

## Improving Statistics on Informal Employment in India: A Brief on Statistical Concepts from the United Nations Publication, *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*.\*

### Box 4.6

#### Improving statistics on informal employment in India: the role of users

The importance of dialogue and collaboration between statisticians and users of statistics in producing timely statistics that inform policy has been illustrated time and again in the field of gender statistics. An exceptional example of this is the active role played by the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) over the course of more than 20 years. SEWA has worked with national research organizations, government commissions and the national statistical system to develop statistics on the working poor women in the informal economy that it represents. In doing so, SEWA furthered not only the development of statistics on these women workers but also the improvement of labour force data in India.

Since its beginning in the 1970's SEWA has made the development of statistics on informal workers a priority. It began to develop these statistics with research institutions and then gradually with the official statistical system. In the last 10 years, SEWA collaborated closely with the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in the planning and design of the 1999-2000 and the 2004-5 Survey of Employment and Unemployment. This was the first official survey in India that included questions that provided for the identification of the informal economy in both urban and rural areas. In addition, the survey allowed for the classification of home-based workers, both self-employed and industrial outworkers (called home-workers), and of street vendors.

SEWA is a member of the Independent Group on Home-based Workers in India. Organized in 2007, the Independent Group has brought together statisticians, researchers and advocates to address: 1) concepts and definitions of home-based workers and their categories for data collection purposes; 2) a plan for tabulation and analysis of data from various official sources; and 3) identification of data needs and recommendations for filling the gaps.<sup>a</sup>

The collaboration of statisticians and the various data-user groups in India to improve statistics on informal workers has been very fruitful. With national labour force surveys showing over 90 percent of the labour force in informal employment, there is now greater recognition of these workers and their situation, and new programmes have been developed to improve the livelihood of women and men in informal employment. In addition, steps are being taken to further develop data on these workers in India. As a result, the statistical services of the Government of India have been leaders worldwide in the development of statistics on informal employment. This includes responsibility for the standing expert group of the United Nations Statistical Commission on informal sector statistics, known as the Delhi Group.

<sup>a</sup> Report of the Independent Group on Home-based Workers (New Delhi, India, 2008), <http://www.unifem.org.in/PDF/IG%20HBW%20Report.pdf>