
Building And Maintaining A Democratic Organisation Of Informal Workers



Organising In The Informal Economy:
Resource Books For Organisers

Number **2**

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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Contents

Overview:

Organising In The Informal Economy: Resource Books For Organisers	iii
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Issues And Challenges:

Informal Workers In Different Sectors	v
---	---

1. Introduction

In This Book	1
Democratic, Member Based Workers' Organisations.....	1
Internal Challenges	2

2. Worker Leaders in the Informal Economy

Qualities	5
Women Leaders.....	7
Collective Leadership	8

3. A Strong Foundation

The Constitution	11
Policies, Procedures and Values.....	13

4. Choosing Leaders: The Election Process

Election Principles	17
Organising An Election.....	18
After An Election	21
Dealing With Difficult Situations	21

5. Participation And Decision Making By Members

Building A Strong Base	24
Holding Successful Meetings.....	25
Not The Only Way: Alternatives To Meetings	31

6. Accountability

Financial Accountability.....	33
Political Accountability.....	37

7. Worker Education And Empowerment

Formal And Informal Education.....	39
Worker Education for Building Organisation	40
Work Skills Training.....	43

<i>Learning Activities</i>	45
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<i>Resources and References</i>	47
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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.

Using the Books

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

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.

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

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



1. Introduction

In This Book

You will find information and practical ideas on how to run a democratic organisation of informal workers. We look at the type of leadership needed; some of the foundation documents you will require such as the constitution; and some of the processes that define a democratic organisation, such as elections and effective meetings. The book emphasises democratic principles, for example, full participation and leadership of women, and collective, accountable leadership. In the final section, the book gives ideas and experiences on worker education for informal workers. At the end of the book you will find learning activities, for use in discussions and workshops, that can help reinforce democratic leadership and organisational practices.

Democratic, member-based workers' organisations

“a membership based organisation is one where the members (who are women workers) are the users of the services of the organisation, the managers and its owners”.

(Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, India)

When we talk of building an organisation of informal workers we mean much more than recruiting and growing membership. We mean building and maintaining an organisation, run and controlled by the members, through democratic organisational structures and processes. We mean building and maintaining an organisation that effectively represents the interests of all its members, women and men. We mean ensuring that the organisation lasts.

A democratic, member-based, workers' organisation can take many different forms. It can be a trade union, an association, a network, a worker cooperative amongst others. It can be small or large; local, national, international. Its members can be informal workers, formal workers or a mix of both. Whatever its form or its name, it is based on strong, democratic grassroots (workshop, farm, market, taxi park, street, landfill site etc) structures led by elected leadership which is accountable to the members. It operates with a clear purpose, backed by sound values and principles.



Definition

Democracy

Governance by the people (members) through direct participation and/or a system of elected representatives.

Democratic organisation

Based on the principles and practices of democracy.

Internal challenges

It is never easy to run a democratic member-based organisation. Because the members are the owners, the managers and the beneficiaries, decision making is often slow and complicated and administration and management not very efficient. For informal workers, it is particularly challenging to run an effective and democratic organisation:

Challenge 1: Choosing the right kind of leader. Some leaders are drawn from organisations with a history of weak and undemocratic organisational practices. Some want to be leaders to further their own interests. Others are corrupt, and some are in the pockets of politicians or criminals. Men predominate in leadership positions even where a majority of the members are women.

Challenge 2: Developing the necessary skills and knowledge to run an organisation. Many workers in the informal economy have had little opportunity to acquire a good education and formal skills. They often lack the confidence and experience to run their organisations well.

Challenge 3: Having enough money to carry out the objectives of the organisation. Member-based organisations rely on fees paid by their members. Informal workers are generally poor and cannot pay high and/or regular subscription fees. It is often difficult to collect subscriptions regularly because of members' poverty, scattered locations and lack of financial facilities. It is not easy to find donors who are willing to support them.



2. Worker Leaders In The Informal Economy

Leaders can make or break an organisation. Where leaders are strong, representative, work collectively and listen to their members, organisation can flourish. But where leaders are individualistic and self-serving, organisations can die or remain a shell.

An organiser plays an important leadership role. This is true whether she is an elected leader, an appointed official or a volunteer. An organiser/leader is usually the one who educates and guides newly elected leaders. An organiser may have to work with existing leaders to help them change their approach and style.

Qualities

Use the checklist on the following page to assess your own leadership qualities, and as a guide for other organisers, worker leaders and members.



Check List 1:

Qualities of an effective leader of informal workers

I am...	✓
Committed to organisational objectives, policies and values	
Committed to serving the interests of the members	
A person who understands and is close to the members	
Honest and sincere	
Respectful of other peoples' opinions	
Fair when dealing with people of different sex, religion, colour and politics	
A person who listens to what members say and acts on their mandates	
Able to work collectively and contribute as part of a group	
Able to inspire and influence others	
Willing to accept responsibility	
Ready to admit mistakes and to learn from them	
Gender sensitive and committed to the empowerment of women	
Confident of myself and the members	
Cool, calm and composed under pressure	
Tactful, diplomatic and humble	
Brave, and able to defend myself and my organisation	
Full of initiative, drive and energy	
I do not...	
Talk too much	
Consider myself an expert on all subjects	
Dominate other peoples' way of thinking	
Manipulate to serve my own interests	
Misuse the resources of the organisation	
Consider myself a leader for life!	

(Adapted from IFWEA, 2006, Building Democratic Worker Organisation and Representation in the Informal Economy. A manual in two parts)

Women leaders

“He worries about the length of time I spend outside the family home. There are a lot of meetings and all the hours spent away from the salon constitute a serious loss of earnings”.

(Eliane Quedraogo, National Union of Hairdressers and Beauticians of Burkina Faso (SYNAGEB) in ITUC, Union View # 3, March 2007)

Women are often excluded from leadership positions for many reasons: internal such as lack of confidence or belief that leaders should be men and external such as religion, traditional male attitudes and child and homecare burdens. But where given a chance, women have proved to be very effective leaders. The Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India is the largest and most successful union of informal workers in the world. Its members and leaders are all women.

Strategies to encourage women leadership

- Target men: raise awareness, challenge tradition, educate on gender equality.
- Target women: raise awareness, build confidence, overcome fears, build skills, provide role models.
- Target structures: set targets and quotas for women in leadership, set up and give status to women’s committees, ensure gender issues are on agendas.
- Target leaders: change mind-set, challenge self interest.



Experiences:

Women Leaders overcome resistance

“I was not one of them, but I took a stand”

Beauty Gaza was elected to be the treasurer of a union organising formal and informal retail workers. She was the first woman to be elected to a leadership position.

“ The three other office bearers are all men. They operated as if I was not one of them. They would get together and make decisions and leave me out. They never sent me documents. I would come to the office for a meeting and find that they had the correspondence but I don’t have a single thing. It became very frustrating because people phone you for something and you don’t know that a decision has been taken. I decided to take a stand. I told them that it was tough luck if they did not want to work with me. I am here to stay. Members elected me, and I intend to do my job. Eventually things started to come right. Now they always phone me and include me in all decisions”.

“ They believe in custom and culture, but I showed them I was capable”

Anna Dlamini was elected as a union shop steward in a small metal recycling factory where most of the members are men. “ I didn’t know why they elected me. They believe in custom and culture and used to say, ‘we like this union but the leader is a woman. What will our women at home say? Our culture does not allow a woman to stand in front of us’. But the men’s attitudes gradually changed towards me when they saw that I am a capable leader and that they can rely on me to go to meetings and report back to them. I was re-elected with very big support”.

(Adapted from Ditsela, Women Leadership Development Foundation Course, Johannesburg, May 2003)

Collective Leadership

“Combat the spirit of the big man”.

“Combat the spirit of closed circles”.

(Amilar Cabral)

One of the principles of democratic, worker organisation is collective leadership. In practice, you often find that informal worker associations have powerful, charismatic leaders who act alone. This may be a result of cultural norms (leader is accepted as the authority figure who takes decisions for the people) or self-interest (leadership means control and access to money, resources and power). Your members and your leaders/potential leaders may be used to this leadership model and style. Existing leaders may resist change. Members may be afraid, or not interested to challenge it. You will need to carefully argue the case for collective leadership. Point out its advantages to existing leaders, but more importantly, to the members. Where you are organising informal workers into an established union, informal worker representatives should be part of the leadership collective.



Definition

Collective Leadership

“Collective leadership means leadership made by a group of persons and not by one alone or by some persons in the group”.

Arguing the case for collective leadership.

Collective leadership is strong leadership because it:

- Combines everyone's ideas, creativity, experience
- Makes the best use of each person's skills and strengths
- Provides mutual support
- Shares power
- Shares responsibility
- Apportions praise
- Facilitates transparency
- Combats corruption and abuse of power
- Combats individualism
- Strengthens the leadership capabilities of everyone in the group.

Leadership from below

"leadership cannot be imposed from above. It must blossom from below so that the organisation can remain dynamic, effective and unified".

(SEWA Academy)

Collective leadership also means leadership that is spread throughout an organisation and not just those at the top. A democratic organisation has many layers of leaders. Grassroots leaders are the direct link between members and top leaders and the organisation's organisers and staff. They are tomorrow's "top" leaders. Make sure you focus efforts on building this layer of leadership.



3. A Strong Foundation

A strong informal workers' organisation has a strong foundation, made up of an active membership, a representative and collective leadership and democratic decision-making. To make these elements work together an organisation needs clear objectives, structures and rules. It needs policies and procedures. These should be in writing and formally adopted. If you are building a new organisation you have a big task in developing these documents. But, if done well, it will prevent problems and difficulties in the future. If you are an established union now organising informal workers you may need to change your constitution.

The Constitution

The constitution is a body of rules mutually agreed to by the members to guide the conduct of the organisation. It is binding on all members, leaders and staff. The constitution:

- Guards democracy
- Stores the organisation's principles and values

- Educates and empowers members
- Protects against mismanagement, ill-discipline and corruption
- Guides in times of conflict.

A constitution should be:

- Known and available to all the members
- Drawn up, reviewed from time to time, and amended if necessary through democratic processes.

A constitution is a legal document. Where possible it should be registered with appropriate authorities.

A new organisation will need to develop a set of rules to guide its work until it can develop and adopt a constitution. You are an important link between the constitution and the members. You must make sure members participate in developing a new constitution or amending the old one and/or that they know the existing constitution. Developing a constitution can be a powerful tool to educate and empower members and to build their confidence and commitment.

What should go into a constitution?

- Objectives of the organisation
- Who are the members
- How members are represented in the organisation (structures)
- How often they meet (leaders, members)
- How leaders report to members
- Who are the leaders
- How leaders are elected
- When and how often leaders are elected (term of office)
- Leaders' roles, responsibilities and powers
- Representation of women and women leaders
- How finances are run and checked
- Discipline and recall of leaders

Your constitution should be clear and understandable for members.



Experiences: Constitution making process

Kenyan Street Vendor Organisation draws up its Constitution

The Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT) was officially launched in 2006. Before that, its major activity was consolidating membership and developing the constitution. A Steering Committee drew up a first draft of the constitution, with the support of academics, trade unionists and a community NGO. This draft was sent out to its member Urban Alliances (of street vendors). They shared it with their members (local associations) and gathered their inputs. Feedback and proposed amendments from grassroots members formed the basis of the next meeting of the Steering Committee. The constitution was redrafted and sent again to the Urban Alliances. In turn, they discussed it with the wider membership. They submitted new amendments in preparation for a National Delegates Meeting. The Meeting discussed the amendments. It agreed and adopted the constitution. This paved the way for the delegates to elect the national office bearers of KENASVIT.

(The Street Trader, KENASVIT Official Newsletter, April 2006)

StreetNet International ensures women are fully represented

StreetNet International's Constitution ensures that representation of women in leadership and in decision-making structures is formalised and not left to chance.

International Council

“meets annually, consisting of representation by eleven (11) elected members in addition to the International President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, of whom at least (50%) must be women”.

International Office Bearers

“Two or more of the four International office-bearers elected must be women”.

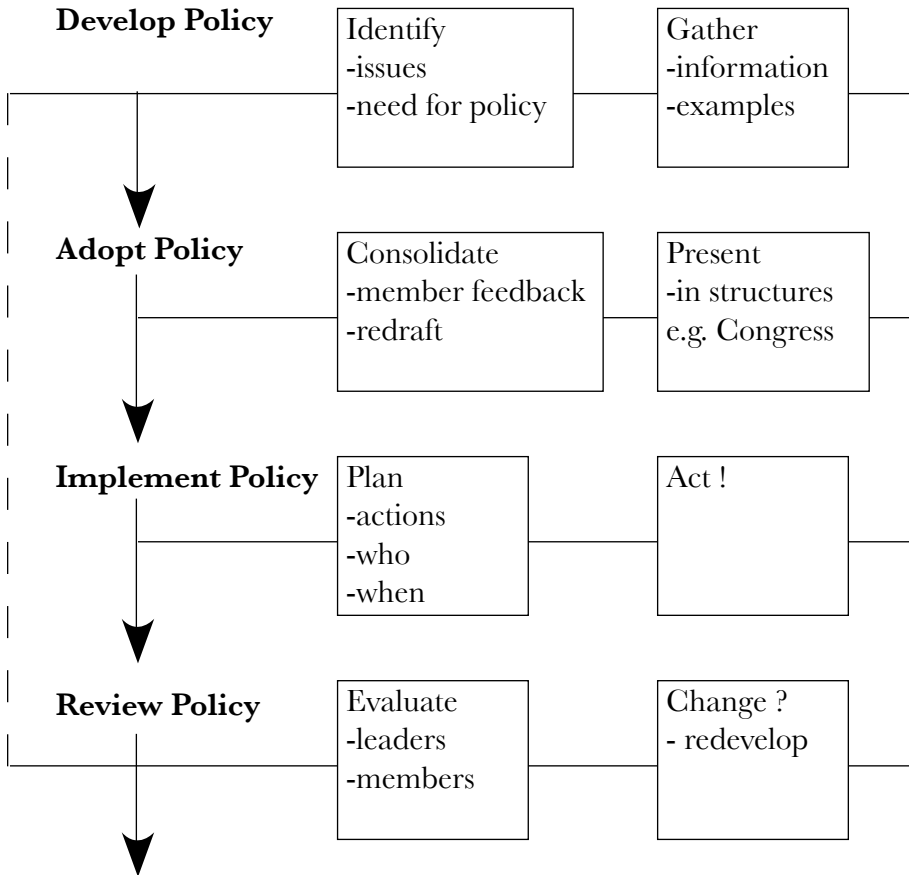
(StreetNet International Constitution-www.streetnet.org.za)

Policies, Procedures and Values

#Policies

All organisations need a set of policies. Policies tell us what our stand is on an issue. They guide the work of the organisation. An organisation can have policies on many issues. Policies, like a constitution, should be binding on leaders and members. Develop your policies through a democratic process.

The policy process: example



Definition Policies

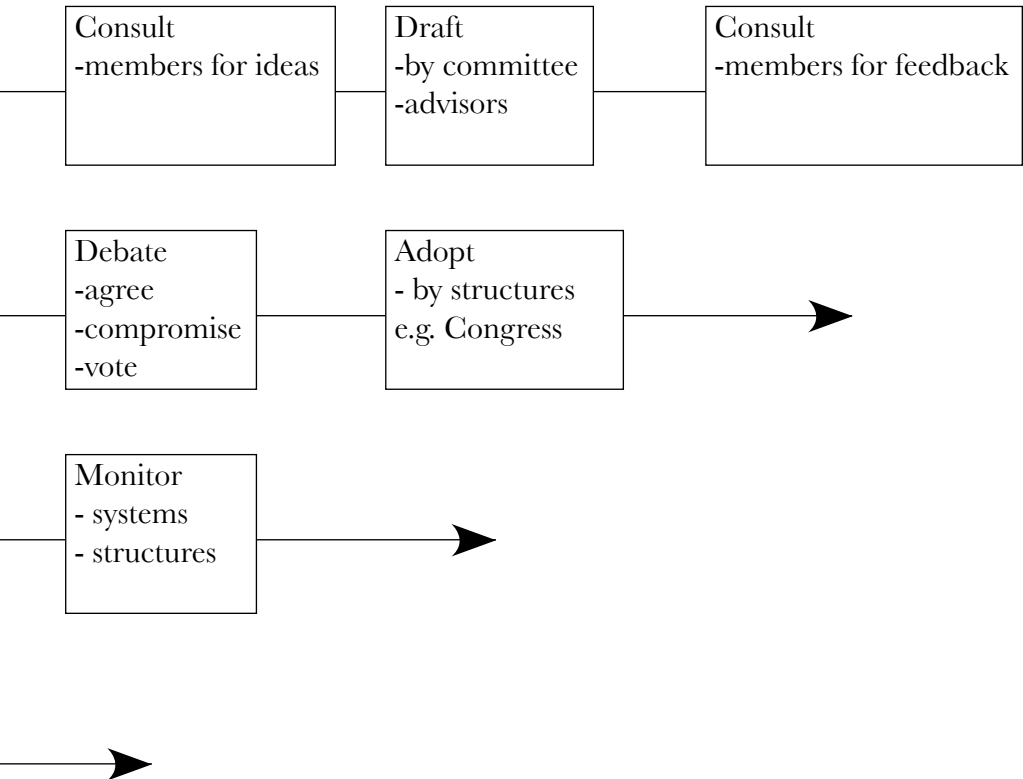
Positions adopted by an organisation that guide its actions.

Procedures

How to do things. Steps to follow when implementing policies.

Policy issues: examples

You will, over time, develop policies on a wide range of issues. Informal worker organisations have put in place in the early stages of organisation some of the following kinds of policies (and depending on the sector and circumstances):



- Financial policies such as financial independence and sustainability, no personal loans from the organisation, reduced fees for informal workers (in mixed organisations) and administration of finances.
- Political policies such as political independence, alliances and affiliations.
- Organisational policies such as gender equality, inclusion of migrant workers and how to deal with authorities/employers.

Procedures

Together with the constitution and policies you will have a set of procedures that lay down how things are done and the steps that should be taken. The procedure for running elections is usually contained in the constitution to safeguard democracy in the organisation. It is something that all members must be clear about. A procedure for ordering stationery however, might be contained in an office manual, a memo or may be agreed verbally. Office staff and some leaders need to know about it. Build and formalise your procedures as the organisation develops.

Values and principles

Our values and principles underpin everything we do. As an organiser/ leader it is important that you uphold the values and principles of your organisation and guide members and other leaders. Do you know what they are? Some organisations develop clear statements of their values and principles.



Definition Values

Beliefs, principles or standards that guide the way an individual or group behaves.



Experiences: Organisation values

KENASVIT spells out its values

“The Core Values of the Alliance are three fold:

- The alliance will not discriminate on the grounds of physical challenge, gender, language, religion and tribe, among others.
- The alliance will strive to uphold transparency and accountability in the management of its internal affairs.
- The alliance will strive to ensure that the constitutional rights of traders are respected”.

(The Street Trader, KENASVIT)



4. Choosing Leaders: The Election Process

In a democratic workers' organisation the members have a right and duty to choose their own leaders through an election process. Elected leaders in turn appoint others, such as paid organisers, who play leadership roles. Such "secondary" leaders are accountable to the elected leaders and through them to the members.

Election Principles

- Members elect their own leaders
- Freedom from harassment or victimisation
- One member-one vote or a proportional vote (applies to organisations)
- No gender, race, religious, sexual orientation or other discrimination
- Confidentiality (unless otherwise agreed by voters or in terms of constitution).

Organising an Election

Step One: Prepare for the election

- **Know the rules and procedures**

Check your constitution and /or election rules. If none, develop a set of rules and agree these with the members.

- **Define constituencies**

Do workers elect representatives by street, market product, taxi rank, trade and area?

- **Educate leaders and members**

What is an election?

Significance of the election for members, the organisation and for democracy

How the election will be run

Leadership criteria (qualities, gender)

- **Prepare practicalities**

Arrange the date and venue well in advance

Arrange with authorities/employer where appropriate

Organise ballot papers and ballot boxes (if secret ballot)

Arrange who will oversee the election

Arrange who will count the votes and confirm results

Make sure members are informed in good time

Collect nominations and inform members.

To help you prepare for elections with members you could hold special meetings and election practice runs. You could draw up a simple pamphlet explaining about the elections. You could produce a poster for workplaces. You could train a group of volunteers as voter educators to visit workplaces, communities or homes.

Do encourage open and healthy discussion on the kind of leader that the organisation needs. **Don't** try to influence or put pressure on members to vote for you or your candidate. **Do** challenge assumptions and myths about leadership. Use some of the ideas below to help your discussions, together with **Checklist 1** above.

Choosing leaders: do you agree?

Leadership Myths?

A leader must always be well educated.

A leader must speak English (or other colonial language).

The most important leaders must be men.

A leader must be someone forceful and who speaks a lot in meetings.

A leader must have economic and/or political status.

Key Leadership Criteria?

A leader must show strong and genuine commitment to the organisation.

A leader must always be true to the organisation's mandate.

A leader must be able and prepared to work collectively.

A leader must be honest, open and principled.

A leader must be genuinely gender sensitive.



TIP: Don't assume that women and men have an equal chance of being elected. Look beyond the obvious. Check for hidden discrimination or factors that block women from standing for election. Point out that women can and should be elected to leadership positions. Give lots of encouragement to the women so that they agree to stand for election, and assure them of support.

Step Two: Run the election

• Equipment

Make sure you have all the necessary equipment with you such as pens, ballot slips, ballot boxes, tape to seal boxes and large papers to write up nominations.

- **Time keeping**

Be early so everything is in place before the scheduled voting time.

- **Set up**

Make appropriate arrangements in the room, under the tree or in the market place. If you cannot get workers together to vote you may have to go to them in their homes, in the fields or in the streets. It is best for two people to work together.

- **Voting “officers”**

Make sure they are ready and that they run the election freely, fairly and in an orderly manner. This is very important whether the election is by secret ballot, or by the less formal way of raising hands. The election must be genuine and free from influence by candidates or their supporters. Members must feel confident about this. If you are holding a secret ballot have you put in place a system to assist those who cannot read?

- **Ballot papers**

Where these are used they should be kept safe until counted.

Step three: Process the results of the election

- **Count the votes**

Where voting is by show of hands this is done straight away by people appointed to the task. The advantage of this system is that everyone can immediately see who has won and can verify the counting. The disadvantage is that people may feel pressure to vote or not to vote for someone. With the secret ballot vote counters will be appointed and approved. The advantage of this method is that every individual is free to vote for the candidate of her choice without feeling any pressure.

- **Record the results**

List the results showing the number of votes cast for each person.

Step Four: Communicate results

As soon as possible communicate the results to the members and to those elected. Introduce the new leaders to the members.

After an Election

- **Brief the new leaders**

As soon as possible give new leaders a briefing about their roles and duties. Make sure they have all the documents they will need e.g. constitution, policies, meeting schedule.

- **Educate**

Arrange an ongoing programme of education for leaders. Don't wait for a formal leadership education programme.

- **Set to work**

New leaders should learn by doing. They should get started immediately with their duties. Keep in close communication. Provide advice and support.

- **Keep records**

File and keep records of the election in a safe place (usually registered organisations have to keep records for five years). You never know when there is going to be a challenge or a conflict around leadership.

Dealing with difficult situations

“ leaders did not want to go for elections, and often operated like a mafia because of lack of accountability and transparency”.

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

You are likely to have to deal with difficult situations around elections. If workers do not have a tradition of participation and democratic organisation, then you will have to help build this tradition. Below you will find some of the situations you might encounter. How would you deal with them? There is no single answer. To overcome such blockages to democracy you will need to understand the underlying issues and have skill in dealing with people. And, most importantly, you will need strong and informed members.



**Experiences:
Undermining Democracy: what they say
(but not always to you!)**

Stuck in the past

“I started the association. I have always been the leader. Why do I need to be elected? Don’t come with fancy new ideas. Our way has worked all these years”.

Reluctant to let go

“ I was elected as president of the union 5 years ago. I am doing a good job. What does it matter if I run my own business now? My heart is with the workers. They do what I say because they trust me and want me to stay. No-one will stand against me, so why bother holding an election?”

Paid to stay

“ I will make sure that I stay as the leader of the market association and get workers to support your re-election as councillor. Give me 5 000 rupees and help me give workers something that they need. I want to show them that I have power and influence”.

Smearred

“ Mr. Fernandez from the PP Party is trying to prevent me from being elected because I don’t support him and his party. He has spread rumours in the community, and amongst the taxi drivers, that I am a spy for the traffic police”.

“My husband won’t let me”

“ I can’t stand for election as a leader. My husband refuses to let me go to meetings. I am not allowed to mix with men when he is not present”.

Women can’t be leaders

“ We will never vote for a woman. Women are too weak to lead. No-one will listen to a woman”.

Leaders make money

“ Everyone wants to be a leader because leaders can control who gets access to the best materials for recycling. They keep the best for themselves. There are 20 candidates for one leader position. This will cause big fights”.



5. Participation And Decision Making By Members

The basis of a democratic organisation is active, informed and fully participating members who make decisions collectively using organisational structures and procedures. This is not easy to achieve. For informal workers, especially own account or piece-rate workers, time spent on organisational activities is time lost to earning a living. Opportunities to participate are often restricted, such as where workplaces are scattered or where employers force long hours on workers. Women in particular struggle to fully participate in the life of the organisation.

You will need to take these and other difficulties into account in your structures, meeting arrangements and communication tools. If you are bringing informal workers into an already existing trade union you will probably have to adjust your structures and practices to accommodate informal worker members. You may need to change your constitution. You may be the one who has to persuade union leaders and members to

do so. If your union has always had male leaders you will need to take positive action to ensure women are represented.

Building a strong base

The first building block of a workers' organisation is usually a group of members at a workplace, a combination of workplaces (e.g. a street of individual vendors), an occupational or trade grouping within a community (e.g. homeworkers producing leather goods). These base units will elect their own leaders and run their day-to-day affairs. When organisation spreads beyond the local level it is usual for the base units to elect representatives to the higher structures of the organisation. What happens at the base therefore affects the organisation from top to bottom. For example, if one occupational group is not fully represented at the base, then it is unlikely to be fully represented at the top. If women leaders are not elected at local level, then there is little chance of women being elected to national leadership positions.

Time spent building a strong base is time well spent. Spend time:

- with members and local leaders
- developing suitable grass-roots structures
- establishing appropriate ways of doing things
- informing and educating members and leaders
- supporting leaders in their roles
- promoting the election of women leaders
- supporting women leaders
- training leaders to educate and train others
- keeping workers mobilised and active
- helping workers make concrete gains and drawing out the lessons.

Grassroots leaders are a vital part of any organisation. Their role is to recruit new members, educate members about the organisation, take up members' issues and problems, represent members in organisation structures, report back and give information from the organisation.

They may also be responsible for collecting member dues. Train and support them well!

Holding successful meetings

Your organisation will take most of its important decisions in meetings. A meeting is a tool of democracy. A meeting allows members and/or their representatives to:

- Directly participate in decision making
- Hold leaders accountable
- Gain experience, knowledge and skills in running the organisation
- Identify with the organisation and other members.

The ingredients of a successful meeting are:

- Good planning and preparation
- Clear rules and meeting procedures
- Well drafted agendas
- Informed and skilful chairing
- Clear decisions
- Good minute-taking

And after the meeting:

- Good reporting
- Implementation of decisions

Apply these ingredients to all of your meetings. Adjust them to the level of formality required. For example, where you have been called urgently to a meeting with a group of members to help resolve an immediate conflict with authorities, you are unlikely to have a formal agenda or minutes. But you will informally decide the issues for discussion (agenda). You will jot down notes of the meeting (minutes).

Step One: Planning and preparing for the meeting



TIP: Don't underestimate the importance of planning your meetings well. "90% of a successful meeting happens before it starts".

(Alan Baker in Ditsela, 2005, Organising successful meetings)

Meeting rules and procedures

Clear rules and procedures should guide your meetings. Check if these are already established. They may be written into your constitution or in your procedures. In this case, your role is to make sure that everyone knows and understands the rules and to provide support to the chairperson. If you are involved with a new organisation you can help guide the development of the rules and procedures. You will need to include some or all of the following, depending on the kind of meeting:

- Who should attend
- How many members must be present before the meeting can go ahead (quorum)
- How often the particular kind of meeting should be held
- Roles of chairperson, office bearers and of staff
- How and by when documents must be circulated
- Speaking rules (time limits, raising of hands)
- How decisions will be taken
- Voting procedures
- How to resolve conflict.

The agenda

The agenda is the most important document for a meeting. The agenda sets out the items for discussion and the order of discussion. Before drafting the agenda decide why you need the meeting and what you want to achieve from it. When you draw up the agenda put priority items near the beginning. Think through each item and ask “What do we want to get out of this item? Do we want a decision, a recommendation, a debate or a plan?” It is best if the chairperson, secretary and other office bearers agree the agenda collectively.

If you know who is coming to the meeting, circulate the agenda and other documents in advance of the meeting so members have time to prepare. Or if it is a meeting where you need wide participation, distribute pamphlets, put up posters and get volunteers to spread the word.



TIP: Make sure items placed on the agenda by women, or of particular interest to women, are not at the end of the agenda. This often happens in organisations, consciously or unconsciously!

Time and venue

Set a time and venue that suits the needs of those who should attend. Plan to keep the meeting short. Your members do not have a lot of time. Accommodate the needs of women. Do they need someone to look after children? Is a weekend better than an evening for meetings?

Roles and responsibilities

Plan who will chair, take minutes, present different items and prepare documents. If you know you will be dealing with controversial issues, plan how best to do this to avoid conflict and help reach a decision.



TIP: Some of your members might not be able to read. Enlist the support of those who can. Find other ways to communicate the items for discussion. Some members might speak a different language. Make sure you arrange for translation.

Step Two: Running the meeting

Chairing a meeting

Every meeting needs a chairperson, someone who guides and controls the meeting. Even with an informal meeting you will find that someone leads the discussion. Usually a worker leader will chair your meetings. In some situations you may find yourself chairing, especially if you are a worker leader as well as an organiser. A chairperson is the key to a successful meeting. Train her/him well. Use the checklist to prepare for, and to evaluate, chairing a meeting.



Check List 2: Chairing a meeting

I Do?	✓
Prepare well for meetings	
Know the issues and meeting objectives	
Arrive at the meeting before it is due to start	
Follow the agenda	
Encourage participation	
Make sure women participate and are given the protection of the chair	
Discourage domination by a few individuals	
Encourage and listen to different views	
Value and respect all contributions	
Try to bring out hidden agendas	
Make sure the meeting goes smoothly and keeps to time	
Intervene if members repeat points and waste time	
Make sure the objectives of the meeting are met	
Ensure that the meeting takes clear decisions and agrees on actions	
Ensure that members leave the meeting confident that decisions were arrived at democratically – even if they disagree with the decision	
I Don't	
Dominate the meeting by talking too much on issues	
Impose my own opinions and views	
Cut off those with opposing views	
Manipulate decisions	

Taking decisions

Sometimes meetings go around in circles. The chair cannot get people to make a decision. Be firm. Follow the steps below. Make sure you draw discussions to a conclusion.



Definition Consensus

A lasting decision that has total member support.

Compromise

A decision people can live with.

- Get a wide range of views on the issue from a broad range of people.
- Get those who are silent to express their views.
- If there seems to be agreement, save time by asking who disagrees.
- Sum up opposing viewpoints and what they could result in.
- Get the meeting to think realistically about whether a decision can be put into action.
- Try to get consensus or find a compromise. If this fails, go to a vote and decide by majority.
- Clearly and accurately summarise the final decision.
- Confirm agreement. Be careful not to assume that view expressed by the loudest or last speaker was a decision.

Taking minutes

You need to have an accurate record of your meetings, whether formal or informal. This will help you avoid misunderstandings and conflict in the future. Minutes:

- Are a record of debates, decisions and mandates.
- Say who is accountable for implementing decisions.
- Remind members what they have to do after the meeting.
- Help you monitor progress.
- Provide the starting point for your next meeting.



Check List 3: Minute taking

At the meeting	✓
<i>Have you recorded ?</i>	
The title of the meeting	
The place, time, day and date of the meeting	
Who attended the meeting, including the name of the chair and minute taker	
Who sent apologies	
The agenda	
Who proposed and adopted the minutes of the last meeting	

The main points of the discussion	
The decision or proposal and who proposed and seconded it	
The action to be taken and the intended outcomes	
By when will they take the action	
To whom will they report the outcome of the action	
After the meeting	
<i>Are your minutes?</i>	
Well set out and following the meeting's agenda headings	
Clear and to the point	
Easy to read and understand	
Numbered in a simple, easy to follow way	
Neat, accurate, checked and corrected	
Quickly circulated	

(Adapted from DITSELA, 2005, Organising successful meetings)

Step Three: After the meeting

Reporting back

After every meeting representatives and leaders should report back to the general membership. Where possible, call workers together. Work through your structures.

Always prepare your report carefully. If several people are to give reports arm them with a summary of the key decisions, actions and feedback needed. This will help minimise the risk of spreading very different versions of a meeting and its decisions.

Implementing

Make sure you plan how to implement decisions. Ask and answer the questions:

What are the tasks?

Who will carry out each task?

By when must the task be completed?

What resources are needed and what is available?
How will this be monitored?

Then implement the plan!

Not the only way: alternatives to meeting

Sometimes you need to report back to members or take decisions but you cannot meet. This should not be an excuse for a leader to take a decision alone, or to act without a mandate from the members. What can you do?

If you have a well-developed network of grassroots leaders and volunteer workers, use these networks to provide information and gather opinions. They can convene small group discussions at suitable places or visit individuals at their workplaces, homes and at social gatherings.

If you have a mobile/cell phone you might be able to communicate directly with members. Or you may be able to work through contact persons who can then discuss with members in their areas.

Where possible, explore other technologies. For executive and leadership meetings perhaps you could arrange a meeting by telephone (teleconference) or a meeting via your computer using free computer voice programmes such as SKYPE. You could hold discussions via e-mail, computer “chat” or phone text messaging.

None of these methods is ideal because they are informal and depend more on individuals than collective, structured and open procedures. Some of the dangers are:

- Inconsistency. Different people give very different reports of the same event or decision leading to confusion.
- Misinterpretation. People misinterpret decisions.
- Misinformation. People deliberately give wrong information to promote a particular position or for self-interest.
- Rumours and gossip. Informal discussions, can turn into gossip resulting in rumours spreading in the organisation.

Find ways to limit the dangers.

- Always carefully plan the approach you will use.
- Make sure that everyone involved in the process knows what is expected.
- Run things as procedurally and formally as possible. For example, prepare an agenda for a teleconference and appoint a chair. Agree a common meeting procedure and agenda for small group discussions. Agree a common cell phone message. This will help keep things focused and prevent slipping into gossip and rumour.
- Prepare short summaries of meetings for report backs. Spell out decisions clearly. Say what mandates or opinions members must give. Give this to everyone who will report to prevent them giving different and inconsistent reports or misinformation.
- Where possible, get everyone to agree to keep a record of what happened in their meetings, teleconferences, informal discussions and cell phone conversations.
- Agree on a formal process to gather all the different sources of information and to prepare mandates and/or take decisions. Inform members how this will be done.



6. Accountability

Democracy can only work if leaders are truly accountable to the members through democratic structures and processes. It is particularly important to have financial and political accountability in your organisation. These are areas of potential corruption and conflict.

Financial accountability

Many informal workers have had bad experiences. Leaders of organisations made promises, took their money and then misused it. Now they are suspicious of any organisation. Many workers' organisations have collapsed because leaders did not properly account to members on the finances of the organisation. On the other hand, where finances are well managed it helps build workers' confidence in their organisation. It helps the organisation build a good reputation.

Membership contributions: a tool for accountability?

“ the workers’ readiness to pay affiliation fees is not optimal. More time and perseverance is still needed to explain the benefits of unionising, to explain that the affiliation fees are less than the price of the beer that the workers often drink on a daily basis”.

(Ibrahima Zakari of ILO/ACTRAV, on Burkina Faso, in ITUC Union View#3, March 2007)

A well-constituted, democratic organisation will require members to pay dues or make other forms of regular contribution to the organisation. This is because members own and control the organisation and can demonstrate their commitment in this way. And, because they are contributing hard earned money, they demand to know how it is being spent, forcing leaders to be accountable! It is also a way to ensure the organisation remains independent, sustainable and accountable only to members.

However, organisations of informal workers are often not able to put these principles fully into practice. Members are poor and find it difficult to pay fees. They may be reluctant to pay over money if they are not sure it is safe and properly used. You may have to collect cash by hand-a difficult, unsafe and unsystematic method. If you are part of an established union organising informal workers you may have to argue for different procedures for collecting dues or for a special subscription rate for informal workers. These compromises may be necessary but could weaken accountability.

You will need to build as many safeguards as possible into your collection systems, and management of finances. You will need to empower ordinary members to protect themselves and the organisation.

Advise members of their **right** to:

- Responsible, clean and honest financial management
- Ask and receive answers about finances
- Receive regular financial reports on money received and how money is spent
- Examine financial documents
- Get information on financial policies and procedures.

Advise members to take **practical steps** to protect themselves by:

- Insisting on a receipt after making a payment
- Insisting on proof of membership e.g. a membership card
- Informing the office/representative immediately if they have any doubts or problems.



Experiences: Member contributions

A firm policy

A waste picker union in India has a policy that, “if members believe in the organisation they have to pay towards it. Nothing is subsidized and the unwillingness to spend money unnecessarily has become part of the organisational culture”.

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

Cross subsidising

“Trade unions depend on dues paid by members. The ability to pay dues depends on regular income, which is difficult for informal sector workers. So we did not expect them to pay dues at first. The union members were sympathetic, and operated on the principle of the stronger helping the weaker”.

(FX Owusa, FNV, 2003, From Marginal Work to Core Business. Report of an International Conference)

Special fee collectors

The Transport and General Workers Union in Britain organises migrant domestic workers. The Union had to adapt its working methods. It now has a group of collectors of union fees because many of the women cannot pay through banks. They are unable to get bank accounts.

(Diana Holland, Chair of ITUC Women’s Committee and in charge of equality at the British TGWU, ITUC OnLine, 136/130808)

If you cannot generate enough money through member contributions to do all you want in the organisation you may need to find other ways to finance activities. But it is important that you maintain the principle of member contributions. Any deviation from this position has to be fully discussed, democratically agreed and regularly reviewed.

Donations

Many unions and informal worker organisations supplement their member income with donations. Many rely heavily on donations. This can be dangerous. Donors may impose their own agendas, or demand something in return such as political favours. It is important that your organisation has clear policies on who to take donations from and for what purpose, and that you have clear financial and reporting procedures.

Commission

Some organisations earn income through contracts and commissions. Informal workers generally do not have access to social protection or financial services. They need health and retirement protection. They need access to micro loans. Many organisations link up with insurance companies or micro finance providers to assist their members. In turn, the service providers give commission to the organisation. This official commission is sometimes supplemented by “kick backs” to leaders or organisers, encouraging corruption. Be aware of the danger. Make sure your structures approve schemes. Make sure members receive full reports.

Looking after money

Your organisation must look after its money.

- Practice financial responsibility.
 - Only take on obligations you can meet.
 - Pay for the things you order, buy or use (e.g. telephones).
 - Keep proper records and documents of all money that comes in and goes out.
 - Keep money secure.
 - Put in place policies, procedures and systems.
 - Implement strict controls.
 - Only use workers’ money for the purpose it is intended for.
 - Find someone with financial skills to help you do the books.

- Practice financial accountability.
 - Draw up budgets and stick to them
 - Account to your members for the way in which the money is spent
 - Provide proper financial reports to all your structures
 - Adhere to democratically agreed policies and procedures
 - Challenge financial mismanagement and misuse.

Avoid:

- Keeping and using cash for payments
- Giving a person sole responsibility for handling all aspects of finances
- Situations where people may be tempted to “loan” or misuse money
- Giving in to threats and intimidation.

Political accountability

Politicians sometimes use informal economy workers as “voting fodder”. Politicians often target vendors, marketeers, transport workers because they are many and visible. As your organisation grows strong, whatever sector you operate in, you could find politicians trying to influence you. Politicians may offer bribes in return for your support and help in delivering votes. This leads to divisions amongst workers and encourages the formation of rival organisations. It leads to workers losing trust in their organisation and in future organisations.

As an organiser you need to watch for signs of undue political influence. Counter this by helping to strengthen democracy and accountability. Work with leaders and members to:

- Agree clear policies on political and organisational independence.
- Ensure that everyone knows and understands the policies.
- Strengthen collective leadership.
- Strengthen the culture of open and transparent leadership.
- Empower members and build their confidence to question.
- Limit opportunities for individual leaders to make deals.
- Make sure structures meet.
- Insist on regular, written reports.

- Assess possible alliances. Is it a principled alliance based on common interests and objectives? Is it a tactical alliance to achieve a short-term objective?
- Ensure formal democratic decisions on political alliances and political positions.



7. Worker Education And Empowerment

Worker education is a powerful tool for building and maintaining democratic and effective informal economy workers’ organisations. It helps empower workers so they can control and run their organisation, challenge authorities and improve their work situation.

An organiser of informal economy workers is an educator. A leader of informal economy workers is an educator. You will be involved in educating and empowering your members and leaders in many different ways. Because resources are usually limited, especially at a local level, you will have to be resourceful and creative in finding education opportunities.

Formal and informal education

Worker education in the informal economy is often informal and happens in the course of your daily activities. Education takes place on the job: in meetings, informal discussions, during negotiations or collective action. Some education is more “formal” because you have arranged a workshop or an education session in a meeting, or you have produced materials designed to inform or support workers.



TIP: You don't need lots of money to educate. Experience is the greatest teacher! Look at activities with an educator's eye. Draw out the lessons from every day experiences.

Worker Education for Building Organisation

By worker education we normally mean education that helps build the organisation and makes the work of the organisation effective. It builds the capacity, self-confidence, knowledge and skills of individual members and leaders so they can run their organisation and challenge those in power and authority. This includes:

- Education and skills for running the organisation e.g. understanding worker organisations, the role of leaders, how to run finances, organising women workers.
- Education and skills on dealing with issues e.g. workplace health and safety, social protection, HIV/Aids, negotiations.
- Education on the context e.g. political, economic, social, legal.



TIP: Remember you are dealing with adults. Adults, however little formal education they have, come with learning and experience. Adults learn best when:

- Learning builds on their experience
- Content is relevant to their lives
- They are motivated. They need to know or want to do better
- They are actively involved and engage in practical activities



Experiences: Finding a way: worker education in the informal economy

Education sites

In the streets

In India, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) leaders educate women in their community areas. Equipped with special bags and aprons containing educational posters and materials, they arrange short sessions in community spaces, or in the streets where women live and work. For example, the SEWA health workers educate them about health and safety matters such as nutrition and reproduction, and about the union.

(Chris Bonner, 2005, WIEGO-SEWA-Cornell, Exposure Dialogue Programme, Ahmedabad, India, 2005)

On the dump

"I often saw Marcos call over four or five other catadores (waste-pickers) and begin to talk to them about the experiences of other catadores in Brazil, the ways in which they have organised and the benefits they thereby acquired, the importance of their work as a profession, the pride that catadores should have as recyclers who contribute to the protection of the environment, and the immediate need to address the closure of the dump".

(Kathleen Millar, Recycling Class: Politics of the Informal Economy at a Brazilian Garbage Dump, unpublished MA Thesis, Brown University)

Education tools and methods

Training Manuals

The Ghana Trades Union Congress has developed training manuals targeted at different groups involved in organising informal workers: desk officers in affiliates, responsible for the organising informal workers; contact persons who provide the link between a union and informal economy groups; leaders in informal economy associations; core leadership in affiliates.

(FX Owusu, Ghana TUC, presentation to IFWEA regional seminar, Malawi, 2006)

Newsletters

The Association of Catadores in Jardim das Flores, Rio de Janeiro, began their own monthly newsletter called O Mensajeiro da Verdade ("The Messenger of Truth"). The newsletter first focused on telling other catadores about the planned closure of the dump, and called them to action. It includes sections on the experiences and activities of catadores in other cities in Brazil, on health and safety for catadores, on general news and events and on quotes for reflection and meditation.

(K.Millar)

Mass publicity

Synazeb (motorcycle taxi drivers union) in Benin, uses publicity vehicles and T-shirts with slogans for its education campaigns

(ITF Report)

Theatre

About two hundred waste-pickers, two hundred citizens and members of the press together watched the presentation of two plays about the lives of waste-pickers, organised by the KKP KP (union of waste pickers, India). The first play was a dramatisation of a diary of a Brazilian waste picker and her daughter. The second was a play written with, and presented by, five waste-pickers themselves about their life experiences. This event was an education for the workers and for the public.

(KKPKP Case Study)

Song

Waste pickers, being illiterate, are steeped in oral tradition. They remember occasions through slogans. They use songs, and are encouraged to compose their own lyrics on social themes set to their traditional folk tunes.

(KKPKP Case Study)

Carnival

ASMARE, a Brazilian Waste picker/recycling cooperative, organises an annual street carnival. The costumes used in the parade are made from materials collected by workers. This allows the workers to experience the practical and symbolic benefits of recycling. It helps educate other workers and the general public about the valuable work waste pickers do for society.

(Fernando Resende, Case Study on the Project Asmare)

New member orientation

In the Philippines, the National Transportworkers' Union (NTU), organising informal transport workers, provides a Basic Orientation Seminar (BOS) to new member federations. The BOS module discusses the situation of the transportation industry and workers in the industry, introduction to unionism, and the principles, goals, and workings of the NTU. This is offered to federation level officials and at least three (3) persons or officers of each local association belonging to the federations.

(ITF Report)



Experiences:

Throw the Paper: a SEWA education game

Purpose:

To help women members understand how as a union they should work towards a common goal to fight against the problems faced in their trade/livelihood. A common goal could be a demand for increase in income, bonus, minimum wages, which should be mutually decided upon.

Method:

This game can be played by 5 to 10 women members. Place a paper cup at a throwing distance approximately 7 feet (2 metres) away. Provide all the women members with a piece of paper. Tell the members to throw their piece of paper onto the paper cup. Thereafter, ask them to collect all the pieces of paper. Now, ask them to form a group together and bunch all the pieces of paper into ball and hit the paper cup.

This game can be played for 5 to 10 minutes.

Summary and lesson:

When individual women members tried to hit the paper cup with their piece of paper, they were unable to do so. But, when they got together, bunched the paper to make a ball and tried to hit the paper cup they managed achieve the task. Therefore, this game teaches members that if individually they try to win demands for minimum wages or any other worker rights they are unlikely to be successful, but if they are united and organised the chances of achieving success are high.

Manali Shah, SEWA, March 2009



TIP: “Each one, teach one.” Propose that your organisation adopts this South African liberation slogan. Educate and empower workers to educate and empower others. Make it the duty of every leader and every member!”

Work Skills Training

Workers in the informal economy often rely on their organisations to provide training that enhances their work skills and income producing opportunities. This is not an easy role for a poor organisation. If it is not possible to raise funds for special skills training projects you might find ways for the more skilled to “teach” the less skilled, or for collective

learning sessions or to bring in volunteers to assist. By addressing their immediate and crucial needs informal workers will see the relevance of the organisation. This can help build and strengthen it.



**Learning
Activities**

Activity 1: Running successful meetings

Aim

To help you make meetings more effective

Task

Divide into groups

1. Prepare a chart like the one below

Problem	Type of meetings	Possible Solutions
Example: Leaders always arrive late for meetings	Meetings of structures General meetings with workers	1. Hold a collective leadership discussion. Point out the problem with their behaviour. Get a commitment to change 2. Raise it with the members in a meeting and ask them for a solution.

2. Discuss the problems that you encounter, or might encounter, with meetings.
3. Identify possible solutions to these problems.
4. Fill in the chart and prepare to present it to other groups.



Learning Activities

Activity 2: Finding education opportunities

Aim

To generate ideas on how you can educate and empower workers informally, and without lots of money.

Task

1. Working together as a group:

Generate a list (brainstorm) all the possible opportunities you have to educate and empower your members whilst “on the job”. (An example: at a general meeting of members, explain and discuss what we mean by negotiations and how negotiations work. Do a role-play).

2. In pairs:

Take one of the ideas and plan in detail how you could implement it.

Who is the target group?

What would you hope to achieve?

What would you do?

What questions would you ask?

What resources would you need?

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www.global-labour.org

www.ditsela.org.za

www.domesticworkersrights.org

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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