

**WIEGO GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018**  
**KEYNOTE ADDRESS – MARTY CHEN**  
**November 13, 2018**

Good afternoon!!!

Many thanks to Renana Jhabvala, WIEGO Chair, and Sally Roever, WIEGO International Coordinator, for inviting me to speak to you this afternoon.

**TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

I feel *so blessed* to have co-founded and led WIEGO for 20 years and to have worked with all of you. Twenty years ago, I would never in my wildest dreams have imagined that *130* people from *41* countries – including representatives from *40* organizations of informal workers - would be gathered here today in Johannesburg, South Africa for the 7<sup>th</sup>. General Assembly of WIEGO. I am overcome with *joy* - and with *gratitude* to all of you, the members of WIEGO – each of you has contributed to making the WIEGO Network what it is today.

One of the real blessings of working with WIEGO for me personally – and for all of us – has been the opportunity to work in South Africa. We were all inspired by the brave struggle of our South African colleagues for political freedom from Apartheid. And we continue to be inspired by the on-going struggle of informal workers in South Africa for what Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA and founding chair of WIEGO, calls the *Second Freedom – Economic Freedom*. And we feel blessed to have so many WIEGO network members, team members, partners and allies in South Africa. Also, I should note that this is the *second* WIEGO General Assembly in South Africa – we held our 3<sup>rd</sup>. General Assembly in Durban in 2006. So please join me in thanking South Africa and our South African colleagues. *Thank you, South Africa!!* And please join me in the rallying call of the freedom struggle in this country: Power to the People!!!

*Amandla Awethu (3 times)*

I would like to share with you some highlights from the first two decades of WIEGO

I would like to acknowledge the roles that all of you have played in building the WIEGO Network. *And, while recognizing the challenges ahead, I would like to reaffirm my faith that working together – with trust and solidarity, with organization and voice, and with support from allies - informal workers will claim a better future – a more just and equal world.*

But first I want to pay tribute to the vision – and the wisdom - of WIEGO’s founders. There were 10 founders in all - labor activists, academics, and practitioners. Each of us had worked on the informal economy for many years. We met in Bellagio, Italy in April 1997 to plan a program in

support of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. The *WIEGO Network today exceeds our wildest dreams*. But the key decisions we took 21.5 years ago have *stood the test of time*.

The *problem statement* of our founders is still valid today: that most public resources and public services are targeted at formal workers while most policy and legal constraints are targeted at informal workers.

The *vision* of our founders still inspires: that with stronger organizations, greater representation, and increased visibility in official statistics, the working poor in the informal economy can demand a more equal and just policy environment – and their fair share of public resources.

The *governance structure* proposed by our founders still holds and is reflected here today: that WIEGO's membership and board of directors should come from three constituencies – organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy and development practitioners also working on the informal economy.

Finally, the *rather cumbersome name* chosen by our founders – Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing – proved to be *prescient*: - who would have predicted – not even Joann Vanek - that “*informal employment*” would become an official international statistical concept with its own definition?!!!

## **HIGHLIGHTS OF FIRST TWO DECADES**

Together we have accomplished so much in the past two decades - I don't know where to start. I hope you have had a chance to review the WIEGO timeline and add highlights of your organizations. Let me highlight some of our collective achievements in terms of the three Vs of WIEGO's model of change: Voice + Visibility + Validity

### **The First V is for Voice - collective representative voice**

Organization – the organizations and networks of informal workers in the WIEGO Network have affiliates in 90 countries with around 5 million members

Collective Representative Voice – representative leaders from these organizations and networks have been *active members of delegations to multiple global events*. Please stand up & remain standing if you participated in any of the following global policy dialogues:

#### **Climate change negotiations - *WPs***

#### **International Labour Conferences = ILCs for short**

- 2002 ILC General Discussion on Decent Work and the Informal Economy – *different IWs*
- 2010-11 ILCs Standard Setting Discussion on Decent Work and Domestic Workers - *DWs*

- 2013 ILC General Discussion on Sustainable Development, Green Jobs and Decent Work - *WPs*
- 2014-15 ILCs Standard Setting Discussion on Formalization of the Informal Economy – *different IWs*
- 2016 ILC General Discussion on Global Supply Chains - *HWs*

**World Urban Forums & Habitat III:** preparatory meetings & summit - *different IWs*

*Join me in a round of applause for this group of informal worker leaders for their impact on the global stage. Thank you!*

Informal worker leaders have also participated in multiple policy dialogues at the city-level:

Please stand up and remain standing if you have taken part in policy dialogues in any of the following cities:

Ahmedabad, India

Accra, Ghana

Bangkok, Thailand

Bogota, Colombia

Buenos Aires, Argentina

Cape Town, South Africa

Dakar, Senegal

Delhi, India

Durban, South Africa

Joburg, South Africa

Lima, Peru

Mexico City, Mexico

Montevideo, Uruguay

Other cities I have left out

*Join me in a round of applause for this group of informal worker leaders for their impact on the national and local stage.*

*Also, join me in a rallying call of the workers' movement in Latin America: "United Workers will never be Defeated"*

*Trabajadores unidos, jamás serán vencidos (3 times)*

**The Second V in WIEGO's model of change is Visibility** – visibility in official statistics & policy research

Ela Bhatt and Renana Jhabvala of SEWA taught us all *that statistics in the hands of workers is power*. But even in our wildest dreams, we never imagined that WIEGO would help produce the first-ever global estimates of informal employment. But, thanks to more than two decades of collaboration with the ILO, we now have *global estimates* of informal employment. We now know that *61% of all workers worldwide* – a total of *2 billion workers* – are informally employed.

We also never imagined that the WIEGO Network would generate such a wealth of knowledge on the informal economy. Please stand up and remain standing if you took part in any of the following joint research studies:

Global Economic Crises: 2009 – 12 cities = no cushion to fall back on

IEMS 2012: 10 cities – ground-level insights on 3 drivers of urban informality: economic policies/trends + policies and practices of city government & local officials + supply chain dynamics and relationships

Informal Economy Budget Analysis: Ghana, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines South Africa, budget allocations often are non-transparent and remain underspent + tax contributions of IWs remain unrecognized

Technology and Informal Workers: Ahmedabad, Durban and Lima – everyday technologies very basic + city-level systems have major impact

Health and Informal Workers: Ahmedabad, Bangkok and Durban – supply side constraints for instance, registration for health facility near place of residence not place of work

Occupational Health and Safety: Brazil, Ghana India, Thailand, Zanzibar - OHS risks are high + OHS protections are few in the IE

Any other WIEGO research study!!

**Let's have a round of applause for our research partners!!!**

**The third V in the WIEGO model of change is Validity** – by which we mean that informal workers are recognized as workers, as legitimate economic actors, who contribute to the economy, to the environment, to society

Informal workers have gained validity at the global, national and local levels

*IWs have achieved Validity on the Global Stage*

### **ILO Conventions – which mandate worker rights and benefits for informal workers**

- C177 for Homeworkers (adopted in 1996) – 10 countries ratified
- C189 for Domestic Workers (adopted in 2011) – 27 countries ratified

**ILO Recommendation 204** – which mandates that formalization for informal workers includes social protection + regulated access to public space and natural resources

### **Habitat III**

- New Urban Agenda – mandates that informal workers should be integrated in urban plans, policies

*IWs have also achieved Validity on the National and Local Stages*

**Ratification of C177 and C189** – in multiple countries each

### **National Laws: sector-specific**

- Domestic Workers: 15 countries - Austria, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Ghana, India, Ireland, Malta, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Thailand, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, South Africa and USA (state laws)
- Home-Based Workers: at least 1 country, Thailand
- Street Vendors: 3 countries - India, Ireland, Singapore + city-level by laws and ordinances in multiple cities/countries
- Waste Pickers: 4 countries - Brazil, Colombia, India and Peru

**City-Level Victories – in addition to the victories at the city-level which we heard about yesterday**

- Accra, Ghana – market head porters (kayayei) registered under NHIS
- Bangkok, Thailand – bus services + pedestrian bridge for relocated HBWs
- Belo Horizonte, Brazil - warehouses + equipment for WPS
- Bogota + 15 other cities, Columbia: waste pickers being paid for their waste collection and recycling services
- Delhi, India – implementation of Street Vendor Act through training of members of Town Vending Committees
- Durban, South Africa – 2 legal cases to stop building of mall + 1 legal case that ruled against confiscation of street vendor goods
- Lima, Peru: simplified registration system & progressive tax system for own account workers + ordinance to regulate and protect street vendors
- Mexico City, Mexico:

*All of these victories involved advocacy and negotiations by informal workers and their organizations with support from WIEGO and other allies. Let's have a round of applause for all these victories. Join me in the rallying call of StreetNet International which has become the rallying call of the WIEGO Network of Networks:*

*Nothing for Us, Without Us (3 times)*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS**

Together we have accomplished so much. I want to thank each and every one of you for your contributions to these successes.

I want to begin by thanking SEWA – our mother– for your inspiration and guidance and your support and solidarity over the years. We have learned so much from SEWA's pioneering strategy combining unions and cooperatives, struggle and development. As the founding chairs of WIEGO, Ela Bhatt and Renana Jhabvala, have served as a *moral compass* for the WIEGO Network: always steering us in the right direction.

Will the representatives of SEWA please stand up

*Please join me in thanking SEWA and in calling out the SEWA slogan "We are all One"*

*Hum Saab Ek Hein (3 times)*

**I want to thank the other Institutional Members of WIEGO Please stand up when your organization is called**

**The Sector-Specific Nets –**

StreetNet International – for building a structure and discipline modeled on a trade union federation + for pioneering and training us on collective bargaining by informal workers + for you rallying calls of *World Class Cities for All* and *Nothing for Us, Without Us*

*Thank you, Street Net*

HomeNets – for developing strategies that combine a focus on the different sources of disadvantage faced by home-based workers: their invisibility and isolation as workers, their disadvantaged position in supply chains and markets; and the lack of tenure and basic infrastructure services for their homes-cum-workplaces

*Thank you, HomeNets.*

IDWF – for being the first ever global union federation founded and led by women and the fastest growing global network of informal workers.

Thank you, IDWF

National and Regional Networks of Waste Pickers - for being the first group of informal workers to successfully bid for contracts from cities + to successfully negotiate with corporations,

Thank you, ANR, ARB, AWI, FACR, KKPKP, MNCR, MNRC, FACR, and all the other WP organizations

### **Global Union Federations**

International Union of Food and Allied Workers – IUF, Dan Gallin & Barbro Budin

Thank you, IUF

### **National Union Federations – thanks for organizing informal workers**

Ghana Trades Union Congress

General Federation of Nepal Trade Unions

Thank you, Ghana TUC and GEFONT

### **I want to thank the Individual Members of WIEGO**

Would the Researchers and Statisticians who are Individual Members of WIEGO please stand up

Would the Development Practitioners who are Individual Members of WIEGO please stand up

We thank you for your technical, political and moral support to the WIEGO network and for partnering with us on many projects.

### **THANKS TO THE WIEGO TEAM**

#### **Founding Generation of WIEGO Team – please stand up when I call your name**

First Generation of Program Directors – Chris Bonner, Francie Lund, and Joann Vanek

Plus two persons who were the youngest members of the first generation of WIEGO: Caroline Skinner and Carmen Roca who have continued as members of the second generation

I want to thank other first generation program directors - not with us today

Marilyn Carr – founding director of our Global Trade Programme

Elaine Jones – second director of our Global Trade Programme

Winnie Mitullah – the first director of our Urban Policies Programme

Sharit Bhowmik – the second director of our Urban Policies Programme, has passed away

Gizelle Yasmeen – second director of our Social Protection Programme

Jacques Charmes – one of WIEGO’s co-founders who co-directed our Statistics Program for a few years

Dan Gallin – who was the first director of our Organization-Representation Program

I also want to thank Dave Spooner and Joe Holly who helped WIEGO register in the UK and set up our office in Manchester, UK

**Second Generation of WIEGO Team – please stand when I call your name** I want to thank...

The fantastic new generation of Program Directors - Laura Alfery, Jane Barrett, Marlese von Broembsen, Françoise Carre, Caroline Kihato

And Deputy Directors - Rachel Moussie and Karin Pape

And Urban Research and Publications Director – Caroline Skinner

Our amazing Program team – Ana Carolina, Cyrus, Eli, Lucia, Fede, Laura Morillo, Lucia, Mike Rogan, Pamhi, Pilar, Sonia, Vanessa

Our amazing Focal City team - Jenna, Adama, Dorcas, Shalini, Tania + Carmen and Avi, Da, Edith, Yalena who are not here today

Our amazing Communications team – Demetria, Leslie, Miguel + Megan in absentia

Our amazing Program Support Team – Kendra, Olga, Pauline, Rhiana and Sofia

Our amazing Finance team – Jacqui and Shirley + Henrial and Halima in absentia

Our amazing Events and Travel manager - Justina Pena Pan who arranges our travel and events – including this GA

And Sally’s Research and Administrative Assistant – Megan Landeros

I want to especially thank the top leadership of WIEGO... Rhonda Douglas and Mike Bird – who helped make WIEGO what we are today - who stood by my side as we grew and formalized WIEGO

Sally – my extremely capable and highly-regarded successor



## **THANKS TO THE WIEGO BOARD**

Thanks to the WIEGO Board for providing policy and financial oversight of WIEGO – as well as technical and moral advice. We are deeply indebted to each of you.

Members of the Board –

Renana Jhabvala, Barbro Budin, Juliana Brown Afari

Lin Lim + William Steel + Carmen Vildoso + development professional constituency

Debra Davis – our treasurer

Ravi Kanbur + Jeemol Unni and Vicky Kanyoka – who could not join us

Two founding members of WIEGO Board

Biff Steel – who has willingly and ably served on so many committees of the Board,  
including the committee that drafted our constitution and oversaw the transition to  
our formal status + our poet laureate

Renana Jhabvala – chair, smartest and wisest and most focused and dedicated person I  
know

*Please join me in a round of applause for WIEGO's amazing Team and Board.*

Together, over the past 20 years, we have done great things – accomplished so much. And together we will accomplish even more over the next 20 years. *But there are challenges ahead.*

## **CHALLENGES AHEAD**

### **Old Persistent Challenges**

Lingering negative stereotypes about the informal economy + limited appreciation of informal workers and their livelihood activities

Insecurities around the world: due to conflicts & wars & terrorism

### **New Challenges**

Global turn to the right politically – right-wing populist leaders

Changing nature of work – eroding labor and social protections or displacing workers

Future of Work debates - fascination with online platforms + robotics + AI – to the neglect of the fact that most of the working poor do not have smart phones or internet access & most of the working poor work in open spaces or private homes where robots are not likely to be used

Future of Cities debates – fascination with efficiencies of Smart Cities & vision of Global Cities – to the neglect of the fact that most urban dwellers live in informal settlements and work in the informal economy

*While recognizing the challenges that lie ahead, I would like to reaffirm my faith that working together – with trust and solidarity, with organization and voice, and with support from allies - informal workers will claim a better future – a more just and equal world.*

**BUT DREAMS AS WELL** - I have dreams for what together we can do going forward - *Together we can...*

Continue to increase the Voice, Visibility and Validity of informal workers

Continue to challenge the negative stereotypes and narratives about the informal economy

Create new images of the informal workforce – not just fight the negative images

Create new policy and legal frameworks –not just fight existing policies and laws

Find ways to focus the world’s attention on the problems and challenges faced by informal workers + their contributions to the economy, environment & society

Continue to make the impossible, possible!!

Continue to exceed our wildest dreams!!

**ENDING ON A PERSONAL NOTE** I would like to end on a personal note

For me, leading the WIEGO organization and network for twenty years has been the greatest honor and privilege – a deep joy. Growing up as a missionary daughter in India, I would never in my wildest dream have anticipated co-founding and co-leading a global network.

For me, doing so with Renana-ben, a dear friend and valued colleague for 40 years, has been a pleasure and treasure beyond measure.

For me, handing over the leadership of WIEGO to Sally, a dear friend and valued colleague for 10 years, has been very easy and effortless – because Sally is so smart and strategic, so respected and trusted and so dedicated to WIEGO’s mission.

Thanks to *all of you for all you mean* to WIEGO and to me personally!!

As my grandmother used to say, *I love you more than tongue can tell!!*

And, as my grandfather used to say, *hooray for us and our folk!!*

*WIEGO!! (3 times)*

*Thank you.*