

# **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: WIEGO POSITION AND APPROACH**

Economic empowerment of working poor individuals in the informal economy is at the heart of WIEGO's mission. This paper describes our position and approach to several issues core to this empowerment, and provides details on the work that we do. While WIEGO seeks to foster economic empowerment for both men and women, this paper takes particular note of the challenges faced by women.

## **I. WIEGO POSITION AND APPROACH**

WIEGO is a global action-research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. Founded in 1997, WIEGO achieves this by fostering increased organization and representation; improved statistics and research; more inclusive policy processes; and more equitable trade, labour, urban planning, and social protection policies.

### **WIEGO's Structure**

The members of WIEGO, including the members of our Board, are drawn from our three constituencies:

- member-based organizations of informal workers
- researchers and statisticians
- practitioners in development agencies: governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental.

Member-based organizations (MBOs) of informal workers are invited to become Institutional Members of WIEGO; individuals from the other two constituencies are invited to become Individual Members of WIEGO. At present, WIEGO has 15 Institutional and 120 Individual Members from some 35 countries.

WIEGO is a virtual global network with 27 staff in 10 countries and two offices: a Secretariat at the Harvard Kennedy School, and an office in Manchester, UK. In 2009, we had activities, members, and/or staff in 44 countries around the world (see <http://www.wiego.org/wiegoWorldwide.php>).

### **WIEGO's Definition of Women's Economic Empowerment**

The economic empowerment of women has been defined variously in terms of increased *access to and control over* resources and markets and increased *agency and choice*, as well as improvements in and control over specific *outcomes or achievements* (such as enhanced wellbeing and dignity, better work-life balance, and improved economic opportunities). All dimensions of empowerment – resources, agency, and achievements – are critical to the wellbeing, dignity, and livelihood opportunities of working poor women.

WIEGO emphasizes the increased ability of working poor women to influence the wider environment that shapes their livelihoods and lives. Through our work with MBOs of informal workers, we have learned that increased access to resources without the ability to influence broader external factors will not necessarily translate into more secure and remunerative livelihoods. Existing policies, regulations, and institutions are not designed to meet the needs of these women's lives (and, therefore, offer little real choice); improved outcomes are often not sustainable without the ongoing ability to significantly influence the wider environment.

For WIEGO, then, empowerment refers to the process of change that gives working poor women – as individual workers and as members of worker organizations – the ability to gain access to the resources they need while also gaining the ability to influence the wider policy, regulatory, and institutional environment that shapes their livelihoods and lives.

**WIEGO Focus: The Working Poor, Especially Women, in the Informal Economy**

WIEGO focuses on the working poor for two reasons. The first is the more important normative reason: those who work in the informal economy usually earn less and encounter higher risks than those who work in the formal economy. Most of the working poor are engaged in the informal economy; most of those engaged in the informal economy are poor. Among these working poor, women face specific disadvantages and discrimination.

Within the informal economy, there is a hierarchy of average earnings and poverty risk (eg. being from a poor household) and different segments of informal workers exist: employers, employees, own account workers, casual day laborer, industrial outworkers, and unpaid contributing workers. These segments have different status within the informal economy: employers earn the most on average and industrial outworkers earn the least (leaving aside unpaid contributing family workers for whom it is hard to say how much they “earn”). The chart in Appendix 2, below, depicts a pyramid of segmentation within the informal economy based on average earnings, poverty risk, and sex.

WIEGO's second reason for focusing its attention on the working poor in the informal economy is a more conceptual one. Many mainstream economists see the informal economy as comprised of plucky entrepreneurs – and also some illegal elements – who seek to evade regulation and taxation: that is, as a “problem” to be dealt with. So long as this is the dominant view of the informal economy, policy responses will largely carry costs – such as regulation and taxation – and not benefits for the informal workforce.

Policy makers need to understand that the informal economy is the *real* economy in many developing countries: a major and growing share of the workforce is informally employed, and a significant and growing share of GDP is generated by the informal workforce.

From its inception, WIEGO felt it was important to highlight, through credible research and improved statistics, that the informal economy comprises a large share of the workforce and GDP in most developing countries, that it is growing (not going away), and that many of those who work in it are individuals whose personal, household, and business incomes fall below most thresholds for taxation and who do not, as citizens or workers, receive their fair share of public goods and services.

WIEGO has chosen to focus primarily on working poor women because the majority of these women in developing countries work in the informal economy, a higher percentage of economically active women workers (than men) work in the informal economy. Other than in the Middle East and North Africa, where 42 per cent of women workers (and 48% of male workers) are in informal employment, 60 per cent or more of women non-agricultural workers in the developing world are informally employed. Among non-agricultural workers, in sub-Saharan Africa, 84 per cent of women workers are informally employed compared to 63 per cent of men workers; in Latin America, 58 per cent of women workers compared to 48 per cent of men; and in Asia, 73 per cent of women workers compared to 70 per cent of men workers (ILO 2002).

Furthermore, there is a marked gender gap in resources, opportunities, and earnings within the informal economy. Although this is the case, and although WIEGO has "women" in its name, WIEGO does not exclude men in its work. In fact, in most programs and activities, WIEGO focuses on all working poor persons, both women and men, in the informal economy, but places a special emphasis on the roles and status of women workers.

In brief, WIEGO seeks to support the working poor in the informal economy with a special emphasis on the roles, needs, constraints, and opportunities of working poor women.

### **WIEGO's Work**

WIEGO has five core areas of work:

- **Urban Policies Programme** focuses on how urban policies impact home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers as groups of workers; in so doing, we also seek to identify the specific roles, constraints, and opportunities of women and men within these groups.
- **Global Trade Programme** focuses on how informal workers are inserted into global value chains and excluded from export markets, and with what consequences; this program seeks to understand how homeworkers/industrial outworkers (who are predominantly women) might be inserted into global value chains on more ethical terms. It also explores strategies to link small producer groups of women to export markets on fair terms.
- **Social Protection Programme** focuses on how to extend social protection to all workers in the informal economy in ways that are sensitive to the different roles, responsibilities, and life cycle risks of men and women workers.

- **Organization and Representation Programme** focuses on how to build and strengthen organizations of the working poor, both men and women, in the informal economy and to help them gain voice; in so doing, we seek to ensure that women play leadership roles in their own or in mixed organizations.
- **Statistics Programme** seeks to improve the availability of statistics on the informal economy as a whole, recognizing that, in order to do so, we must develop better concepts and measures to capture women's work, which is more likely to remain unrecognized, unmeasured, and unvalued.

WIEGO also has two global projects with partners around the world:

- **The Inclusive Cities for the Urban Working Poor project:** Together with our global partners, WIEGO focuses on home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers, both men and women, with a primary focus on women . See [www.inclusivecities.org](http://www.inclusivecities.org).
- **The Women's Economic Empowerment project,** funded by the MDG3 fund of the Government of the Netherlands, focuses exclusively on women. Sub-projects include Voice for Domestic Workers, Fair Trade for Women Producers, and Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers. Please see Appendix 4 for details on these sub-projects, and for more information please visit [www.wiego.org/wee](http://www.wiego.org/wee).

### **Action-Research-Advocacy**

WIEGO has programs and activities in all three domains: action, research, and advocacy.

**Action** – WIEGO seeks to strengthen member-based organizations (MBOs) of working poor women in the informal economy, as well as sector-specific networks of such organizations. To date, we have helped build national, regional, and/or international networks of domestic workers, home-based producers, street vendors, and waste pickers. In particular, we aim to enhance their capacity for building democratic organizations and for effective advocacy, as well as their operational and financial capacity. The overall objective of this work is to increase the *voice* of working poor women. *By voice we mean organizational strength, solidarity, and bargaining power, as well as representation in relevant policy-making institutions and processes.* We do not directly organize or provide services to working poor women: this is the function of the MBOs.

**Research** – WIEGO also functions as a “think tank” for the MBOs of working poor women. In this capacity, we seek to improve labor force and other economic statistics about informal workers/informal economy, and to make these data available to the MBOs and their allies for use in their advocacy work. We also seek to generate credible research knowledge on issues that relate to the livelihoods and lives of working poor women. The overall objective of this work is to increase the *visibility* of working poor women. *By visibility we mean increasing their presence in official statistics and mainstream research that informs policy makers and policies.* To ensure our research is relevant, we involve MBOs of working poor women in the design, implementation, analysis, and/or dissemination of our research findings. Most recently, MBOs of informal workers, both men and women, in 10 countries were the research partners in a WIEGO-led study on the impact of the global economic crisis on the working poor in the informal economy (see

[http://www.wiego.org/gec\\_study/index.php](http://www.wiego.org/gec_study/index.php)). To ensure our research is credible, we partner with official statistical organizations, mainstream research institutions, and established research scholars. Over the past five years, we have had research partners or activities at 56 research institutions in 25 countries around the world.

**Advocacy** - WIEGO has been characterized as a social justice advocacy network that focuses on the economic rights of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. What sets us apart from other social justice advocacy networks is that we do not seek to do advocacy on our own. Rather, we build the advocacy capacity of MBOs and undertake joint policy advocacy with them. This also requires building the organizational capacity of these MBOs (one aspect of our Action work detailed above). In our joint advocacy work with the MBOs of working poor women, we seek to increase the *validity* of working poor women as economic actors. *By validity we mean their legal recognition, protection, and promotion as economic actors who contribute to the economy.*

## II. WIEGO'S WORK IN KEY AREAS

In this section, we outline WIEGO's position and work in seven key areas of women's economic empowerment and highlight some of the distinctive features of our perspective and approach.

### Key Area 1: Entrepreneurship and Private Sector Development

Our priority is to help remove institutional, regulatory, and policy barriers to livelihoods and to promote inclusive urban policies and trade policies for the working poor, especially women.

Working poor women play critical roles in the economies of their households, communities and countries. They are more likely to be self-employed than wage employed. As self-employed, they are most likely to be unpaid contributing family workers in family firms or farms and own account operators who do not hire others; relatively few are employers who hire others. Many are also sub-contracted workers for formal firms, an intermediary category between independent self-employed and dependent wage workers. These subcontracted workers typically own or rent their workplace (often their own home), own or rent their equipment, pay to repair equipment, and pay for utilities, yet they do not buy raw materials or sell finished goods. Many self-employed women work from their homes; this constrains their productivity, isolates them from other workers, and undermines their knowledge of and access to markets. It also undermines their bargaining power.

The constraints faced by the working poor in the informal economy, both women and men, vary by sector, country and region. However, the constraints faced by specific sectors of workers are often quite similar across countries and regions. A primary focus of WIEGO's work is highlighting and addressing sector-specific policy and regulatory constraints to the livelihoods of specific groups of informal workers—notably, but not exclusively, domestic workers, home-based producers, street vendors, and waste pickers.

In 2004, the World Bank commissioned WIEGO to write three case studies on the constraints in the regulatory environment faced by informal entrepreneurs. These would serve as background papers for the WDR 2005 *A Better Investment Climate for Everyone*. The case studies describe the challenges faced by street traders in six African countries; by garment manufacturers and street traders in Durban, South Africa; and by street traders, garment makers, small farmers, gum collectors, salt farmers, and embroiderers in Gujarat, India. Each case study included a primary focus on women workers among the specific occupational groups.

These case studies can be found at [www.wiego.org/papers](http://www.wiego.org/papers):

- ["Investment Climate and Informal Enterprises: A Case Study from Urban and Rural India"](#) by Martha Chen (International Coordinator, WIEGO), Renana Jhabvala (SEWA) and Reema Nanavaty (SEWA)
- ["The Investment Climate for the Informal Economy: A Case of Durban, South Africa"](#) by Francie Lund (Director, WIEGO Social Protection Programme) and Caroline Skinner (then at the University of KwaZulu Natal; now Director, WIEGO Urban Policies Programme)
- ["Street Vending in African Cities: A Synthesis of Empirical Findings from Kenya, Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Uganda and South Africa"](#) by Winnie Mitullah (former Director, WIEGO Urban Policies Programme)

WIEGO works to build and strengthen sector-specific networks of workers and supporting their advocacy campaigns. Currently, we are helping in the following advocacy campaigns:

***“Decent Work for Domestic Workers” Campaign***

In March 2008, the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) decided to begin a standard-setting discussion on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” at the 2010 International Labour Conference (ILC), with the possibility of adopting a Convention and/or Recommendation on domestic work at the 2011 ILC. The International Domestic Workers’ Network (IDWN) decided to mount a campaign, in consultation and collaboration with the ILO and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to prepare for the 2010 and 2011 standard-setting negotiations. The IDWN held regional workshops in Africa, Asia, and Latin America at which it collected the concerns and demands of domestic workers from the three regions: see the IDWN “Platform of Demands” on the WIEGO website at [http://www.wiego.org/pdf/Platform\\_of\\_Demands\\_English.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/pdf/Platform_of_Demands_English.pdf)

To help domestic workers argue their case, WIEGO produced fact sheets with information on the status of domestic workers worldwide and data on domestic workers in Latin America based on a paper prepared by Victor Tokman (former Regional Director of the ILO for Latin America) for IDWN. See [http://www.wiego.org/occupational\\_groups/domesticWorkers/index.php](http://www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/domesticWorkers/index.php)

The historic first discussion on “Decent Work for Domestic Workers” took place at the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2010. The IDWN was represented at the conference by members of its Steering Committee and other domestic workers, some of whom were on the official national trade union delegations from their respective countries. In addition, a number of allies, some under the auspices of WIEGO, were there to provide technical support to the IDWN delegation.

### ***“Ratification of ILO Convention 177” Campaign***

In 1996, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the Home Work Convention, known as ‘C177’, which mandates that all home workers should have basic labor rights – irrespective of the sector in which they work – and guarantees the applicability of core labor standards and other standards to all home workers. The adoption of C177 was an important victory, but it does not carry the full weight of the law unless it is ratified by individual governments and introduced into national legislation. The campaign to ratify C177 is making slow but important progress. To date, seven countries have ratified the convention: Albania, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands. HomeNet South Asia and the Global Labour Institute, with support from WIEGO, continue to encourage unions and other opinion-formers to press for ratification and for the introduction of national laws to implement the Convention’s principles.

### ***“World Class Cities for All” Campaign***

In 2006, StreetNet International mounted a campaign worldwide to challenge the traditional elitist approach to building “World Class Cities.” This approach too often undermines the livelihoods of the urban working poor. Through this campaign, StreetNet and its allies seek to create a new, more inclusive approach to urban planning and city governance that fosters the inclusion and participation of street vendors and other groups of urban working poor in urban improvement or renewal initiatives. StreetNet focused this campaign on the preparations for the FIFA World Cup in South Africa and the Commonwealth Games in India in 2010 to ensure that street vendors would not be unduly disadvantaged by the improvement initiatives associated with such mega-events and, if they were, would be given viable and acceptable livelihood alternatives. To ensure these demands were met, the campaign called for participatory consultative processes with the working poor individuals and groups affected in any substantive or material manner by any aspect of urban improvement or renewal initiatives envisaged in these events. To support the campaign, WIEGO undertook a study on the impact of mega-events on the working poor.

The StreetNet International campaign was endorsed by and received critical support from Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Ela Bhatt, founder of the SEWA – both members of The Elders convened by Nelson Mandela – who strongly recommended the proposals of “World Class Cities for All” campaign when they met with President Zuma of South Africa and the president of FIFA in May 2010. For more details, see <http://theelders.org/media/news/fair-play-street-vendors>, a blog by Ela Bhatt that WIEGO helped create.

Our research in this area highlights policy and regulatory constraints to the livelihoods of specific groups of informal workers through sector-specific value chain analysis and case study research, as well as statistical data development and analysis. In the policy domain, we do this through sector-specific policy analysis, including informal economy budget analysis (modeled on gender budget analysis), and advocacy. For an overview report on Informal Economy Budget Analysis, visit [www.wiego.org/publications/inclusive-cities-research-report-1.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/publications/inclusive-cities-research-report-1.pdf)

Refer to the About WIEGO/Core Programmes and About Informal Economy/Specific Sectors sections of [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org) for examples of our action, research, and advocacy by sectors.

The gender division of labor through which women are perceived – and conditioned – to be responsible for unpaid domestic and care work is fairly common across societies, countries, and regions. What differs is the degree to which women are constrained by this gender division of labor and, also, by gender norms of modesty that constrain their mobility outside the home.

Many of these have to do with non-social constraints that impact on women’s engagement in paid work. Some of these have to do with the practices of formal firms: whether their investments are capital or labor-intensive; whether they outsource production and distribution through supply chains; and how they hire and compensate workers. Some of these have to do with the policies and practices of governments: whether they regulate or de-regulate labor markets; whether they include or exclude the smallest economic activities/units in their urban spatial planning and zoning regulations; and more broadly, whether or not they embrace the informal economy as an essential part of the overall economy.

WIEGO’s work addresses these social constraints through our focus on “place of work”, particularly our focus on producers for whom their home is their workplace. This focus is incorporated in our action work in support of organizations/networks of home-based workers; our research and statistical work to improve research and data on home-based producers; and our advocacy for ethical trade and fair trade, basic urban services and urban zoning policies, as well as social protection including occupational, health and safety for home-based workers.

In order to be supportive and successful, sector policies need to remove regulatory barriers and provide supportive services. WIEGO supports lifting key regulatory barriers and implementing supportive services needed for the main categories of self-employed women:

- **Home-based producers**
  - Regulatory barriers: urban zoning policies that forbid or discourage productive activities in residential areas, as well as avoidance of regulations by firms through outsourcing production to home-based producers;



- Supportive services: organizing; market knowledge and access; and financial and business services.
- **Street Vendors**
  - Regulatory barriers: city by-laws and spatial plans that do not provide space for street vendors in central business districts or near transport nodes;
  - Supportive services: infrastructure services (notably, water, sanitation, shelter) at vending sites and natural markets + financial services.
- **Waste Pickers**
  - Regulatory barriers: city ordinances that deny waste pickers access to waste at city bins or land fills and private houses; city procurement systems that deny associations of waste pickers the right to bid for solid waste management contracts;
  - Supportive services: sorting and storage sheds; push carts and vehicles.

For women to achieve full economic empowerment, there must be an integrated understanding of where women and men are situated in the workforce and in the economy, and what the consequences of gender differences are.

Consider trade policy: women are increasingly employed as sub-contracted workers in global value chains in textile and garments, footwear, electronic assembly, automobile part assembly, and many other sectors. While the situation of women in export factories has attracted increasing attention and response over the past decade, the situation of women home-workers has yet to receive as much attention or response.

As a member of the Ethical Trade Initiative in the UK, WIEGO seeks to promote an understanding of and a focus on women home workers at the bottom rung of most manufacturing global value chains: they are paid less than most other workers yet have to cover many of the costs of production (workplace, equipment, utilities) and endure delayed payments, (often arbitrarily) rejected goods, and (often without notice or recourse) cancelled work orders.

Consider urban policies: for home-based producers, both self-employed and sub-contracted outworkers, their home is their workplace. Yet they often live in slums or squatter settlements where the lack of access to basic infrastructural services such as water, sanitation, and electricity undermines the time they have for productive work and impacts their productivity when they do find time.

As they are designed, policies across all sectors (trade, urban, agriculture, forestry, fishery, etc.) must integrate an understanding of gender realities – who does what under what arrangements, who owns what, and who gets what – in order to recognize the impacts of policy reforms and to promote gender equality and poverty reduction.

A three-pronged approach is needed that will:

- create more formal jobs through employment-targeted economic policies
- formalize many informal jobs as well as informal enterprises so long as formalization comes with benefits, not just costs
- provide protection and support to those who continue to work informally.

Within each approach, working poor women should be given priority because, as compared to men, women are less likely to have formal or (even) informal wage employment and, as self-employed, are less likely to receive support of any kind.

## Key Area 2: Access to Land and Property Rights

With regard to increased access to, control over and right to property, WIEGO focuses its work on access to public resources and the political economy, not just the gender dynamics, of who gets access and control. Consider the working poor in the urban informal economy. Home-based workers need cities to provide tenure and basic infrastructure services to the slums and squatter settlements where they live and work. The key issue is not whether a woman or her husband/son/brother-in-law owns the home – very often neither does. From our perspective, the central issue is whether the city is willing to improve the circumstances of home and workplace. Home-based workers also need access to affordable transport systems that will allow them to carry raw materials and finished goods from and to markets.

Street vendors need a secure place to vend in good locations next to central business districts and or transport nodes: these are the areas where natural vending markets tend to exist or develop. Fundamental to this is how a city allocates public land (whether to big firms and property dealers only, or also to the smallest enterprises) and whether cities are willing to accommodate vendors on fair terms.

Waste pickers must have access to waste and need the right to bid for solid waste management contracts. Again, the overarching issue is whether waste pickers, both men and women, have access. All waste pickers are threatened when cities privatize solid waste management without considering them as potential bidders or when cities construct incinerators or landfills without a recycling focus.

All three categories of urban informal workers, both men and women, also have to deal with disadvantage or exploitation within the specific value chains they work in. WIEGO is involved with partners around the world, primarily MBOs of home-based workers, street vendors, waste pickers, in the global project Inclusive Cities for the Working Poor, which seeks to address all of these issues. See [www.inclusivecities.org](http://www.inclusivecities.org) for more details.

Policies and interventions related to access to and rights to economic resources must take into account the complex mix of political economy and gender dynamics that constrain the rights of the working poor and, in particular, the rights of working poor women.

WIEGO believes in approaching the constraints faced by working poor women through a

hierarchy or nested tier of constraints; those faced by all informal firms and workers, those faced by the smallest informal firms and workers, and those faced by women-run firms and women workers.

For a framework for assessing policy biases affecting informal enterprises (run by both men and women) and informal workers, see Appendix 1.

### Key Area 3: Labour Markets and Decent Work

Equal access to decent work is essential to the wellbeing of all workers in both the formal and informal economies. However, employment growth has not kept pace with the significant GDP growth in many developing countries over the past two decades. Also, in most countries, recent growth in employment has been largely in the informal economy. This has implications for the working poor, both men and women.

WIEGO works closely with the ILO, UNIFEM, and others to address these issues. In doing so, we promote an employment approach to economic growth, arguing that employment – its quality and quantity – is the key intermediary pathway between growth/globalization and both poverty and gender outcomes. This was the key message of *The Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women Work and Poverty* (see [www.wiego.org/publications/PoWW2005\\_eng.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/publications/PoWW2005_eng.pdf)) and *Mainstreaming Informal Employment and Gender in Poverty Reduction. A Handbook for Policy-makers and Other Stakeholders* (see [www.wiego.org/publications](http://www.wiego.org/publications)) that WIEGO wrote for, respectively, UNIFEM in 2005 and the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2004.

One area of particular concern is the significant gender segmentation in labour markets, which continues to contribute to significant gender gaps in earnings and working conditions despite the fact that there has been a sustained increase in female labour force participation in recent decades.

WIEGO has studied the implications for both women and men of being employed in the informal economy, rather than in the formal economy. For the 2005 UNIFEM publication mentioned above, as well as a 2002 ILO publication called *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, we commissioned analyses of official data in several countries around the world that indicated a) on average, earnings are lower and risks are higher in the informal economy compared to the formal economy; but also b) there is segmentation within the informal economy by average earnings, poverty risk, and sex. Please see Appendix 2 for a graphic depiction of this.

Based on this understanding, WIEGO felt that the original work-related indicator under Millennium Development Goal # 3 – namely, women's share in wage employment – was not adequate and worked with the ILO Statistics Bureau to develop a new supplemental indicator that would take into the account the segmentation of women's paid work. See Appendix 3 for this supplemental indicator, which was adopted by the Inter-Agency Expert Group for MDG Indicators.

WIEGO believes economic growth is a prerequisite for employment creation, but not sufficient in itself. Through data analysis, we have also shown that decent work is not guaranteed by employment growth, and that specific policies are needed to increase employment – especially decent work. We also believe in sector-specific strategies to secure livelihoods and to improve earnings and working conditions.

Policies, laws, and regulations discriminate between formal and informal firms, between formal and informal workers, and against women within each.

WIEGO sees discrimination against working poor women as arising from three basic identities that attach to these women: first, their identity as workers (by different occupations, employment statuses, and sectors); second, their identity as members of poor/disadvantaged households/communities; and, third, their identity as women. Each of these sources of discrimination – and how they reinforce each other – must be taken into account when analyzing and addressing discrimination against working poor women in the economic realm.

Active labor market policies to increase the demand for women’s labor and institutions to regulate the quality of women’s labor are needed. As reflected in the pyramid in Appendix 2, WIEGO has found fairly consistent segmentation of labor markets – both formal and informal. We have also tested (although on a limited scale to date) whether this segmentation is due to supply side variables alone – such as education and skills – or to other factors. Our findings indicate that the demand for labor, institutional factors, and the race-ethnicity-caste of workers also contributes to labor force segmentation.

Since WIEGO was founded in 1997, we have collaborated with the ILO on its Decent Work campaign. We worked very closely with the ILO in its preparations for the General Discussion on Decent Work for Informal Workers at the 2002 International Labour Conference (ILC). Recently, we worked closely with the ILO and the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF) in preparing for the Standard-Setting Discussion on Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the 2010 ILC. WIEGO will continue to work closely with the ILO and the IUF in preparation for the final discussion and vote on this topic at the 2011 ILC. WIEGO has also collaborated in joint advocacy with Realizing Rights—The Ethical Globalization Initiative and the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) to promote decent work for informal workers.

To read our joint advocacy materials, please visit [www.wiego.org/publications/Informal-Economy-Fact-Sheets.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/publications/Informal-Economy-Fact-Sheets.pdf)

#### Key Area 4: Unpaid Care Work

WIEGO does not work directly on women’s unpaid work--there are many excellent feminist economists who do--but we do consider how women’s unpaid domestic and care work limits the time women have for paid work and their physical mobility outside the home.

We also consider how the under-enumeration and under-valuation of women's unpaid work is reflected in the under-enumeration and under-valuation of much of women's paid work. Most notably perhaps, both men and women will consider the paid/market work that women do at home as somehow just "women's work" – not something to be reported in labor force surveys or otherwise validated.

Also, women's *paid* care work is under-valued much like women's unpaid care work – as something that women have a particular inclination or aptitude for – not something that women have been conditioned to do and, more importantly, that should be valued for its contribution to reproducing the labor force, subsidizing wages, and otherwise supporting the economy.

Please see Chapter 2 of *Progress of the World's Women 2005*, for a full discussion of these issues: [http://www.wiego.org/publications/PoWW2005\\_eng.pdf](http://www.wiego.org/publications/PoWW2005_eng.pdf)

WIEGO contends that the almost universal responsibility of women for providing unpaid domestic tasks and care for the family is a key reason behind their lower rates of participation in the paid labour force, as well as for their lower pay.

Infrastructure conditions related to women's household obligations also are a key component of care issues. In low-income countries, the lack of basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, electricity, fuel) forces women to spend long hours fetching water or firewood. The provision of basic infrastructure not only releases women's time for paid work but also improves their homes, which are often their workplaces or the place where they store goods and equipment.

### Key Area 5: Human Capital

WIEGO has two priorities in the area of human capital: one is to promote women's access to technical skills, the other is to help build women's leadership and advocacy skills.

Working poor women need new technical skills to be able to keep up with changing labor demand within the sectors they are engaged in: for instance, women construction workers who do low-skilled manual tasks need to learn higher-skilled technical tasks such as welding, plastering, electrical wiring. This is essential as modernization of the construction sector is reducing the demand for low-skilled manual workers.

While WIEGO does not engage in skills training, as some of our MBO members and partners do, WIEGO does highlight women's need for new technical skills in fast-changing sectors through research and good practice documentation. In most of our activities, WIEGO tries to partner with MBOs of working poor women to learn about their needs and constraints and, in the process, to help them articulate these in a more effective way to policy audiences. Also, in our capacity building work with MBOs of working poor women, we provide training and help to build leadership and advocacy skills.

## Key Area 6: Social Protection

Social protection systems must be restructured to cover both formal and informal workers and to be sensitive to the special needs of women workers within both the formal and informal workforces.

Many social protection systems around the world are modeled on the notion that workers have known, recognizable employers who contribute to the social protection of their workers. Alternatively or additionally, some countries have universal tax-financed schemes to cover, typically, the core contingencies of health and old-age pensions. Under both systems it is mainly formal wage employees who are covered. Both systems are often further limited by the fact that they are premised on the notion of a sole bread winner (a man) or a benevolent head of household (also a man) who is assumed to provide for the social protection needs of his wife and family. This bias toward formal workers and traditional male-led households means social protection systems do not adequately serve informal workers, whether men and women.

Further, social protection strategies need to understand the differences in the life and work cycles of women and men. The core contingencies that are supposed to be covered by social protection do not include one contingency that is specific to women and another that is relegated to women: namely, maternity risks and the need for child care. To ensure women are covered under existing or new social protection schemes, the male-bias also has to be addressed.

WIEGO has supported advocacy, led by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, to include the need for maternity benefits and childcare as important contingencies in a life-cycle approach to social protection.

For women in the reproductive and work years, social protection systems need to incorporate maternity benefits and child care as core contingencies that need protection or coverage.

Also, among the elderly, social protection systems need to take into account that women are less likely than men to have contributed to old age pensions and more likely than men to be widowed (especially in developing countries where there is a large difference in age at marriage between women and men and in societies where women are not allowed to remarry). Also, social protection strategies need to recognize that women are less likely than men to be formal wage workers with benefits, that women are more likely than men to be unpaid contributing family workers and industrial outworkers without benefits, and that many women live on their own – or with young children – for significant parts of their life.

WIEGO has a Social Protection Programme that takes a life-cycle and gender-sensitive approach to highlighting contingencies and advocating coverage; that advocates for universal health and old-age pensions from a social solidarity normative perspective (not an efficiency economic logic); and that researches whether different categories of workers get coverage for various contingencies, and from whom. This program also

documents good practice examples from around the world and promotes policy dialogues between MBOs of working poor women, mainstream economists, and policy makers.

Currently, the WIEGO Social Protection Programme has two major projects: one on Voice and Social Policy for Informal Workers in Colombia, Mexico, and Peru; the other on Occupational Health and Safety of Informal Workers in Brazil, Ghana, India, Tanzania, and Thailand.

### Key Area 7: Agriculture and Rural Development

Poor workers in rural areas face particular constraints. Policies must be developed that empower both men and women who depend for their livelihood on small scale farming, livestock rearing, artisan production, forest-based activities, and fishery.

Small-scale farmers and fisher folk, both men and women, face constraints posed by large-scale commercial farming. Those whose livelihoods rely on collecting and processing non-timber forest products face challenges posed by government monopoly and/or private sector interests in the forestry sector. There is fierce competition among livestock rearers for common grazing land or pastures. The specific disadvantages of, or discrimination against, women within each sub-sector must be considered within the context of these wider constraints. This includes the fact that a) fewer women than men are considered farmers and have land rights and b) more women than men work as unpaid contributing family workers on the family farm.

Consider the situation of individuals and households in India who collect and process non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for a living. A WIEGO study of the forest workers in India, as part of a project on Law and Informality, revealed that many forest workers are engaged in gathering NTFPs. The NTFPs are sold to the forest development corporations or to middle men who process or sell to the eventual consumer. A small fraction of these forest workers are employed by the forest corporations, but most are considered self-employed. They remain isolated, working and living deep in forest areas, with fragile rights over the NTFPs they collect. They are tied to forest corporations or middle men in a dependent relationship, as they cannot independently sell the NTFPs on the open market. Attempts to address the particularly difficult position of women forest workers must first be situated within the wider context of the situation of all forest workers, both women and men.

For a link to the Law and Informality project micro-site on the WIEGO website, see: [http://www.wiego.org/informal\\_economy\\_law/india/index.html](http://www.wiego.org/informal_economy_law/india/index.html)

## III. WIEGO AND GENDER ANALYSIS

In all of its work, the WIEGO network promotes *nested analysis of three key interacting variables*: poverty/class, employment status, and gender.

In carrying out gender analysis, WIEGO asks, in sequence:

- a) where are women and men situated *within the workforce* (i.e., by formal versus informal employment);
- b) where are women and men situated *within specific sectors and employment statuses* of informal employment;
- c) what are the consequences for women and men given the gender segmentation within the workforce, informal employment as a whole, and specific sectors/employment statuses of informal employment;
- d) what disadvantages or constraints do specific population groups face within these various categories and types of work due to their class, race, ethnicity, or caste: and,
- e) what specific disadvantages or constraints do women face, that men do not, within these various categories and types of work due to gender norms and relationships and to age-gender dynamics within households or workplaces.

In our gender analysis, WIEGO assumes that women suffer disadvantages: a) *as workers* due to market relationships within the specific segments of the workforce/ informal employment where they are engaged; b) *as members of particular groups* defined by class, race, ethnicity, or caste; and c) *as women* due to gender norms and relationships and to age-gender dynamics within their households and workplaces.

In conclusion, WIEGO believes that, in every country in the world, under every economic system, women face constraints in the realm of paid work simply because they are women. Women's access to property is typically less than that of men and often mediated through their relationship to men; women face greater social demands on their time than men do (notably to carry out unpaid care work); and women face greater social constraints on their physical mobility than men.

However, to fully understand the relationships between women's employment and their poverty status, WIEGO contends that we need to integrate an analysis of gender with an analysis of other relationships and other sources of disadvantage. After all, most working poor women are poor and disadvantaged not just because of gender roles and relationships. Class, religion, race/ethnicity, and geography all intersect with gender to position many (but not all) women in vulnerable informal forms of work.

In most regions of the world, certain communities of people – differentiated largely by religion, race, ethnicity, or geography as well as by class – are over-represented among the poor: notably, rural communities and religious, racial, or ethnic minorities. In these communities, women are further disadvantaged by reason of their gender: but the fact that they are poor and disadvantaged stems in the first instance from their wider social identity and/or from where they live and work.

Marty Chen  
 International Coordinator, WIEGO Network  
 Lecturer in Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School  
 September 2010



## APPENDIX 1

### **A Framework for Assessing Policy Biases Affecting Informal Enterprises and Informal Workers (Women and Men)**

Policy biases against informal enterprises may emerge at several levels as follows:

1. Generic constraints and disadvantages faced by *all sizes of enterprises* – due to general problems in the external environment, reflected variously in the economic system and policies, the political system and governance, the social cultural environment and market structure and competition;
2. Specific constraints and disadvantages faced by *all smaller enterprises* – due to biases in favour of larger businesses in private sector development strategies or in economic policies;
3. Specific constraints and disadvantages faced by *informal micro-enterprises or own account operations* – due to biases in favour of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in SME development strategies or in SME policies and regulations;
4. Specific constraints and disadvantages faced by *women-run micro-enterprises and own account operations* – due to biases in favour of men in various private sector/SME strategies or in economic policies and regulations and to gender norms that restrict women's mobility and access to resources.

Similarly, policy biases against informal wage workers can take various forms:

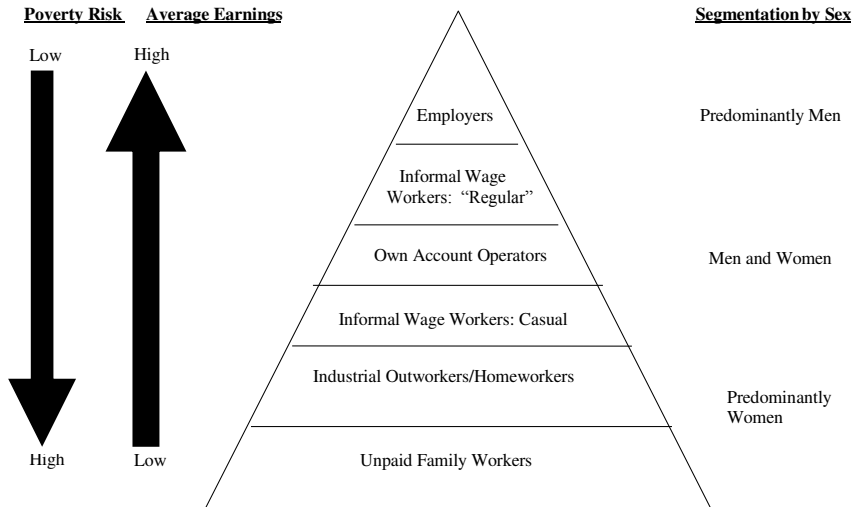
5. Generic constraints and disadvantages faced by *labor* – due to systemic biases in favour of the owners of capital in the wider environment, the structure of labor markets and the system of production;
6. Specific constraints and disadvantages faced by *informal wage workers* – due to the nature of the employment relationship;
7. Specific constraints and disadvantages faced by *female informal wage workers* – due to gender segmentation within the informal economy and to gender norms that assign to women the responsibility for unpaid housework and care work and that constrain their physical mobility.

At each of these levels, it is important to determine whether the policy biases are due to a poor understanding of gender segmentation in the informal economy; its lack of visibility in official statistics; exclusion of informal producers and workers, especially women, from rule-setting or policy-making institutions; and/or to the weak bargaining power of informal producers and workers.

*Source: Chen et al. 2004. Mainstreaming Informal Employment and Gender in Poverty Reduction: A Handbook for Policy-Makers and Other Stakeholders. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.*

## APPENDIX 2

### SEGMENTATION OF INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT



Source: Chen et al. 2005. *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work, and Poverty*, New York: UNIFEM.

### APPENDIX 3

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE STRUCTURE OF EMPLOYMENT

Row		Women	Men
0	Share in total employment (Both sexes = 100.0 %)	%	%
<b>1</b>	<b>Total Employment</b>	100.0%	100.0%
<b>2</b>	<b>Agricultural Employment</b>	%	%
2.1	Own-account workers, employers & members of producers' cooperatives	%	%
2.2	Contributing family workers (informal)	%	%
2.3	Employees	%	%
	2.3.1 Formal	%	%
	2.3.2 Informal	%	%
<b>3</b>	<b>Non-Agricultural Employment</b>	%	%
3.1	Own-account workers, employers & members of producers' cooperatives	%	%
	3.1.1 Formal	%	%
	3.1.2 Informal	%	%
3.2	Contributing family workers (informal)	%	%
3.3	Non-domestic employees	%	%
	3.3.1 Formal	%	%
	3.3.2 Informal	%	%
3.4	Domestic employees	%	%
	3.4.1 Formal	%	%
	3.4.2 Informal	%	%
3.I	<b>Formal Non-Agricultural Employment</b> (3.1.1 + 3.3.1 + 3.4.1)	%	%
3.II	<b>Informal Non-Agricultural Employment</b> (3.1.2 + 3.2 + 3.3.2 + 3.4.2)	%	%

## APPENDIX 4

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT WIEGO PROJECT

### 1. Voice for Domestic Workers

*"Our Network is guided by a steering Committee of Domestic/Household Workers from Across the Globe... We must be included in the Decent Work Agenda. We want Decent Work too." (Ida LeBlanc)*

Domestic/household workers, who are mainly women, are amongst the least recognized and protected workers, and often suffer slave-like working and living conditions. Domestic workers are employed by private households to carry out tasks such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, shopping, gardening, childcare or care of the elderly. Some live on the premises of their employer. Many work on a part time basis, often for multiple employers. Many are children and migrant workers from other countries, or from rural to urban areas in the same country. But despite differences in their working and legal situation, domestic workers worldwide share common characteristics, most notably their isolation, invisibility and lack of recognition and of worker rights.

WIEGO has consistently raised its concern about the situation of domestic workers and has encouraged and supported organizing and networking amongst domestic workers. It is also working to improve statistics on domestic workers and to make these data available to domestic worker organizations and advocates.



*Voice for Domestic Workers* is a project in partnership with the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), a global federation of trade unions representing workers in different sectors, including domestic workers. The IUF is currently in 120 countries working with trade unions to strengthen and support a combined membership of over 12 million workers. The project aim is to support the organisation and representation of Domestic/Household Workers, and in particular to support their efforts to gain recognition and rights as workers through their campaign for an ILO Convention and for national legislations.

The objectives of the project are to

- To support domestic workers in articulating their common needs and concerns
- To help strengthen the existing networks and organizations of domestic workers
- To support the creation and ensure a sustainable structure of a global domestic workers' network

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

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

The regions currently active in the Network include Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

The objectives of the IDWN are to assist in the organization of domestic workers' unions where they do not yet exist; to serve as a clearing house for the exchange of information; to organize mutual support and solidarity; to advance common political aims (international standards, national legislation); to represent domestic workers at international level; and to secure the support of the wider labour movement for each of these objectives.

To read more about the IDWN:

International Domestic Workers Network Consolidated

[http://www.wiego.org/occupational\\_groups/domesticWorkers/IDWN-2009.php](http://www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/domesticWorkers/IDWN-2009.php)

IDWN web siteLink: <http://www.domesticworkerrights.org/>

During 2009, the main activities of the IDWN were identifying organisations of domestic workers, mobilizing domestic workers and allies around the campaign for an ILO Convention, strengthening the Network structure through active involvement of the Steering Committee in the regions, participating in the ILC 2009 to familiarize and prepare for the 2010 negotiations, lobbying trade unions, governments and employers' associations in different countries to support the demands of domestic workers for a Convention, through endorsing these demands in their response to a questionnaire included in the ILO "Law and Practice Report". The answers to this questionnaire informed the second report which was the basis for negotiations at the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2010 and 2011. The Network also prepared and organized workshops, meetings and regional conferences in Mexico, Kenya and Hong Kong in preparation for the ILC; it raised awareness amongst the public at large and gave greater validity to domestic workers internationally. Through all these processes the Network gathered the demands of domestic workers and published their Platform of Demands that was used as a basis for negotiations at the ILC 2010:

[http://www.wiego.org/occupational\\_groups/domesticWorkers/Domestic-Workers-Conference-2010.php](http://www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/domesticWorkers/Domestic-Workers-Conference-2010.php)

The IDWN also organized and led a team of domestic workers to participate in the 2010 ILC negotiations which concluded with an agreement that the instrument to be negotiated in 2011 would be an ILO Convention supplemented by a Recommendation – as demanded by domestic workers and supported by the trade union movement.

### **June 1-18, 2010, International Labour Conference**



The ILO included the first discussion on Decent Work for Domestic Workers on its agenda during the 99th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), which was held in Geneva on June 1, 2010. This will be followed by a second discussion in 2011, where it is anticipated that an ILO Convention supplemented by a Recommendation will be adopted.

Read more about “*Decent Work for Domestic Workers*” Campaign  
<http://wee.wiego.org/pdfs/DW-Campaign.pdf>

*Please follow the links below for information on:*

PR No. 12 – Fourth item on the agenda: Decent work for domestic workers – Report of the Committee on Domestic Workers, ILO, June 16, 2010. Proposed conclusions (negotiated text): pages 124-132.

[http://www.ilo.org/global/What\\_we\\_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/pr/lang--en/docName--WCMS\\_141770/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/What_we_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/pr/lang--en/docName--WCMS_141770/index.htm)

PR No. 19 – Tenth sitting and Eleventh sitting. Wednesday, 16 June 2010, ILC, June 18 2010. Among the speakers were Myrtle Witbooi (chair of IDWN) and Marcelina Bautista (CONTRACTRAHO and regional coordinator of IDWN) Domestic Worker report starts on pages 33.

[http://www.ilo.org/global/What\\_we\\_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/pr/lang--en/docName--WCMS\\_141972/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/What_we_do/Officialmeetings/ilc/ILCSessions/99thSession/pr/lang--en/docName--WCMS_141972/index.htm)

Domestic Workers – ILO Blog: <http://idwnilo.wordpress.com/>

Press Release: Reporting Back on Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the ILC Geneva 2009

[http://www.wiego.org/occupational\\_groups/domesticWorkers/press\\_release\\_ICC\\_2009.php](http://www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/domesticWorkers/press_release_ICC_2009.php)

## **2. Fair Trade for Women Producers**

Women gain respect, domestic violence declines and self-esteem grows. Women who have never left their villages, join groups and speak up.



*“Poor women in Nepal are suffering, exploited and demotivated. Their lives are full of pain and sorrow despite trying their best. Fair Trade has helped women raise their voices. A small drop of economic empowerment.” (Padmasana Shakya of Manushi)*

Much has been written about the negative impacts of globalization on the working poor. Where globalization has widened the gap between rich and poor, there is hard evidence that it is women and children who are affected the worst. The global economic recession has had a massive impact on poor producers. The uncertainties of global markets have led to a down turn in demand from Fair Trade buyers, some of whom have gone out of business. At the same time, climate change has brought a devastating drought to East Africa and floods to Asia.

*Fair Trade for Women Producers* focuses on analyzing, documenting, and disseminating good practice examples of fair trade for women producers by involving women producers in all stages of the project’s development. The project goals are:

1. To strengthen membership-based organizations of the working poor to address issues of organizing, market access, networking, policy influence and policy change.
2. Support women informal workers in articulating their needs and concerns to policy-makers at all levels (e.g. municipal, national, regional, global).
3. Improve the quality of information available to both informal workers and policy makers re: the identified needs and concerns of the working poor.
4. Achieve positive policy changes to improve the lives of women informal workers.
5. Share key success factors where women informal workers have improved their livelihoods to achieve a multiplier effect through the movement of the working poor

Countries of activities:

India, Nepal, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Nicaragua, Mexico

Project Objectives:

- To demonstrate how, when organized in collective forms of enterprise, women can engage with global markets in a way which brings transformational change both economically and politically. The point being to demonstrate that engagement with global markets can be a positive force, rather than all the usual negative impacts of globalisation on the working poor that we hear more about.
- To demonstrate that, in spite of the structural barriers imposed by regional trade agreements and international trade rules, there is a strong alternative trade movement which is mobilising for structural solutions/redress to the inequalities of the global trade system.
- To increase and strengthen the movement through a process of mutual exchange and learning within and across regions. Although this is going on to some extent already, the case studies bring in a gender and organising lens which is often lacking.



WIEGO initial focus for *Fair Trade for Women Producers* was to work with each of the lead organizations in order to identify the appropriate grassroots self-organizing women's groups, coordination, selection and training of local facilitators. An initiation workshop was held in Kathmandu, Nepal in May 2009 with participants from Nepal, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Cambodia. Introductory workshops were subsequently carried out in India,

Nepal, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. Selected women's groups were initiated to work with the local facilitators through the development of case studies and a photographic journal. All groups had a series of workshops to agree their in-country methodologies and introduce the project to producers at village level. An estimated 4,000 women are involved in the project through the country partners. Training workshops, based on Needs Assessment in each country are aimed at improving the skills of the groups and strengthening the organizations. In India and Nepal good progress has been made in collecting stories of individual women and the filming and photographing of the reality of their lives.

In Latin America, an initiation workshop was held in Nicaragua in November 2009, and in Mexico a sub-regional meeting was held with participants from Mexico and Nicaragua in April 2010.

### **News and Events**

Most of the country lead organizations are members of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). WFTO will hold its biennial conference in Nairobi in May 2011 where WIEGO and its partners in the *Fair Trade for Women Producers* project will show-case the products, (photos, documentaries, weavings, murals, embroidery, etc., and share learning. It is hoped that there will be an opportunity after the conference to bring some of the project partners together in Nairobi for a dissemination and sharing learning workshop.

### **Case Studies**

Through the Case Studies, *Fair Trade for Women Producers* aims at demonstrating how informal workers have organized collective forms of enterprise to engage with local and global markets. These case studies are being collected through a process of action research, which enables informal workers to tell their story in their own words. The objective is to use the case studies to share the learning with other informal workers as an incentive to organize themselves. Each case study will be couched in an analysis of the context of trade liberalization in that country/region or sector. Through this process WIEGO will open up a space for analyzing the impact of trade liberalization on informal wage workers and informal producers, and its impact on gender equity, with the hopes of improving sustainability of the Fair Trade Movement.



### **Photo Journal**

Given the low literacy level of many of the women producers, it was important to complement the narrative of the women's stories with visual images which also convey the women's lives. Many of the local facilitators have been issued with digital cameras so that they can capture the reality of the women as they go about their work and their participation in their organizations as well as in the project activities such as workshops. It is hoped to find partner organizations in each country that may be willing to sponsor or facilitate an exhibition of the photos if the quality is at the right level.



### **Documentaries**

Some of the countries are commissioning professional documentaries while others are developing songs, murals and basketry which tell the women's stories.

## **3. Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers**



*Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers* is a project in collaboration between the research and advocacy of WIEGO's Network and HomeNet Thailand. <http://homenetthailand.org/web3/>. The project's aim is to build a membership based organization of home-based workers by focusing on issues of concern to these workers, such as social protection, legal status and labour rights.

### **Countries of Activities:**

Thailand for direct project activities and Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam for shared learning in relation to occupational health and safety.

The project objectives are to:

- Improve the livelihood and economic security of women home-based workers in the informal economy of Thailand.
- Improve access to social protection programmes for working poor women, with an emphasis on occupational health and safety (OHS).
- Enhance the economic empowerment of working poor women.

## **Description of Activities**

### **Strengthening informal workers' organizations**

Through *Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers* the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (FLEP)<sup>1</sup> and HomeNet Thailand have strengthened their networks by adopting the concept of membership-based organizations (MBOs) since

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<sup>1</sup> FLEP is host organization of HomeNet Thailand and an affiliate of HomeNet South-East Asia.

2008, with the support of UNIFEM and the Federation of Dutch Labour (FNV). In 2009, the focus of the projects was on strengthening informal workers' organizations, particularly those of home-based workers located in the country's northern, central, northeastern and southern regions. The Foundation also supported meetings, workshops and development of informal workers' leaders on a continuous basis. Training sessions were held for 184 leaders and members of the networks from all regions to improve their knowledge and capacities in the following aspects: information about MBOs, legal and policy advocacy, gender issues, access to public resources, group management, and coordination with support organizations at local and provincial levels.

Since the beginning of 2010, the "*Informal Workers Newsletter*" is being produced quarterly to keep members informed of project activities. Also, the informal workers' website has been improved to enable members and interested public to comprehensively monitor the activities of the networks.

### **Building of economic capacity**

On 8th August 2009, the Ministry of Labour conducted the seminar "*Informal Workers: The Ministry of Labour's Next Step*". HomeNet Thailand participated and presented a number of suggestions to the seminar, particularly the need of building economic capacity for home-based workers. The Ministry of Labour was also asked to coordinate with other government agencies to provide spaces for home-based workers' groups to market their products and grant the networks' members consideration for government procurement of goods. Subsequently, HomeNet Thailand/Bangkok and the Foundation coordinated with the Bureau of Policy and Strategy and the Ministry of Labour (Office of the Permanent Secretary) to provide the areas where the Network's members could sell their goods. There were 59 groups of producers joining this activity. The following government agencies provided space for the Network's members to sell their products:



- Ministry of Commerce – Friday Market Fair, 10 stalls and during the Blue Flag Trade Fair;
- Social Security Office – Every first Monday of the month, unlimited stalls;
- Department of Land Development – Every first and fourth Thursday of the month, 3 stalls;
- Ministries of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Environment – During their trade fairs.

Besides providing marketing venues, the Network organized the following capacity-building activities for its members:

- HomeNet Thailand/Bangkok was commissioned to produce 5,000 bags to be given to the participants of the seminar held by the Office of the National Health Security;
- HomeNet Thailand/Central Region organized a training session on book-keeping, and cash and inventory management for 15 members of the Ban Wang Loom Phong Weaving Group of Suphan Buri's Uthong district; and
- HomeNet Thailand/Southern Region organized a training session on group management and production for 22 members of the veil embroidery and dressmaking groups of Narathiwat province. In addition, a seminar on the "*Roles of government agencies and local administrative organizations in supporting informal workers*" was held for the Network's members in the southern region to discuss ways to get access to public resources.

### **Promoting occupational health and safety**

As a project objective, the Foundation and HomeNet Thailand will continue its campaign for the promotion of occupational health and safety in all regions of the country by addressing the problems that adversely affect the quality of life of informal workers. In 2009, training sessions were held to provide informal workers' leaders with the knowledge and skills in occupational safety so that they can share lessons learned with their members. The project focuses on encouraging informal workers to change behaviors and improve their working environment. Model groups were selected from those who were already receiving training and newly formed groups. The objectives are to monitor group's performance, assess worker's knowledge and skills, set-up a code of conduct for reducing risks, production of tools to monitor the improvement in occupational safety, and provision of training on OHS for new members; the outcomes can be summarized as follows:

- Eight model groups were selected from the Networks located in the northern, central, northeastern and southern regions (two from each region). In each region, the network's leaders and Foundation's staff produced a plan on the development of knowledge and skills—including ways to improve the safety of working environments.
- Occupational health training-of-trainer sessions were held for the 18 and 27 central and southern network's leaders.
- Members of different occupational groups—90 from the south, 58 from the central and 35 from the northeast regions— were trained on occupational health. Women's wellbeing was also included in the sessions held in the southern region.
- The northeastern network produced a set of rules to avoid health risks for members of 10 occupational groups.
- The central and northern networks produced their tools for monitoring the improvement of behaviors and working environment.

- The northern network provided a training curriculum on occupational health for its members.

## **Legislative and Policy Advocacy**

### **1. Campaign for the enactment of the draft Home-workers Protection Act B.E.**

Since 2003, Home Net Thailand and the Foundation have carried out a campaign with the support of the International Labour Organization, HomeNet Southeast Asia, and the Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV, or the Federation of Dutch Labour), for the government's submission of the Home-workers Protection bill to parliament. On 24<sup>th</sup> April 2007, the government agreed to put the bill through. The bill, therefore, had to be submitted to the State Council for revisions, which were completed in early 2009. The cabinet then presented this revised bill to parliament. In order to facilitate this new legislation's quick passage through parliament so that the home-workers in Thailand could receive the maximum benefit from its timely passage, the Foundation and HomeNet Thailand have organized their advocacy campaign via the following activities:

- Organizing a seminar to compare contents of the bills proposed by the Council of State and HomeNet Thailand and seeking ways to have them considered by parliament;
- Submitting the draft Home-workers Protection Act to Ms Rachadaporn Kaewsanit, a Democrat Party MP to deliver to the government's whip and lobby for its support; and
- Mr Somkid Duang-ngern, HomeNet Thailand's chairperson and 15 representatives of all HomeNet Thailand's regional offices submitted a letter to Mr Chawengsak Rengpaiboonwong, MP and member of the House Committee on Labour; Mr Krit Rattana-kaminee, deputy leader of Chart Thai Pattana Party; Ms Silampa Lertnuwat, Director of Phumjaithai Party, and Mr Prakrit Pholdej, Deputy Chief of the Legal working committee of Phumjaithai Party to ask for their support of the bill's passage.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2009, the bill was approved in principle by parliament with 268 votes to 0, and a 36-member ad hoc committee was set up to review the legislation. Three of the committee members were representatives of the Foundation and HomeNet Thailand.

Apart from running the campaign at a national level, the southern branch of HomeNet Thailand also organized a seminar to update 25 regional leaders on the Home-workers Protection bill.

### **2. Support for the organization of domestic workers in Thailand**

Project activities have been coordinated with the Foundation for Child Development, Foundation for Women, State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederation, Labour Congress of Thailand, ILO Sub-regional Office for East Asia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and the Committee for Asian Women to encourage the organization of domestic workers in Thailand.

In 2009, the Foundation in cooperation with the abovementioned parties disseminated the needs and concerns of domestic workers and presented their opinion to the Thai government so that it could respond to the ILO's questions on the establishment of protection standards for domestic workers. The ILO used the collected views of national governments as a database for the general meeting of the ILO in 2010 on a standard-setting framework for the future protection of domestic workers.

In addition, the Foundation and its collaborating parties organized two consecutive training sessions for 25 domestic workers in Thailand.

Another important activity was held on the Human rights Day, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009, when about 200 representatives of domestic workers staged a march to communicate to society why domestic workers should be protected. The marchers also submitted their petition to the National Human Rights Commission president and a representative of the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare in the Ministry of Labour, demanding that the introduction of the ministerial regulation on the protection of domestic workers in Thailand be sped up.

### **3. Study of the impact of the fish-cage contract farming on the Middle Chi River**

Project activities include a study on the situation of fish farms in Mahasarakham. The fish-cage contract farmers have been exploited and deprived of any protection from their contractors, who usually take advantage through unfair contracts. Moreover, the fish-cage farming also has a negative effect on the river, which is a natural resource. The findings of the study were pointed out to the farmers to raise awareness of their rights and used as a database to campaign for the legal protection of contract farmers in the future.

