

StreetNet International: Organizing Street Vendors

***Impact:** Street vendors regularly confront harassment from police as well as difficult and insecure working conditions. The ability of street vendors to improve their incomes and working conditions increases when they band together.*

StreetNet International promotes the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, market vendors and hawkers and promotes practical organizing and advocacy strategies. StreetNet affiliates, from Africa, Asia and the Americas, join in international campaigns to promote policies and actions that can contribute to improving the lives of millions of street vendors, market vendors and hawkers around the world.

The following are some recent issues StreetNet affiliates have reported and the resulting impact of their work:

Eastern Cape Street Vendors' Alliance (ECSTVA), South Africa

This association is proactively dealing with threats to foreign vendors and shop keepers. The association has met with its members, foreign vendors and local officials to educate about xenophobic attacks that have occurred to street vendors in other states; and to clarify procedures and standards for its own members. As a result, both members and foreign vendors can appeal to the ECSTVA and the police if confronted with potentially dangerous situations. Consequently there have been no xenophobic attacks on eMthatha's streets involving street vendors as there had been in a neighboring state.



photo: Demetria Tsoutouras

In another issue, ECSTVA met with local council officials after informal traders (street barbers) were removed from the streets without an alternative place for their trade being provided. ECSTVA's action prevented the loss of livelihood for the traders affected and the municipality agreed that another area would be made available for the street barbers who are supporting their families with the money they earn. This reinforced with city officials that a better approach to resolving problems of urban planning is to consult with street vendors before taking unilateral action.

National Union of Informal Economy Workers' Organisations (NUIEWO), Uganda

NUIEWO organised an intervention to prevent the sale of the public land where the Kampala market stands. The land was to be sold to private developers in a city 'beautification' project. This threatened the incomes of hundreds of poor informal traders and their families, who earn their living at the market. As a result, the informal traders negotiated with the local government to develop a new market on the public land where even more traders will be accommodated. The new facilities will include better storage facilities, services, and infrastructure.

StreetNet International provides valuable services to trade vendor associations in Africa, Asia and the Americas. By facilitating the sharing and exchange of information and best practices, each member organisation learns new methods of negotiating with government and policy makers to advocate for better working conditions and basic professional rights.