



MBO NEWSLETTER

March 2024

A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations
of Workers in Informal Employment

Produced by: WIEGO Organization & Representation Programme

Gender Balance and Democratic Leadership

Achieving gender balance and democratic leadership for all workers in informal employment is the focus of this MBO Newsletter – with the world celebrating International Women’s Day in March. Many questions are raised, which invites all MBOs to hold space in their organizations to discuss and reflect on these. Check out the links for more information and reading material.



In the spirit of celebrating women, we ask ourselves:



How can we make space to achieve gender balance in practice?



What conditions do we need to create gender balance within our organizations and externally?



What tools do women workers need to work towards equality in the workplace and in their personal lives – to strengthen their capacities and voices?

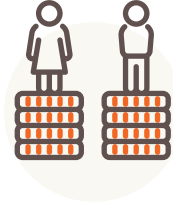
Lived Experience

To shape the global movement of workers in informal employment and raise their visibility in the informal economy, lived experience is crucial. The participation of women workers in Membership-Based Organizations and their taking leadership roles is essential to align the movement with what is most sustainable in the long-term – gender balance, democratic leadership, and fairness in representative spaces.

The understanding that different workers experience inequalities and express agency in distinct ways across sectors, and recognizing how these differences show up in workers' day-to-day lives – particularly in the lives of women workers – is a central principle for all in the movement to uphold while intentionally practising democratic leadership and building MBOs rooted in gender balance.



What is Gender?



Socially constructed characteristics and attributes to women, men, girls and boys. It includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy – as well as relationships with each other as a gender varies from society to society and can change over time.



Gender is where discrimination happens every day in the lives of women and non-conforming persons.



Gender intersects with similar structures like class, race, ethnicity, caste, age and immigration status. It does not work alone in one's experience as a worker in informal employment.



Gender is a critical domain within intersectionality.

What is Intersectionality?

- Intersectionality is the idea that we experience discrimination in our lives, sometimes privileges, based on several different identities.
- It is a tool to help people realize that discrimination happen based on several factors.
- Intersectionality is used to understand how multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage compound themselves, and create obstacles that often are not understood within conventional ways of thinking.



Why Gender Matters

Unbalanced power dynamics within the household, organizations and workplace are the lived experiences of workers. For example, unbalanced power relations at the household level affect women's abilities to take part in public life, making women unable to serve in public committees or exercise leadership – because women are expected to take sole responsibility for raising children, caring for elderly parents, and fulfilling household duties. This **limits women's time, energy and opportunity to take up leadership roles in their MBOs and networks.**

Gender and social norms constrain women to specific roles. For example, the perception that men make better political leaders is a strong gender bias against women's capacity to lead. It leads to women not occupying leadership positions as much as men do – or to their not being respected or supported when they do hold leadership positions.





Addressing Discrimination in Waste Picking

In the solid waste management and waste picking sector, for instance, a significant number of women might not be allowed access to recyclables with the highest value. [WIEGO's Gender & Waste project](#), a collaborative project involving waste pickers in Latin America, sheds light on the multiple levels of discrimination that women waste pickers face. It also highlights their needs – at home, at work, and as leaders within their representative organizations.

Waste picker Cleide Maria Florzinha said she feels a lot has changed for her since the project began.

“I had already had some ideas about respect and rights, but the project added to this. When we talk about gender, there’s also gender choice. In our warehouse, we’re trying to promote this idea because there are still prejudices so it really helped to deal with that.”





Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Women domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors and waste pickers experience gender-based violence in the workplace daily. Organizations such as the International Labour Organization have tried to broaden the notion of violence against women beyond physical and sexual violence to include less obvious forms of violence – psychological, emotional and economic. [ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#) outlines provisions that serve to protect workers and

“recognizes that an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach, which tackles underlying cause and risks factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations, is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work.”

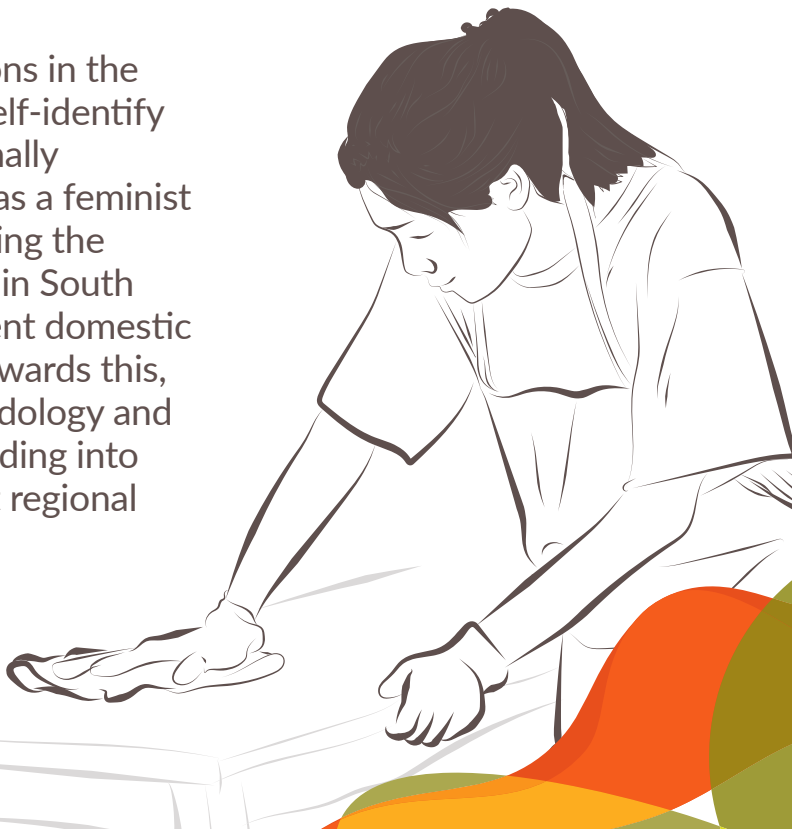




Leading the Way with Domestic Violence Survivors

Within seven months of the Power Up project implementing its [Comic Relief Power Up Project, Empowering Home-based Workers](#), HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) – a network of home-based worker organizations representing 1.2 million worker voices – noted that COVID-19 and related lockdowns had increased the risks of gender-based violence for home-based workers in South Asia. Domestic violence survivors were trapped at home with perpetrators with little or no access to helplines, state resources or even worker-representative organizations.

HNSA – one of only two organizations in the Power Up partnership that do not self-identify as feminist organizations – intentionally embraced what is widely perceived as a feminist issue and is leading the way in creating the conditions for home-based workers in South Asia to be able to address and prevent domestic violence and workplace violence. Towards this, it has integrated engendered methodology and gender-based-violence capacity building into its work focus and convened its first regional gender-based-violence training.

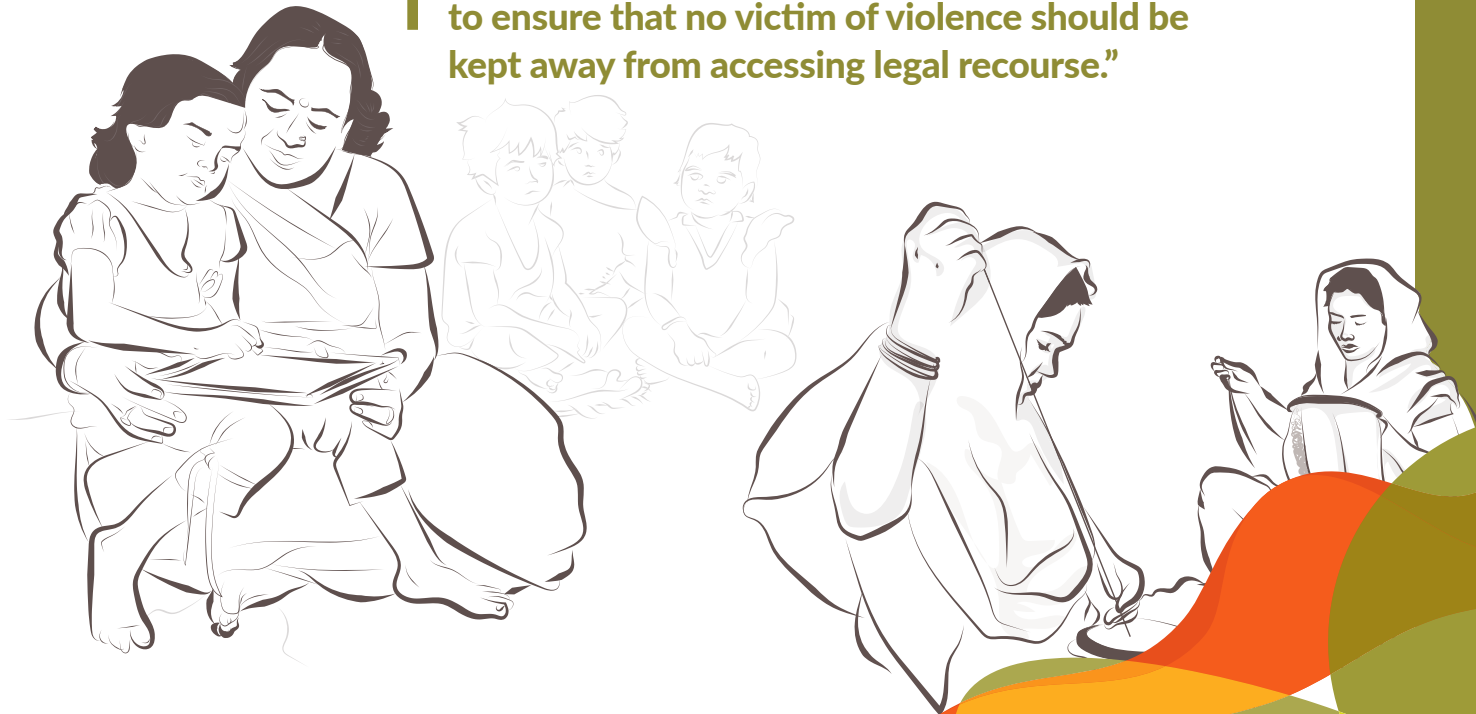


Committed to empowering home-based workers to **speak out** on the gender-based violence they experience, HomeNet South Asia aims to defeat this silent scourge. HNSA is working across seven countries to equip home-based workers with communication tools, including the capacity-development [VAW Training Tool](#) and awareness-building posters in eight languages that disseminate information on local support.



Geeta Thimozina
Dahal

Home-based-worker organizer Geeta Thimozina Dahal is among 436 South Asian women home-based workers who learned through this training to analyze social and cultural norms ascribed to women within the dominant patriarchal structures. Noting that she now feels equipped to handle the issue of violence among her peers, Geeta said, “I want to ensure that no victim of violence should be kept away from accessing legal recourse.”



Gender as a Part of Intersectionality in Practice

What do we mean by gender as a domain of intersectionality in practice?

The aim is to find ways to foster the unlearning of social norms, roles and systems that perpetuate power dynamics rooted in oppression and gender inequity in all spheres of women's lives – as well as to encompass creativity and imagination for something new and expansive.

Recognizing every worker is a key principle in theory and practice. Space must be created for every worker to reflect and **speak from their position and experience** of the difficulties faced, the practical and strategic needs, and the transformation required within society and within their context. In turn, workers collectively think through inclusive ways of counting all voices and prioritizing issues for collective action rooted in women workers' agency within their organizations and national movements.



Creating Space for Everyone to be Heard

StreetNet International's organizer for Asia, Nash Tysmans, explained their process of supporting the negotiation team when identifying priorities in their social protection agenda. As an organizer, she creates a space where everyone's concerns are heard. Every month, they engage in a preparatory process to ensure questions are adequately raised by all the workers and the process is democratic, achieving inclusivity and a representative consensus, especially regarding gender balance.

SNI organizer Nash Tysmans reaffirms that listening to issues and demands is essential. It is vital to discuss roles and recognize that the negotiators might differ from the organization's leaders. This is part of the discussion at the table, where everyone has a seat.



Nash Tysmans

“When we facilitate the process of collective negotiation, there are power struggles, and there is a need to be clear that the process reflects what all workers want, including men, women, aging workers, youth workers, workers with disability. When we speak of justice, how we facilitate determines how we do things collectively.”

As a foundation to democratic processes and leadership, intersectionality should **create the space for diversity to emerge while fostering collaboration to the collective gain**. Building movements and solidarity within diverse voices in meaningful and sustainable ways can be done, not despite the differences, but because of these differences. With layered experiences and diverse approaches, we can make movements stronger.

Resources



Gender & Waste Project:

<https://www.wiego.org/gender-waste-project>. Sonia Dias, WIEGO's waste picking specialist, facilitates this work. It is a partnership between WIEGO, the Women's Research Center (NEPEM) at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), the NGO Insea, the national waste picker movement MNCR, and the regional waste picker movement RedLacre.

- Icebreaker exercise: <https://bitly.ws/3e27K>
- Awareness of Gender Relations exercise: <https://bitly.ws/3e27Q>
- Autonomy exercise: <https://bitly.ws/3e27T>
- Discussing Gender Roles exercise: <https://bitly.ws/3e27X>

Gender Social Norms Index 2023: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>.

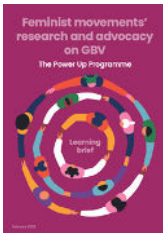
HomeNet South Asia VAW Training Tool: <https://hnsa.org.in/resource/vaw-training-tool>

ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190): <https://bitly.ws/3eoml>



Ogando, Ana Carolina, Siviwe Mhlana and Mike Rogan. 2023. **Interrogating intersectionality: considerations on critical inquiry and praxis for WIEGO's actionable research.** Promoting Intersectional Development Research Case Study Report No. 1. Southern Centre for Inequality Studies, University of the Witwatersrand. <https://bitly.ws/3eomE>

POWA: Gender-Based Violence: What you should know: <https://bitly.ws/3eoml>

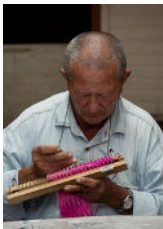


Power Up: Feminist movements' research and advocacy on GBV: <https://bitly.ws/3e28B>.
Also <https://bitly.ws/3e29o>



WIEGO Briefing Note, Violence and Informal Work: <https://www.wiego.org/publications/wiego-briefing-note-violence-work>

- <https://www.wiego.org/es/publications/wiego-briefing-note-violence-work>
- <https://www.wiego.org/publications/note-dinformation-de-wiego-sur-la-violence-au-travail>



World Health Organization, Gender and health: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>