

REPORT ON CONSULTATION MEETING WITH HEAD PORTERS (KAYAYEI)

DATE: SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2011

VENUE: TEMA STATION, ACCRA

1. Background

The Informal Sector Case Law project started in April 2011 through collaboration between Ghana TUC and WIEGO. The project seeks to assess legal constraints on the way of identified groups of informal sector workers in Ghana. Worker groups selected for the project include street vendors, head porters (kayayei) and domestic workers.

As part of data gathering and consultation with the member-based organizations in the chosen sectors, the project team held a meeting with head porters (known as *kayayei*) on 18 September 2011 at the Tema station in Accra.

Kayayeis are notably migrant female head porters from the three northern regions in Ghana. As the name implies in the Ga language (women who carry loads), kayayeis assist shoppers in the central business areas to transport their wares to lorry stations or car parks for a fee. They provide services to shop owners in stocking their shelves or tidying up their shops. Kayayeis are also sometimes taken home by shoppers to perform additional domestic chores.

2. Objectives of the Meeting

- establish working relationship with the workers for smooth implementation of the project
- understand from the workers perspectives legal issues or challenges impinging on their work
- gather information on their working conditions and others relevant data in accordance with the study objectives

3. Participants at the Meeting

A total of 36 kayayeis participated in the meeting. Members of the project team were present with support from two staff from the Organisation department of Ghana TUC.

Participants were all women between ages 15 to 50 who have migrated from the northern regions of Ghana.

4. Methodology

The meeting began with introduction of the project team members and participants, following which key issues were discussed as follows:

a. Working conditions

Working hours and Rest period: Participants stated a twelve hour daily routine from 6am to 6pm, from Mondays to Saturdays. They mentioned that rest periods are dependent on demand for their services. Fridays and Saturdays were noted busy market days but the rest of the days can be very lean, during which they can have sufficient rest.

Wages: The participants mentioned that their incomes are subject to demand. On busy days (Fridays), they earn between GH¢70 and GH¢100 (US\$47 -57); between GH¢50 and GH¢60 (US\$33-40) on Saturdays days but may earn as low as GH¢5 or nothing on lean days. Charges per load depend on the weight, distance and the generosity of the customer.

Living conditions and environmental hazards: Participants stated they live at the Tema station, a lorry station in Accra central (with their children where applicable). Pointing to their belongingness, they informed the project team that they cannot afford to rent rooms/houses. They sleep in the open in plastic covers as protection against rain and mosquitoes. As a result, they noted they suffer frequent headaches, malaria, cough, high fever and bodily pains. Back pain was also noted a common illness but that was attributed to the heavy loads they carry on daily basis. The participants stated that they were aware of the hazardous nature of their work and living conditions and so do often take long breaks (and return to their families in the northern regions) for up to 6 months when they have accumulated enough savings. They hinted that, some workers do not return to the trade whereas others do so seasonally, whenever they are in need of money.

Child care: As observed by the project team, mothers lived with their children at the Tema station. The project learnt that those of school going age are sent to a nearby school. Babies and toddlers are however carried at the back of their mothers during working hours.

Social security: Participants stated they cannot afford to register with the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and often resorted to self medication, when they fall ill. For savings purposes, they have registered with susu collectors (microfinance scheme) and make daily contribution of between GH¢5 and GH¢7 (US\$3-5).

b. Laws that impinge on their work

The workers had no knowledge of laws that affect their work. Except harassment from caretakers (station masters) at the Tema station, they do not encounter problems with law enforcers. Participants did not have knowledge of the labour Act or any other local laws and how it affects them as workers.

They viewed their work as temporary solution to the poverty in the northern regions and did not envisage its permanency.

3. Conclusion and Way Forward

The project team and participants agreed a close working relationship in seeking to create awareness among the workers of their rights and laws that affect them as well as seek to address the challenges.

The participants were also informed about the impending visit from officials of WIEGO in October and the possibility that they would be expected to meet them.