



**'World Class Cities' and the Urban Informal Economy:
Inclusive Planning for the Working Poor**
Durban, South Africa
24-25 April 2006

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Very little is known about millions of waste pickers who “scavenge” on dumps and in streets around the world, pushing rickety trolleys, bent under heavy loads and toiling with torn sacks. Most begin their work well before the sun rises and are still found sorting their findings late into the night.

Yet, despite a courageous bid to survive, these important contributors to many of the world’s informal economies are, at best, unnoticed and ignored. At worst, they are shunned and reviled as backward and dirty.

WEIGO’s Chris Bonner says very little is known about this most vulnerable of groups both internationally and locally. Although it is estimated that two percent of populations in developing countries manage to stay alive by collecting what more affluent people regard as garbage, they are seldom even considered by local governments and policy makers. Many even play pivotal roles in cleaning cities and promoting recycling yet struggle under a load of dirt and disease.

That’s why Bonner says the international meeting of global research and advocacy network of WIEGO and the international colloquium entitled World Class Cities and the Urban Informal Economy (see information attached) to be held in Durban from April 21 to 23 is crucial. “We need to provide vital information and identify people who can help research this important sector. It is crucial to put these people on international agendas. We need to find out more.”





**'World Class Cities' and the Urban Informal Economy:
Inclusive Planning for the Working Poor**

Durban, South Africa

24-25 April 2006

While, in South Africa, waste pickers living near dumps or rummaging through neighbourhood bins are often seen as a source of embarrassment, their counterparts in India and Latin America are now beginning to gain an international voice. Many are organising to express their most basic needs, defend themselves against crooked middlemen who exploit them to make large profits and even begin to impact on urban planning.

For example, in Columbia, the Cooperativa Recuperar has 1 000 waste picker members who can now obtain loans, receive life and accident insurance and benefit from formal contracts to collect, transport and dispose of solid waste. In the Indian city of Pune, a union of 5 000 waste pickers was recently authorized to carry out daily door-to-door garbage collections from residential and commercial areas.

In Ahmedabad, the Self Employed Womens' Association is providing members with tools to pick up garbage, aprons and bags and has negotiated with municipalities to provide identity cards. This is just one of many fascinating topics that will be highlighted at the international colloquium by speakers such as Martin Medina, an academic and activist from Brazil and Luxmi Narayan, a leading organiser for a network of waste pickers in India.

Overall, the colloquium, jointly hosted by StreetNet International, WIEGO and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, will spotlight key controversies surrounding the management and regulation of informal economic activity and support for informal workers. Presentations will cover important initiatives such as the Ahmedabad slum upgrading project and Durban's Warwick Junction





**'World Class Cities' and the Urban Informal Economy:
Inclusive Planning for the Working Poor**

Durban, South Africa

24-25 April 2006

improvement initiative (and include a fascinating field trip that will give a real life view of this all important project).

- ends -

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The proposed International Urban Policies Colloquium will be jointly hosted by the global research policy network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (or WIEGO), Streetnet International, an international alliance of street vendor associations and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa on April 24 and 25, 2006. It will bring together approximately 150 stakeholders - including city managers, officials from economic development departments of local, provincial and national governments, academics, activists from international informal worker organizations and trade unions, civil society leaders and representatives from international development agencies. The Colloquium will coincide with and follow on from WIEGO's fourth general meeting (previous ones have been held in Ahmedabad, Ottawa, and Boston).

ISSUED BY: THE WIEGO GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESS OFFICE

DATE: 24/03/2006

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Call 083 301 2809

