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WIEGO MBO Newsletter



A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations of Informal Workers

GREETINGS FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES!

Please enjoy this December 2013 issue of the WIEGO MBO Newsletter, featuring articles on the International Domestic Workers Federation, Waste Pickers in Montevideo, Kuapa Kokoo, Street Vendors in Johannesburg, the ITUC Conference with SEWA, and the ILO discussion on the Informal Economy. Remember, we love to hear from you! If you have questions or comments, or would like to submit content for the next issue, please email us at julia_martin@hks.harvard.edu or karen_mccabe@hks.harvard.edu.

Domestic Workers Create the Future: Founding of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF)

By Chris Bonner, WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme Director

You have created your future right here, these past three days. You have created the first international trade union federation in history that will be run entirely by women. You have also created a federation of workers who until recently were not even perceived as workers. You have demonstrated that there is no such thing as "unorganizable" workers.

Dan Gallin spoke these words while addressing the Founding Congress of the IDWF in Montevideo, 26-28 October 2013. His moving speech summarized the significance of the momentous event, when The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) transformed itself into the first global union organization in the world run by women: the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF). He went on to say that domestic workers and their new federation were "part of the renewal of the trade union movement".

The Founding Congress of the IDWF was held in Montevideo, Uruguay: the first country to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention (ILC189), and the first country in Latin America to sign a formal collective bargaining agreement between employers, government and domestic workers. The IDWF already has 48 affiliated organizations representing around 300,000 domestic workers worldwide. There were 80 voting delegates at the Congress, which

were joined by over 100 or so local domestic workers, trade unionists from other sectors and countries, representatives of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the ILO as well as many NGOs and researchers. WIEGO was there in full force with Organization & Representation Programme Director Chris Bonner and European Regional Advisor Karin Pape playing important roles in steering the constitution from inception to adoption and in coordinating the elections. The Steering Committee with the IDWN Coordinator, Elizabeth Tang, also played a crucial strategic and coordination role, supported by Barbro Budin of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF) and a team from the IUF Regional Office in Montevideo.

The Congress was preceded by regional workshops where participants thrashed out the Constitution and made nominations for their regional representatives on the Executive Committee. Such preparations meant that the Constitution was well understood and owned by the delegates and thus unanimously adopted, despite initial contested ideas. It also meant that the election of the Executive Committee and Office Bearers was open, democratic and smoothly run.

Spirits were high throughout the Congress and the hall was filled with songs and inspiring speeches, while outside the hall domestic workers

displayed exhibitions of their work and publications. Government officials from Uruguay spoke about various policies and laws that protect domestic workers in Uruguay. Workshops were held to share experiences and ideas on important issues, and WIEGO and the IDWN launched a new book on the struggle of domestic workers for a Convention and the building of their international organization. Yes *We Did It!* *How the World's Domestic Workers Won Their International Rights and Recognition* by Celia Mather is available on the [WIEGO website](http://www.wiego.org).

On the final day delegates elected a six person, all women Executive Committee, and six alternate members. Myrtle Witbooi from South Africa was elected as President and Ernestina Ochea from Peru as Deputy President, with Elizabeth Tang from Hong Kong as the General Secretary.

A final highlight of the Congress was the closing address by the President of Uruguay, who warmly welcomed the domestic workers to his country, saying that many business and professional people hold conferences in Uruguay but, "I like it a lot more when we have workers". He said he was proud to host a meeting of domestic workers who had been "eternally neglected" and who are "taking these steps, in order to organize to be able to fight for their given rights".



Above and Below: Photos from the IDWF Founding Congress

Photos by Martha Chen



Dan Gallin of the GLI. Dan is former director of the WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme, a former WIEGO Board member and current member of the ORP Advisory Committee.





Above and Below: WIEGO Visits to the Juan Cacharpa and Ave Fenix Waste Picker Sites in Montevideo, Uruguay

Photos by Federico Parra



Members of the Ave Fenix cooperative sort recyclables at a well-equipped facility co-financed by a new law that makes packaging manufacturers and producers responsible for the cost. A levy charged to these companies has made possible the creation of two such segregating centres. Twenty-one workers receive minimum wage to sort the waste, along with uniforms and equipment. They pick up the materials from drop-offs at local supermarkets, and are able to keep 100 per cent of the money from the sale of recyclables.

WIEGO Visits the Waste Pickers of Montevideo, Uruguay

By Leslie Vryenhoek, WIEGO Writer and Editor, and Deia DeBrito, WIEGO Waste Picker Programme Communications Officer

Between the annual WIEGO Board and WIEGO's Team Meetings, WIEGO Board and Team members visited three waste picker organizations in Montevideo, Uruguay.

One group visited **Juan Cacharpa**, the oldest waste picker cooperative operating in Montevideo. Juan Cacharpa was established in 2005 after the Second Latin American Congress. They are located near the main official dumpsite, though they have never worked inside it. At their site, a cooperative leader named Eduardo explained the organization's history and current struggles. He recalled a time of brutal oppression of waste pickers, whose efforts to make a living at the dumpsite were met with police dogs, arrests and even shootings. That treatment eventually led to a 2002 protest in which the waste pickers chained themselves to the gates. This was the first battle in the fight to recognize waste pickers' rights and open the dumpsite so workers could earn their livelihoods.

Almost a decade later, there is more acceptance of this work, but also still struggle. The cooperative has formal agreements of cooperation with the Social Development Minister and other institutions regarding where to collect the recyclable materials. (The cooperative has two big clients, one an educational institute.) The cooperative also saved up and bought a truck a few years ago so it can pick up from businesses.

Waste is sorted at a recently secured, covered sorting centre – a big improvement, though not perfect – or in the homes of the members, where spouses and children can also help.

Asked what the municipality does for Juan Cacharpa and other waste picker organizations, Eduardo smiled a little ruefully. In truth, he explained, they try to do things to help – but because consultation with waste pickers is not thorough,

the municipality doesn't always do the right things. For example, city drop off points where waste can be accessed and sorted do not include shelter, so the work is miserable in the rain. Another problem he identified is the small scale of interventions. For example, the city has plans to integrate waste pickers into its formal waste management system – but this will only provide regular work for 128 of the 15,000 waste pickers.

In 2009 Juan Cacharpa became a formalized cooperative. Now, Eduardo says, they must deal with paperwork, fill out forms and pay taxes. And while there have been improvements in working conditions, the income has not improved. As a result, the cooperative currently only sustains five members (the minimum number to maintain legal status). He says they live on less than minimum wage and have not been able to advance themselves. But he has a vision for the future, for a healthy system where the work is profitable and beneficial to workers, the city and the environment. However, he says for waste pickers to compete effectively in the market will require investment and intervention by the government.

During another site visit, the members of **Felipe Cardoso** explained that formalization must involve an inclusive and participatory process for it to be a desirable goal for workers. Located on the outskirts of Montevideo and at the edge of a closed landfill, Felipe Cardoso is the result of a 10 year struggle involving the Trade Union of Clasificadores (UCRUS), the only waste picker organization affiliate of the National Trade Union Confederation.

After years of organizing, they came to an agreement with the municipality to receive the contents of special garbage trucks on their daily route to the landfill. Their members used to work individually inside the dumpsite and since the union was created they began a

long organizing process. In 2003, after one year of negotiations, they managed to secure a designated street for work. Finally, in 2005 another special space was designated for the waste pickers, outside the new sanitary landfill site. The cooperative model started taking shape, allowing them to finally set up their cooperative in 2006.

Today, Felipe Cardoso is the largest cooperative in Montevideo with more than 80 members. Although improvements have been made in terms of space available, their working conditions remain very poor, especially those related to health and safety. Now, the cooperative is moving towards a formalization process. Its members will be contracted by an NGO to perform a recycling service, receive a minimum wage from the government and will no longer have to work in the open. The workers, while looking forward to the perks that come with these changes, say they were excluded from the discussions and have many complaints about the new system. Changes will have to be made before they will accept it.

The third site, **Ave Fenix**, is a cooperative formed as a result of the implementation of a National Law on extended producer responsibility (EPR). In Uruguay, it is commonly referred to as the "Packaging Law," and it requires that producers of packaging pay for their recyclable materials to be collected and sorted by a group of organized waste pickers. Producers of packaging are thus co-founders of the system and machinery, including compensation of the workers. The facility is located between Montevideo and Canelones, and under the jurisdiction of the Canelones Municipality.



Above: Kuapa Kokoo Women's Forum, Accra

Photos by Carol Wills



Membership-Based Organizations (MBOs) of vendors and hawkers marched to the offices of Executive Mayor Parks Tau in protest of the removal of the informal traders by the City, and demanded the immediate return of the street vendors to their trading spaces in Johannesburg.

Photo by Puxley Makgatho, Business Day Live

Kuapa Kokoo Pa Pa Paa: The Best of the Best Cocoa Farmers

By Carol Wills, Independent Consultant

One of four partners in the WIEGO project Developing Leadership and Business Skills for Informal Women Workers in Fair Trade, Kuapa Kokoo is a huge cooperative of more than 80,000 cocoa farmers in Ghana, West Africa. Kuapa Kokoo has a strong track record in promoting women's leadership, and one of its main objectives is to enhance the participation of women in the decision making process at all levels of operation and organization. The cooperative currently has a woman president and half of its main Board members are women. Kuapa Kokoo strives to become the most globally recognized, leading, caring and efficient cooperative in cocoa production and marketing. In May this year, Kuapa Kokoo held

a project inception workshop for 35 Board members and staff to ensure that everyone was informed of the details of the WIEGO project and would have the opportunity to ask questions. The workshop was followed by a two day Women's Forum for more than 250 women farmers. It was a joyful, noisy, exuberant event with much singing and dancing as well as serious training sessions on the characteristics and responsibilities of a good leader. The Forum provided an opportunity for raising awareness of the WIEGO project, which was greeted with much cheering and clapping.

The three-year WIEGO project is a programme of capacity building to

increase the participation of women as active cooperative members and leaders, increase women's control over and access to assets, strengthen organizations and improve their ability to access markets and generate income and, by the end of 2015, develop a package of resources accessible to cooperatives all over Africa. By the end of the project, 2,800 Kuapa Kokoo women farmers will have been trained in leadership and increased their participation in the cooperative and its local societies. We're very excited to learn from this project, and to share the findings across Fair Trade networks throughout the continent.

Sudden Mass Evictions of Street Vendors in Johannesburg, South Africa

Sources:

[Tanya Zack's open letter to the City of Johannesburg](#)

[Cosatu Throws Its Weight Behind Informal Traders' March](#)

[On illegality, Lawlessness and Illegitimacy](#)

Beginning in early October, a number of Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) agents forcefully evicted local street vendors as part of a supposed "Clean Sweep" commissioned by Executive Mayor Parks Tau, the [legality of which has been highly contested in the media](#). The street vendors "[were being treated like criminals and some had not been able to work for more than 20 days](#)." In her [open letter to city officials](#), another eyewitness and independent consultant Tanya Zacks reports,

"The informal trader stalls which are rented from the City by traders [have] been removed. There were many JMPD and SAPS officers on the street. A number of SARS and Customs police were also present. The uniformed people were stopping traders and passersby, checking asylum papers. They were chasing traders and searching them. Goods – including goods such as boxes of apples – were being confiscated. Shop keepers were closing their shops and police were shouting at them to close their shops. Some JMPD and SAPS officers were

entering buildings. I saw a person being dragged out of his vehicle. I saw a JMPD officer threaten a female trader with a broken stick, and pull the trader by the arm ... I saw policeman hit a man on his head with a stick. I saw another policeman grab a long pole from one of the shops and use it to prod and hit and threaten people as he ran down the road shouting at people to clear away."

According to reports, stalls allocated by the City had been broken down, and the vendors forcefully removed without written notice or explanation regardless of having paid for rentals through 2015 in some cases. An estimated [6,000 traders](#) have been displaced in the operation.

In response, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) supported a march by the street vendors through Johannesburg to the Mayor Tau's offices. Also involved in the march were South African National Traders Retail Alliance (Santra), One Voice and other associations of street vendors and hawkers. The vendors

demanding an end to the "Clean Sweep" and the restoration of the displaced vendors, and issued a memorandum. One Voice Director Frans Seema indicated that human rights lawyers have also been contacted, as this operation has affected the means to survive for so many.

However, JMPD spokesman Superintendent Wayne Minnaar said the clean-up operation only targeted illegal traders, illegal taxi ranks and those trading in contravention with the bylaws and restrictions.

On December 5th, the Constitutional Court sided with the South Africa National Traders and Retail Alliance (Santra) and the South Africa Informal Traders' Forum (SAITF), representing 2,000 vendors, returning them their right to trade. For more read this [article from IOL News](#).

For additional information, please refer to the following articles: [The scouring of Jo'burg's inner city; Joburg informal traders accuse officials of illegal evictions](#) .

TO MY SISTERS IN SEWA

BEHIND YOUR FACES SO
FULL OF HUMILITY

WHAT STRENGTH OF
CHARACTER!

WHAT COURAGE IN YOUR
EFFORTS!

FROM THE SWEAT
TRICKLING DOWN YOUR
BODIES

AND THE FRUITS OF YOUR
LABOUR,

YOU NOURISH THE
WORLD.

MOTHERS NOURISHERS

WITH HEART FULL OF
TENDERNESS,

YOU ARE WITHOUT ANY
DOUBT

THE WORTHY HEIRS OF
MAHATMA GANDHI.

SO THEN BE ETERNAL!

Mamadou Diallo
ITUC/Brussels

Ahmedabad, 27 September 2013

The ILO report contains a questionnaire which, in accordance with article 38 of the Standing Orders of the International Labour Conference, calls for a reply from your Government, after consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers.

The replies to this questionnaire must reach the Office no later than 31 December 2013.

ITUC Conference on Organizing in Informal Economy

By Pat Horn, StreetNet International Coordinator

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) co-hosted an International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) conference in Ahmedabad in September. Participants were those ITUC staff responsible for the informal economy in the Brussels Head Office, as well as the regional offices of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) and ITUC Africa, and representatives of several of ITUC's affiliates from different regions.

On the first day, participants embarked on exposure visits to SEWA's different operations – SEWA organizing, SEWA Bank, SEWA Academy and the VIMO-SEWA social protection division. Some of the participants were seeing SEWA's innovative methods of organizing women workers in the informal economy for the first time, and found this

to be an eye-opener. One participant from the ITUC Head Office, Mamadou Diallo, was so impressed that he wrote a poem dedicated to the women of SEWA.

During the conference, participants examined the ITUC policy position on the informal economy as reflected in Resolutions of the 2nd ITUC World Congress, the Resolution of the 8th ITUC General Council, Brussels 2011, and Resolutions of Regional organizations TUCA (autoreforma sindical, i.e. trade union self-reform) and ITUC Africa (transformation of informal economy to social and solidarity economy). This was followed by presentations and discussions on the following themes:

- Overcoming obstacles to organizing workers in the informal economy
- Social protection as an organizing drive for workers in

the informal economy: What have we learned from successful experiences?

- Gaining rights and protection for workers in the informal economy – what works?
- How can the ITUC and its regional organisations promote organizing campaigns targeting workers in the informal economy?

In conclusion, it was agreed that the informal economy agenda of the ITUC going forward should be focused on the following three key themes, which emerged from the discussions and will be put forward to the ITUC World Congress in May 2014:

1. Union growth based on organizing workers in the informal economy
2. Sustainable work, income security and social protection
3. Realizing rights of workers in the informal economy

On the Agenda: ILO Discussion on the Informal Economy

By Chris Bonner, WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme Director

June 2014 will see the first of two discussions at the International Labour Conference (ILC) on "Transitioning from the Informal to the Formal Economy". This is an opportunity for informal workers, with the support of trade unionists in the Workers Group, WIEGO and other allies, to say what they mean by formalization, the benefits it should bring for them and the processes that need to be followed. They need to build strong arguments to persuade governments and employers to support their positions, and to counter those that are unfavourable.

To facilitate this, WIEGO has convened a broad Working Group to jointly plan and prepare for the discussions. Plans include:

- encouraging affiliates of informal worker networks/

federations and trade union federations to complete and return the ILO Questionnaire by the end of December; this questionnaire will help inform future ILO documents and the draft instrument to be discussed at the ILC

- facilitating the convening of three Regional Workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America for informal workers to develop their positions
- preparing a draft Platform document for discussion and amendment by workshop participants
- supporting a group of informal workers and organizers from different sectors to participate the ILC in June 2014

The Questionnaire can be found in the ILO Report V (1), [Transitioning from the Informal to the Formal Economy](#).

