

Latin America



Maribel Fajardo earns her living as a recycler (or waste picker) in Bogotá, where she is a member of the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá. By expanding research and knowledge, sharing good practices, and connecting poor women workers to powerful decision-makers, **WIEGO puts a human face on complex issues.**

Photo: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

Informal workers around the world, especially women, face multiple barriers in securing their livelihoods. For two decades, WIEGO has worked with informal workers' organizations to find solutions that improve their day-to-day lives.

Our research—done in collaboration with workers, their organizations, and a broad range of allies—generates a grounded, credible body of knowledge that informs local, national and international policies and movements. For workers' organizations, knowledge is crucial. WIEGO equips them with practical tools, research and data that they can use to advocate for more secure livelihoods.

In addition to helping informal workers build stronger organizations, we help connect them regionally and globally, allowing them to share experiences and learn from each other.

WIEGO has a strong presence in Latin America, where our pioneering work is advancing informal workers' rights and helping secure their livelihoods. We amplify the voice of informal workers, make them more visible—including through improvements to official statistical data—and increase their validity in the realm of public policy.

Generating New Knowledge

Making Sure Informal Workers are Counted

If informal workers are not included in official statistics, they are not seen, and their economic and social contributions are not counted. WIEGO works with national and international bodies to improve the measurement of informal employment in developing and developed countries. This includes working to improve classifications, concepts and methods for data collection, dissemination and analysis. WIEGO has generated widely cited regional, country and city-level statistics on the size of the informal economy and informal workers.

“Informal worker issues were not widely discussed or understood in Peru, and detailed statistical data was not available. The workers need research, statistics and findings when speaking to the press and governments.”

~ Carmen Roca, WIEGO's Regional Adviser for Latin America

Groundbreaking Research

The WIEGO-led Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) examined the contributions informal workers make to economies and communities, the challenges they face, and what influences can help or hinder them. The landmark study involved ten cities, including three in Latin America. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil and Bogota, Colombia, the focus was on waste pickers. In Lima, Peru, street vendors were the focus. In all instances, the majority of informal workers in the study provided the main source of household income, faced growing economic challenges, and were more often hindered than helped by official policies and practices.

Key Achievements in Health

In Brazil, WIEGO's Occupational Health and Safety project supported the Worker's Health Unit (PISAT) at the Institute for Collective Health in its quest to integrate informal workers into the primary health care system. With WIEGO, the Institute conducted research, developed educational resources, and ran a campaign with the Salvador municipality on hearing loss prevention for street vendors. In 2012, Brazil adopted a National Workers' Health Policy, giving informal workers access to occupational health services similar to registered workers.

In Lima, WIEGO's policy advocacy for self-employed workers helped create the New Simplified Unique Tax Payer Register (NRUS), which allows single-person operators to contribute taxes and gain access to free coverage under the Integrated Health Insurance (SIS).

In Nicaragua, WIEGO launched a participatory socioeconomic and health research project in several dumpsites. This project

led to the formal inclusion of waste pickers in national waste management legislation.

Law & The Informal Economy

Law is an essential tool in improving livelihoods and lives, but legal and regulatory frameworks are designed for the *formal* economy. WIEGO's Law & Informality initiative analyzes how informal workers' demands for rights and protections can be transformed into law.

Recently, domestic workers in Mexico, with support from WIEGO's Law Programme, hosted their Latin American counterparts to share successes and strategies. Armed with an understanding of how they are or are not protected under law, Mexican domestic workers built a policy platform to raise awareness and make demands of different government powers and specific agencies. Many demands related to themes that are absent in Mexican policies for domestic workers, including health services, maternity, retirement, pension, minimum wage, working conditions, and housing.

WIEGO's Work

WIEGO aims to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through:

- strengthening organizations and promoting representation of informal workers;
- promoting more inclusive policy processes that include informal workers;
- expanding statistics and research on the informal economy, and assisting organizations to make their data needs known to national statistical offices and helping those offices develop methods to produce the data;
- advancing more equitable trade, labour, urban planning and social protection policies to protect and promote the working poor in the informal economy.

WIEGO focuses on four occupational groups:

- domestic workers
- home-based workers
- street vendors
- waste pickers

Taking the World Stage



International bodies and experts regularly convene to discuss and make decisions that directly impact the lives and livelihoods of informal workers. Too often, these discussions happen in the absence of informal worker representatives.

Domestic workers from around the globe held a demonstration in 2010 in the lead up to securing the international Convention that confers rights on these workers.

Photo: S. Trevino

WIEGO facilitates the participation of informal workers in forums around the world by including them in our delegations. This involves providing financial and logistical support for travel, as well as technical support at conferences and events to ensure their voices are heard by decision-makers. These snapshots represent just a small number of events at which, with WIEGO's support, informal workers helped negotiate favourable outcomes.

For the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2014, WIEGO facilitated the creation of a Latin American platform of demands for recognition of domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors and waste pickers in informal employment. The platform was created using a participatory approach to include voices of informal workers and their organizations, as well as trade unions and ILO representatives. In 2015, the ILC adopted the first-ever international labour standard specifically for the informal economy.



In preparation for the International Labour Conference in 2014, informal workers from across the region met in Argentina to develop a platform of demands on how formalization must benefit them. Photo: L. Fernandez

Recognition Achieved

The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, known as Habitat III in 2016, is held every 20 years to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development. In the long process leading up to the Habitat III summit in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016, the WIEGO Network advocated for the recognition and integration of informal workers and their livelihoods into the New Urban Agenda document. These efforts are reflected in the document:

“We commit to recognize the contribution of the working poor in the informal economy, particularly women, including the unpaid, domestic, and migrant workers to the urban economies, taking into account national circumstances. Their livelihoods, working conditions and income security, legal and social protection, access to skills, assets and other support services, and voice and representation should be enhanced.”



Part of the WIEGO delegation at Habitat III. Photo: K. Hughes

At the Habitat III summit, the WIEGO Network’s delegation included 12 informal workers representing organizations of street vendors, home-based workers and recyclers. WIEGO aimed to create spaces for informal workers and their representative organizations

to have their voices heard, to make visible the positive contributions of informal livelihoods to cities, and to advocate for policy approaches that result in greater livelihood security for urban informal workers.

Domestic Workers Triumph

WIEGO coordinated a sustained and successful international campaign, led by domestic workers and supported by WIEGO and allies, to secure the adoption of a Convention and accompanying Recommendation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189) at the 100th International Labour Conference, June 2011. Photos: WIEGO.



Waste Pickers Champion the Environment

Waste pickers promoted their contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations between 2009 and 2012. This demonstration took place in Cancun in 2010. Photo: WIEGO.



In 2012, WIEGO and its allies included a delegation of waste pickers who participated in "RIO+20 – United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development" and in the concurrent People's Summit. Photo: WIEGO.

Waste pickers from across Latin America came together at Exocatadores in Belo Horizonte, Brazil in 2016. Photo: A.C. Ogando





Expanding Capacity, Networks and Advocacy

Waste Pickers

Nohra Padilla, leader of the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá (ARB), leads waste pickers as they demonstrate against city policies and programmes that negatively affect their livelihoods. Photo: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

WIEGO has worked extensively with waste picker organizations in Latin America.

- Our mapping of waste pickers in Central America led to the first Central American Conference of Waste Pickers and a significant increase in networking in the region.
- We supported Latin American waste picker leaders at the Global Strategic Workshop in India, where 80 representatives from 34 cities around the globe exchanged information and tactics on becoming integrated into municipal waste management systems. Then WIEGO helped expand the international exchange of waste pickers through development of a website for waste pickers, www.globalrec.org, which covers news and events from organizations and allies around the globe.

- In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, WIEGO supported multi-stakeholder platforms, such as the Observatory for Inclusive Recycling and The Waste and Citizenship Forum, that advocate for inclusive recycling systems.
- To build capacity, WIEGO organized a workshop on communication and leadership skills for women waste pickers in a partnership with The International

- Coaching Federation (ICF). In addition, ICF provided individual coaching sessions for 10 women leaders to address their individual demands about what it takes to be a leader.
- WIEGO was involved in advocacy that led the Human Rights Commission in Mexico City to pass a recommendation on the inclusion of waste pickers in the city's waste management system.



A congress of Nicaraguan waste pickers was held in 2012. Photo: WIEGO



Waste Pickers in Colombia Win Major Legal Victory

Bogota's waste pickers achieved a landmark win that helped secure their livelihoods. In December 2011, the Constitutional Court of Colombia ruled that waste pickers should be recognized and remunerated for the service they provide to the municipality. The result of a decades-long fight by the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá (ARB)—aided by WIEGO—the court's decision mandated that associations of waste pickers should be allowed to bid, alongside private corporations, for municipal solid waste management contracts. Waste pickers were made part the city's waste management

Maryury Ruiz, a recycler and waste picker in Bogota, works at the warehouse operated by ARB in Bogota. Photo: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

programme. National regulatory frameworks now recognize waste pickers as recyclers and public service providers. More than 12,000 waste pickers have received a bi-monthly payment for their service through a basic payment system. This significantly increases their earnings.

WIEGO has worked with local organizations of waste pickers and municipal governments across Colombia to promote the replication of the Bogota model of integrating waste pickers into solid waste management.

Addressing Gender Issues in Waste Picking

The Women and Waste Project addresses gender inequality in waste picking activities, extending

to the inequality women waste pickers face at home, at work and as leaders within their representative organizations. The project brought Brazilian waste pickers together for intense workshops, then produced

two toolkits. A popular toolkit, to be disseminated and used by waste pickers in their own cooperatives, introduces gender inequality issues and themes that emerged in the workshops. A toolkit for practitioners and academics integrates a variety of information on gender and waste, learnings from the project, and links to resources.

The ultimate goal of the project is to increase efficiency in waste management while encouraging mutual respect between men and women.



A woman shares her experiences as a waste picker in Brazil. Photo: L.Mintz

Home-Based Workers

Those who produce goods or provide services in their homes are essential to local economies and global value chains. Home-based workers are the most invisible of all informal workers, yet their numbers exceed 100 million worldwide. Women home-based workers occupy the lowest rungs of global value chains. They are often poorly paid and work long hours in unhealthy conditions. By gaining visibility and recognition as economic contributors, these informal workers can improve their livelihoods. In this struggle, establishing a collective voice is one of their most powerful tools.

In 2012, WIEGO conducted a mapping process in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay to find home-based

workers offering a wide variety of products and services. Once organizations were identified, WIEGO began to facilitate networking and knowledge exchanges that built collective strength.

In collaboration with more than 100 home-based workers from countries around the world, WIEGO drafted a historic Declaration for Home-based Workers that sets out challenges and demands on

issues ranging from wages to better housing, from basic services to social protection.

This motivated informal workers' organizations in Argentina and Brazil to step up their organizing efforts with home-based workers. In Argentina in 2015, WIEGO took part in workshops that led to a first-ever action plan and legislation review. This is propelling home-based workers toward greater recognition and rights.



*Peruvian home-based workers demonstrate their skills at a gathering of informal workers in Lima.
Photo: S. Trevino*

WIEGO Experts in Latin America

Carmen Roca, the Regional Advisor for Latin America, plays an instrumental role in WIEGO's Latin American activities, but much of her work is concentrated in Lima. Carmen holds an MBA in Management for Development from McGill University (Canada), Peru. Before joining WIEGO, she worked for the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada on issues of social and economic policy. She was Deputy Director of the *Consortio de Investigación Económica y Social* (CIES) in Peru up to 2009.

Federico Parra, Regional Coordinator for Waste Pickers Latin America, is an urban anthropologist and ethnographer whose work contributes to understanding the socioeconomic context of recyclers and the impact of public waste management policy in Bogota. Previously, as a public official in the Special Administrative Unit of Public Services (UAESP) attached to the Mayor of Bogota, he coordinated the development of the Inclusion Plan of Recyclers. He holds a PhD from the National University of Colombia.

Tania Espinosa Sánchez, Latin America Coordinator of WIEGO's Law Programme, has 10 years of experience practicing international human rights law. She studied law at Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City and holds a Masters in International Legal Studies from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Her recent work has focused on labour rights for waste pickers, the linkages between human rights and the waste management service, and the interplay between human rights and the recycling industry. In 2014 she was appointed general director of a human rights NGO in Mexico.

Edith Anampa, Project Officer, works on WIEGO's Strengthening the Voice and Leadership of Informal Women Workers Around Social Policy Issues in Lima. Edith holds a degree in Anthropology with an emphasis on urban issues. Her thesis focused on women street sweepers. She has worked across different sub-national regions of Peru on strategic planning for development initiatives.

Domestic Workers

Working behind closed doors in private homes can make domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation. Isolation can prevent collective approaches. For these reasons, organizing efforts are extremely important in this sector.

WIEGO supported the launch of the International Domestic Workers Network (now the International Domestic Worker Federation, or IDWF) at a founding congress in Uruguay in 2013. Uruguay was the first country to ratify the Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189). Through the IDWF,

domestic workers from around the globe are networking and building capacity to fight for their rights. In Latin America, the focus has been on building the capacity of domestic workers.

WIEGO implemented, in concert with the International Domestic Workers' Network and the global trade union IUF, a project called Economic and Employment Rights: Advancing Domestic Workers' Leadership in 15 countries, including in Latin America and the Caribbean: Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, Peru, and Uruguay. Membership

in the IDWF increased more than six-fold from 2012 -2015, raising visibility for domestic workers on national and international forums.



Uruguayan President José Mujica spoke to domestic workers in Montevideo at the IDWF's founding congress. Photo: J. Shenker



The International Domestic Workers Network held a founding congress, and became the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) in Montevideo, Uruguay in 2013. Photo: M. Chen

Sonia Dias, WIEGO's Waste Picker Sector Specialist, has been active in waste management in Brazil since 1985. Based in Belo Horizonte, Sonia is a sociologist by training and a “garbologist” with specialization in Solid Waste Management by the University of Kitakyushu, Japan. Her MA in human geography and PhD in political science, both from Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), examined aspects of participation in solid waste management in Brazil. Previously, she was a public officer at the Municipal Cleansing Agency in Belo Horizonte. Currently an associate researcher with the Women's Centre for Research and Studies with NEPEM/UFMG.

Lucia Fernandez, Waste Picker Sector Advisor, has extensive experience with waste picker organizations, ranging from assisting small cooperatives and trade unions in her native Uruguay to large scale networking and support of the Latin-American Network of Waste Pickers and more recently, international

coordination of the Global Alliance. Lucia studied and taught architecture at the Uruguayan University, and researched the inclusion of waste pickers into municipal waste management policies. In France, she completed an MA in architecture, focused on spontaneous recycling dynamics, and a second MA on ethical and sustainable development.

Ana Carolina Ogando, Research Associate, provides support to WIEGO's Urban Policies Programme on gender, women's economic empowerment and waste issues. Based in Belo Horizonte, she was the senior qualitative researcher for the Informal Economy Monitoring Study team in Brazil. Previously she taught at the Federal University of Minas Gerais on a post-doctoral fellowship and was an affiliated researcher at the Women's Studies Research Center (NEPEM-UFMG). She holds a PhD in political science from UFMG with a specialty in gender, feminist theory, and social movements.



Focal City: Lima, Peru

In 2010, WIEGO chose Lima as one of two Focal Cities in which to concentrate efforts and resources. Despite strong economic growth in Peru, the country had one of the highest rates of informal employment in Latin America—69% of the non-agricultural workforce was informal in 2013. WIEGO implemented several thematic initiatives, creating a critical mass of work on informal employment issues in the city.

Highlights

Built Workers' Knowledge and Skills: Street vendors, market vendors, domestic workers, waste pickers, newspaper vendors, shoe shiners, market porters, and moto-taxi drivers in Lima (and two other cities in Peru) participated in face-to-face and online training sessions for a year. Through modules, they learned about the contributions of informal workers to the economy, social protection and advocacy, social policy surveillance, communications and social media, fundraising, and communications in political contexts.

Above: Walter Loiza Cervantez and his wife Rosa Huapaya own a newstand and are newspaper vendors or canillita. They are members of Federación Nacional de Vendedores de Diarios, Revistas y Loterías del Perú, one of several organizations of informal workers in Lima that works closely with WIEGO.

Below: Victoria Vargas Condave sells clothes in a street market in the local municipality of Independencia in Lima. Street vendors provide affordable products in convenient locations—particularly for people who live day-by-day.

Photos: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage



Pioneered Legal Engagement: A project on Law and Informality analyzed how informal workers' demands for rights and protections can be transformed into law, and how to build the capacity of informal workers to engage effectively with the law and achieve legal empowerment.

Improved Capacities for Membership-based Organizations: Both online and in-person training provided much-needed computer skills, as well as competencies in social policy, advocacy, communications, regulatory and legal frameworks, occupational health and safety, sustainability and fundraising.

Contributed new information: WIEGO has done an analysis of street vendors and market traders in Lima and in urban Peru from 2004 to 2015; the information is contained in a new WIEGO Statistical Brief.

Advanced dialogue and policy influence: The project brought informal workers' leadership together with government officials and Members of Parliament, as well as candidates running for offices including Mayor, Sub National Governor, and President of Peru. Together, they discussed the workers' situations and demands.

Important Outcomes in Lima

Developed a multi-sector government board on waste pickers:

Efforts led to the development of Labour Certification of Waste Pickers with the Ministry of Labour; a pilot project on Health & Safety at work with the Lima City Government; and, financing



mechanisms for vehicles and the purchase of segregation plants with the National Fund for Environment.

Elevated the voice of informal workers: A collective platform gave all sectors of informal workers a voice in election processes. Also achieved was the regulation and promotion of retail markets at city level, and advances in new child care and non-contributory pension programmes in Central Government.

Created conduits for discussion and action: Leaders were able to use their new knowledge and skills in important discussions with key government offices, including:

- Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, for provision of social programs to informal workers.
- Ministry of Health, to demand better access to health services, and to make improvements to the health insurance program for the poor.

María Elena Díaz Espinoza, a waste picker in Lima, collects recyclables on the streets in the neighbourhood of Los Olivos. Photo: Juan Arredondo/ Getty Images Reportage

- Ministry of Environment, to ensure that programs to include waste pickers associations in the solid waste management systems in Peru operate as mandated by the programme goals; and for safeguarding the position of waste-pickers in the new General Law of Waste.
- Ministry of Labour for the Law of the Self Employed Worker, for a campaign to have employers of Domestic Workers registered and paying for their health and pension benefits as mandated by law.

The concentrated efforts in Lima have raised awareness and generated momentum. In 2016, the new Government in Peru set a target of reducing informal employment by half by 2021.

A New Focus on Mexico City

WIEGO recently made Mexico City a focal city. The work has already begun. On February 5, 2017, Mexico City published its first Constitution. Leading up to this historic event, WIEGO's involvement helped to ensure the Constitution contains provisions that protect informal workers.



A New Vendor-Friendly Ordinance in Lima

The intense work in Lima resulted in a new ordinance for Metropolitan Lima (passed in May 2014) that governs how individuals are authorized to sell in public spaces. As street vending represents the largest portion of employment in the city, and Peru in general, this regulation was a milestone.

The ordinance has a pro-poor approach, recognizes vendors as workers, and seeks to protect their ability to earn while impelling them toward working in improved commercial spaces through their own savings and consolidated skills.

Luzmila Elba Rojas Morales has sold fresh produce in the market at La Victoria for almost three decades. She is the president of the Asociación 20 de junio, which forms part of the Red Nacional de Trabajadoras/es Autoempleadas, an active participant in the consultation process that helped shape the street vending ordinance for Lima.
Photo: Juan Arredondo/Getty Images Reportage

To help make this possible, WIEGO directly supported a consultation process involving more than 150 street vendors' associations across Lima. This re-shaped the draft text of the city regulation to include vendors' input.

Going Forward

The movement of informal workers has grown on multiple fronts over the past 20 years. Achievements include concrete policy gains, a robust set of statistics and well-organized, well-informed workers.

Much still needs to be done to advance informal workers in Latin America. New groups and new

areas need to be reached. Existing policies need to be enforced, while improved policies must be implemented to ensure workers' rights are protected. And, most importantly, for real, lasting change to happen, informal workers need to be recognized as valuable contributors to society.



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WIEGO shares its knowledge and projects with the region through a Spanish website (<http://espanol.wiego.org/>) and blog. Many WIEGO publications are available in Spanish and Portuguese. **For more information visit: www.wiego.org.**