



Women in Informal Employment:  
Globalizing and Organizing

## MBO NEWSLETTER

MAY 2022

A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations  
of Informal Workers

Produced by: WIEGO Organization and Representation Programme

# Taking a Stand

## Building global organizations and more

**Workers in the informal economy are making their mark globally.** In this edition, we show how they are doing this – from participating together in United Nations forums and building global organizations, to strengthening national organizations from the bottom up.

**Enjoy reading the stories!**

**Please give us feedback on the MBO Newsletter by filling in the survey on page 16. And remember to send in your own organizing stories. Email them to Sope Ogunrinde at [sope.ogunrinde@wiego.org](mailto:sope.ogunrinde@wiego.org)**

## Global Networks Stress Democracy in Social and Solidarity Economy

The Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is among topics up for discussion when representatives of workers, governments and employers meet at the International Labour Conference (ILC) from 30th May to 9th June. A delegation from the global network organizations will take part in the SSE discussion virtually.

In preparation for the ILC discussion, WIEGO and the global network organizations jointly produced a position paper that proposes that democracy within SSE entities should be emphasized, and that the principles of the Social and Solidarity Economy should be mainstreamed in economic policies so as to root out the causes of unemployment, marginalization and environmental degradation.

The Social and Solidarity Economy is widely understood to mean economic development that puts people and the planet above profit. Examples of SSE entities are cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations and social enterprises.

But there are disagreements about whether democracy in the work process is a requirement of an SSE entity. Many employers and governments see SSE entities as an extension of the private sector and are not interested in seeing a transformation in work relationships.

**We will report the outcomes of the ILC discussion in our next edition.**

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## Breakthrough as Plastics Treaty Statement Recognizes Waste Pickers' Work

In a historical moment for waste pickers, the Plastics Treaty to End Plastic Pollution statement [notes](#) that waste pickers' contribution in collecting, sorting and recycling plastics is recognized, and that the best practices in informal and cooperative settings must serve as lessons for all. The [moment](#) that the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA5.2) approved the adoption of a mandate to negotiate the treaty was hailed as a victory as it is the first time that informal recyclers have been mentioned in a UN environmental resolution.

Representing labour interests at the assembly, the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers (Global Rec) delegate and president of the Asociación Movimiento Nacional de Recicladores de Chile (ANARCH), Soledad Mella, read a [statement](#) at the plenary calling for the recognition of waste pickers in international legally binding instrument on plastics pollution. **Governments at UNEA5.2 formally agreed to negotiate by 2024 a global plastics treaty, an internationally legal binding instrument designed to end plastic pollution, and to establish a science-based policy panel on chemicals and waste.**

**Soledad Mella was among the Global Rec delegation at the UNEA 5.2 in Nairobi, Kenya**, which gave all member states and stakeholders an opportunity to share best practices for sustainability and create momentum for governments to build back better through green and sustainable recovery plans, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

PP12 *his* Recognizing the significant contribution made by workers under informal and cooperative settings to collecting, sorting and recycling plastics in many countries (Agreed ad ref)

OP3 (a) quarter Lessons learned and best practices, including those from informal and cooperative settings (Agreed ad ref)

Read more about the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers' [participation](#).

## Taking Part in CSW66

The 66th session of the United Nation's [Commission on the Status of Women](#) took place from March 13-25. Worker leaders and representatives of the [Global Alliance of Waste Pickers](#) (GlobalRec), [International Domestic Workers Federation](#) (IDWF), [HomeNet International](#), [StreetNet International](#) and WIEGO [participated](#) in the virtual conference parallel events. **The theme was achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.**



In addition to these events, the [Virtual Artisan Fair](#), set up as an online marketplace, was open to all attendees throughout the forum. For the first time, HomeNet International members, including HomeNet Thailand Brand, Sabah Nepal, Sadhna, among other great shops, had their products available online.

## Home-based Workers in Africa Plan to Develop and Grow Regional Organization

The Africa Regional Platform of home-based workers held both physical and virtual meetings, involving 168 home-based workers representing their constituencies in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, to develop its inaugural strategic plan. A five-year strategic plan for the Platform was developed during the meetings, which were held on December 2-3, 2021, and February 22-24, 2022.

Home-based workers in Africa have a vision of building their own representative organization to address their needs as over-burdened women workers. **The strategic plan is based on five key pillars to be achieved over the next five years.**

- Formalization of the regional platform through the adoption of a constitution and election of leaders.
  - Addressing the need for wider market access through collective and improved marketing.
  - Improving home-based workers' lives by addressing their social and economic needs.
  - Growing the membership of the Platform across Africa, so as to become fully representative of the continent.
  - Improving the quality of products for better market access and improved livelihoods.
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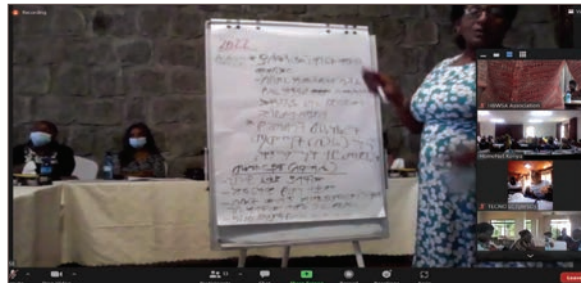
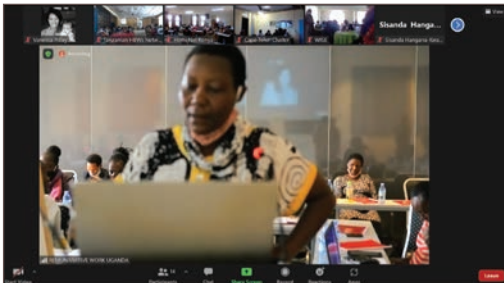
**The Africa Regional Platform** invited HomeNet International, HomeNet South Asia and the International Domestic Workers' Federation to share their experiences of organization building that collectively span more than 25 years.

The most important outcome of the planning discussion was coming to appreciate the progress that home-based workers have made over the past decade in organizing from local to regional level for greater visibility and a collective voice.

There are active networks in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda at different levels of organization building.

HomeNet Kenya was launched in December 2020. Ngalo Buwereza Organisation was registered in Uganda in February 2022, at the same time that Home-based Workers' South Africa Association was born. Tanzania has a growing national network and home-based workers in Ethiopia are active members of WISE, an organization for women in self-employment.

The Africa Regional Platform adopted its logo as part of formalizing its regional identity.



Photos:  
Vanessa Pillay

## Developing a Constitution for an International Waste Pickers' MBO

Waste picker MBOs across the world agreed in 2020 that a democratic Constitution needs to be developed for a global waste pickers' organization, to be adopted at a launch congress. This was seen as a key step in the global recognition and accreditation of waste picker representatives in international negotiating structures such as the International Labour Conference of the ILO (International Labour Organization).

**The Waste Pickers' Global Advisory Committee set up a committee to develop a constitution and the first draft was ready in July 2021.**

After comments by national and regional organizations, a second draft was ready in December and this is being worked on by national and regional organizations with a view to having the third draft ready in May 2022. A virtual launch congress will then be held.

After the global organization has been launched through the adoption of a constitution, the tasks for the following 12 to 18 months will include establishing a transitional acting working committee to admit affiliates according to constitutional procedures, and preparing for an elective congress. After this, the global organization will set up a secretariat and can apply for accreditation for the ILC.



## Home-Based Workers South Africa Association is Born

The journey began with just a few home-based workers organizing into local clusters in two South African cities – Cape Town and Durban. The clusters gradually extended to another four provinces as WIEGO partnered with the International Labour Organization to find more home-based workers through a media campaign inviting workers to become part of a database.

**Since 2020 home-based workers in South Africa have been coming together via WhatsApp.** They were eventually able to meet each other in a national workshop in Johannesburg from February 11–16, 2022.

Participants came from Cape Town, Durban, and from cities and towns in the provinces of Eastern Cape, North West, Limpopo and Gauteng. Some were members of cooperatives, some were own-account workers, and some were Cut Make and Trim (CMT) sub-contractors. But the challenges they face as home-based workers were common.



**Participants were introduced to worker education materials and other resources that gave them a regional and global perspective of their value as workers.** By the end of the five-day workshop, the 29 workers had taken their two-year organizing via WhatsApp a step further by agreeing their priority organizing issues, their interim organizational form and planning an extensive recruitment drive to begin immediately after the workshop.

And so Home-Based Workers South Africa Association was born with a greater appreciation of common issues and challenges and with the great resolve that home-based workers will no longer be hidden from each other, from their communities and from the government because they contribute to the economy from their backyards where they make a living.



Photo: Vanessa Pillay

## Waste Pickers Take Over Superintendency of Public Services in Colombia

**In early March, more than 5,000 waste pickers from different parts of Colombia, led by the National Association of Waste Pickers (ANR), peacefully took over the facilities of the Superintendence of Public Services for three days to protest the withholding of their payments by this “supervisory entity” and to demand changes in national recycling regulations.**

The path for formalization set out in these regulations puts the onus on waste pickers to comply with all requirements, without an equal responsibility for compliance on the part of the other actors involved in waste management, or support from the authorities. Failure to address these issues will result not just in the displacement of waste pickers in recycling, but will be a step backwards on earlier gains.

Thanks to pressure from organized waste pickers, a negotiation table was set up with national authorities in charge of the formalization process. This led to the dismantling of several (not all) requirements applied to waste picker organizations that were designed for formal actors.

Also, the **Ministry of Labour** set up technical roundtable engagements to discuss legal labour regimes and special social protection floors for waste pickers and their organizations. The Ministry of Housing, City and Territory and the tariff entity made constructive commitments too.



Photos: Federico Parra



## Urgent Call to Support Ukrainian SNI Affiliate

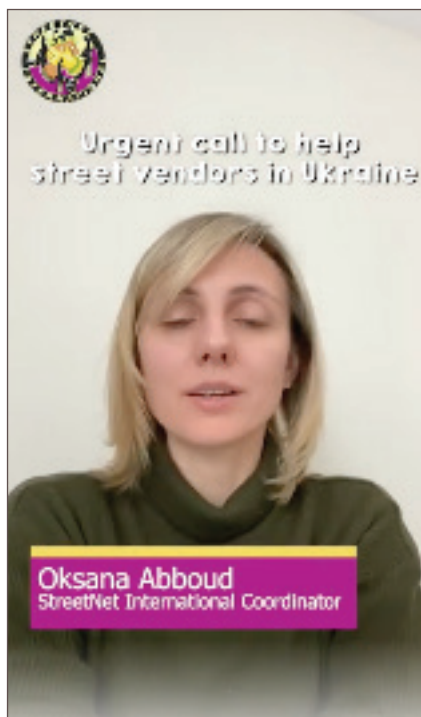
StreetNet International (SNI) has set up a solidarity fund that is providing immediate economic assistance to members of their affiliate, the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (VPPU). Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, StreetNet International has been in constant communication with VPPU, a union of 20,000 market vendors and small-scale entrepreneurs.

The union's work over the past decade has guaranteed employment to informal economy workers, especially in Kyiv where most members are based.

**We are counting on your solidarity to make this possible.**

Donate here:

[GivenGain.com](https://www.givengain.com)



## Domestic Workers in South Africa Unite for Rights

Forty domestic workers from three organizations in South Africa met to develop a campaign for the implementation of domestic worker rights to unemployment insurance as well as to compensation for injuries and death in the workplace. The February national workshop in Johannesburg was funded by UN Women and facilitated by WIEGO, and the organizations represented were the South African Domestic and Services Workers Union (SADSAWU), the United Domestic Workers Union of South Africa (UDWUSA), and Izwi Domestic Workers Alliance.



Photo: Jane Barrett

Officials from both the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Worker Compensation Fund attended the workshop and promised to work with the three organizations to ensure that domestic workers are registered by their employers for both funds.

**Three provincial workshops have been held since the national meeting to extend the campaign's reach.**

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Photo: Jane Barrett



## MBO Resources

### May Day 2022: Workers in Informal Employment Demand Action So That No One is Left Behind.

WIEGO and the Nets – International Domestic Workers Federation, Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, HomeNet International and StreetNet International – issued a joint statement calling on governments to invest in labour and social protection and recognize organizations of workers in the informal economy as partners.

Watch [global May Day celebrations](#) with LabourStart.



**“The traffic officers take us as a source of income, they find all means to extort money from us. Even when you have all the requirements you need to ride in town (...) they still create a fake reason and arrest you.”**

**The cooperative Kambe Sacco fosters solidarity among riders and helps them stand for their rights against authorities' abuse.**

From Health Care to Helmets: Common Concerns at the Heart of Cooperatives  Listen to our podcast

The WIEGO and Streetnet International research project **“New Forms of Social Insurance for the Economic Inclusion of Women & Young Informal Workers”** has produced a series of [podcasts](#) in English and French, *From Health Care to Helmets: Common Concerns at the Heart of Cooperatives*.

### Please fill in our MBO Newsletter Survey

We would love to know how you find the MBO Newsletter! [Please click here to fill in a short survey](#), which has only seven multiple-choice questions.