



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Inclusive Cities Project

August 2015

Empowering Market Traders in Warwick Junction, Durban, South Africa

During the apartheid era, South Africa had some of “the most sophisticated anti-street trader measures anywhere in the developing world” (Rogerson, C. and Hart 1989), and municipalities and local governments were often overtly hostile to informal workers. Until the early 1990s, Warwick Junction’s traders were largely considered illegal, few permits were issued, and traders were subject to the discretion of police officers and other officials enforcing so-called “move-on laws,” which forced traders to move every half hour.

The city’s contradictory approach to the informal economy is evidenced by its embrace of a “world class city” slogan in the 2000s. Under the auspices of the Inner Thekwini Regeneration and Urban Management Programme (iTRUMP), the city council adopted an area-based management approach and formed special teams to improve services and facilities in Warwick Junction, such as cleaning and rubbish removal, the provision of toilets, child care facilities, and the formalization of informal drinking outlets in the market. Efforts, however, were implemented with mixed success. Many support services were not adequately resourced and have been overshadowed by the Metro police’s heavy-handed tactics. As a result, the Warwick Junction area has continued to suffer neglect and marginalization by the city, with traders operating under conditions of harassment, poor infrastructure, and limited services.

What Changed?

Founded in 2008 as part of the Inclusive Cities project, Asiye eTafuleni is a non-profit organization that works to support informal workers’ sanctioned access to productive public space, infrastructure, and equipment by championing inclusive urban planning and design. AeT’s programming builds from the elemental concept that “voice, visibility, and validity” for informal workers will lead to more inclusive urban planning, particularly when underscored with a focus on design-based interventions. Under the Inclusive Cities project, these interventions included the following:

- Implementation of a promotional campaign for the book *Working in Warwick*, a book that shows that it is possible to include street trading in urban plans in a way that adds to the vitality and attraction of cities.
- Conducted national workshops to assess the potential for up-scaling Warwick Junction precedents to national scale projects.
- Establishing an operational AeT presence amongst the vendor community and a communications presence online;
- Creating a new tourism project, called *Markets of Warwick*, to assist Warwick Junction’s traders in bringing FIFA visitors to the market, in increasing public awareness of informal work, in increasing the voice and visibility of informal workers, and in validating their contribution to the cultural and economic life of the city;
- Co-created the AeT Law Programme, particularly the “Know-your-rights” Project, a legal rights awareness programme for Warwick Junction street vendors;



A street vendor from Warwick Avenue, Durban holds her produce. Women comprise the majority of Warwick’s vendors. Photo: A. Buckland.

Legal and Policy Environment

By the 1990s, national legislation, together with a highly progressive municipal level policy framework meant that Durban was moving well ahead of other South African cities in terms of its approach to informal work. The Department for Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunities (later the Business Support Unit and then the Business Support and Market Unit or BS&MU) was created as a dedicated informal economy department to oversee the policy process and implementation of regulations affecting informal work. Durban’s Informal Economy Policy (IEP) of 2000 made Durban the first municipality in South Africa to introduce a policy for the “informal economy”.

On the other hand, the city’s approach to the informal economy has been piecemeal and without coordination between stakeholder departments and institutions and without a consistent platform for negotiations between traders and officials. It has generally treated informal traders as a “nuisance”.

- Undertaking advocacy efforts, where considerable success was achieved in representing the rights of informal workers through the SA Constitution Chapter 9 Institutions. Both the CGE and the Legal Resources Centre addressed the ongoing gender discrimination (particularly with respect to mealie cooks) and inequity of confiscations;
- Conducting the Designing with Informal Workers Workshop, which thirty registered architects attended.

Results

- Working in Warwick was used as the primary reference for the South African Council of Architects' accredited "Design with Informal Workers" continual professional training course. Workshops utilizing Working in Warwick as a resource material were in cities both in South Africa and internationally, and AeT continues to provide guidance and technical expertise to a number of built environment professionals, academics, and students;
- The presence of AeT amongst the Warwick Junction vendor community was fully established with a functioning board of directors, a meeting space, and the ability of vendor participants to meet. AeT has also had a significant media presence and has won major awards;
- During the project period, over 5,000 visitors, including school groups, took the MoW tour. Forty-two traders received tour training that included guiding, first aid, and public speaking. The "school tour" aspect of MoW has continued to grow. The South African Informal Workers Association (SAIWA) has emerged from the community facilitation processes associated with the implementation of the MoW, and it has now been registered as an MBO in accordance with national legislation; 259 Warwick Junction vendors have become registered members of SAIWA. The incomes of Warwick Junction vendors directly exposed to the MoW tourists increased and, the project is continuing to provide the means of negotiating improved urban maintenance within Warwick Junction. A marginal increase in the provision of city services in the quest to "showcase" the city provided an indirect benefit to vendors ranging from moderate to significant.
- AeT is a crucial resource for the city on the informal economy and acts as a liaison for increased consultation between informal workers and the city;
- On a social level, the benefits to the city created by AeT's interventions include an increase in the quality of life for some of Durban's poorest workers.

Suggestions for Future Efforts: What Made It Work?

- Without exception, it was the trust of Warwick Junctions informal workers that allowed AeT to represent their interests so effectively;
- AeT's deep knowledge of Warwick's informal traders meant stakeholders were able to get good information about an otherwise inaccessible part of the community from a reliable source, which ultimately led to the recognition of the needs of informal workers in the development and planning process;
- The Inclusive Cities network itself was important to the project's success because it encouraged AeT to set its work in a global perspective. This enabled sharing best practices with partner organizations and gave the work of AeT more authority with local stakeholders.
- The AeT team's integration in project work and the collaborative nature of progress led to a more creative team perspective and to an organizational culture that, through a process of reimagining, allows its members to see a nuisance as an asset, a mess as beautiful, etc.
- A bottom up approach empowered informal workers with knowledge and skills that allows them to challenge and question any development that might compromise their right to trade;
- Consultation was key; it takes time and patience to achieve positive results;
- Grassroots urban design/planning is key in developing the informal economy—beyond advocacy and the usual approach of governments to dealing with the sector through enforcement, regulation, local economic development.
- Different communities generally know what works for them. Establishing an inclusive process for sustainable development is key.

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities and rights. WIEGO creates change by building capacity among informal worker organizations, expanding the knowledge base about the informal economy and influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org.

