WIEGO
Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Working in public space:
A manual for street vendors

Public space for you, for me, for everyone!

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Cities Alliance
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If you are a street or market vendor, this is for you. You may sell from a fixed location, like a stall or in a market. Maybe you sell from the pavement (sidewalk), or you are a mobile vendor who sells your goods as you walk around. You sell where the people are, usually in busy locations like the city center, next to the bus station, the taxi rank, or the train station.

Your work is important. You contribute to your city by providing much-needed goods and services to people in convenient locations. You are creating your own jobs and you are working to support your families. You may also support other businesses, when you buy your goods in bulk from wholesalers, for example. Maybe you also create jobs for others by hiring people to package, transport or sell your goods. But not only do you contribute to the city economy, you also fill public spaces – like parks, pavements and plazas – with activity and life, which make cities safer and better places to live.

You face many challenges. Many city officials don't really like you working on their streets and pavements. They may have misconceptions about you, like that you bring crime and grime to their city, or that you are making traffic worse, or avoiding taxes. You may have experienced your goods being confiscated. Often you never get them back. Or maybe you had to pay somebody a bribe to stay in your trading space. Or they just chase you away and sell the space to a company that employs security guards to keep you off the pavement.

You are not alone. Street vending is an important source of work in every region of the world. For example, in India 4 per cent of workers in cities are street vendors[1]. In Lima, Peru, street vendors and market traders together account for 9 per cent of non-agricultural workers[2]. In many cities, the challenges that street vendors face are similar. To fight for recognition as workers and the right to work, many street vendors have joined hands and formed organizations at the local, city, national and regional levels. There is even an international organization of street vendors called StreetNet International.

You can read through this document yourself, with another person, or even better with a group of people. Where you see this symbol throughout the manual it indicates an exercise or activity. The exercises in this guide will be interesting to reflect on with others, especially other street vendors. We hope you enjoy it and find it helpful!

This document is meant to help you:

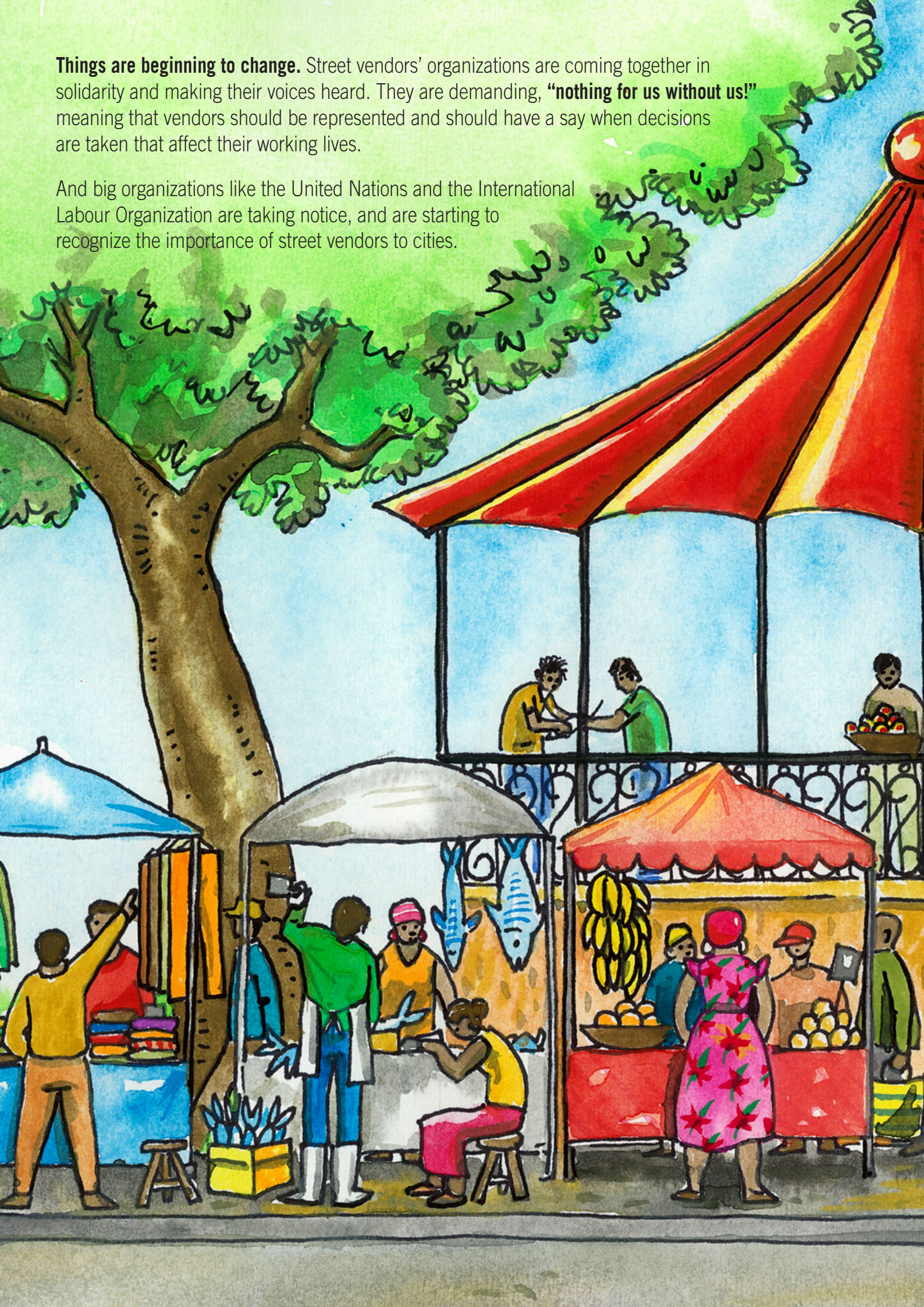
Think: Reflect about what it means to be a street vendor working in public space, the contributions you make and the challenges you face.

Get informed: Learn more about the purpose of regulations, what arguments you can use to defend the right to work in public space, and what actions other street vendor organizations have taken.

Act: Get organized. Join up with an existing organization or help organize a new one. When you are strong and ready, approach your local government and negotiate for the changes you want to see.

Things are beginning to change. Street vendors' organizations are coming together in solidarity and making their voices heard. They are demanding, **"nothing for us without us!"** meaning that vendors should be represented and should have a say when decisions are taken that affect their working lives.

And big organizations like the United Nations and the International Labour Organization are taking notice, and are starting to recognize the importance of street vendors to cities.



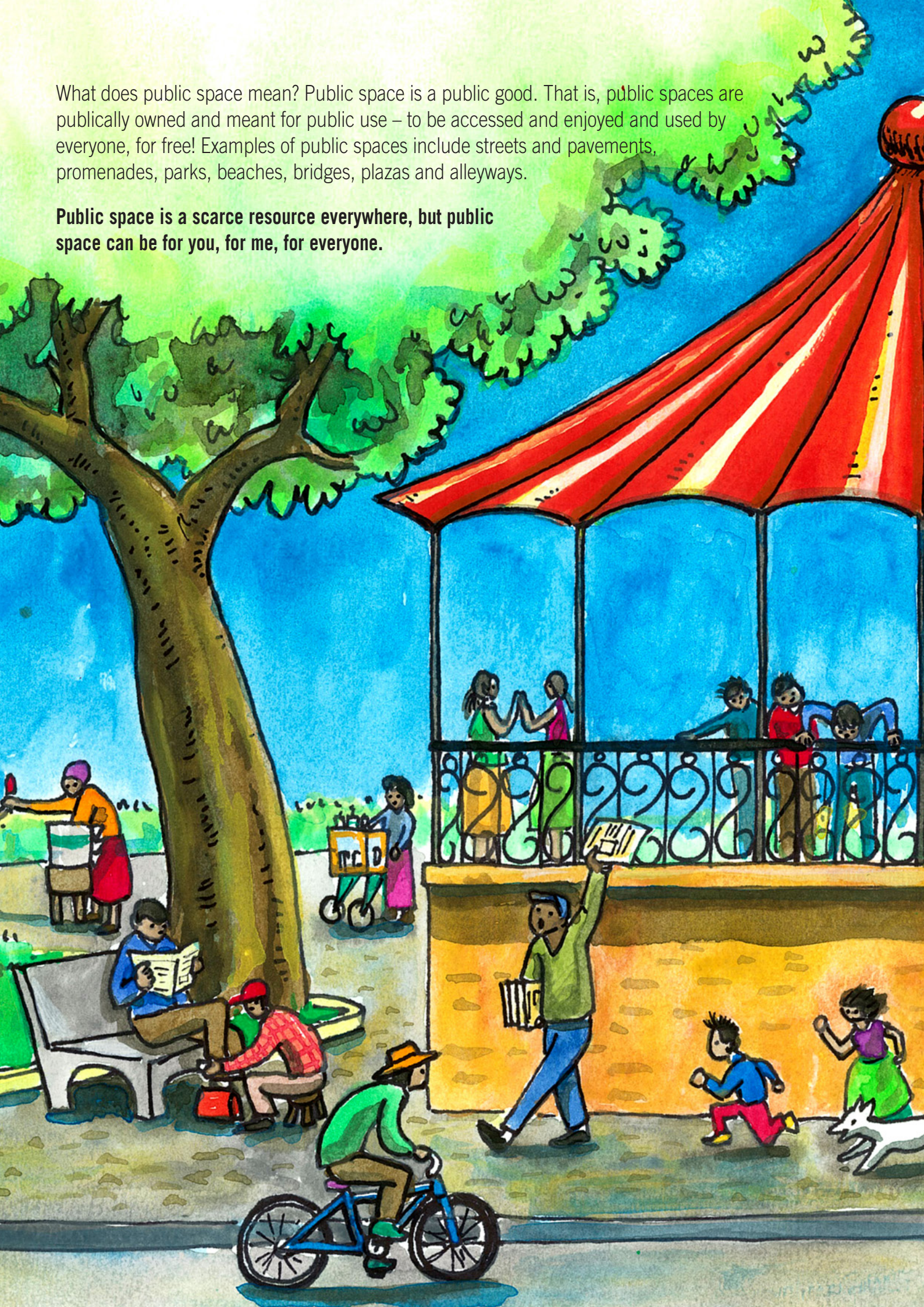
Think: Street vending in public space

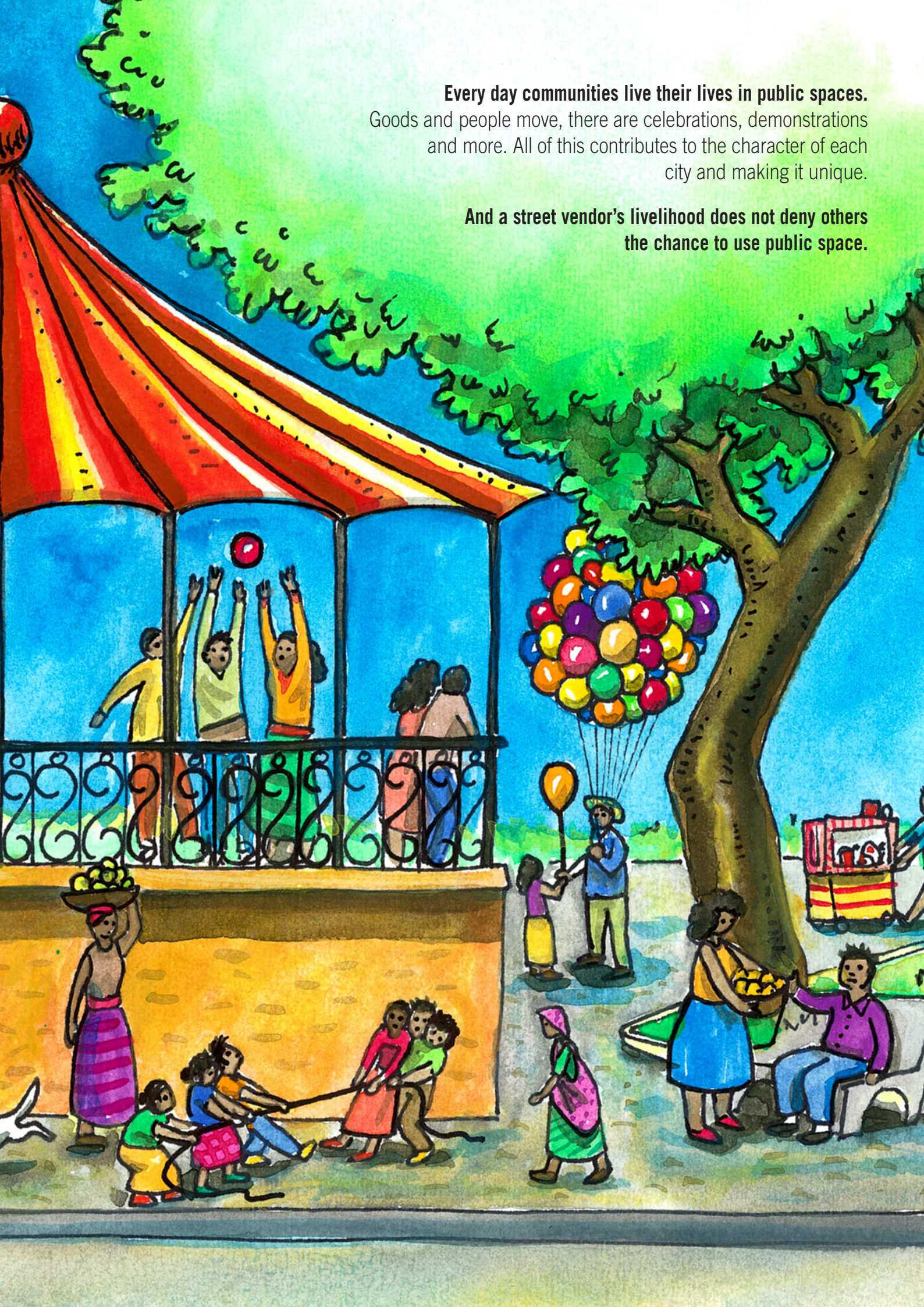
What is public space?

When we talk about "workplaces" we usually think of factories, shops or offices, maybe hospitals or schools. But for street vendors, your workplace is usually in **public space**.

What does public space mean? Public space is a public good. That is, public spaces are publically owned and meant for public use – to be accessed and enjoyed and used by everyone, for free! Examples of public spaces include streets and pavements, promenades, parks, beaches, bridges, plazas and alleyways.

Public space is a scarce resource everywhere, but public space can be for you, for me, for everyone.





Every day communities live their lives in public spaces. Goods and people move, there are celebrations, demonstrations and more. All of this contributes to the character of each city and making it unique.

And a street vendor's livelihood does not deny others the chance to use public space.

What do you see?

Think by yourself or with others about your city and all the ways that public spaces are used, for example: people walking to and from work, riding bikes, playing music, people sweeping and picking up trash, families and friends spending time together in parks, and of course, street vendors selling their goods and services.

- Now think, what do you see from your workplaces?
- What does it tell you about life and public spaces in your city?
- Who are other workers working with you in public space?

Who benefits from public space?

Sometimes the city authorities and members of the public have negative ideas about your work and do not understand the contributions you make to cities. They may say that you are using public space for your own benefit, and that this isn't fair. But many other citizens use public space for their own benefit too. For example, people driving and parking private cars in city lots are also using public space for their own benefit, but they don't face the same kind of criticism from city authorities that street vendors do.

What do you think?

- What do people and authorities think about you and your work as a street vendor? Who do they say you are?
- Now consider your own experiences and everything you know about your work as a street vendor. Who do you say you really are?

You can think about these questions on your own or with other street vendors, and you can use the table below to set out your answers.

Who they say we are	Who we really are

What is it like to work as a street vendor in public space in your city?

In a perfect world, city authorities would use **inclusive practices** to ensure that everyone can enjoy their right to public space. Like involving street vendors and other members of the community in the process of managing public space. Or working together to set clear guidelines for the use of public space in a way that is fair and that makes public spaces work better for all.

In reality, earning a living in public space is not easy. Most cities have restrictions and rules that are meant to stop vendors from setting up shop in certain places. Sometimes, these rules aren't made clear, and it can be hard to know where you are allowed to vend. Where there are restrictions, and sometimes even when there aren't, the city authorities and police may try to stop you from working in public space through **exclusive practices.**

For example, in some cities, authorities threaten you, take away your goods, or ask for a bribe to stay in your spot. Many cities carry out evictions, or even arrest street vendors. This is a way of **criminalizing** your work. To justify many of these practices many authorities use the argument that they are "cleaning up" "decongesting" or "modernizing" the city. All of this makes it hard to earn a stable income, which affects both you and your family. Some of these actions may also be a violation of your rights, which we will talk about later on.

Street vendors across the world face similar challenges.[3]

Lima, Peru

Accra, Ghana


"We have to move our goods from point to point looking for places to sell. Sometimes our goods are destroyed and the business comes to a standstill, making us poorer. Sometimes we try to relocate by asking for money from friends, looking for money from a bank, but this often doesn't work as relocating is quite expensive and it's difficult to raise the money."
- Street vendor from Accra

"World Class" for who?

Another challenge for street vendors is that in some cities, the amount of public space available is shrinking. Sometimes, this is because cities are **privatizing** public space by selling or leasing public land to real estate developers. These developers often build gated communities or fancy malls where you are prohibited from working. Cities may choose to privatize public land because they want the revenue, or because they want to create an image of a more so-called "modern" or "World Class" city. But, ask yourself, with so many workers in the world working as street vendors today – in cities as different as New York City, Lagos, Paris, São Paulo, Bangkok and Mumbai – **how can a city without street vendors be described as modern?**

In many cities where officials pushed for a "world class" image, urban informal workers, including street vendors have suffered. For many government officials, creating a "world class" city means evicting informal workers from city streets, and even evicting many existing communities from their homes to make room for new private developments.

So in the face of this, some vendors' organizations have asked themselves, world class for who? For example, the international street vendors' organization StreetNet International, launched a global campaign called "World Class Cities for All" that aims to fight government practices that exclude street vendors. Instead, the campaign calls for vendors and other poor urban workers to be included in decision-making processes about what cities should look like.

What have you experienced?

As a first step to thinking about defending your right to vend in public space, it can be helpful to think about how street vendors are treated in your city. Think by yourself or discuss with others about:

- How would you describe your city's approach to managing public space? Would you call it inclusive, exclusive or somewhere in between?
- What challenges have you faced as a street vendor working in public space? How have you been treated by city authorities?
- Have you been evicted from public space in your city? Who occupies or uses that space now?

Get Informed:
Defending your right to public space

What is the purpose of regulations?

The great thing about public space is that public spaces are for **everyone to use and enjoy**, and it is the responsibility of city authorities to make sure that happens. But this can be a very difficult task, because many different people want to use public space for many different things, and public space is usually in short supply.

Municipal regulations, by-laws, or policies determine where, when and how vendors can work in public space. Many street vendors are not against the idea of regulations, but they want these to be **fair, inclusive and clearly communicated. Regulations should be used to promote and protect vendor's livelihoods, not to destroy them.** Vendors also want authorities to involve them in the design and monitoring of regulations.

In January 2018, street vendors from the Informal Hawkers and Vendors Association of Ghana (IHVAG) met with government officials to discuss a recent round of street vendor evictions. At the meeting, the president of IHVAG, Anass Ibrahim stated:

> *"The issue of street vending is becoming a phenomenon worldwide, and I believe that, with proper regulations, and monitoring and education, by our city authorities, everything will be very successful. In IHVAG, we believe that there should be street vending. We equally disagree with those who are vending or trading on the ceremonial streets. With proper regulation, and education on policies, everything will be solved."*

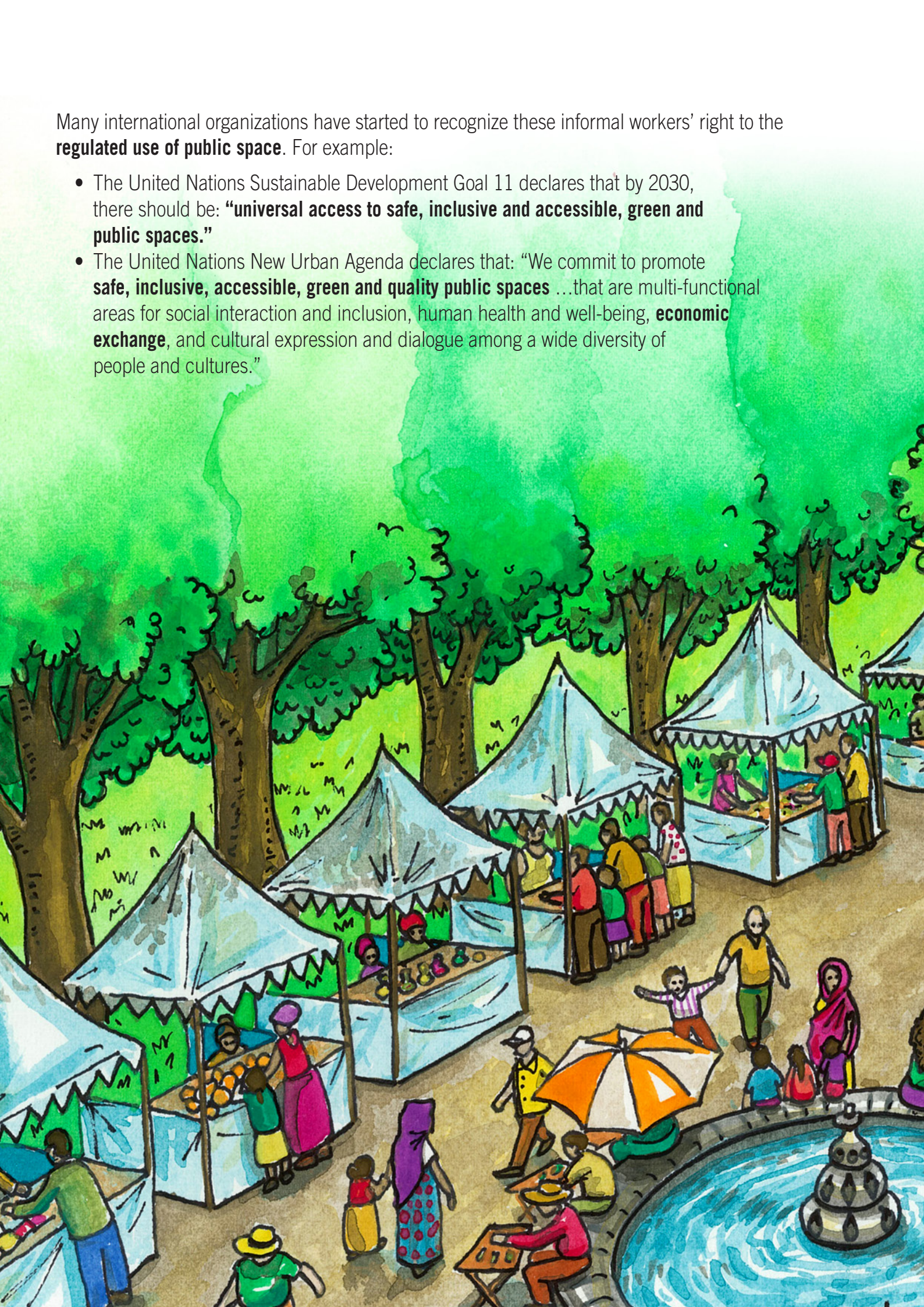
Street vendors are not alone in calling for access to public space with fair regulations. Many other informal workers work in public space and make important contributions to cities as well. Informal workers may work in lots of different occupations, but they share one thing: they lack legal and social protection through their work.

For example, other informal workers who need access to public space to earn a living are:

- Waste pickers who collect and transport waste and need public spaces for sorting.
- Rickshaw pullers and motorcycle taxi drivers who use public space to transport people around the city.
- Musicians and artisans who play music and sell their art from public space.
- Other workers who provide services in public space like: carrying goods for buyers and sellers of goods (porters), washing clothes, shining shoes or cutting hair.

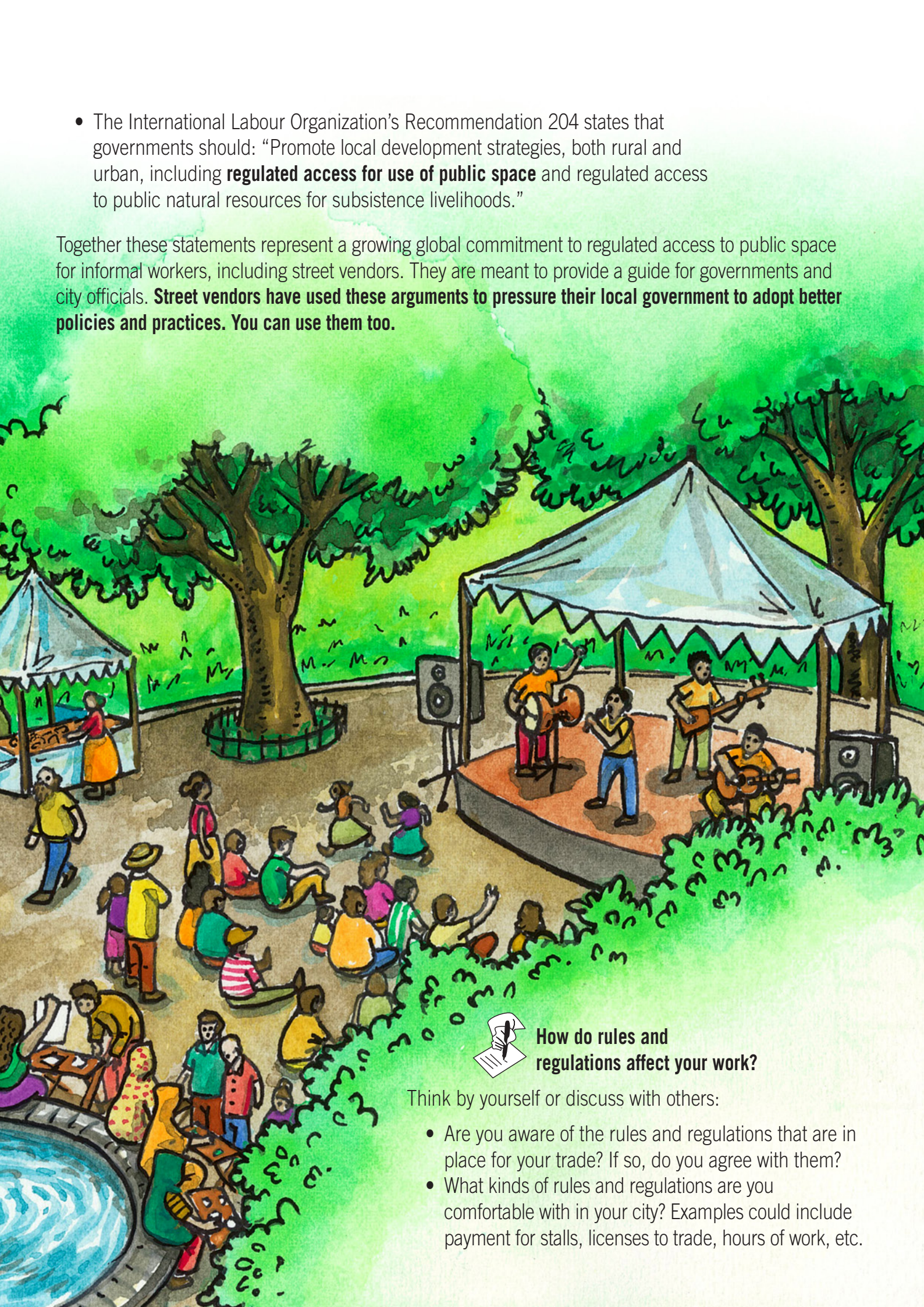
Many international organizations have started to recognize these informal workers' right to the **regulated use of public space**. For example:

- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 declares that by 2030, there should be: **"universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces."**
- The United Nations New Urban Agenda declares that: "We commit to promote **safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces** …that are multi-functional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being, **economic exchange**, and cultural expression and dialogue among a wide diversity of people and cultures."



- The International Labour Organization's Recommendation 204 states that governments should: "Promote local development strategies, both rural and urban, including **regulated access for use of public space** and regulated access to public natural resources for subsistence livelihoods."

Together these statements represent a growing global commitment to regulated access to public space for informal workers, including street vendors. They are meant to provide a guide for governments and city officials. **Street vendors have used these arguments to pressure their local government to adopt better policies and practices. You can use them too.**



How do rules and regulations affect your work?

Think by yourself or discuss with others:

- Are you aware of the rules and regulations that are in place for your trade? If so, do you agree with them?
- What kinds of rules and regulations are you comfortable with in your city? Examples could include payment for stalls, licenses to trade, hours of work, etc.

How can you defend the contributions of street vendors to cities, and fight back against negative practices and stereotypes?

The exclusionary practices of city authorities are often motivated by negative and misinformed ideas about your work. Sometimes, when you do have opportunities to talk to government about your needs, officials respond with some of the arguments below (labeled myths). In order to make a strong argument to government, it can be useful to be prepared with some responses to these myths. Review the myths and facts below. Have you heard these before? Do you agree?

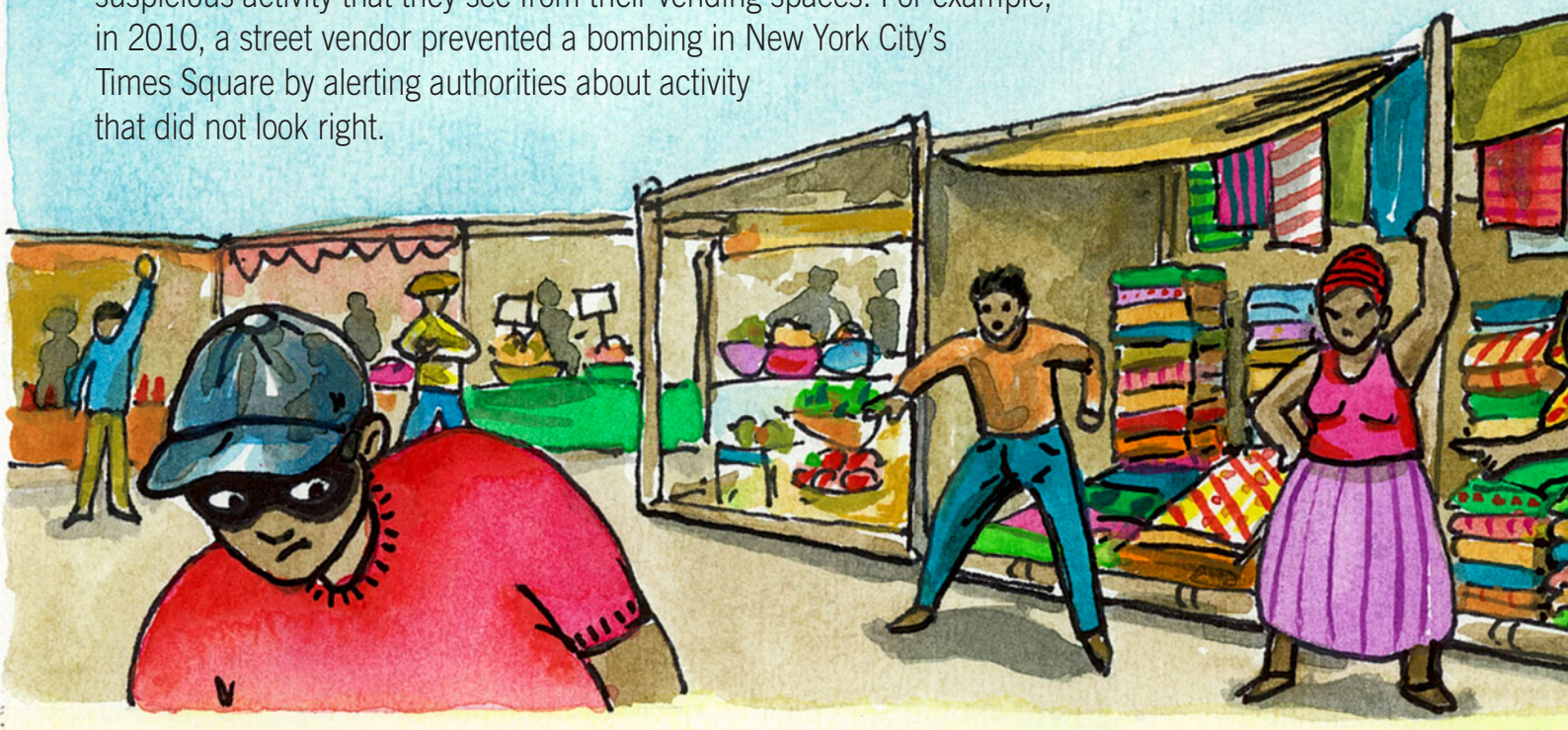
These examples are drawn from Myths & Facts about the Informal Economy and Workers in the Informal Economy, WIEGO May 2015.[5]

Myth: Street vendors don't pay taxes.

Fact: Street vendors commonly pay a variety of taxes, fees and levies to governments. A study conducted in 10 cities[4] found that nearly two-thirds of the street vendors sampled pay for a license, permit or access to public space. In addition, in many countries vendors pay VAT (value-added tax) when they purchase goods to re-sell.

Myth: **Street vendors contribute to "crime and grime" in cities.**

Fact: **Street vendors repeatedly point out that crime and dirty environments are bad for their businesses.** Because of this, street vendors often self-organize to keep their workplaces clean and safe, often using their own time and resources to do so. Also, street vendors have often been involved in preventing crime by reporting suspicious activity that they see from their vending spaces. For example, in 2010, a street vendor prevented a bombing in New York City's Times Square by alerting authorities about activity that did not look right.



Myth: **Street vendors buy and sell illegal products.**

Fact: **The vast majority of vendors buy and sell goods that are legal.** These include fruits and vegetables, prepared food, basic household goods and others.

What is missing here?

Think back to the responses you listed above about "what they say we are" and "what we really are." Are there any other myths you can break open?

What are some examples of street vendors organizations successfully defending their right to vend in public space?

In **Lima, Peru** in 2013, street vendors worked with the city to create a new ordinance on street trade. Vendors and city officials met regularly to talk about the ordinance, and to work together to make sure that the new rules took into account the needs and experiences of the street vendors. In the end, many of the vendors' ideas were used in the ordinance, but after that the city administration changed they stopped talks with the vendors. The new ordinance wasn't put in practice as the vendors hoped, and they are still facing many challenges like evictions and bribes. In 2018, vendors across Lima are mobilizing to demand the city work with them again to come up with solutions that benefit both sides.

In **Ahmedbad, India** the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) built a strong street vendors' movement. When a new law was passed in India in 2014, which required city officials to consult with street vendors about public space management, SEWA went into action. They pressured local government to create a committee (town vending committee) where they were able to have a voice in developing a street vending plan for the city, which defines clear areas for vending.

In **Chiang Rai, Thailand** the city government formed an Informal Employment Working Group where city officials and street vendors can meet regularly to discuss street vending and public space management in the city. Since they have been participating in the working group, the city's two main street vending organizations have grown in membership. Through the group, they have been able to successfully propose and implement new ideas with the city, like expanding a Saturday market to include one more day of the week.

Act: Link up with organizations, make your voices heard

Get organized: In this document we have tried to provide some general information about a street vendor's right to work in public space. However, the **specific regulations that govern street vending, and the rights that you are entitled to as a street vendor, are different in different places.** And so are the options that you have to challenge government actions and decisions that affect your rights. The best way to learn more about the regulations and rights that affect you, and to work collectively to defend those rights, is to join a street vendor organization. Or, if you are already part of an organization, you will want to be sure your organization is strong and links up with other organizations to call for change in a unified voice.

Street vendors are organizing all over the world, and usually multiple organizations exist even within the same city. To find an organization near you, sometimes the best strategy is to ask other street vendors. You can also search on this database for organizations in your area: http://www.wiego.org/wiegodatabase/search

Organization is strength. Through organizing and collective action you can work to:

- Speak with a unified voice to pressure government officials to sit down and speak with you about your experiences, needs and demands.
- Raise awareness about your sector and the issues you face through collective action.
- Find key allies that can support your organization in its struggle, including the international street vendor organization StreetNet International.

Once you are organized, your organization will need to fight for the right to direct representation in collective negotiations. Because the rights of self-employed workers like you to collective negotiations are not well recognized yet, new forums for negotiation will probably need to be established, and you may find

yourself having to fight to establish them. Where forums already exist, you may have to fight for them to be reformed to make sure they serve the needs of street vendors, not only the needs of local authorities.

Get to know the laws that affect you and the ways you can defend your rights: As we discussed in this document, local government authorities make decisions and take actions that affect street vendors and other workers who work on public space: like carrying out evictions or issuing or refusing to issue permits and defining and allocating trading space. Most countries have laws that say how government authorities must make these decisions and take these actions. These laws include the Constitution, national laws and even municipal laws. It is important to learn what laws apply in your country or locality, and what rights these laws give to workers like you when government officials violate them.

For example, in South Africa, administrative law requires decision-makers to make decisions that are lawful and reasonable, and to follow a fair procedure. If a decision-maker makes a decision the law does not allow them to make, or if they fail to give the worker a chance to state their case, street vendors can go to court to have the decision thrown out. In such cases, the court will order the decision-maker to make a new decision.

You can look for information about laws that affect you:

- At municipal offices
- At municipal libraries
- On the websites of local authorities
- From the offices of supportive organizations, like legal non-profit organizations or organizations of street vendors

Thank you for reading through this document! We hope you enjoyed it. For a list of resources to learn more about the topics we discussed, turn over to the last page of this document or visit http://www.wiego.org/cities/PS

Find resources: The global network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and StreetNet International have created many resources for use by informal workers and their organizations. You can find all of these resources online at this address: http://www.wiego.org/cities/PS

Six organizing manuals for workers in the informal economy (also available in French, Portuguese and Spanish): This series of resource books on organizing in the informal economy provides organizers of informal workers with practical ideas and tools based on real experiences from around the world.

The Only School We Have: Learning from Organizing Experiences Across the Informal Economy: Another resource on organizing is this guidebook for building membership-based organizations with success stories from around the world.

Information on a model framework for local level collective bargaining: This document provides ideas on the type of collective bargaining system that street traders and their organisations could fight for. The ideas in the document come from research that was commissioned by StreetNet into collective bargaining experiences of street traders and their organizations in Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), India, Kenya, Malawi, Nicaragua, Senegal and Spain.

StreetNet International: Find out more about the StreetNet, the international network of street vendors.

References:

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