on the elected leadership to ensure that the money is well managed and is used for the purposes for which it was given.

External finance can also undermine the independence of the organization. As soon as external support has enabled the organization to hire staff, rent offices, undertake professional education and organizing programmes and so on, there is pressure for that money to continue. It is hard to return to a more modest operation with the voluntary effort of the members and unpaid elected leaders when money dries up. When sources of grant assistance are cut, and the contractual conditions become more strenuous, there is a danger that policies and programmes of recipient MBOs are less in response to the democratically expressed needs of the members, and more in response to donor organizations.

Challenge 5

Making Gains – Achieving Success

“Take up the issues and try and show successes. They need to be interested and motivated to join by seeing real benefits of membership.”

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

“Make sure that the organization takes up the issues that concern the members and fully support members in their struggles. Vendors will not be part of the organization if it does not address their needs.”

StreetNet member

Nobody is interested in joining an organization for its own sake. Informal workers join unions, cooperatives or other MBOs because they see real benefit from doing so.

Successful organizations begin to improve the lives of members in particular and working poor in general in many different ways – some very concrete and others less so. Organizing is about making concrete gains and positive changes to lives as well as defending against attacks on economic positions, physical and verbal abuse and harassment. Key to successful organizations is their ability to do this, while at the same time continually building esteem, confidence, skills, knowledge, and strategic thinking among members.

Perhaps the most important factor is success in building a collective spirit among the members. As SEWA frequently reminds us, an MBO is “of the members, by the members, for the members.” Often MBOs, particularly in their early stages of development, face the problem of workers joining the organization with an expectation of immediate personal benefit – access to loans perhaps, or an instant end to police harassment on the streets through ownership of a membership card. Successful organizing must start from an understanding among the members that the gains to be made are through

collective decision making, collective action, and ultimately collective power.

This challenge is one that underlies all others. In Section Two we saw the demands and issues that the four sectors organize around. Many are similar such as achieving legal recognition and worker rights, favourable laws and policies, social protection, improving economic and social status and decent and secure income. Here we highlight two important strategies for achieving success: the integration of struggle and economic



photo: Leslie Tuttle

Coopersoli is a recycling cooperative in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

development organizations and activities, and collective bargaining (negotiations) inside and outside of traditional forums and with a range of counterparts other than employers.

Strategies for Success

Successful struggles and campaigns over key issues and demands depend on some simple principles:

- good knowledge of the issues concerned (often backed up by good research)
- knowledge of the legislation and regulations concerned
- leaders – women and men – with good negotiating skills
- a substantial membership in the area affected (workplace, local area, national sector ...)
- good communications – publicly through the media, as well as with the membership

Successful initiatives are driven by issues that are deeply and widely felt among the members (anger), who believe that their struggle will make a real difference – there must be an expectation for change – not an exercise in futile protest (hope). Crucially, the workers themselves have to participate in the process – and be actively engaged in the campaign (action).

Source: Anger-Hope-Action. *Unite the Union, Change at Work training materials, December 2011.*

“We are going to have to negotiate with those who want to buy our work and for that we must be large, strong, organized, articulate, educated in modern language; we must understand the economy; we must know the law; we must know about international relationships; we must know who we have to talk to and how to speak on an equal footing.”

Chilean Homeworker
quoted in *We are Workers Too!* (Mather 2010)



Street vendors from Durban contributed to research on the impact of the Global Economic Crisis on informal workers

“In addition to the union we have established a credit union and SWaCH, a cooperative, which has a contract with the municipality to collect waste. We maintain different accounts for the two organizations and run them as separate organizations. But the members are the same.”

Mohan Nanavare, KKPKP

Strategy 1: Providing for Different Needs – An Integrated Approach

Because many informal workers do not have an employer, their organizations have to provide for a wide range of needs. They have to provide economic opportunities, livelihood development and often social protection through collective organizations and activities. At the same time they have to struggle for rights as workers, and against exploitative buyers, purchasers, middlemen, local and national government officials. They also need to engage in the broader political and economic struggles affecting the working poor in general. These combined roles may take place in a variety of forms, through cooperatives combining into movements as is common among waste pickers in Latin America; through unions forming cooperatives and other forms of collective organization such as KKPKP in India, the LDFC in the Democratic Republic of Congo or the National Union of Domestic Employees in Trinidad/Tobago (NUDE). SEWA provides perhaps the most extensive and best known model of struggle and development.

An Integrated Approach through Struggle and Development: The Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)

The Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is an MBO of more than 1,200,000 poor working women in the informal economy in India. It was first registered as a trade union in 1972 in Gujarat State. It is now a national trade union and represents self-employed women all over India.

However, SEWA is not just a trade union, it is a movement of several inter-connected types of MBOs of informal women workers. It pursues a mix of what it calls “struggle” and “development.” Practically this strategy is carried out through joint action of union and cooperatives and other collective economic organizations. Struggle takes place through Union struggles for rights and improved working conditions; development by providing economic opportunities through cooperatives, producer groups, savings and credits groups among others. All of these economic organizations are owned by the women who are members of SEWA. They put up the share capital and manage and control the organizations through democratically elected boards of worker representatives. SEWA also has specialized units, some run as cooperatives such as the Cooperative Bank and SEWA Social Security. SEWA Academy provides training and research services, and also runs a video co-operative and the Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust provides housing and infrastructure services.



photo: L. Vignathok

SEWA members enjoy many benefits including literacy classes

Strategy 2: Engaging Policy and Decision Makers: Collective Bargaining

“When they are organized, informal workers can win rights and improve their work and social conditions through collective negotiations. Unlike unionised formal workers, informal workers generally do not have permanent and recognized negotiating forums. However, this does not stop them finding ways of overcoming such challenges and negotiating their demands with authorities, or other bodies responsible for taking decisions on a particular issue. Collective negotiations, known as collective bargaining, is a key strategy for organizations to advance and defend the rights and position of informal workers. It can help empower workers. It can start to change power relationships.”

(From “Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers,” Bonner 2010)

Gains are ultimately secured through various forms of collective bargaining whether with employers, governments, municipal authorities, or others who have power to influence the lives and working conditions of informal workers. In some cases, successful collective bargaining will be the culmination of a long hard fight. In others, it may be resolved relatively quickly and peaceably. In all cases, it involves:

- identifying the key issues
- agreeing to demands that would solve the issues
- deciding on who to negotiate with, and how
- establishing an agreed platform or forum for negotiation
- agreeing on a negotiating strategy
- conducting negotiation
- implementing and monitoring adherence to the agreement

Collective Bargaining: Lessons

Lesson 1: Breaking Through: Recognition and Agreement to Negotiate

Often the establishment of an agreed forum for negotiation can be the most difficult part of the process. It firstly requires identifying who the bargaining counterpart is and then recognition by the bargaining counterpart of the MBO as the legitimate representative of the workers, agreement to negotiate, and then agreement of the detailed terms of negotiation (where, when, who’s involved, what’s on the agenda, etc.).

Examples of successful collective bargaining by MBOs of informal workers include many different sorts of bargaining counterparts. They may be local negotiations with, for example, market superintendents, individual middlemen dealing with homeworkers, municipal departments responsible for solid waste, or a family employing a single domestic worker. They may involve national negotiations with governments such as National

Alliance of Street Vendors of India's (NASVI) negotiations with the Indian Government for the National Policy on Street Vendors, and HomeNet Thailand's negotiations that resulted in the new Homeworkers Protection Act (page 63). At the other extreme, they may involve negotiations with senior representatives of governments, employers and trade unions at major international conferences on, for example, labour rights, sustainable development, debt or trade.

"We need to negotiate with government at different levels."

Josephine Parilla, Patamaba

"Street and market vendors are self-employed. They don't have an employer/employee relationship. We consider the government as the negotiating partner. We want to establish negotiating forums at local level. We also want to establish provincial policies on street trading. We believe this is the only way we can develop a friendly environment for informal workers."

Gaby Bikombo, StreetNet

Lesson 2: Marshalling Strong Arguments: Preparation and Research

Good preparation and, in particular, research are essential to ensure that collective bargaining is backed up by well-formulated argument.

"In the face of privatization and the loss of access to waste, we undertook research that showed that waste pickers made a huge contribution to improvements in the environment, as well as substantial financial savings for the municipality. Around 20 per cent of the waste in the municipality is being cleaned by waste pickers. Negotiations with the government led to the award of a waste-collection contract and now around 3000 women collect waste from 300,000 homes. The neighbouring city then invited us to do the same thing and 600 women are involved there. Our fight demonstrated how much these women contribute to the city, but also how much we saved in the municipal budgets. These savings now cover the premium for health insurance for all women in the city."

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

Lesson 3: Building Alliances

Negotiations are often part of a multi-pronged strategy which combines advocacy, collective action such as marches, demonstrations, petitions. In many instances unions, NGOs, researchers, development agencies provide critical support.

In India, the government passed the new Unorganized Sector Social Security Act (2008).

"A lot of people have been working together since 2004 to push for social security legislation that covers informal workers, but implementation across the whole country is a major challenge. How can we bring everyone into the care framework? This requires power and strength."

Janhavi Dave, SEWA

At an international level, collective bargaining can be complex and protracted. As we have seen (page 42) in the successful struggle for the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, the IDWN, supported by the IUF and WIEGO, was active in ensuring that the voice of domestic workers themselves was heard in the negotiations and that they worked effectively with trade unions, campaign groups and NGOs prior to and during the ILCs.

The successful adoption of the ILO Convention was in large part the result of national negotiations between domestic workers' unions and their allies in the broader trade union movement and their counterpart governments and employers' organizations. By the time delegates arrive at such meetings, most have already decided on their policies and negotiating positions in advance. It was essential that there was coordinated lobbying and negotiations to influence delegations before they left their home countries.

"We built alliances of NGOs, activists, trade unions, researchers, academics from all over the world to support the adoption of an ILO convention. This helped increase awareness of the situation of domestic workers among governments, unions and employers. It has all helped to increase membership at local, national and international level."

Vicky Kanyoka, IDWN

Lesson 4: Implementation Needs Strong Organization

"It is important to secure favourable laws by working with government. However, once the laws are there you must not rely on government to implement these. It is up to the workers to make sure they are implemented through their strong organizations."

Severino Lima Junior, MNCR

Once gains have been achieved through collective bargaining – new laws, policies, or agreement for higher wages, for example – the MBO must try and ensure that the agreement is implemented. Ideally there should be a formal agreement that includes procedures to monitor implementation, raise complaints, propose amendments, etc. An example might be a garment company that agrees to ensure that all homeworkers in its supply chain are treated fairly, paid at least the minimum wage, etc. Such an agreement needs to be backed up by regular meetings with MBO representatives, when they have the opportunity of presenting evidence of middlemen or supply companies that break the agreement. But as often noted, achieving an agreement at local, national or international level is a huge step and is usually the beginning of a much longer process to ensure implementation and enforcement.

"We now have a law to protect home based workers (a new Homeworkers Protection Act). Home-based workers now make co-payments with government for social security. Building alliances with NGOs and other civil society groups was important in this process."

Poonsap Tuliphan,
HomeNet Thailand

"Implementation of the National Policy on Street Vendors, laws and regulations, is our major challenge."

Mageshvaran Veerappan,
NASVI

DEBATE: "Advocacy" or "Collective Bargaining"?

When is advocacy a form of collective bargaining? When is collective bargaining a form of advocacy? What's the difference?

The two phrases are often used interchangeably. "Collective bargaining" is a term used to describe negotiations by representatives of collective organizations, and is most commonly used by trade unions, but increasingly by other MBOs. "Advocacy" is a much broader term meaning to speak in favour of, or promote through various actions, something on behalf of another. The implication is that collective bargaining is done by representatives of the workers themselves, answerable to the workers, on issues raised by the workers; whereas advocacy is something that can be undertaken by people or organizations on behalf of workers who do not have the power to speak for themselves. MBOs often use a combination of advocacy and negotiation to achieve their demands.

Lesson 5: Organizing for the Long-Term

The struggle to make gains is usually long and never stops. MBOs need to have a long term vision rather than a focus only on short term gains. This is not always easy for members to embrace as their immediate needs are so pressing.

In *We Are Workers, Too*, Celia Mather explains how SEWA set up embroidery centres for homeworkers in five locations in east Delhi, India while negotiating with “socially responsible” clothing companies to provide them with work. In effect, SEWA became an agent in the supply chain for garments, in an attempt to improve the livelihoods of its members. This is part of SEWA’s strategy of cutting out the middlemen who pay the homeworkers so little, so negotiations were organized directly with international retailers, such as Gap and H&M, and with some of the Delhi-based export houses. Some of these companies claim to have a more ethical approach, and do pay a little more than the normal rates for homeworkers – but not much:

“The market presses down on rates. We can only get contracts when our prices are close to what the contractors are prepared to accept. So we only get a few more rupees per piece. And we have to accept very low rates when there is no other work.”

SEWA Embroidery Centre organizer, Delhi quoted in
We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

“A union has its own power and, if you join, you will feel that power.”

SEWA Embroidery Centre worker, Delhi, quoted in *We are Workers Too!* (Mather 2010)

Nevertheless, SEWA has managed to become de facto recognized by the companies as the legitimate bargaining representative for the homeworkers, establish processes and procedures for collective bargaining, and make some modest gains for the members. Further more substantial gains will only be possible through organization on a wider scale, when MBOs such as SEWA have organized the bulk of the homeworker workforce in Delhi, in India and ultimately throughout the international supply chain.

And of course, the union is able to do far more for their members in the centres than simply bargain for small wage increases. It also opens the door to all the other forms of SEWA self-organization – the “development” part of “struggle and development.”

“Be part of a centre like this. You get many benefits, not just savings and work, but pensions, training, so many things. We have been able to go on pilgrimage. We hold drawing competitions between us. Women who are not organized, come into the union! A union has its own power and, if you join, you will feel that power.”

SEWA Embroidery Centre worker, Delhi, quoted in
We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

Resources

SEWA website: www.sewa.org
SEWA Academy website: www.sewaacademy.org
KKPKP website: www.workerscollective.org

For examples of arguments see: Celia Mather (2010) *We are Workers Too!* Available at <http://wiego.org/resources/we-are-workers-too-organizing-home-based-workers-global-economy> and Celia Mather (2011) “Myths & Realities about Domestic Workers.” Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/8%20Myths%20english%20FINAL%281%29%20_0.pdf

Challenge 6

Reaching Out

Informal workers are not alone. As we have seen throughout this handbook, many of the issues they face are shared by workers across the different sectors of the informal economy. Some are shared by workers in the formal economy. MBOs of informal workers often seek solidarity and alliances with many sorts of external organizations.

But solidarity is a two-way street. Most major threats to informal workers are threats to all – austerity measures from banks and governments, global warming, super-exploitation by global corporations, denial of human rights (including workers' rights), corrupt and undemocratic regimes, and so on. Formerly “traditional” trade unions are increasingly reaching out to include informal workers and informal workers are increasingly reaching out to formal unions. Formal economy workers are facing a dramatic world-wide attack on their livelihoods and conditions as work is informalized and jobs are increasingly insecure.

Many MBOs of informal workers take an active part in much broader struggles against poverty, for democracy and for decent work. In some cases, MBOs of informal workers come together in alliance or in permanent structures with informal workers from other sectors, or organizations of the poor, to campaign for common demands. In others, informal workers' MBOs join forces with formal economy unions to strengthen common campaigns and issues. Many informal workers' MBOs (not necessarily trade unions) are able to join national trade union centres, and gain valuable access to regular well-established collective bargaining structures with government.



photo: Demetria Tsoulouras

StreetNet International has built the World Class Cities for All campaign in alliance with unions and social movements

Internationally, individual MBOs or MBO networks have established strong relations with the international trade union federations, or have joined broad international alliances. SEWA, for example, is a member of several Global Union Federations, and as a recognized national trade union centre, is a member of the International Trade Union Confederation. StreetNet has strong links with the GUF, Union Network International, and built the international World Class Cities for All campaign in alliance with unions and social movements. The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and Allies brings waste pickers from Latin America, Asia and Africa together with support organizations and environmental justice NGOs to offer real solutions for climate change mitigation.

Ultimately, as the informal economy expands worldwide, and a whole generation of workers face a life of insecure or "precarious" work, the nature of work is itself changing. This requires new solutions and new organizational strategies. Informal workers' MBOs have a crucial role in rebuilding the world's labour movement.

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1. Recruiting Informal Workers into Democratic Workers' Organisations
2. Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers
3. Handling the Day-To-Day Problems of Informal Workers
4. Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers
5. Handling Disputes between Informal Workers and those in Power
6. Collective Action for Informal Workers

Available for download or in-house printing at <http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/building-organizations/>

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Websites

Activist Toolbox on Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/building-organizations/>

Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCPC) website: www.ctcpnicaragua.org

GAIA website: www.no-burn.org

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org

HomeNet Nepal website: www.homenetnepal.org

HomeNet Thailand website: www.homenetthailand.org

HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net

HomeNet Southeast Asia website: www.homenetseasia.org

HomeNet South East Europe website: www.homeneteasteurope.com

Inclusive Cities website: <http://www.inclusivecities.org>

IDWN website: www.idwn.info

IDWN blog: <http://idwnilo.wordpress.com/>

KKPKP website: www.workerscollective.org

NASVI website: <http://www.nasvinet.org/>

MNCR website: www.mncr.org.br

RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net

StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za

SEWA website: www.sewa.org

SEWA Academy website: www.sewaacademy.org

WIEGO website: <http://wiego.org>.

WORD (WIEGO Organization & Representation Database) of informal worker organizations: <http://www.wiegodatabase.org/>

Appendix

List of Participants at the Workshop “Organizing in the Informal Economy: Building and Strengthening Membership-Based Organizations” Bangkok, 3-5 March 2011

Lucia Fernandez	Woman	WIEGO: Global Coordinator: Waste pickers	France
Chris Bonner	W	WIEGO: Organization and Representation Programme Director	South Africa
Rhonda Douglas	W	WIEGO: Global Projects Director	Canada
Dave Spooner	Man	WIEGO: Consultant, Organization and Representation Programme	UK
Ricardo Valencia	M	WIEGO: Latin America Coordinator: Waste pickers	Colombia
Dan Gallin	M	WIEGO: Advisory Committee and Global Labour Institute (GLI)	Switzerland
Sofia Trevino	W	WIEGO: Global Projects Officer and Spanish translator	Canada
Melanie Samson	W	WIEGO: Africa Coordinator, Waste pickers	South Africa
Samson Muluqeta	M	Media Consultant	South Africa
Angelique Kipulu Katani	W	StreetNet International and Ligue pour le Droit de la Femme Congolaise (LDFC)	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
Violeta Zlateva	W	Association of Homeworkers	Bulgaria
Prof Krastyo Petkov	M	Association of Homeworkers	Bulgaria
Hamida	W	Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA Bharat)	India
Janhavi Dave	W	SEWA	India
Sapna Raval	W	SEWA Academy	India
Phamuang Khanthone	M	HomeNet SE Asia and Nonprofit Association of Laos Development (NALD)/HomeNet Lao	Lao PDR
Sinoeun MEN	M	HomeNet SE Asia and Artisans Association of Cambodia/ HN Cambodia	Cambodia
Om Thapaliya	M	HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet Nepal (HNN)	Nepal
Sapna Joshi	W	HomeNet South Asia Coordinator (HNSA)	India
Poonsap Tulaphan	W	HomeNet SE Asia and HomeNet Thailand	Thailand
Josephine Parilla	W	HomeNet SE Asia and PATAMABA	Philippines
Hillary Dickens Ochieng	M	Kenya Alliance of Waste Handlers	Kenya
Niasse Harouna	M	Association Book Diom des Recupérateurs et Recycleurs de Mbeubeuss	Senegal
Simon Mbata	M	South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA)	South Africa
Severino de Lima Junior	M	Red Latino-americana de Recicladores (RED LACRE), and Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (MNCR)	Brazil
Madalena Rodrigues Duarte	W	RED LACRE and MNCR	Brazil
Mageshvaran Veerappan	M	National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)	India

Monica Garzaro Andrino	W	StreetNet International	South Africa
Gaby Bikombo	M	StreetNet International	South Africa
Sandra Yadira Flores Jimenez	W	StreetNet International and Confederation de Trabajadores Cuenta Propia (CTCP)	Nicaragua
Vicky Kanyoka	W	International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)	Tanzania
Ida Le Blanc	W	IDWN and National Union of Domestic Employees	Trinidad and Tobago
Fish (Ip Pui Yu)	W	International Domestic Workers Network	Hong Kong
Myrtle Witbooi	W	IDWN and South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU)	South Africa
Marcelina Bautista	W	IDWN and Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar (CONLACTRAHO)	Mexico
Machababu Malakar	M	General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and Independent Garbage Cleaners' Union of Nepal (IGCUN)	Nepal
Elizabeth Tang	W	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF) and Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU)	Hong Kong
Guillermo Onofre Flores	M	Federacion de Estibadores Terrestres y Transportistas Manuales del Peru (FETTRAMAP)	Peru
Heng Yon Kora	M	Community Sanitation and Recycling Organization (CSARO)	Cambodia
Cheng Khoem	W	CSARO	Cambodia
Channy Khoun	W	CSARO	Cambodia
Suntaree Saeng-ging	W	HomeNet Thailand	Thailand
Monal Kapadia	W	HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet India	India
Surekha Gade	W	Alliance of Indian Waste pickers (AIW) and KKPKP	India
Mohan Nanavra	M	AIW and KKPKP	India
Nuchnapa Bamrungna	W	HomeNet Thailand (Home-Based Workers)	Thailand
Waraphon Pongtanu	W	HomeNet Thailand (Domestic Workers)	Thailand
Preeda Sirisawat	W	FES Thailand	Thailand
Nalini Shekar	W	AIW	India
Elsa Ramos	W	ex ILO	Thailand

The Only School We Have Learning from Organizing Experiences Across the Informal Economy

About this Handbook: This handbook details the experiences of organizing among informal workers, and provides information, practical ideas, successful strategies, inspiration and resources for organizers.

It is a resource for those organizing informal workers in any sector, though it is based on the organizing experiences in (mainly) four groups: domestic workers, home-based workers, street/market vendors and waste pickers. It draws on the themes, ideas and information generated at the WIEGO workshop, organized with the assistance of HomeNet Thailand in March 2011, called Organizing in the Informal Economy: Building and Strengthening Membership-Based Organizations.

It aims to provide useful material that can help organizations of informal workers:

- understand more clearly some complex and evolving **concepts**, such as the informal economy and membership-based organizations (MBOs)
- develop a sense of the growing movement of informal workers through looking at the **historical roots** and more recent developments
- share **information and experiences** of informal workers in different sectors of the informal economy
- gain guidance and inspiration from **practical ideas and lessons learned** by organizations
- develop **strategies** to overcome some of the challenges and find **answers** to some of the difficult questions and debates commonly raised.



Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing