



**POLICIES FOR FORMALIZATION: A
GENDER FOCUS**

SONIA DIAS / WIEGO WASTE SPECIALIST

INFORMALITY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THREE PAIRS OF KEY FACTS

❑ **Informality & Poverty**

- ❑ Most informal workers are poor; most working poor are informally employed
- ❑ Earnings are low and costs-plus-risks are high, on average, in the informal economy

❑ **Informality & Gender**

- ❑ Higher percentage of women workers than men workers are informally employed in 3 out of 5 developing regions; but *men comprise the majority of the informal workforce in all regions* due to relatively low female labour force participation rates.
- ❑ Women are concentrated in the lowest-earning segments of informal employment in all regions

❑ **Informal Economy & Cities**

- ❑ Informal economy = broad base of urban workforce, enterprises and output
- ❑ As cities modernize they are becoming increasingly hostile to the informal economy, penalizing or criminalizing informal workers + undermining or destroying their livelihood activities

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: WIEGO'S PERSPECTIVE AND POSITION

- ❑ WIEGO's perspective on WEE is informed by:
 - ❑ Our close collaborations with organizations of informal workers, including the leaders and women members;
 - ❑ Our grounded knowledge of informal workers and their livelihoods.
- ❑ Women workers are more likely than men workers to be informally employed and, within the informal workforce, women face specific disadvantages and discrimination.



Justina Mokena (l) and Liberia Mapesmoawe (r) in Boitshepi Landfill, South Africa
Photo: Jonathan Torgovik – Getty Images

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN INFORMAL WORKERS

- For the WIEGO network, empowerment refers to the *process of change* that gives working poor women – as individual workers and as members of worker organizations – the *ability to gain access to and exercise influence or control* over the:
 - **resources** they need for their work;
 - **markets or value chains** they operate in;
 - **wider policy, regulatory, and institutional environments** that shape their livelihoods and lives;
 - **representative organizations**, including the promotion of gender equality within unions, cooperative movements, etc.
- Strengthening women’s leadership within MBOs is key to a broader view of empowerment: economic, symbolic, political

WASTE PICKERS: FACTS, CONTRIBUTIONS & THREATS

- There are millions of waste pickers around the world saving the planet by: recycling; by creating their own green *jobs*; and sustaining the entire recycling industry.
- According to WB estimates, 1- 2% of the urban working poor earn a living by handling waste.
- 2010 UN Habitat publication: waste pickers perform between 50-100 per cent of all ongoing waste collection in most cities in developing countries at no cost to the city budget.



WASTE PICKERS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SECTOR & COMMON THREATS

- A significant number of waste pickers are women and some are children. In some cities in India, for example, about 90 per cent of door-to-door waste pickers are women.
- Both men and women wps receive low earnings despite their contributions as environmental agents and service provider.
- WPs face abuse and harassment from authorities
- WPs face discrimination from society
- WPs may face intimidation and harassment from intermediaries.
- Livelihoods are threatened by privatization.

Formalization needs to factor in a livelihoods perspective



Woman waste picker from SWaCH Cooperative in Pune, India.

VOICES FROM THE GROUND: FORMALIZATION THREATS



Landfill in Ahmedabad, India

“I have been working at the dumping ground in Ahmedabad for 30 years. My mother-in-law picked waste for a living, and so does my daughter-in-law...”

“There is less waste and less money now and more wastepickers. We have no access to waste, most of which goes into the new company. Door to door collection has now started and we have not been included in it.”

“The new company employs outsiders for work, but they do not employ us, why is that? Our sons know driving too, why not employ them?”

**~ Kanta Narsingh , woman waste picker -
SEWA**

EXPERIENCES FROM THE GROUND: BRAZILIAN COOPERATIVES

- ❑ In Brazil, cooperatives have been the alternative to formalizing waste pickers.
- ❑ Women comprise the majority of waste pickers in cooperatives (56 per cent women / 44 per cent men)
- ❑ Cooperatives may be more conducive for women because it allows them more flexibility given women's double and triple work shifts.
- ❑ However, higher concentrations of women waste pickers in cooperatives did not necessarily lead to gender equality for several reasons.

WHY TAKE A GENDER APPROACH TO WASTE?

- ❑ Women might not be allowed access to recyclables with the highest value.
- ❑ Women are often exposed to specific health risks due to biological needs (including lack of proper sanitary and salubrious work conditions).
- ❑ Gender, race, ethnicity and other identities play a role in shaping inequality.
- ❑ Women may not occupy positions of authority within their communities or organizations. And when and if women do, they may not be fully respected.
- ❑ Asymmetrical power relations at the household level affect women's abilities to take part in public committees or to exercise leadership within their representative organizations. Women are responsible for raising children and maintaining the household, limiting their time and energy for taking up leadership opportunities.
- ❑ When waste picking activity is formalized, women often do not enjoy the same opportunities as men for fair earnings. Data on formalized waste pickers in Brazil reveals this distinction: 80% are men and 20% women (RAIS database, Brazil, 2006)

GENDER DYNAMICS: AN INVISIBLE DIMENSION



The idea of building women's leadership was still largely ignored at the national movements of waste pickers until recently:

“We are very active in our coops, but when it comes to power positions at the national movement we face constraints.”
(woman wp leader).



In this sense, economic empowerment did not necessarily mean political empowerment.

In 2012, the Gender & Waste Research Action Project was developed in Brazil.

GENDER WASTE PROJECT TIMELINE – FRAMING THE PROJECT



First talks with women



Informal talks with women from Redesol & Cataunidos

Half day workshop with women from Redesol & Cataunidos

Feedback session at W&C Festival



Nicaragua meeting

Informal talks at the national women's meeting in Curitiba

Various meetings with women leaders" - June -August 2012

Participatory project drafting - June –September 2012

Literature review: June-August 2012



GENDER & WASTE PROJECT IN A NUTSHELL

Objectives:

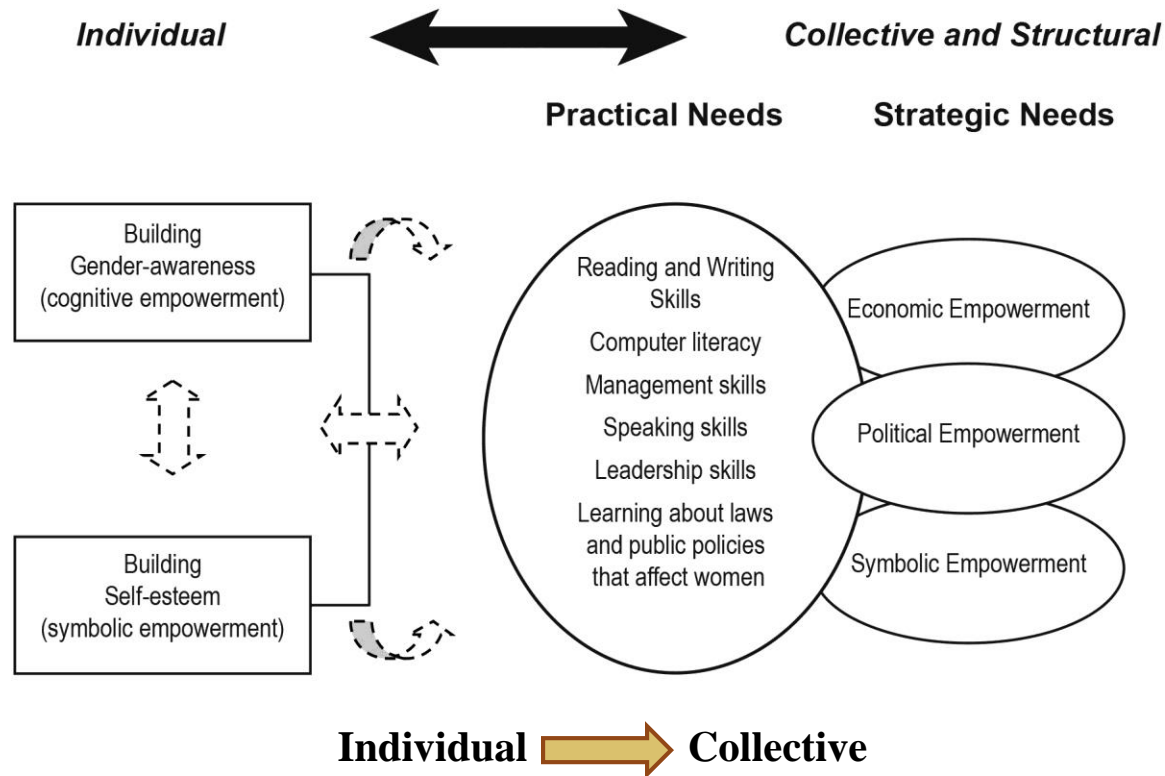
- Increase women's leadership roles within organizations
- Raise Gender-Awareness within organizations and national movement
- Foster Individual and Collective Empowerment (economic, political and symbolic)



How:

- Involving women in all phases
- Engaging multiple partners and expertise
- Collaborative coordination involving all partners especially waste pickers
- Regional Workshops sessions
- Production of key resources, such as gender toolkits
- Ongoing communication

CONNECTING GENDER AWARENESS AND LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT



Began with women's situated experiences – Home, Cooperatives, Movement to Strengthen women's self-worth and shared understanding of which resources (Practical Needs) that can lead to broader levels of empowerment (Strategic Needs) so as to begin challenging structural and institutional practices.

MAKING WOMEN'S VOICES VISIBLE: SYMBOLIC EMPOWERMENT

“If I hadn't known the movement perhaps I would not have been exposed to this gender discussion [...] I may not be alive today.”

“This was beneficial, sometimes we are embarrassed of expressing ourselves. Here we felt comfortable.”

➔ **Significant moment for women to claim their value as mothers, wives, workers, activists.**

➔ **Emphasis on the idea that women's empowerment may begin at the individual level, but must be linked to collective action within their organizations and movement**

“As an activist in the movement, as a woman, as a waste picker, the discussions on gender all feed into each other in the following way because we have the conviction that when we are all there, women [coming from] various places and with different stories have shown us they were capable of overcoming [hardships]. This encourages [us] more and more, [encourages] this activist, that we have to continue struggling, that it is possible.”

PROJECT SNAPSHOTS: REGIONAL EXPLORATORY WORKSHOPS



MAIN TENETS: ADDRESSING PRACTICAL NEEDS AND MOVING BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT

“We don’t know how to read, we have ears [...] we cannot be scared of being leaders. I’m not afraid because I can’t read”.

“Sometimes it is complicated, we are leaders of a cooperative and a job like this requires us to give orders to men, right? So sometimes it is difficult for us to delegate responsibilities, and so sometimes there are confrontations and such but I was able to deal really well with this confrontation.”

➔ Recent activities involving women’s leadership skills have given women more confidence in managing their cooperatives. ***Learning practical skills such as public speaking and how to manage conflicts*** not only empowers women within the workplace, but can also improve the trust, respect and social ties among men and women.

GENDER EQUALITY = MNCR'S IDEALS

“This project gave us hope to take it to the bases. We need to make changes. As women continue to produce this sexist thought, we won't change. We know it is a slow process. Women have to change.”

➔ Building gender-awareness is not disconnected from the MNCR's general ideals as a social movement.



VOICES FROM THE GROUND: GENDER AUTONOMY



“I started to work as waste picker in an open dump at the age of seven. It was from this place that my family earned a living. My life changed when at the age of 37 I learned about the existence of the National Waste Pickers Movement. This changed my life completely and inspired us to create a cooperative in my city, Itaúna.”

“Now we have achieved recognition and the municipality has contracted our cooperative to provide selective waste collection (...) Later we found out that women had to talk about autonomy at home, at the workplace, in our social movements.”

~ Madalena Duarte, leader MNCR, Brazil

LEARNINGS

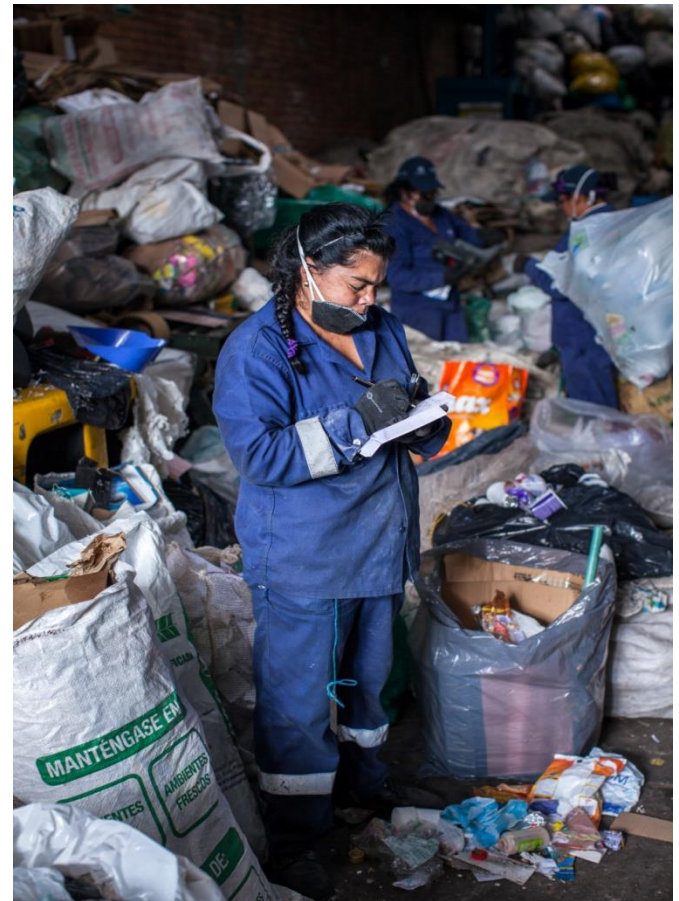
- Other factors related to exclusion: gender, class, race, ethnicity, caste, sexuality, age.
- Formalization might lead to extra work for women: we need to **allow “pedagogical” time for women to get involved** from the outset of projects/interventions. We often forget that poor women are overloaded and need time to be actively involved.
- Transformation happens at the local level but **“trans-local links”** might also be relevant. Links between women in Belo Horizonte with women in Colombia has inspired important exchanges of ideas and practices. Colombians are raising gender issues within their cooperatives with learnings from Brazil’s experience.
- Raising gender awareness has encouraged women to become more involved in the administration of their coops, to participate in the politics of their own movement, and to engage in other social struggles.

FORMALIZATION AND GENDER

- ❑ WIEGO's efforts to raise the voice and visibility of waste pickers has included the support for both men and women waste pickers and their MBOS because there is a threat to the occupation as a whole.
- ❑ We are now beginning to address gender issues through a broader lens.
 - ❑ Understand how women informal workers are affected by gender discrimination;
 - ❑ Understand how women can confront these dimensions of discrimination within their occupation as a whole and within their representative organizations.
- ❑ Comparative research on advantages/disadvantages of different organizational forms (associations/coops/micro enterprises/unions) might be useful to understand which (if any) is more favourable for the formalization of women waste pickers.

COOPERATIVES, FORMALIZATION AND GENDER

- **Cooperatives and decent work:**
 - Tackle social and economic exclusion of marginalized groups;
 - Create ways to extend social protection for informal workers;
 - Play a role in enhancing channels of social dialogue and political negotiations;
 - Contribute to rights at work by mitigating risky conditions of economically vulnerable workers;
 - Raising gender awareness needs to be comprehensive in order to truly empower women.



Carmenza Mora, ARB, Bogotá, Colombia
Photo: Juan Arredondo – Getty Images

COOPERATIVES, FORMALIZATION AND GENDER

- ❑ Legal framework that recognizes access to waste as a livelihood resource;
- ❑ Provision of proper contracts (covenants, memoranda of understanding, and others);
- ❑ Payment for collection and environmental services (“diversion rate”);
- ❑ Provision of infrastructure for sorting and capacity-building;
- ❑ Social protection schemes;
- ❑ Dedicated programmes to address gender equality and specific risks (child labour, childcare);
- ❑ Platforms that ensure fair representation and real influence for workers.

VOICES FROM THE GROUND

THE STORY OF MATILDE, WASTEPICKER LEADER FROM BRAZIL

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB96Tzs1Hh0>

Millions of informal waste workers around the world demand:

Respect and Comprehensive policies



For more information, visit our site:

www.wiego.org and www.inclusivecities.org

Please contact:

sonia.dias@wiego.org and soniamdias2010@gmail.com

