
Recruiting Informal Workers Into Democratic Workers' Organisations



**Organising In The Informal Economy:
Resource Books For Organisers**

Number

1

This series of resource books on Organising in the Informal Economy was written in response to requests from unions and associations for practical ideas on how to go about organising workers in the informal economy. It is an attempt to share more widely the experiences of those already organising informal workers.

The project was initiated by the International Coordinating Committee on Organising in the Informal Economy (ICC) composed of representatives from the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India, StreetNet International, Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), HomeNet South East Asia, Confederacion Revolucionario de Obreros y Campesinos of Mexico (CROC) and the General Federation of Nepal Trade Unions (GEFONT).

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2. KKP KP (Trade Union of Waste pickers). May Day meeting. India.
3. StreetNet International. Market vendors of FESTRACOM gathered for a meeting. Burkina Faso.
4. StreetNet International. Meeting of Conakry market women. Guinea.
5. LARES (Laboratoire d'Analyse Régionale et d'Expertise Sociale). Motor cycle taxi driver. Benin.



Overview

Organising in the Informal Economy: Resource Books for Organisers

The Books

There are six books in the series:

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

The Aims

This series of resource books aims to assist anyone who has the task of organising workers in the informal economy. It hopes to give organisers practical ideas on what needs to be done and how to do it.

It aims to help organisers:

- Identify what information is needed to start organising informal economy workers and where to find it
- Recruit informal economy workers into democratic worker organisations
- Build democratic organisations and engage collectively in democratic organisational practices
- Solve members' daily problems
- Develop the elements and practice of collective negotiations
- Use creative strategies when negotiations fail or are not possible, including dispute-resolution mechanisms, legal remedies, mass action and publicity
- Use basic discussion-group educational activities
- Encourage and support representative, accountable leadership
- Focus on women workers' participation at all levels.

Using the Books






The resource books provide ideas, guidelines and examples that you can draw upon when organising informal workers.

You can use the books on your own, or with a team. You can use them in the field, in the workplace, in the office or community centre. Adapt them according to your context. Adapt them to suit your sector, your country, and the sex, race and culture of the people you are organising.

Use them:

- **as an organising guide:** draw on the ideas, checklists and experiences
- **for information:** read, and share your knowledge with others
- **to generate ideas:** create new ways of doing things
- **as a planning tool:** use the steps and strategies to help you plan
- **to educate and empower:** in informal discussions, workshops or training sessions.

You will find the following symbols throughout. Use them to help you find your way around the booklets.

-  Tips
-  Checklists
-  Experiences
-  Definitions
-  Learning Activities

Key definitions and Principles

What we mean by organising

Organising means building the power of workers by:

- Recruiting: bringing workers into the organisation
- Building and maintaining democratic organisation
- Building accountable worker leaders, including women leaders
- Empowering members through activism, education, information
- Representing members individually and in collective negotiations
- Dealing with problems and disputes
- Supporting workers' mass actions
- Providing services for, and with, members

Three key organising principles

- Win real, immediate concrete improvements in workers' lives
- Give workers a sense of their own power
- Alter power relationships

“Be passionate, committed, innovative and creative in your efforts toward the organisation and mobilisation of workers in the informal economy”.

(Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, Secretary-General of Ghana Trades Union Congress, September 2006, addressing the ICC Conference on Organising in the Informal Economy)

Issues and Challenges: Informal Workers in Different Sectors

| Sector / group | Priority issues | Organising challenges |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Street, market vendors and hawkers | Right and space to vend Facilities- storage, shelter, toilets, water Protection against police harassment Safety and security Competition –protection against bad effects Access to credit | Not regarded as workers by selves and others Controlled by politicians, “mafia” Fear of harassment by authorities, police Competition amongst selves and formal sector Time spent on organizing means loss of income No forums for bargaining |
| Home-based workers | Equal income, benefits as factory workers Identifying employer End to exploitation by middlemen Access to regular work Access to markets (own account) Access to credit (own account) | Isolated in homes, invisible Time-double burden of work and home care Fear of losing work Restrictions imposed by religion, culture Children working Unprotected by labour law or disguised status |
| Garment workers | Living wage Right to Organise Excessive overtime Security of employment | Women workers are seen as ‘seasonal’, ‘supplementary’ wage earners Harassment of trade unions Often small workshops |

Recruiting Informal Workers Into Democratic Workers' Organisations

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Waste pickers and recyclers</p> | <p>Access/right to recyclable waste Integration into municipal systems Work higher up the recycling chain Fair prices for recyclables Recognition and improved status Health and safety End to exploitation by middlemen</p> | <p>Low status and self esteem Fear of losing work Fear/dependency on middlemen Competition amongst selves Time to meet means loss of income Child labour Not protected by labour law</p> |
| <p>Agricultural, forestry and fish workers</p> | <p>Right to land and land use Right to natural resources Regular work Access to resources and equipment Access to credit and markets</p> | <p>Scattered locations Isolated and far distances Child labour Not protected by labour law Seasonal or intermittent work</p> |
| <p>Domestic workers</p> | <p>Recognition as workers Protection against dismissal, abuse Freedom of movement Freedom to change jobs (migrant) Less hours, more rest Better living conditions</p> | <p>Isolated and invisible in homes Fear of employers and losing jobs Dependency on employer for housing etc Not protected by labour law Lack of time: long hours Fear of authorities (migrant)</p> |
| <p>Transport workers (urban passenger)</p> | <p>Access to routes and passengers Protection against harassment Health & safety/ accident protection Parking and facilities Petrol and spares prices and fares Competition-protection against bad effects</p> | <p>Mobility Competition between selves and formal sector Control by politicians, "mafia" Threats by employers Fear of harassment by police/ authorities Time for organizing means loss of income</p> |
| <p>Women workers all sectors</p> | <p>Safe and affordable child care Income protection during/after childbirth Physical security Sexual harassment protection Equal income for equal value work Access to higher income earning work</p> | <p>Fear and lack of confidence Cultural and religious barriers Often in scattered locations Dominated by men in sector Lack of time Child care and home care</p> |
| <p>All sectors</p> | <p>Better and more secure income Improved working conditions Social protection</p> | |



1. Introduction

In this book

In this resource book we look at some basic recruiting steps and strategies for organisers who are setting out to bring a new group of workers, or individuals, into an established or new organisation. You will find ideas on planning, including ideas on the information you will need and where you might find it. The book draws on experiences from different occupational groups in the informal economy and alerts you to some of the responses and questions you should expect from workers. At the end of the book is a learning activity that you can use in planning or training sessions with others in your recruiting team.

Why recruit?

A democratic workers' organisation is made up of its members. Without members an organisation is an empty shell. Numbers are an important source of power. That is why most organisations try to continuously expand their membership, and unite with other organisations- locally, nationally, regionally and internationally. Recruiting new members into the organisation (or recruiting new organisations into a bigger organisation) never stops.



2. Steps In The Recruiting Process: Preparing

Before setting out to recruit new members you need to prepare well. You need a well thought out plan, backed up by research. It is equally important when you are starting a new organisation or when recruiting workers into an established organisation. It is especially important where you are new to organising informal workers. It is important where you have to recruit a new type of worker, or in a new sector, or where you are targeting workers in a new and unfamiliar workplace or area.



Definition Recruiting

Drawing workers into the organisation; persuading workers to join the organisation

Recruiting is not an easy task. Different groups of workers come with different problems and experiences. They may have different priorities and expectations. It is not easy to just approach a worker or group of workers- one of the reasons you need to prepare well. Not all recruitment will follow the steps below. You may miss out or add steps, or you may follow a different order. Use them as a guide.

Step One: Do research

Identify a group of workers that you want to recruit. Find out as much as you can about the workers you are targeting and their circumstances. This will help you develop your strategy.

You don't need to be a qualified researcher; you don't need to have lots of resources to be good at digging out information. Use your initiative. Use the collective knowledge and resources of your own members, colleagues and allies.

In the check list below are some questions you need to ask, and possible sources of information. You might at first have only a general idea of whom you want to recruit, or you might be targeting a specific group of workers in a specific location. You may be very familiar with the workers already or you may not. Adapt the checklist to your circumstances.



TIP: Reproduce the checklist below. Adapt the questions and fill in your own possible sources of information, with full contact details. This will make it easier to work through the checklist systematically.



Check List 1:

Information needed and where to find it

| Information needed | Possible sources |
|---|---|
| What type of worker are you targeting? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What work do they do?• Are they men, women or both• Are they self-employed, employed or do they have workers working for them?• Why are they doing this work? | From contacts in the target group From leaders of their associations From workers themselves Your own observations |
| What is the potential number of workers in your target group? | As above From already organised groups in nearby areas Research departments of unions and NGOs |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Where do workers work and where do they live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there obvious units of organisation e.g. by street, by parking area, by church catchment area, by product sale, collection or production? • Where is the best place to meet with workers? • When is the best time to meet workers? | <p>From contacts in the target group From leaders of their associations From workers themselves From experienced colleagues Your own observations</p> |
| <p>What problems do workers have at work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is their income level? • Do they have health and safety problems? • Are they harassed by authorities, employers? • Do they work long hours? • What are the most pressing problems? • Other problems? | <p>From contacts in the target group From leaders of their associations From workers themselves Your own observations Organisations in the same sector Internet</p> |
| <p>What problems do workers experience more generally?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they have housing problems? • Do they have transport problems? • Do they have problems in accessing health care and other social security measures? | <p>As above Contacts in worker communities Religious institutions in the area Social workers Supportive NGOs</p> |
| <p>Are workers organised or have they been members of organisations before?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of organisation? • Is/was it a positive or negative experience. Why? • Have workers taken up any issues, or taken any action before. What happened? | <p>From contacts in the target group From leaders of their associations From workers themselves From supportive NGOs, universities</p> |
| <p>What are the laws and policies relating to this group of workers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour law • Municipal laws, regulations | <p>Trade unions and worker organisations Supportive NGOs Department of Labour Internet</p> |
| <p>Who are your potential allies and opponents in organising?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others organising in the sector/area? • Leaders in the sector, community, political parties? • NGOs, local authorities (and particular individuals), religious groups, trade unions? • Colleagues with useful experience? | <p>Ask around in your organisation and other organisations you are close to Ask around in the community Read local newspapers Read earlier reports and documents</p> |
| <p>What resources are available?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People to assist you • Transport • Recruiting materials • Finances | <p>Your organisation</p> |



TIP: If you cannot find all the information before you start, don't worry. Get out there and start your work. You will deepen and expand your information as you go along through making contacts, talking to workers and observing.

Step Two: Work out your strategy

In planning your strategy, you will need to take into account all relevant factors: the workers, the environment, resources available, organisational policies as well as the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation.



TIP: Many heads are better than one. Wherever possible, work out strategies collectively. Make use of the experiences and wisdom of others. It is useful to put together a small **organising committee** to share responsibility. Draw in colleagues. Draw in contact persons, leaders and activists from amongst your target group.

Decide on the strategic approach

First decide on the big picture. Look at your aims, the size, scope and shape of your recruitment strategy, and the policies needed to support this. This should be something your organisation as a whole has taken a decision on. You will need to agree the following:

Type of organisation If you are starting a new organisation decide what kind of organisation is appropriate and workable. Is it a union, cooperative, association? Or will it be better to organise workers on the basis of cultural, community or other interests first. An example might be migrant workers coming together through a common home bond or shared situation.

Workers Which sector, sub sector and group of workers are your targets?

Membership Who can join? Who is excluded from membership? Where is your cut-off point? For example, you might decide to exclude vendors who “employ” one or more assistants or drivers who own more than one taxi? You might decide that your members will consist only of women.

Priorities What are the priorities? Is there a particular focus on recruiting women or on the poorest workers in the sector?

Approach Will you recruit existing associations into a bigger organisation, or join up workers as individuals, or work through an existing organisation to gain individual members? Or will you use a mixture? Does your constitution allow for different approaches?

Big or small Is the organisation running a big, organisation-wide recruitment campaign or are you involved in a small, local initiative?

Objectives and targets What do you want to achieve? What are your target numbers?

Collaboration Will you work with other organisations or people? For example, there may be an NGO that works with your particular target group that you could usefully collaborate with.

Resource allocation What resources will the organisation allocate to the recruitment programme?



Experiences: Strategic approaches to recruiting

Recruiting existing associations into unions in Ghana

In Ghana, the TUC and some of its affiliates took a decision to recruit informal workers through their existing local associations. They had to change their constitutions so that this could happen. Unions identify and train contact persons from amongst workers in the associations/groups targeted for recruitment.

(Francis X Owusa, Ghana TUC, paper presented at the IFWEA Regional Seminar, Malawi, May 2006)

Community organising in China

The Chinese Working Women Network (CWWN) is a community-based organisation of migrant women workers operating in export processing zones in South China. The network runs projects and cultural activities, as well as encouraging workers to take up workplace issues themselves. The choice of a community based organising strategy was made because workers mistrust formal trade unions and there is a lack of political space for new labour organisation. It is also very difficult to organise at the workplace.

(Dr Pun Ngai, 2005, paper presented at a workshop on membership based organisations of the poor, Ahmedabad, India)

Using a campaigning approach in Nepal

In 2004, the Nepal National Transport Union (NETWON) decided on a campaign to recruit informal taxi drivers in Kathmandu, the capital city. The union used the International Transport Worker's Federation (ITF), International Road Transport Day of Action in 2004 as a publicity tool. It put up posters near bus depots and city junctions, and distributed leaflets. All taxi drivers sounded their hooters for 15 minutes to highlight their issues and protest about accidents, fatigue etc. The union issued press statements, took photographs. It arranged a symposium on transport workers' problems and issues.

(International Transport Worker's Federation, ITF, 2006, Organising Informal Transport Workers. Global Research Project. Overview Report)

Recruiting through Women's Committees

The National Union of Congolese Workers (UNTC) has set up women's committees in 64 markets in Kinshasa to teach informal workers about trade unions. The committees explain, for example, that many of the problems they have with the various authorities can be avoided by joining a union.

(Marie José Lokongo Bosiko, Vice President, ITUC OnLine, 140/270807)

Plan specific strategies and activities

"Household workers are invisible and we have to use our imagination to help them organise".

(Marcelina Bautista, Secretary General, CONLACTRAHO, Latin America, Amsterdam, November 2006)

Armed with your overall strategic approach and your research, you can plan the finer details of your strategy. Here are some of the things you will need to decide upon.

Contacts How will you start? It is usually best to work through a contact person who will talk to workers with you, or for you. Do you have an existing contact to start you off? Is that person an existing leader? Do workers trust her/him? If you do not have a contact, how will you make the initial approach? You could, for example, give out a pamphlet explaining your organisation and inviting workers to a meeting.

Place You will need to find the best place to talk to workers. It could be at their workplaces. At quiet times you could talk to vendors at their sites. You could talk to taxi drivers at parking places or pick-up points. You might talk to domestic workers on the telephone.

Or it might be better to contact workers in their communities. This could be through their churches or when they are socialising. You might even decide that house visits are the best way. Be creative. Sometimes talking to organisers is dangerous for workers. Do you need to first meet in secret?

Time Many informal workers work for themselves and their families. Others work for harsh employers with little free time. When is the best time to meet with your contacts, and for how long? If you want to meet with a group of workers when is it possible? Do they have breaks or can they only meet with you when work is finished? Do they have a day off?

Communication tools You might decide it is best to speak “quietly” to workers. Or you might decide on a very public approach. You will need to decide on appropriate ways to communicate. You may decide that you need something to help you explain your organisation to workers such as a pamphlet or the organisation’s newsletter. You may find creative ways to use mobile/cell phones or even the employer’s telephone.

Mobilising issues Many organisations spring up when workers are confronted with a serious and immediate issue. Bringing workers into the organisation by dealing with their real concerns is a useful strategy. But care is needed. Your strategy must include how to build on the issue and how to sustain interest when the immediate issue or crisis dies down.



Experiences: Recruiting strategies and activities

Domestic workers in Hong Kong use training centres as an entry point

The Hong Kong Domestic Workers' General Union was started in government retraining centres. The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) ran programmes at the centres. Women workers took domestic worker skills training courses there. At three of the centres, with the assistance of organisers, the women formed groups, and over a year and a half they built the foundations of the union.

(Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union, leaflet)

Transport workers in Zambia build worker organiser teams

The recruitment strategy of the Zambia Bus and Taxi Workers' Union is to talk to potential driver members on a person-to-person basis. Organisers talk to workers at the bus stations, at times when they are not loading. If the organiser manages to recruit one or two workers, these workers are given the job of organising other drivers. If they manage to recruit ten, they form an interim committee to take on the job of recruiting other drivers into a branch or district.

(ITF Report)

Domestic workers in South Africa make use of telephones

The South Africa Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU) was forced to close down in 1996 due to financial problems. "But when we closed we decided that this was not the end, we would form a new union. So, we elected ten of our people to mobilise for a new union. We had no offices or anything so we organised from our rooms, from our houses and we used our employers' telephones". "We launched the South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU) in 2000".

(Hester Stephens, SADSAWU President, Amsterdam, November 2006)

Market vendors in Uganda recruit around an HIV/Aids programme

The National Union of Informal Economy Workers' Organisations (NUIEWO) organises market vendors, transport workers and others in Uganda. It works closely with the Market Vendors AIDS Project (MAVAP) established in three large markets. This has helped the union recruit members because the vendors see the practical benefits of belonging to the union.

(John Kalema, GS, NUIEWO, Malawi, May 2006)

Motorcycle taxi driver organisers in Benin go house to house

Organisers of SYNAZEB, a union of motorcycle taxi drivers in Benin, go from house to house, family to family, to try and recruit new members. This approach is inspired by the strategy that politicians use at election time. It seems to be a very effective method, “especially because to visit someone personally in this way to discuss an issue constitutes a mark of respect that is very deeply-rooted in our societies”.

(ITF Report)

Waste picker union develops a map of worker locations

Organisers of the KKP KP union of waste pickers in India developed a map of all the routes workers follow, the places where they congregate to keep their filled sacks, their sorting sites and the scrap traders to whom they sell scrap. They also know the times at which they will be available at each place. And, since waste pickers are concentrated in pockets within slums, it is relatively easy to visit them there.

(P.Chikarmane, L.Narayan Organising the Unorganised. A Case Study of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Trade Union of Waste-pickers, India)

Farm workers in South Africa have a 3-fold strategy

Sikhula Sonke is a union of farm workers. A majority of members are women. Many are seasonal or casual workers. The union recruits at pick up points where farmers collect casual labour. It distributes pamphlets and union newsletters in town centres on Saturday mornings when many farmers bring their workers into town for shopping. They also recruit in social and community spaces such as churches, schools and clinics.

(A.Devenish and C.Skinner, SEWU and Sikhula Sonke. Tips on organising informal workers, SALB, July/August 2007)

Step Three: Plan the practical details

Paying attention to practical details and making sure there is good administration may sound boring but it can make a difference. This does not mean that if you don't have a smart office, or a secretary, you can't be a successful recruiter. It does mean that you need to be well organised yourself! Use the checklist below to help you organise yourself.



Check List 2:

Planning practical details for recruiting

| | |
|--|---|
| Have we? | ✓ |
| When | |
| Set a starting date | |
| Made sure we have the necessary time available | |
| Set a time period for the first phase | |
| Set a time period for the overall project/campaign if appropriate | |
| Decided when to evaluate progress | |
| Who | |
| Put the recruiting team together | |
| Made clear arrangements with recruiters: who will do what and when | |
| Decided who is responsible for: | |
| • Monitoring progress | |
| • Reporting | |
| • Producing recruitment materials | |
| • Making sure joining forms and cards are available | |
| • Keeping records and filing | |
| • Arranging meetings | |
| • Arranging transport | |
| • Arranging money or payments | |



3. Steps In The Recruiting Process: Implementing

You have already decided on your strategy and approach. You have made all the practical arrangements. You should now be ready to start recruiting. There are two important points to remember:

- The steps do not follow a straight line- so research goes on all the time; practical arrangements need to change; the strategy has to be reviewed and so on.
- Things do not always work to plan. Be prepared to think on your feet!

Step Four: Approaching workers

#Are you prepared?

Before setting out to recruit, ask yourself what qualities, attributes and skills you need to successfully recruit informal workers. Where are you strong and where are you weak?



Check List 3:

Qualities, attributes and skills for organisers/ recruiters

| | |
|--|---|
| “I”? | ✓ |
| Speak the workers’ languages | |
| Understand and respect the workers’ culture and background | |
| Know the key problems and issues facing workers | |
| Empathise with workers | |
| Show respect for workers | |
| Am honest and trustworthy | |
| Work hard and am committed | |
| Act independently and impartially | |
| Act democratically and fairly | |
| Have confidence and courage | |
| Am patient and persistent | |
| Have a friendly approach | |
| Know how to listen and how to communicate | |



Experiences: Organiser Qualities

The Ghana TUC says:

On organisers from the union

“As much as possible the organisers should try to bring themselves to the level of the identified group to be organised. They should be mindful of the character of the labour force in the informal economy and be careful of their behaviour, utterances and the way they relate with them. A good informal sector organiser must be articulate, tolerant, influential and most important must have a commitment to do the work”.

On organisers from an existing association

“...must be operators themselves, and must either be leaders in the group, or persons that are well respected. It is important that the contact persons are eloquent and able to educate the other operators, and it is important that they are seen as serious and honest people”.

(Ghana TUC, Standard approach manual for organising workers within the informal economy)

#Who to approach

You need to find an entry point, a way of approaching workers. The most common entry point is through a contact person. Where possible, get someone to introduce you to a potential contact person from the target group. This can help to open doors, and overcome distrust, fear and reluctance. The person should be someone workers trust, respect and have confidence in. It may be the official or unofficial leader of a group or association of workers, or a leader in the community. On the other hand, the leaders of a group or association may be the very people that workers fear or distrust. Here you may have a problem. If you bypass the leader, he may turn hostile and undermine organising efforts. If you work with the leader, the workers may reject your organising attempts. There is no easy answer to this problem. Be aware of it and be prepared to change your strategy.

Sometimes you have to build your contacts from scratch. You have to approach a worker or group of workers without any introduction. If you have to do this, make sure you have first spent time observing the group or situation before selecting a person/group to approach.

Build motivation amongst your contacts. Agree on tasks for them to

do such as such as bringing along new contact persons to the next discussion, or collecting and sharing information.



TIP Assign (or take with you) someone who comes from within the group, or with a similar background to the workers you want to recruit. S/he will be in a better position to understand and relate well to them, and is more likely to win their trust. For example, women find it easier to recruit other women; migrant workers to recruit other migrants, especially from their own countries and so on. Speaking in the worker's own language is very important too. This strategy is known as "LIKE RECRUIT LIKE".

#Where and when

It is often better to hold first discussions with your contact persons away from the workplace. Meeting informally at social, community, place of worship, training centres or other gathering places can be a good starting point. You might visit them at their homes or invite them to your home or office.

You will have to assess whether workers are vulnerable to action by authorities, criminals, employers, husbands. You may want to meet with your contacts secretly and move slowly and stealthily to bring in members.

Where open recruitment is possible, find the gathering places; find the break times or times when work is slack to visit groups of workers or individuals at their workplaces.

#What to say

Here is an example of the way a discussion with a new contact, or group of workers, might proceed.

1. Greet and introduce yourself, emphasising your "credentials".
2. Explain *briefly* where you are from and say you are here to explain about the organisation and how it may be able to assist her/him/ them.

3. If the worker/contact does not agree, you should try and gently persuade her or him to talk to you. If not be sensitive and judge when to say “thank you for your time” and walk away. You may draw her/him in later!
4. If s/he agrees to talk first give an overview of your organisation:
What is your organisation.
What does it aim to do.
Who are the members.
Where does it operate.
How is it run, including who are the leaders, democracy in the organisation.
5. Explain why workers need such an organisation:
To build unity, solidarity and power.
To enable them to *collectively* take up their issues and demands.
To provide support in times of difficulty.
6. Show how in practice this works. Give concrete examples:
How you might deal with an issue important to this group of workers.
Successes and achievements of your organisation.
Successes and achievements of similar organisations.
7. Ask if there are questions or concerns and make sure you have time to listen and answer.
8. Invite her/him/them to join if this seems appropriate.
9. Arrange how you will follow up on this discussion.
10. Give your contact details and take the details of the worker(s).
11. Give out information leaflets or newsletters.

#How to say it

Do:

- LISTEN.
- Be friendly but professional.

- Be respectful and calm.
- Be brief, clear and to the point. Don't give too much detail at first.
- Constantly involve the worker as you talk- allow for comments and questions as you go along. Respect the knowledge and experience of workers.
- Listen to the comments and questions from workers and do your best to answer.
- Make sure you have enough time and don't appear rushed.
- Make the worker feel that his/her concerns are important.
- Be knowledgeable but not arrogant.

#What not to say or do (common mistakes)

Do not...

- Promise what you can't achieve.
- Exaggerate the organisation's achievements.
- Be dishonest.
- Arrange a date and not turn up.
- Ignore or brush aside workers' concerns.
- Be a know-all or arrogant.
- Threaten.
- Lose your temper.
- Be impatient.
- Have a body language that contradicts what you say or is disrespectful.
- Make sexist remarks, harass or treat women unequally.
- Be patronising, and use a "them and us" approach.

Workers will react differently to your approaches. You will have to deal with the expected and unexpected. To prepare yourself, think through how you might respond to some of the scenarios below.



Experiences: What workers might say (1)

Aggressive worker

“Get away from here. There’s nothing you can tell us about unions. They are useless organisations. They take our money and promise to help us. But all they do is tell lies and rob us. Go away and don’t come here again or we will break your neck”.

Uninterested worker

“ I am too busy to talk to you”.
“ Associations don’t interest me”.
“ I am only working for my children”.
“ No thank-you”.

Worker who does not understand

“ What can a union do for me? There is no benefit in belonging to an organisation. I can look after myself thank you”.
“ My boss is OK. If I work hard I will improve my position”.

Worker with bad experience

“When we lost our jobs at Lawson Brothers the union helped management to dismiss us. Then the organisers ran away. Unions just bring trouble. Leave us alone”.

Cynical worker

“ Who are you really working for? We know about politicians and their friends in organisations. You just want to use us. Every time near elections you come and recruit all the vendors. You give us loans and make promises. But afterwards you dump us”.

Scared worker

“ Please go away, my boss will see you”.
“ My husband won’t let me join a union”.
“ Associations bring trouble. The police will beat us if we join”.
“ I’m afraid to get involved in politics. Don’t come here again”.
“ I don’t want trouble. I just want to do my work”.

Worker who says “yes” but means “no”

“OK, give me the form and I will send it to you”.
“I will come to the meeting another time”.
“I really must rush but will see you next time”.



Experiences: What workers might say (2)

Domestic worker

“ It is difficult to find jobs. If my employer knows I have joined a union, she will dismiss me. I have to support my children”.

Migrant domestic worker

“ If I lose my job I will be sent back to Indonesia. I am not allowed to change my employer”.

Women street vendor

“ I don't have time for organisations. I live far away. I have to work all day and then cook, clean and look after my children”.

Waste picker

“ I am working for myself and my family. I can earn more money working by myself. I am not interested in your coop”.

Taxi owner/driver

“ In my area we already belong to Mr. Chen's association. We pay a monthly fee to him and he protects us from the police”.

Migrant street barber

“ We can't join your organisation. Local people don't want to work with us. We are afraid that they will chase us away or attack us if we speak out”.

#Common worker questions and concerns

Be prepared for some or all of the questions below. Do your best to answer the questions. Take time in advance to anticipate questions and plan how to answer them. Don't be afraid to say you don't know, or that there is no single or correct answer. Don't be evasive or dishonest. In some cases you can ask what the worker thinks and develop a discussion around the question.

- Why should I join an organisation?
- What can the organisation do for me?
- How can you solve my problems?
- This is my problem now – can you solve it?
- What can you do that I can't do myself?

- How can you help me to make more money/ sell more/ outdo my rivals?
- How much do I have to pay?
- Why must I pay dues?
- How will my money be used?
- How do I know you will not steal or misuse my money?
- How can I find time to participate in an organisation?
- Who are the leaders? How can I trust them?

Step Five: The recruitment meeting

Along the way you will hold many meetings. These might start with one or two workers, and expand into a core group that will help you to recruit more. Ideally, you will hold meeting with larger groups of workers to:

- Explain the organisation.
- Discuss problems and issues .
- Explore possible solutions and the role that the organisation can play.
- Share experiences of other informal workers.
- Plan to take up an issue.
- Report on successes.
- Report on progress.
- Work out the involvement of workers and leaders in the recruitment process.

#Running a successful recruitment meeting

Before the meeting

- With your contacts decide on the best place and time to hold the meeting
- Inform workers in good time, explaining briefly the purpose of the meeting and how long the meeting will last.
- Choose an appropriate way of getting the message to workers.
- Be clear what you want to get out of the meeting, and plan an interesting and realistic agenda. Circulate this in advance where possible.
- Decide who will chair the meeting, who will record the minutes and who will speak on different issues.
- Build in time for questions and discussion.
- Prepare materials you want to use or distribute at the meeting.

During the meeting

- Explain the purpose of the meeting and the agenda items.
- Chair the meeting firmly so you can deal with the issues, reach conclusions and finish on time.
- Chair the meeting democratically so that all views are heard, especially those of women workers.
- Summarise decisions and agree the way forward.
- Take minutes of the meeting and make sure they are well filed.

#When meetings are not possible

“Workers tend to be individualistic and have little or no time for group meetings. The reason is that they will lose their daily incomes or sales when they attend meetings outside of their workplaces”

(Francis X Owusa, Ghana TUC, Malawi, May 2006)

“Workers are not interested in meetings, only in money”

(Lameck Kashiwa, General Secretary, Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations, AZIEA, Malawi, May 2006)

The most potent communication tool for democratic worker organisations is the meeting. But, informal workers often find it difficult to attend meetings. For workers working on their own account, time spent in meetings may mean less working time, and less money earned. For others, working hours may prevent them attending. For women informal workers, there may be additional barriers such as child and home care “duties”, security fears, religious or cultural norms and so on.

If workers cannot come to you in the form of a meeting, then you have to find ways of going to them. Getting information to workers individually, and getting their feedback on issues is extremely challenging. It requires resources and imagination. Here are some ideas:

- Mobilise teams of volunteers to assist you in paying visits to workers in their homes.
- Send messages along the “grapevine” or informal communication networks.
- Visit workers in places they socialise.

- Where available, send regular messages to cellular/mobile phones.
- Set up a network of “leaders” within the community or in work areas who can pass on messages and receive feedback from workers.
- Put out regular information pamphlets.



Experiences: An integrated approach

SEWA reaches women workers in their community

Ayesha-ben Mashrat Pathan is a member of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). She lives in a “slum” area of Ahmedabad City. There the streets are dusty. They teem with people and animals. Men and old people lay in the sun on wooden beds. Women are working in their homes. They are engaged in unpaid domestic labour and a variety of home-based income generating activities such as sewing, embroidery, incense stick rolling, bidi (cigarette) rolling, cooking food for sale.

Ayesha-ben is a SEWA “bare-foot” health care worker in the community. Most days, Ayesha-ben goes on her rounds in the community. She knows her members well: where to call, what problems they have, who might want attention. Women approach her as she passes by. She provides health advice and medicines, and helps members with their health insurance.

Ayasha-ben is an organiser. Her work extends beyond health issues. She acts as an organiser, a recruiter, a SEWA insurance scheme agent as well as being a trusted community support person for women. She acts as eyes and ears for SEWA, and in turn provides information on the union to the members and potential members.

As well as routine duties, Ayesha-ben organises regular health education sessions in the different neighbourhoods. Women and their children gather around her to learn about a range of health care issues such as good nutrition, the reproductive system and sexual health. And of course she educates them about the Union!

In her community women are poor, cannot afford to travel or spend time away from their work or, in some cases, are not permitted to leave the house or immediate surroundings. Through the SEWA system women have access to basic health care which otherwise might never reach them. They experience the practical benefits of union membership, and at the same time they get information on the Union.

Ayesha-ben is an executive member of the SEWA health cooperative. She is one of SEWA's worker leaders – the key to building SEWA from the bottom up. Deeply embedded in the community, she is involved in an integrated organising programme- providing a basic service, organising the union, and building a movement of women at the place of immediate need.

Chris Bonner, Reflections After an Exposure Dialogue Programme, Ahmedabad, India, 2005



4. Recruiting Informal Women Workers

Challenges

When attempting to recruit women workers you may find it hard to get going. You need to take special note of the particular circumstances of the women such as cultural and social norms, organisational experience. Some of the barriers to recruiting women workers are:

Time Women have little time to attend meetings and engage in organising activities due to household and childcare. Men do not usually take an equal share!

Traditional male attitudes Husbands/partners may prevent women from joining organisations, or participating in their activities.

Religion and culture These may limit women's freedom to leave their homes/immediate area or to interact with men

Confidence Women may not have the confidence to join or participate in organisations

Fear Women may fear that they will lose their livelihoods if they become active in an organisation; fear their husbands; fear the community; fear for their safety

Actions

- Check the situation of the women you intend to approach- religion, cultural norms, type of work and hours, organisational experience.
- Work with a person trusted by, and close to, the women. In most cases this should be a woman.
- Get the support of trusted, respectful and powerful male leaders. This can help build women's confidence, and the men can work with resistant husbands/partners.
- Go slowly and carefully. Explain clearly. Listen! Let women speak for themselves and draw their own conclusions.
- Explain the practical benefits of belonging to the organisation. Convince them by giving concrete examples involving other women.
- Find ways to meet women where they are comfortable. This may be at an already existing gathering; at their workplaces; in their homes (when their husbands are not there, but only if you are a woman!). It should be somewhere where they do not fear being seen with an organiser.
- Find the most suitable times to hold discussions and make sure children can be there if necessary. Provide facilities.
- Keep discussion short and to the point.
- Work with groups of women where possible so they can support each other and build confidence.
- Show respect for religion, culture, language.
- Encourage women to go out and organise others. Decide together on tasks to be done and who will do them.
- In mixed recruitment sessions make sure that issues of concern to women are discussed; women are encouraged to speak; what women say is respected, and treated as important as that said by men.

Please don't

- Propose love affairs, or sexually harass women.
- Put women in danger by exposing their interest in organising too soon.
- Delay them so that they travel unsafely, or arrive home late.
- Speak down to them or patronise them.
- Lose patience when women take time to speak or resist joining.
- In mixed recruitment sessions ignore women and what they say, or ignore issues of concern to them.



5. What Next?

It is very important that you maintain contact with new members. It is no use persuading them to join the organisation and then leave them alone. Visit them regularly. Hold meetings. Take up issues and help solve their problems. Provide regular information through pamphlets circulars or newsletters, and/or through elected representatives and activists. Bring members formally into the structures of the organisation, or build the structures with them if your organisation is new. This will mean holding elections for leaders and representatives. Provide formal or informal education sessions. Learn through your experiences and develop your own organisation's approach to recruiting and organising informal workers. Attract more members to your organisation by dealing effectively with the issues that really matter to them.



Experiences: developing an approach for your organisation

Ghana TUC: a standard approach for organising workers in the informal economy

1. Research

Research and gather information on types of operators that the union is interested in organising and where to locate such operators

2. Contacts

Contact the leaders of the identified groups. Depending on the situation one may have to do this first of all establishing various contacts with the groups, association or community through whom the rest can be reached. Several of these contacts may have to be done before going to the next step.

3. Meetings

Hold meetings to discuss the needs and problems of the operators identified and find solutions together with them. It is very important to allow them to find their own solutions.

4. Selling unionism to informal workers

Organise a training programme or workshop for the group and provide them with information concerning the union especially the importance and benefits of joining the union. They should be made aware of the responsibility of the members to pay union dues. The organisers from the union should also take note of the operators' expectations of joining the union.

5. How to absorb them (informal workers) into the union

If the concept of unionization is accepted, conduct elections to elect officers and follow with the completion of membership forms. Subsequently enter their names into the database of the union and if possible issue them with membership cards. Offer leadership training for the leaders to enable them to face the challenges of being a leader and also to enable them organise more members into the union.

It is also important to create a structure within the union for the organised informal sector operators in order to bring them into the mainstream of the union.

6. Periodic interaction with them (informal workers)

Follow up with periodic contacts with them through workshops and meetings and involve them in normal union activities (e.g. May Day Celebrations). There should be constant interaction between the Informal Sector Desk Officer of the union, the contact persons for the group and the operators themselves.

(Ghana TUC, Standard approach manual)



Learning Activities

Activity 1: A recruitment plan

Aim

To strengthen your skills in recruitment planning.

Task

Work in groups:

1. Draw up a list of the key challenges you face in recruiting workers in your sector/area.
2. Taking into account the key challenges outline a strategy and plan for recruiting workers. Your strategy and plan should include at least:

What you hope to achieve

target group and priorities
by when

How you will do it

contacts
times and places
communication tools
special provisions for recruiting women(where appropriate)

Practical arrangements

who will do what and when

3. Write up your plan on a flip chart and prepare to present this to the other groups.



Learning Activities


Activity 2: Different worker responses

Aim

To help you to deal with different responses from workers when you are recruiting.

Task

Work in pairs or small groups:

1. Turn back to  **Experiences: What workers might say (1)** on page 19.
2. How will you deal with these situations in your own recruiting attempts? Decide on the best approach for each type of situation.
3. Present to the other groups, and compare your ideas.

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Resource Centre

The Development Institute for Training, Education and Support for Labour, DITSELA, in South Africa has a large collection of local and international trade union education materials. These were used extensively in preparing the books. For access to these resources contact info@ditsela.org.za

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