International Solidarity:
IDWN Gives Advice to Thai Domestic Workers

Having heard the challenges faced by Thai domestic workers, IDWN members drew on their experience and gave advice to the Thai domestic workers on how they might win their struggle for legal recognition, protection and improved working conditions. Here is a summary of key points.

Publicize, pressurize and embarrass

Get on television when you go to see the Minister.
Make a petition and get lots of signatures.
Demonstrate and influence public opinion.
Shame the government.
Create an international issue.

Don't wait: be pro-active

Draw up your grievances and what you want from Government.
Approach the Ministry – don't wait for them.
Negotiate with employers – start with something small such as having wages on time.
Build your power step by step.

Get support: find partners and allies

Find partners to support you - in Thailand as well as internationally.
Make alliances with different groups. You can't get results only from domestic workers.
Get support from the IDWN. Keep us informed and we can act.

Mobilize members around their issues

Have issues that you are working on and can unite around.
Mobilize members. You need to be seen.
Gather on the streets and start to make the sisters understand their rights.
Organize and build unity.

Be patient and don't give up

Try not to despair.
The struggle is long but you have to use all the media at your hand to raise awareness.
No government agrees first time to demands. Keep going back – don't give up.
Go back and back again until they get tired and have to respond.

Domestic Workers' Unions Unite: Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong

Elizabeth Tang of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), and since August 2011 the International Coordinator of the IDWN. She speaks about the formation of FADWU and the role played by the HKCTU.

The Federation of Asian Domestic Workers Unions (FADWU) in Hong Kong is probably the only registered federation of trade unions of domestic workers who are migrants. It brings together five unions representing five different nationalities – Thai, Nepalese, Filipino, Indonesian and local Chinese domestic workers. The federation was formally launched in Hong Kong in November 2010 with the support and assistance of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).

There are four main points that allowed us to succeed in forming this unusual national federation:

1) Since 2000 the HKCTU has been affiliating the individual unions one by one. So by 2008, four out of the six domestic workers' unions were affiliated.

2) In 2008 we started to campaign for an ILO convention for domestic workers. We tried to build the ILO process together with the process of federating these unions, so the two processes have been interwoven. We brought members of all of the domestic workers' unions together to discuss our common positions and what we must do to achieve them. At the same time we always concluded by putting the formulation of a federation as a strategy.

3) A year or two earlier, the local unions campaigned for minimum wage legislation and we tried to form a network of domestic workers' unions, including those of migrant workers, in order to increase their participation in the campaign. We knew that in our society there was a strong voice for the exclusion of migrant domestic workers from the legislation. The campaign for minimum wages has helped to build unity.

4) Our close collaboration with NGOS has been crucial, especially NGOs that work closely with migrant workers in Hong Kong. The main NGO is the Asian Migrant Centre.

We're proud that the HKCTU has been able to support the development of this federation. It was so important that the process of organizing went hand-in-hand with the campaign for an ILO Convention on domestic work, and for the inclusion of domestic workers in the Hong Kong's minimum wage legislation. A final and crucial factor was the development of solidarity between the nationalities. It took many years to build solidarity, not just through meetings but also through "solidarity days" for the union members, building friendship and mutual enjoyment of fun and relaxation.

Resources

ITUC Online. Spotlight Interview with Elizabeth Tang. Available at
http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-elizabeth.html

Historic Victory for Domestic Workers Emerges from Geneva Conference

"FREE AT LAST!"

This is an edited version of the IDWN message circulated in July 2011, after the adoption of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention.

Dear friends,

For us domestic workers, June 16, 2011 will go down in history as the day we were finally recognized as workers. At the 100th International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, Switzerland, governments, employers and trade unions from around the world adopted the first Convention (C189) and accompanying Recommendation (R201) on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, establishing global labour standards for domestic workers. Support for the Convention was overwhelming, with 396 voting in favor, and only 16 voting against (Swaziland as the only government against, and 15 employers' organizations), with an additional 63 abstaining (governments: El Salvador, Malaysia, Panama, United Kingdom, Singapore, Sudan, Czech Republic, Thailand; the rest of those who abstained were employers' organizations). The Recommendation passed with 90 per cent approval!

Today we celebrate a great victory for domestic workers. Until now we have been treated as "invisible," not respected for the huge contribution we make in society and the economy and denied our rights as workers. It is an injustice that has lasted too long. After thirty years of organizing domestic workers throughout the world, The International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN), supported by the Global Union Federation IUF and WIEGO and many others in the international labour movement, became the driving force behind this massive campaign to finally recognize domestic work as real work, worthy of the same recognition and protection of other sectors.

photo: ©International Labour Organization

IDWN unfurls a banner at the International Labour Conference, June 2011, signalling that their triumph is just the beginning of the fight

Myrtle Witbooi, SADSAWU and President, IDWN

Getting here has been a long road – some of us have been organizing domestic workers for over 30 years and all of us have been told our organizing and our demands for worker rights were impossible. This process was a powerful reminder of the importance of movements: movements of workers that demand change, movements of women that promote hopeful visions for new ways in which we can relate to each other, social

movements that create progressive governments that can play powerful roles in international arenas. It was the growing movement of domestic workers around the world – and our capacity to capture the imagination of trade union movements and governments internationally – that got domestic work onto the agenda at the ILO in the first place. Over the past 10 years we've built our organizing, our networking, and alliance building, and we are so proud that today we have both an International Domestic Workers Network and an ILO Convention for Decent Work for Domestic Workers! The day after the Convention passed we met to lay out our plans to ensure this Convention is widely ratified and implemented, and IDWN looks forward to working with many of you on the road ahead.

Although many ILO Conventions cover all workers, regardless of whether they are formal or informal, the newly adopted ILO Convention for Domestic Workers aims at minimum standards for a sector which is often excluded from coverage of labour legislation and social protection. It will help to lift informal domestic workers into the formal economy and will also ensure minimum standards for those who do have contracts and are registered.

After the adoption of the Homework Convention in 1996 (C177), we regard this as a commitment by the ILO to further ensure protection for the majority of the world's workers who work in the informal economy. Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General, said, "We are moving the standards system of the ILO into the informal economy for the first time, and this is a breakthrough of great significance. History is being made."

The team at the ILO included a strong contingent of domestic workers' representatives, who spoke for themselves at the ILC, with the support and backing of the IUF, WIEGO and many NGOs, researchers, trade unions. Strong domestic worker leaders coupled with effective alliances made for a powerful voice and was a key factor in the victorious campaign.

Resources

For the full text of the Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189), see http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/reports/provisional-records/WCMS_157836/lang--en/index.htm
For R201: Domestic Workers' Recommendation, see http://www.ilo.org/rome/risorse-informative/servizio-informazione/norme-del-lavoro-e-documenti/WCMS_157906/lang--en/index.htm
IDWN. 2008. "Domestic/Household Workers Demand Respect and Our Rights!" Pamphlet on mobilizing for an ILO Convention. Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/pamILOeng.pdf
IDWN. 2010. Domestic Workers' Platform of Demands. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/IDWN%20-Platform-of-Demands-English-2010.pdf
IDWN. "Myths & Realities about Domestic Workers: What THEY say and what WE say." Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/8%20Myths%20english%20FINAL%281%29%20_0.pdf
IDWN website: www.idwn.info
IDWN blog: http://idwnilo.wordpress.com/

Focus on Street/Market Vendors

Overview of the Street and Market Vendors Sector

Street vendors sell a wide range of goods and services in public places including pavements, alleyways, parks, parking lots. They sell food, fabric and clothing, toiletries, electrical goods, and handicrafts, and they provide services such as phone and hairdressing, among many, many others. Some sell from fixed stalls, others from temporary kiosks or collapsible stands; still others sell from a piece of plastic on the pavement or move

Vendors in Cotonou, Benin selling food and household items

around with bicycles or on foot, carrying a mobile container. Although we do not know just how many street and market vendors there are, we know that there are a significant number, making up a large portion of those working in the informal economy, and particularly in cities in the developing world.

Where national level statistics on street vendors do exist, they show that street vendors in non-agricultural employment make up between 2 and 9 per cent of total employment. As a share of total informal employment, street traders generally account for 15-25 per cent in African cities, 10-15 per cent in Asian cities, and 5-10 per cent in Latin American cities. In many countries, women represent the majority of street vendors. This is especially the case in Africa. In only a few countries where cultural norms restrict women's economic activities do women account for 10 per cent or less of street vendors. However, women street vendors typically earn less than men, and in many countries less than half as much as men.

The most pressing challenge that street vendors face, especially those without a permit, is harassment, removal or even arrest by local government authorities, coupled with confiscation of their goods and requests for bribes. This threat, together with fluctuating supply and demand, child care responsibilities, illness without income protection, and other threats means that income is insecure.

Street vendors face many routine occupational hazards as well. Many must lift and haul heavy loads. Their workplaces typically lack proper infrastructure such as clean running water, toilets, and solid waste removal. They may be exposed to pollution and bad weather. Long working hours also add to their health risks. As own account workers, they are not covered by labour laws and have little or no social protection. There are almost no

national policies or laws for street vendors, with India being an exception. They are usually subjected to local by-laws and ordinances. These are often outdated and/or change frequently, and most are inappropriate for the needs of vendors. They are influenced by local politics, but exclude street traders and their organizations from the policy processes.

Although street vending organizations have existed for many years, some new organizational forms are taking shape in response to changing times. An important example is StreetNet International (officially launched in 2002), an alliance of street vendors promoting solidarity and the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors worldwide. There are also many examples of innovative organizations at the local and national levels. SEWA of India and the Red de Mujeres (Women's Network) of Peru specifically address the concerns of women street vendors.

Street and Market Vendors: Common Demands

- legal recognition and the right to use of urban space

- freedom from criminalization of activities and harassment from authorities

- appropriate policies, laws, regulations favouring and protecting vendors

- provision of infrastructure and facilities such as toilets, water, storage space

- social protection including health care, income protection, child care

- fair taxation

- access to credit

- representation in policy processes and the right to statutory negotiation forums

Resources

This note is drawn substantially from the WIEGO website. For more details see: http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors
Sally Roever and Lissette Aliaga Linares. 2010. Street Vendors Organising: The Case of the Women' Network (Red de Mujeres), Lima, Peru. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Roever_WIEGO_OB1.pdf
StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za
SEWA website: www.sewa.org

How Street and Market Vendors Are Organizing

Base Organizations

Organizations take many forms. Unions are quite prominent, as are associations organized by local area or productive activity. Unions tend to work in the political arena i.e. fighting for rights, defending members against harassment; cooperatives help with economic issues through collective organization. There is a focus on organizing against harassment, displacement and bribery and for recognition as important contributors to society. The form of organization is not important. What is important is that vendors are united and strongly organized as the only way to change conditions.

National Organizations

There are unions, union federations and federations/alliances of organizations. They focus on obtaining national policy and laws and ensuring implementation. The advantage of national organizations is they can influence government and they are able to strategize for the long term and not just focus on immediate problems. National centres are working to organize at the local level.

International Organizations

There is only one regional network – *La Red de Sindicatos de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Economía Social Solidaria de las Américas* (SEICAP) in Central America. It brings together self-employed, mainly but not exclusively vendors, from Nicaragua, Guatamala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama. There is one international federation, StreetNet International (discussed below). In this sector, internationally, there is no one focus issue, but vendors organize around recognition, publicizing their situation, and solidarity. The advantage of international organizing is information sharing and solidarity, making street vendor issues visible and influencing governments. Linking all levels of organizing is important.

This summary table was compiled collectively by representatives of the vending sector from different countries. It is based on their own experiences and organizations.

Vendor, in the Philippines, selling slippers made by home-based workers

Table 2: Forms of Street and Market Vendor Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizations	Advantages of this form	Organizing issues
Local/Base		
Cooperatives	Facilitate collective buying and improved income Provide collective services Improve solidarity and reduce competition	Income improvement
Associations Unions City Federations Organized by area or by productive activity	All: Build strength Foster mutual support and solidarity Give voice so vendors can be heard Provide protection	Solidarity Bribe avoidance Opposition to displacements and harassment Improved economic conditions Improved working conditions and facilities
National		
Associations Alliances Unions Federations	Influence government Offer ability to strategize long term Work to gain recognition for workers	National policies and law enactment Implementation of national policies at state and country level
International		
International Federation/Network Regional network (LA)	Allow street Vendors around the world to share issues and learn from each other Develop common strategies and workplans regionally, and collective bargaining or dialogue in international forums	Publicity and awareness raising among the international community on Street Vendors' issues Support from national governments by influencing Improvement of work/lives of vendors globally Solidarity

StreetNet International

StreetNet International is an alliance of membership-based organizations (unions, associations, cooperatives) who are directly organizing street vendors, market vendors and/or hawkers among their members. The aim of StreetNet is to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors, market vendors and hawkers (i.e. mobile vendors) and on practical organizing and advocacy strategies (www. streetnet.org.za).

Steps in the Formation of StreetNet International

Setting things in motion

In 1995, the Self Employed Women Association of India, SEWA, organized an international meeting of street vendor representatives from 11 countries, to understand the urban space problems faced by them. They identified that they had no forum that could represent their needs and interests. They made a declaration on their demands – the Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors. WIEGO took on the responsibility to raise start-up funds for setting up an international network, and also identified a coordinator to perform that job.

Preparatory work

In 2000 an interim Association (StreetNet Association) with a four-person Steering Committee was set up to coordinate processes leading up to the formal launch of StreetNet International. An office was established in Durban, South Africa, and a coordinator and administrator employed part-time.

The coordinator made field visits to different countries to meet vendor organizations and bring them into StreetNet. As a result, in some countries, new national alliances were formed.

StreetNet Association hosted three regional workshops (Peru 2001, India 2002, Ghana 2002) to consult about four important principles that had to be established: representation and leadership of women vendors; the status of NGOs; political affiliation or independence; and financial self-sufficiency.

Launch

The official launch of StreetNet International took place in Durban, South Africa, in November 2002.

Delegates were invited from the organizations identified in different countries. The delegates adopted a Constitution and the name of the Organization, and elected an Interim Committee to run StreetNet. They also adopted key policies: gender equality, including a constitutional provision for a 50 per cent quota of women on all structures of the organization; NGOs were not entitled to be affiliates but could be service providers; and non- affiliation to political parties. Priority was given to developing national alliances of street vendors in as many countries as possible.

StreetNet International Congress, August 2010

In March 2004, the National Organization of Street Vendors of Korea hosted the first StreetNet International Congress of member delegates. The first International Council was elected for a three-year term, consisting of 15 people who come from the membership organizations. Eight have to be women. Many of the affiliates started to be aware of their own gender policies, and some developed their women leadership a bit more consciously.

StreetNet International in 2011

StreetNet has 40 affiliated member organizations, from Africa, Asia and the Americas, with a majority in Africa. It has an international office in South Africa where the International Coordinator, administrative and support staff are based. It has two organizers: one based in Cote d'Ivoire and the other in Guatemala.

Structure

- International Congress: meets at least once every three years, and consists of members of the International Council and delegates elected by each member organization, based on size.

- International Council: meets annually, and consists of 11 members elected at Congress together with the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, of whom at least 50 per cent must be women.

- Executive Committee: a sub-committee of the International Council consisting of seven members, including the President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary, who meet quarterly (in person or by teleconference).

- International Coordinator: is engaged by and accountable to the International Council.

At its 2007 Congress, StreetNet adopted an official demarcation into four regions, and decided to work towards regional coordinating structures based on Regional Focal Point organizations in Nicaragua, India, Niger and Zimbabwe.

Activities

StreetNet reaches out to new organizations and into new regions such as most recently into Central and Eastern Europe. It works to strengthen its affiliates by holding workshops on topics such as collective bargaining; supporting worker education; arranging exchange visits where organizations from different countries can learn from each other. It also uses media tools, such as a regular newsletter, website and mobile phone messaging, to exchange information and encourage solidarity actions. It conducts research that can help build organization, provide information, develop policy to be used in campaigns, negotiations and advocacy. StreetNet International is active on the international stage through its campaigns such as the World Class Cities for All (WCCA) Campaign and through promoting and taking up issues of importance to vendors in forums such as World Social Forum (WSF), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).
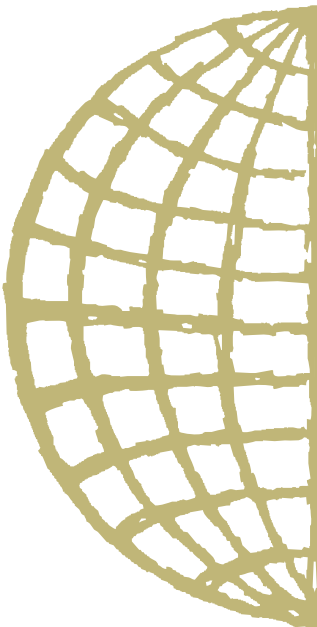
Some Current Challenges

- making a more visible impact on urban policy and development planning

- addressing class imbalances in leadership

- keeping leaders accountable

- implementing resolutions

- building internal democracy among affiliates

- striving for gender equality and women leadership in affiliates

Resources

www.streetnet.org.za

Street & Market Vendors: Challenges and Successes

We now turn to the challenges and successes in strengthening organizations of vendors. We start with an example of a base association of migrant street barbers, that has developed innovative activities to enable it to be self-sufficient, an extremely difficult and widespread challenge for informal workers' MBOs. In particular, we look at examples of different forms of organizations and the role they are playing in improving the lives of vendors: a trade union, a cooperative and, importantly, an association of women vendors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), still rebuilding after the ravages of war.

Case Studies

Launching the Siyagunda Association of Street Barbers, in Durban, South Africa

Gaby Bikombo, Chairperson of the Siyagunda Association, prepared this piece about his organization's work.

Siyagunda Association, an organization of street barbers in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, was launched on 16th December 2005 as a result of the decision by eThekwini municipality to manage street vending through a permitting system.

In 2001, eThekwini Municipality created a special department called "Business Support Unit" (BSU) to manage informal trading and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME). In 2003, the BSU implemented a new street trading management system that restricted street trading to demarcated spots in designated areas. Only those street traders who had vending permits were allowed, in accordance with street vending bylaws, to trade. Anyone trading without a valid vending permit was, and still is, called an "illegal trader" and therefore a target of harassment by municipal police.

Many meetings were organized to explain the process that every street trader had to go through in order to "legalize" his/her trading activities. Most street barbers operating in the city of Durban come from other African countries. In this new system, foreign street traders were denied access to a vending permit because they did not possess South African identity documents. This exposed street barbers to constant confiscation of their goods by metro police and prevented them from providing for their households' livelihoods.

photo: Gaby Bicombo

Durban's Street Barbers organized to fight for vending permits

With the support of StreetNet and the Durban Legal Resources Centre, an urgent High Court interdict against the eThekwini Municipality was launched in May 2005 to challenge the right of metro police to evict traders from their place of work without an eviction order. Although the vendors lost the court case, the publicity it created forced the BSU to issue vending permits to all foreign vendors who were initially denied the right to trade.

That is when we realized that if we had been organized, we would have had a much stronger case and the verdict would probably have been different – hence the idea of forming an organization with the aim of fighting for the rights and interests of street barbers throughout the province of Kwazulu Natal. Siyagunda Association has made it possible for more than 80 per cent of street barbers in the city of Durban now to possess valid vending permits.

Unfortunately this success came with a major challenge; as soon as members got their vending permits, they lost interest in Siyagunda's activities. We had to identify other important needs, as well as sources of income for the organization so that we do not depend on membership fees only. We took important decisions on this at our 2008 Annual General Meeting:

- We set up a mini battery centre to charge batteries used by our members in their businesses. This provides our organization with a small income and a livelihood for two families of our members.

- We identified other sources of income for the association such as translation and interpretation services involving English, French, Kiswahili and other languages. We have a signed a translation/ interpretation contract with StreetNet International providing highly needed resources.

- We developed a scheme to support members in difficulties. We run a loan service with an annual interest rate of 10 per cent per year and contribute 500 rand to funerals of active members or their direct family. We also contribute the same amount of money to members who lose their equipment through theft, fire or any other disaster.

For us to be able to continue with these benefits to members, we need to be able to raise enough money. Our translation/interpretation services are very important and could become a major source of income especially with support from NGOs and organizations.

We are planning to launch a "Financial Cooperative" to enable our members and other vulnerable refugees who have no access to banking, to be able to save money and have access to loans. We also envisage providing other services to members, and hope to gather the necessary support to make this initiative a success.

The Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (CTCP): Street Traders Organizing into a Trade Union in Nicaragua

Sandra Jimenez from the CTCP, talked to Sofia Trevino, WIEGO Global Projects Officer, about the importance of informal workers being part of a union.

The Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (*Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCP*) was founded on 17 June 2002 at a rally organized by informal workers, following the assassination of a deputy commissioner and the detention of many workers. With this detention by police of self-employed workers, it was evident that there was a need for an organization that could represent and protect the interests of the self-employed. This organization started as an association, but it quickly evolved into a union as the only body that could provide a framework for the recognition of workers' rights and demands.

In Nicaragua there are over one million self-employed workers, many of whom work at home, on the streets, as vendors and within the transportation sector. Since its creation, the CTCP has grown to over 28,000 members. Activities aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of joining the confederation, different social projects, and legal/economic struggles with policymakers at all levels are increasing, resulting in even faster growth today.

The main activities of the CTCP are initiated by seven unions which are organized to represent the predominant sectors of self-employed workers in Nicaragua. First, the moneychangers who work on the streets: they

organized, and then were able to obtain identity cards and consequently gained peoples' trust and increased their businesses. Second was the transport union composed mainly of announcers at the bus stations who have organized. They have the support of the owners and administrators of buses who now rely on their services to attract customers. In addition to this sector, a new and growing union is that of *tricicleros*, a type of taxi service on a tricycle pulling a cart where a person can be transported for short distances at a lower price rate. The growth of this sector is due to high demand. Also within the transport sector are the own account taxi drivers. The fifth union represents street vendors and market vendors. Closely related is the union of vendors at traffic lights, a common and growing activity in Nicaragua. Finally, there is a union classified as "different trades" where all other informal workers, such as carpenters, mechanics, home-based workers and others, can be organized.

Despite the CTCP's achievements in organizing different sectors, there are many challenges due to the high numbers of informal workers, lack of social protection mechanisms and increased poverty. In addressing these issues, the CTCP is working towards becoming self-sustainable and to create a solidarity economy, mainly to provide access to credit which most workers do not have. There is also a need to develop a practice of self-management and savings so that workers can rely on the organization and on themselves when there is a need for credit.

Great progress has been made and the confederation is now recognized at a national and international level. However, this was hard to achieve as there was a need to raise the understanding of the term "worker" among government institutions and among workers themselves. Most informal workers do not recognize themselves as workers, due to the lack of employer-employee relationships. Government institutions did not want to recognize the union at first. The CTCP demonstrated that in most cases informal workers need to work harder than workers employed in the formal sector. They pointed out their contribution to the gross domestic product and to the need for workers rights. Since then, alliances have been made with Managua's Town Hall, the Ministry of Health and other government institutions. The CTCP is working towards the creation of an optional health insurance for informal workers and for collective pricing for medicines.

One of the CTCP's main achievements at an international level is joining RED SEICAP, the Informal Economy Network of Central America, Panama and Cuba. This network is a joint effort to increase the organization, communication and strength of the partners in the alliance. All countries share common interests and values, and are now working together to improve economic opportunities in Central America. Currently, the main focus is to eradicate child labour by implementing a program financed by Intervida, an NGO from Spain which is investing in educating parents about the benefits of keeping their children in school, while creating support programmes and activities at the schools.

The long term objectives are to continue raising the voice, visibility and validity of informal workers internationally and in Nicaragua. Also, to raise the numbers of our affiliates, not just as numbers, but as empowered workers.

photo: CTCP

CTCP is working towards becoming self-sustainable

"In Nicaragua our organization is part of the National Union of Workers. There is an advantage to being part of the National Union of Workers. It can influence the government to take positive decisions such as bettering health and education for persons working in the informal economy. To be part of a National Trade Union helps in capacity building and awareness of unionism."

Sandra Jimenez, CTCP

Resources

Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (*Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCP*) website: www.ctcpnicaragua.org

Women of Courage: Association of Women Vendors in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Sofia Trevino, Global Projects Officer with WIEGO, spoke to Angelique Kipulo Katani, Secretary General, Ligue pour les Droit de la Femme Congolaise/League for the Defence of Congolese Women (LDFC), about her work with women vendors. The LDFC is an association of 2,500 women street and market vendors, hawkers and other informal economy workers, based in four cities in different provinces of the DRC.

"Eighty-five per cent of people in my country are informal workers, and the majority of them are women," reports Angelique. They often bear the responsibility of supporting and caring for their families and suffer violence against them. They need to be educated about their rights but also helped to find practical ways of caring for their families. That is why Angelique works so hard to help informal women workers in her country.

The women street vendors face daily challenges. "They are constantly harassed and hunted by the police." Their merchandise is confiscated on a regular basis. The LDFC helps the women to organize themselves into collective groups with a formal structure. It helps them to attain all the required permits and permissions needed to become "legitimate" and thus have some protection. Navigating the bureaucracy is not easy, and there is money required at every step. "It takes time, and if you don't have courage, you can easily quit." LDFC accompanies the woman all the way through the process so that they can obtain the rights and privileges needed to conduct their business legitimately (in the eyes of the bureaucracy).

photo: LDFC

LDFC helps women street vendors fight for rights

The other significant challenge the women vendors face is financing. Women always ask if there is money for micro finance available to buy merchandise and for working capital. "We educate them on how to organize their own financial networks of loans to one another." This involves making monthly contributions to a collective fund which the group can then draw on to lend money to a single person for a monthly term. Other challenges are found inside the women's families as "the husbands sometimes do not understand them," even when they see the benefits of these micro businesses in supporting the family. Women also face many insecurities. For example, the locations used for markets are not secure. Officials can and do come by at any time and claim these areas for other developments, sending the women off.

Angelique sees the growing courage of women in the face of all the difficulties as the most encouraging part of her job. By engaging with them and educating them they are better able to manage their affairs. "When you see these women engaged in the process, they say 'It's today or never!' We have to take control of our work."

She is now looking forward to the launch of a new training centre they have organized for young women who have abandoned school. There, the women will learn practical skills for employment.

Street Vendors Benefit from Forming the Moo Ban Nakkeela Community Service Cooperative

During the Organizing Workshop held in Bangkok, representatives of MBOs from Africa, Asia and Latin America visited the Moo Ban Nakkeela Community Service Cooperative. This is what they learned during a question and answer session. (Interview notes by Janhavi Dave, Self Employed Women's Association.)

Q.1: Do you have an alliance with other street vendor organizations in Bangkok?

A.1: We are not aware of other Street Vendor organizations in Bangkok and hence do not have any alliance.

Q.2: What are the major issues faced by the street vendor members of your cooperative?

A.2: Security of vending space is the foremost issue faced by members and the second issue is access to credit. The money lenders tend to charge a very high interest rate, which is around 20 per cent per month.

Q.3: Have members tried to get loans from the banks?

A.3: Some members have tried and have even been successful.

Q.4: Filing litigation and fighting a court case is very expensive. How do members arrange for that money?

A.4: We receive funding from foundations supporting such causes. We approach voluntary lawyers and also members contribute Baht 200 per month to run the cooperative and fight for their cause.

photo: Marty Chen

Vendors in Bangkok benefit from belonging to a cooperative

Q.5: What is the criteria of the Cooperative to give loans?

A.5: The applicant must be a member and should have saved for six months.

Q.6: Do you provide a loan for purchasing jewellery or for the applicant's daughter's wedding?

A.6: Yes, we do. But, it depends upon the member's savings and the funds with the cooperative. We tend to give loans that are double the amount of the savings.

Q.7: You are a street vendor cooperative. Then why have you shifted your activities to a thrift and credit cooperative?

A.7: We haven't shifted our activities. The aim for the formation of a cooperative was to increase the voice and collective bargaining power of the members and to create access to credit facilities.

Q.8: What is the interest and tenure for the loans provided by the cooperative?

A.8: 12 per cent p.a. and 18 months.

Q.9: Do you provide loans only from the cooperative savings? Or does the cooperative takes loans from other sources and further lend it to members?

A.9: The loans are provided only from the savings of the cooperative; 80 per cent of savings is used to provide loans, while 20 per cent is kept for emergency purposes.

Q.10: Does your cooperative pay taxes?

A.10: We are exempted from tax, as we are a cooperative. But, we do pay the membership fee to the National Cooperative of Thailand. We also have to pay for the notice board that we put up outside our office.

Q.11: Is your cooperative exclusively for women?

A.11: No, our cooperative has both men and women as members. But for this term, the elected committee is only women, which has 13 members for a two-year term.

Q.12: What is the ratio of men and women membership in the cooperative?

A.12: 80 per cent of members are women as compared to 20 per cent men. The reason for this is that most of the street vendors are women, while men go to work in the factories.

Q.13: Are there any special schemes for women vendors in your cooperative?

A.13: No, it is uniform for all.

Q.14: Who manages the cooperative?

A.14: The 13 elected members have four main roles:

i. President: the head of the cooperative, arranges meetings and conducts them

ii. Secretary: supports the president, takes notes during the meetings, helps prepare the agenda and meeting

iii. Treasurer: responsible for withdrawing money and providing loans

iv. General Committee Members: they attend the meeting and help decide who should be provided loans

Q.15: Where is the money kept?

A.15: In the bank. And the Treasurer is responsible for withdrawing cash and providing loans.

Q.16: Are all the Committee Members also vendors?

A.16: Yes, they are. Therefore, we don't have our office open every day. The office is open for meetings, collecting savings and distributing loans.

Q.17: What do you do if one vendor starts selling goods at lesser price?

A.17: We haven't faced this situation in the past, as the vendors have known each other for a number of years. But, if there is a situation like this then we won't allow it and stop it immediately.

Q.18: Before 1993, what was the occupation of the street vendors?

A.18: Most of the vendors worked in offices, but there was a recession in the early nineties, which forced them out of their jobs. Thereafter, they became street vendors.

Q.19: Why haven't you tried to unionize further with other street vendor organizations to increase your strength?

A.19: They would love to do that. But, they are full-time street vendors and lack the information and time to do so.

Focus on Home-Based Workers

Overview of Home-Based Workers

It is estimated that there are more than 100 million home-based workers worldwide, the vast majority of whom are women. They do a variety of tasks such as sewing clothes, embroidery, assembling jewellery, making footballs and shoes, baking cakes and making snacks, creating handicrafts and so on. Because they work from their homes they are largely invisible, sparsely organized, often not even recognized as workers. They are among some of the lowest paid workers in the informal economy.

Home-based worker is the term used to describe all those workers who produce goods or services working from their homes (or sometimes adjacent premises). There are two main types of home-based workers:

- **Own Account Home-Based Workers**: self-employed home-based workers who do not hire others but may have unpaid family members working with them. They produce goods and services themselves, and sell them to make a living. They buy their own raw materials.

- **Homeworkers**: those home-based workers who carry out paid work for firms/businesses or their intermediaries. They are usually given the raw materials and are paid a stated amount per piece produced. They usually do not have any direct contact with the markets for the goods they produce. They could be producing for a large or small national firm or for a global company.

Women are over-represented among home-based workers, especially among homeworkers engaged in manual work. A compilation of data from 14 countries found that that the share of women in home-based work was over 75 per cent in seven of the countries, over 50 per cent in another one country, and over 30 per cent in the remaining six countries. Women are more likely than men to work mainly at home; women are more likely than men to work at home in manual activities; and among home-based workers women are far more likely than men to be engaged in low-paid manual work. From what we know, women home-based workers in manual jobs, especially homeworkers, are among the lowest paid workers in the world.

Home-based workers face many common challenges, as well as challenges that differ according to their employment status. Because of their

Home-based workers are largely invisible and among the lowest paid informal workers

isolation, most are unorganized and therefore are not able to bargain with their employers (or intermediaries) for wages, with local authorities for infrastructure and services, or about prices with suppliers. On average they earn very little, especially those working on a piece rate system. Homeworkers are dependent on contractors and intermediaries for orders and for payment. Orders are often irregular and their payments slow to come. Home-based workers generally have little or no protection through labour law or social protection measures. Even where they are producing on order from a business, and should be entitled to conditions equal to those of other workers in the industry, often their real employer is unknown to them and they generally remain without worker benefits and protections. For own account workers the lack of access to capital, as well as technical and marketing assistance makes it difficult to sustain their livelihoods.

As the home is the workplace for home-based workers, inadequate housing and poor services affect their ability to work productively and also affect members of the family. Another challenging issue is health and safety. Home-based workers are exposed to many hazards: some are exposed to dangerous chemicals, others develop posture problems and so on.

However, home-based workers are organizing in some areas, notably Asia and South East Europe. In Asia they have formed national and regional HomeNets to bring together unions, self-help groups, cooperatives, and NGOs so they can build a united voice, raise the profile of home-based workers and advocate for new policies and laws, among other things. There is also already an ILO Homework Convention (C177), which although only ratified in seven countries provides a focus for campaigning and a guideline for government policy and laws.

Home-Based Workers: Common Demands

- recognition as workers and legal status

- recognition of their organizations as worker organizations, and collective bargaining rights

- social protection, including insurance, health, pension, maternity protection and child care

- regular and secure work and income, including at least a minimum wage equivalent

- good physical infrastructure including housing, electricity, water, waste removal

- appropriate occupational health and safety measures

- access to credit

- access to bigger and inclusive markets

- skills training, technology and design upgrading

- capacity building within organizations and leadership development for women

Resources

This material was drawn from the WIEGO website. For more information see
   http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/home-based-workers
Celia Mather. 2010. *We are Workers Too! Organizing Home-based Workers in the Global Economy.* WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at http://wiego.org/wiego/we-are-workers-too

How Home-Based Workers Are Organizing

There are two types of home-based worker: those who produce work for others working on piece rates (homeworkers or industrial outworkers), and those who are own account workers. They may organize together or separately in their base organizations but their national and regional organizations have members from both groups. While facing some common problems, many of their needs and issues around which they organize will be different, or have a different emphasis.

photo: Sofia Trevino

In Asia, home-based workers have been organizing to overcome their many challenges

Base Organizations

These take a variety of organizational forms, including self-help groups, cooperatives, unions, social enterprises and NGOs. Most of the groups are organized around livelihood issues and social security. An advantage of unions is that they engage in collective bargaining and are more focused on rights than other forms of organization. The advantages of self-help groups, cooperatives, social enterprises, etc., is that they provide a vehicle for improving livelihoods: jobs, loans, access to markets, and regular work. Some are able to negotiate with contractors such as the Thai Fishing Net Group.

National Organizations

There are national unions of informal workers with home-based worker members such as SEWA or national unions of home-based workers affiliated to a union national centre such as the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and country HomeNets which are a mixture of MBOs and NGOs. In Bulgaria there is a national organization which is registered as an NGO but operates like a trade union. The advantage of national organizations is that they can represent workers nationally and engage with national governments around law and policy, share information more widely and collectively improve skills and gain access to markets.

International Organizations

There are two regional HomeNets in Asia: South Asia and South East Asia. At this international (regional) level, much of the focus is on sustaining the networks, accessing funds and promoting solidarity, but information sharing and exchange, joint activities and trainings are also important. And HomeNet South Asia has provided an important vehicle through which to engage policymakers across the region, as well as to build their own trade facilitation organization. International networking gives additional advantages such as the possibility of global representation and recognition, accessing global funds and wider information sharing.

This summary table was compiled collectively by representatives of the home-based workers from different countries. It is based on their own experiences and organizations.

Table 3: Forms of Home- Based worker Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizing	Advantages of this form of organization	Organizing issues
Base organizations		
Self-Help Groups	Regular work and recognition Access to social security, savings schemes Backward and forward linkages in the market place Access to loans Training	Social Insurance Marketing Exploitation by middlemen Wages Political and financial constraints Access to OHS
Cooperatives	Access to loans at lower rates of interest Old age pensions Access to funds Marketing jointly	Policy and law Invisibility/recognition Exclusion from financial, health and other schemes
Social Enterprises	Job opportunities Access to markets Social benefits	Irregular income Migration
Unions of HB Workers	Collective bargaining, with "employer" Policy advocacy Sharing information and experiences Recognition Access to government schemes Leadership building and representation	
NGO-democratic	Voice Marketing opportunities Regular income	
National organizations		
NGOs-democratic Networks Unions Union Federations	Representation at national level Nationwide representation in tri-partite committees Access to productive resources and skills Pressure on government for legal protection Social integration of disadvantaged group Wider dissemination of information Access to technical expertise	Visibility and recognition Policy and laws
International		
Regional Networks	Fund-raising abilities Global recognition Global representation Global networking Wider collaboration: programmes, training, etc. Access to global resources	Retaining of network Funds raising and sustainability Solidarity Regional policy Sharing experiences

The HomeNets

HomeNet International

In 1994 HomeNet International was formed. This was prior to the discussions on, and subsequent to the adoption of, an ILO Convention on Homework (C177) in 1996, at the International Labour Conference. Six years later HomeNet International collapsed. However, organizing and unifying home-based workers has continued through the development and activities of HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet South East Asia and their national affiliates, and more recently through expanding activities in South East Europe and building linkages between home-based workers in Asia and South East Europe.

HomeNets in Asia

HomeNet South Asia is a network of national Homenets from Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and some supportive individuals. HomeNet South East Asia has members in Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia. Both are formal organizations in that they are registered, employ staff and have a governing body.

The national HomeNets in the networks vary in their composition and functioning: some are made up primarily of MBOs while others have a majority of NGOs working for and with home-based workers as their members. Some are not truly organizations of home-based workers but are NGOs that act as a focal point to take forward organizing of home-based workers in that country. The regional HomeNets have active programmes to encourage the development of MBOs at local and national levels. They work to make visible home-based workers, change policies and laws in favour of home-based workers and improve their conditions of work, assist in improving skills, products and market access and develop stronger organizations.

Resources

HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net
HomeNet Southeast Asia website: www.homenetseasia.org

Promoting the ILO Home Work Convention (C177) and the Rights of Homeworkers: A Manual for Workers' Educators and Facilitators by Dave Spooner, edited by Celia Mather: http://www.inclusivecities.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Spooner-Mather_Promoting_ILO_Convention_C177.pdf
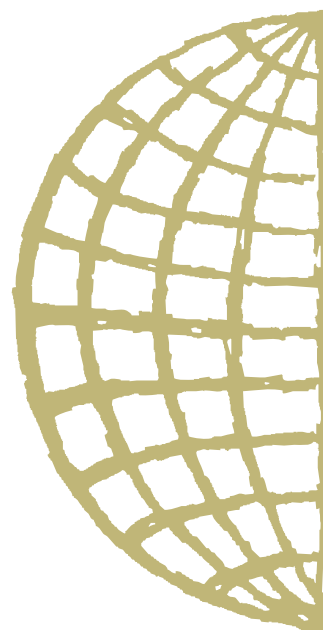

photo: HomeNet South Asia

Home-based workers campaign for the ratification and implementation of C177

Home-Based Workers: Challenges and Successes

Despite the many difficulties faced in organizing democratic organizations of home-based workers, starting with their own lack of identity as workers, there are successes. The Association of Homeworkers in Bulgaria have done a remarkable job in gaining ratification of the Convention on Homework, C177, and negotiating a new national law on homeworkers. In Thailand, there is a new law, the Homeworkers Protection Act 2010, brought about through an alliance of home-based workers organizations, NGOs, and activists. These struggles are recorded in the stories below.

An important aim of the HomeNets is to transform themselves into MBOs from their current mixed NGO-MBO format. In the coming pages, we tell the story of how HomeNet Nepal is transforming itself to become an organization where the governance structures are now in the hands of the home-based workers. Finally, in Thailand again, we share the experience of the Two Sergeant's Community Group (cooperative), recorded during the field visit of participants in the Organizing Workshop.

"Cooperation with the union is vital if you are not a union yourself."

Violeta Zlateva, Association of Home Workers (Bulgaria)

Case Studies

Organized strength of Home-Based Workers in Bulgaria Brings Success!

This case study was compiled from conversations with Violeta Zlateva, President of the AHW, and other files.

In Bulgaria it is estimated that there are at least 500,000 home-based workers, of which a majority are own account workers and women. The numbers are increasing as the economic crisis bites and more and more workers are losing their jobs. Even those employed, or on pension, find it difficult to make ends meet because wages and pensions are low, and so many supplement their incomes with home-based work.

The Association of Home Workers (AHW), Bulgaria, was founded in 2002. It has approximately 40,000 members nationally, the majority being women. AHW has local co-ordinators in all major cities. They are home-based workers themselves and do their association work as unpaid volunteers. Its larger governing body is the Co-ordinating Council made up of 22 coordinators, which meets quarterly, and its executive governing body is the Control Council meeting twice a year. The General Assembly is the highest decision-making body, meeting once per year. All members pay a monthly fee to the association which is retained in the regions and used for activities there. At a national level, once again work for AHW is on a voluntary basis. AHW believes strongly in self-sufficiency and is not reliant on donations, although from time to time money is raised for specific activities, such as the fairs and exhibitions organized for members to market their products. In some of the local areas, AHW has managed to forge a good relationship with the local mayor and local government officials who provide facilities such as meeting rooms free of charge.

photo: Dave Spooner

Home-based workers workshop, Bulgaria, 2011

The association is registered as an NGO, although it is structured like a union and operates democratically. It is therefore, in practice, an MBO. Unusually, it is also registered with an employer association, the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CEIBG),

for tactical reasons such as contact with business, orders and marketing opportunities. It is also an associate member of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CITUB)- KSNB in Bulgarian. Violeta Zlateva, President of AHW explains: "When we tried to negotiate with the government they said we are not unions so we cannot participate. This is why we shifted our tactics and decided to join with the trade union movement." Together with the CITUB the Association successfully campaigned and negotiated with government and employers for the ratification of the Convention on Homework (C177) and finally succeeded in 2009. According to Violeta, "Then it was easier for us to promote changes in the Labour Code which regulates activity and provides protection for homeworkers."

In 2010 the new Labour Code was passed in Parliament, coming into force in 2011. The provisions of the Labour Code cover only those home-based workers that have an employer (homeworkers). Provisions include the obligation for employers to provide a contract of employment and ensure healthy and safe conditions. Workers are covered by the minimum wage, working hours and other conditions applicable to workers employed in factories. But as yet the provisions are not being implemented and government is not attempting to enforce them and the struggle to turn law into practice and improve the lives of homeworkers continues.

Now the association is taking the lead in encouraging home-based workers to organize in other South East European countries: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey. HomeNet South East Europe is a network in making.

Resources

HomeNet South East Europe website: www.homeneteasteurope.com

HomeNet Thailand – Winning Legal Rights for Thailands' Homeworkers

The case study has been reproduced from Celia Mather's "We are Workers Too," with small modifications. The final paragraph has been changed to include up-to-date information.

In Thailand, a survey by the National Statistical Office revealed over 440,000 home-based workers, three-quarters of them women. But in reality there may be up to two million. The country's National Economic and Social Development Board has accepted that the contribution of homework to the national economy is no less than that of the formal economy.

When thinking about how to get improvements in the laws for home-based workers, HomeNet Thailand took a careful look at the existing laws. They found several helpful paragraphs in the country's Constitution, and in legislation on occupational health and safety and welfare rights. They and their allies used this information to lobby for these laws to be applied to home-based workers.

Then, after much lobbying, in 2004 the Minister of Labour passed a special Ministerial Regulation for homeworkers (those who work for others). It contained some good elements, such as a written contract signed by both the employer and employee; payment within 15 days of the work being completed; employers' responsibility for workers' safety; equal treatment for women workers; no sexual harassment; no

photo: Samson Mulugeta

Homeworkers in Thailand make a significant contribution to the national economy

child labour under the age of 15 years; and gave homeworkers' the right to make a complaint to labour inspectors or the courts. There were weaknesses, though: for example, it did not say whether contractors who bring the work to the homeworkers are the employers. And there were many difficulties in getting the regulation implemented.

So HomeNet continued to approach the Ministry for improvements, even meeting with the Minister several times. This led the Ministry to draft the Homeworker Protection Act, which was approved by the Cabinet in 2007. Again, it contained some good elements, including many of those above, plus official labour inspection. But the definition of homeworkers was limited, and HomeNet continued to lobby. Then political turmoil slowed its progress in Parliament. However, by March 2010 the Act had been passed by the Lower House.

The Homeworkers Protection Act B.E. 2553 (2010) was finally published in the Government Gazette on 10 November 2010, and came into force 180 days later, in May 2011. The final Act covers home-based workers who are sub-contracted and not those who are own account workers. It provides for some key protections, such as the obligation to provide a contract, and wages not less than those workers covered by labour law. It also contains prohibitions against occupational health and safety hazards and discrimination, among other things. And it provides for a Homeworker Protection Committee which includes worker representatives, and access to the labour court in the case of a dispute. While there are weaknesses in its scope and provisions, it is a big step forward for home-based workers. The challenge now is to implement its provisions and to work towards improvement of the Act.

"Over the past 10 years, we have dedicated our efforts, energy and resources to push for the passage of this law. So its enactment brought us such pride and joy that we would love to give three shouts of delight: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

Poonsap Tulaphan, HomeNet Thailand

Resources

Celia Mather. 2010. We are Workers Too! Organizing Home-Based Workers in the Global Economy, WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at: http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Mather_We_Are_Workers_Too.pdf

For the full text of the Homeworkers Protection Act B.E. 2553 (2010) see http://www.homenetthailand.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73%3Ahome-workers-protection-act&catid=6%3Alow&Itemid=8&lang=en

HomeNet Thailand website: www.homenetthailand.org

HomeNet Nepal – Transforming an Organization: Building an MBO

This information was told to Dave Spooner by Om Thapaliya, HomeNet Nepal Coordinator.

HomeNet Nepal (HNN) was formally registered in 2003 as an NGO and in 2008, 174 organizations with an interest or concern in home-based workers had become loosely involved – a wide variety of organizations ranging from grass-roots NGOs to large institutions, such as the ILO.

By 2011, HNN had virtually completed a process of transformation into a network of MBOs, with a new constitution, new structure, and a combined membership of more than 25,000 home-based workers, in 61 member organizations. While this is still a small proportion of Nepal's total home-based workforce of an estimated 2.2 million, it is a significant achievement, and is still growing. HNN can now legitimately claim to be the democratic voice of home-based workers in Nepal. How was this achieved? Is it sustainable in the long-term?

The Inclusive Cities project emerged just at the right time to enable a thorough bottom-up restructuring of the organization. HNN was convinced of the need to have equal involvement of home-based workers in HNN activities and governance rather than an NGO-based client relationship. An organization of workers, not just for workers.

In 2009-10, with the help of HomeNet South Asia and the Inclusive Cities project, HNN was able to undertake the first serious research and analysis of membership-based organizations of home-based workers in Nepal – identifying who was real, and who was sincere. As the result of the mapping exercise, which included the collection of membership data from organizations, HNN built a database of detailed profiles of the 25,000 home-based workers in membership of HNN's affiliates.

HNN decided to use five indicators to determine whether an organization was entitled to claim status as a membership-based organization. In other words, organizations should meet (or plan to meet within a specific time-period) five criteria for HNN membership: a minimum membership of 25 home-based workers; at least one home-based worker should be on the governing body; activities to target home-based workers; explicit reference to home-based workers in the organization's policies; and a constitutional commitment to be for and of home-based workers. Using these criteria, HNN member organizations were allocated to one of four categories, ranging from MBOs (mostly unions) that fulfilled all five criteria, to those who only fulfilled the first – effectively NGOs with some democratic characteristics.

There was resistance to change however by some of the NGOs who had been involved in HNN, leading to some very hard debates and difficult discussions. Some were very nervous about the shift towards an MBO approach, and were worried about the sincerity and integrity of some of the MBOs. The main worries were to do with politicization. Would the political parties attempt to infiltrate? Was it too early to move to an MBO strategy? Why not stay in the same structure for another two years or so? Will the MBOs help if HNN hits a crisis, or will they walk away? Other members of HNN were broadly in favour, although all recognized the problems that lay ahead.

"We were all aware of strong currents in the river, but still the need to cross," recounts Om Thapaliya, HomeNet Nepal Coordinator.

Finally the Board was convinced, and following the National Consultation Workshop on Membership-Based Organizations organized by HNN and HNSA in Kathmandu in September 2010, HNN agreed to a four-month strategy for constitutional change.

After a long process of discussion, a draft new constitution was presented to a General Meeting in February 2011 – with new elections and the new constitution adopted. The new constitution establishes a 15-member governing body, consisting of eleven voting members nominated by membership-based organizations, and four non-voting members: one founding member, two trade union representatives and a legal advisor. This ensured that voting members of the HomeNet Nepal Board were to be home-based workers themselves – MBO representatives directly accountable to their members.

HNN thus completed the first essential steps in building a democratic and representative organization of home-based workers: building a common understanding of what constitutes a democratic membership-based

"Strong currents in the river but still the need to cross."

Om Thapaliya, HomeNet Nepal Coordinator

organization, an agreement on the principles of democratic governance for HNN, and the necessary constitutional changes to make it a reality.

Yet the next steps are challenging. Many of the workers elected to serve on the new Executive Committee will have no previous experience of overseeing a national democratic organization; a new relationship has to be built with Nepal's trade union federations that strengthens solidarity, yet maintains HNN's autonomy; HNN's membership needs to grow, yet, most importantly, the growth needs to be sustainable – especially when external funding cannot be guaranteed beyond a couple of years or so.

In common with home-based workers' organizations (and other informal economy workers' organizations) in other countries, HNN faces major challenges of sustainability. If HNN has its own resources, it can determine its own direction. MBOs which are strong do not need to take a penny from external donors to survive. HNN recognizes that it is essential to keep the basic operating costs to a minimum, with the objective of covering its core budget from self-generated income. Rules of HNN membership stipulate that each organization must collect a minimum of NPR 25 (USD 0.35) per member per year in membership dues. External funds are very welcome and valuable, but not if they become essential to cover the core costs of running the organization. It is at that point that the donor policies begin to overshadow the priorities of the members, and the organization becomes, in effect, just one more of countless small NGOs.

Resources

HomeNet Nepal website: www.homenetnepal.org

Two Sergeant's Community Group: A Community of Home-Based Workers in Thailand

This article was written by Samson Mulugeta, Media Consultant.

On a small side street where children in tricycles played happily, a small army of women sat at small consoles inside their homes, their hands moving rapidly, scooping up cake mix, splashing it on a pancake baker and quickly rolling it into a flaky pastry.

The women laboured up to eight hours a day, as their children played outside. As the hours passed, boxes of the pastries piled up high in the workshops and were soon whisked away to the streets of Bangkok to feed hurried commuters as favourite snacks.

Some workers bought raw material for themselves and produced the Thong Muan, while others worked for others. Most workers earned about $10 a day for their many hours of toil.

Until recently these home-based workers were on their own, eking out a living without any support or recognition from the authorities. The workers eventually got together and formed a cooperative that formalized their working arrangement. Since 2009, the workers have been organized as a cooperative known as the Two Sergeant Community, which consists of 158 households of 600 people. The group is led by a committee of eight who meet once a month and whose principal duty is to market the group and recruit new members.

The Two Sergeant Community is a member of HomeNet Thailand, which was officially established in June 1998. It is the coordinating

photo: Samson Mulugeta

The Two Sergeant Community is a cooperative member of HomeNet Thailand

centre of the network of home-based producers and homeworkers as well as concerned NGOs in the country. It operates through regional networks of NGOs and home-based workers in the Northeast, the North and Bangkok. Each regional network has its own committee and an office with a regional coordinator who works part-time for HomeNet Thailand. HomeNet Thailand provides the coordination at the national and international levels on policies and issues related to home-based workers. The national committee is composed of two representatives from each region.

The Two Sergeant Community collects small monthly contributions from its members and uses the revenue to offer death benefits to its members and a small scholarship fund for needy students in the community.

Focus on Waste Pickers

Overview of the Waste Picking Sector

Millions of people worldwide make a living collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling materials that someone else has thrown away. Vital actors in the informal economy, waste pickers provide widespread benefits to their communities, their municipalities and the environment. However, they often face low social status and social stigma, have poor living and working conditions, and receive little support from local governments. They are frequently subjected to harassment. Some waste pickers live and work on municipal dumps – as many as 20,000 people in Kolkata, India; 12,000 in Manila, Philippines; and 15,000 in Mexico City, Mexico.

Although we know that there are millions of waste pickers worldwide, mostly found in developing countries, little reliable socio-economic or statistical information exists. A 1988 World Bank study estimated that waste pickers comprised 1-2 per cent of the world's population. A more recent study in India estimated waste pickers in that country numbered 1.5 million people, primarily women and those from socially marginalized groups.

Waste pickers in South Africa are beginning to address difficult working conditions through organizing into a national association

A significant number of waste pickers are women and many are children. They are frequently found in occupations within the recycling chain that provide the lowest incomes and poorest conditions. In Brazil for example, men working as waste pickers earn much more than women in all age groups, with no women among the highest waste picker income groups. In some cities, most waste pickers are migrants, such as in Delhi where waste pickers are often from Bangladesh. In other places, they are likely to be from marginalized groups or rejected from global economic processes.

Although the situation differs across countries, some basic categories of waste pickers exist:

- Dump/landfill waste pickers reclaim recyclables for selling, and organic matter, usually for feeding livestock at disposal sites.

- Street waste pickers reclaim recyclables from mixed waste disposed in garbage bags and bins on streets or in dumpsters; some have

arrangements with commercial and/or office buildings and may have access to previously segregated material.

- Doorstep waste pickers collect recyclables as part of door-to-door selective waste collection schemes run by municipalities in partnership with membership-based organizations (MBOs) of waste pickers. Also, cooperatives that enter into formal or informal agreements with commercial and office buildings to collect large quantities of recyclables may have members engaged in the collection of materials by trucks or other vehicles.

- On route/truck waste pickers often designate formal collection crews who segregate recyclables from household waste as a supplement to their salaries. The term can also designate informal pickers who have permission to collect materials alongside collection crews.

- Itinerant buyers collect recyclables from households/businesses in exchange for payment or barter. They generally work on fixed routes and use pushcarts or other collection vehicles.

- Sorters select and sort recyclables by type from conveyor belts or other devices.

- Handlers/processors of organic wastes work in compost plants or biogas plants.

Waste pickers face a number of important risks and challenges:

- Health risks: these include contact with fecal matter, paper saturated by toxic materials, bottles and containers with chemical residues, health residues, contaminated needles, and heavy metals from batteries.

- Risk of injuries: waste pickers work in hazardous and dangerous conditions. Those who work on landfills are particularly at risk.

- Harassment, disrespect and violence: waste pickers are treated as nuisances by authorities and with disdain by the public. They are particularly susceptible to violence by the police. They may face exploitation and intimidation by middlemen, which can affect their earnings.

- Recent trends in waste management such as privatization of municipal solid waste management services, global approaches to climate change mitigation, and the global recession all pose major threats to their livelihoods.

In spite of the significant benefits waste pickers make to public health, the environment and the economy, they continue to suffer poor working conditions without recognition. In addition, the majority of waste pickers worldwide do not have access to any kind of state-sponsored social protection schemes. However, change is on its way. Waste pickers are organizing in many different ways – cooperatives, associations, companies, unions, micro-enterprises.

Some are even forming "women only" organizations in order to better confront gender stereotypes. Research suggests that women waste pickers are more likely to belong to organizations. A small-scale study conducted in Brazil found that 56 per cent of the members of waste picker organizations, cooperatives and associations are women while 44 per cent are men. They are

also building local, national, regional networks as well as networking across the globe.

Waste pickers' membership-based organizations and networks are helping to improve livelihoods and bring recognition and dignity to waste pickers across the globe. They are helping cities recognize the vital role waste pickers play, and encouraging authorities to design more progressive policies that include an important role for waste pickers.

Waste Pickers: Common Demands

- authorized access to waste materials

- payment for environmental services

- health care and social protection schemes

- economical and technical support to unions, cooperatives/associations and micro-enterprises to enable them to enter new niches

- provision of infrastructure for sorting, baling, etc.

- implementation of educational campaigns to help change public attitudes towards waste pickers and also to promote the segregation of recyclables

- extended legal frameworks that enable the hiring of waste pickers as service providers

- provision of identity cards

- preferential rights to work on source segregation schemes

- clear tendering processes for waste collection so that waste pickers can be bidders

- equitable distribution of profits in the recycling chain

- credit lines for equipment and other materials

- provision of work facilities: sorting warehouses, crèches (day care services), etc.

- programs for the eradication of child labour

- participatory channels: platforms for joint planning and implementation of solid waste programs

- capacity building courses on organizing, technical aspects of recycling, etc.

Resources

For a more detailed version of the above see: http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/waste-pickers
See also the Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/waste-picking/
Melanie Samson. 2009. Refusing to be Case Aside. Waste Pickers Organising Around the World, WIEGO. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Samson-Refusing-to-be-Cast-Aside-Wastepickers-Wiego-publication-English.pdf

How Waste Pickers are Organizing

Base Organizations

Cooperatives and associations are the most common forms of organization, especially in Latin America. In India there are examples of unions which have also formed cooperatives such as SEWA and KKPKP. The key focus is access to materials, the right to work and defence against harassment.

National Organizations

These are most common in Latin America, e.g. Brazil and Colombia, where cooperatives form federations/alliances/networks, often known as movements. Important organizing issues relate to changing laws, recognition and building a common identity. The advantage of national organizing is that waste pickers can speak with one voice, with their numbers giving them a public profile, and the power to access and influence government and industry.

International Organizations

In Latin America there is a regional network, the Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers Network, and internationally there is a developing Global Alliance of Waste pickers. A distinction is made between those alliances that include workers' organizations and NGOs such as the Global Alliance of Waste pickers and Allies, formed to provide an identity for the waste pickers and allies such as WIEGO and GAIA at the Climate Change Conferences, and those alliances or networks composed of only workers' organizations such as the Latin American and Caribbean Network. International networks focus on influencing international policy but also issues relating to the market functioning at a global level. Their advantage is that they unite waste pickers in different countries and provide solidarity, help develop a common identity and profile and gain recognition and respect, provide a means to share experiences and information and, at a global level, influence global and national policies.

This table is compiled from a discussion by waste picker representatives from different countries at the Organizing Workshop. It is based on their own experiences and their own organizations.

photo: Amit Thavaraj

Meetings of MBO members play a crucial role in building unity and strengthening organization

Table 4: Forms of Waste Pickers Organizations, Advantages and Issues

Forms of Organizing	Advantages of this form	Organizing issues
Base/Local Organizations		
Cooperatives (or associations operating as cooperatives)	Offer recognition Allow for processing and selling collectively to get better prices Help get rid of middlemen Allow pooling of resources/facilities Facilitate negotiation with local governments	Defense against harassment by police, authorities Improved earning capacity Secure access to material Secure right to livelihood/work Facilities and rights from local government
Associations	Facilitate negotiations with middlemen, dump site manager, local authorities Provide means to self-discipline and work organization Open channels to other waste picker organizations	
Non registered informal organizations	Facilitate negotiations and Provide a means to self-discipline and work organization Provide support for individual problems	
Unions	Offer recognition as workers Serve as vehicle for collective bargaining with authorities, contracts Provide links to and support from other unions	
Local networks of cooperatives	Offer improved income through collective processing and selling Foster moving up value chain Reduce power of middle-men	Better prices
National organizations		
Associations	Negotiate with governments Access donors Foster solidarity Facilitate information sharing Raise profile and public awareness	National level laws and policies Recognition of occupation Building a common perspective
Networks and Movements	As above Build political awareness Offer linkages with other social movements	As above
Unions	Undertake collective bargaining Foster recognition as workers Bring support from union movement Provide access to resources, skills, influential organizations	As above
Alliances	Provide linkages and access to resources	

International Organizations		
Alliances – which includes workers' organizations and NGOs	Bring in additional skills, knowledge Raise profile across wider spectrum Provide access to additional resources	International policy influence Policies in other countries Global market issues
Networks- only workers' organizations	Empower worker leadership Offer global and national recognition Provide common worker voice Collaborate with WPs globally	As above Solidarity Organizational skills Sharing information

Waste Pickers' Global Networking
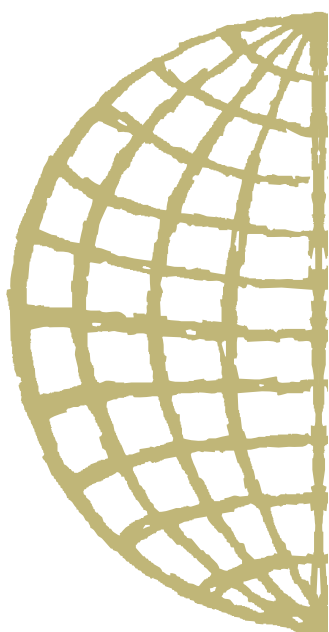
The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers brings waste picker organizations from Latin America, India and Africa into a networking process. In this way, waste pickers engage in joint activities which are planned by an interim global steering committee made up of waste picker organization representatives from different regions. WIEGO facilitates the networking process, helping with resource mobilization, capacity building, coordination and support through its team of global and regional coordinators, researchers and others. As well as a global programme, there are extensive programmes in different countries and regions in support of waste picker' organizing activities and livelihood development. Further support is provided through alliances and partnerships, in particular with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives/Global Anti-Incinerator Alliance (GAIA).

In 2007 waste picker organizations in Latin America and India began the global networking process, and in 2008, in Bogota, Colombia, they held the First World Conference of Waste Pickers, "Waste Pickers without Frontiers." The conference was organized by an international steering committee composed of waste picker organizations from India and Latin America, and supportive individuals and organizations including WIEGO and the AVINA Foundation.

Since then, global connections have been strengthened through increased communication, sharing of experiences on common issues and challenges, learning exchanges and visits, global meetings, alliance building and participation in global events impacting on waste pickers, such as the United Nations Framework on the Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations

photo: Leslie Tuttle

First World Conference of Waste Pickers, "Waste Pickers without Frontiers," March 2008

(this is discussed in the Case Studies, below). Waste pickers and support organizations are also reaching out to new groups in the different regions, to support them and bring them into the networking process.

Through these activities they are forging solidarity and a unified voice, which is increasingly being heard, bringing with it recognition of informal recycling as a valuable occupation and waste pickers as important environmental players who bring benefits to all.

Resources

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org

Building a Regional Movement:
The Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers Network

The Red Latinoamericana y de Caribe Recicladores/Catadores (Red Lacre), or Latin American Waste pickers Network, is a network that brings together democratic, waste picker organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean – primarily national movements formed by cooperatives.

"In 2005, in the City of Sao Leopoldo, Brazil, I had the opportunity to help gather a few leaders of waste pickers´ organizations from four Latin American countries. Who would have imagined at that first meeting that, eight years later, those same leaders and countries would be part of a network that, to date, gathers organizations from Asia, Africa and Latin America?" said Lucia Fernandez, WIEGO's Waste Pickers' Global Coordinator.

During 2006 and 2007, cooperation increased and more countries became involved. Despite resource and other challenges, "the will was always stronger than the difficulties, and support from some allies came swiftly," Fernandez says. They succeeded in holding several meetings and exchanges, with the assistance of the AVINA Foundation. Thereafter the Network grew and at their Third Conference, held in conjunction with the First World Conference, "Waste Pickers without Frontiers," in 2008, representatives from 15 Latin American countries participated.

The Network's key objectives are recognition of waste picking as an occupation, to help create and strengthen national waste picker associations, share information, promote public policies and laws that include, formalize and dignify the work of waste pickers, as well as global policies that recognize their work and bring benefits to waste pickers and society as a whole such as climate change, poverty mitigation.

"We are a social movement and so the objective is constant movement and change," noted a participant in a meeting held between the Network and WIEGO in June 2011. Hence bureaucracy is avoided; leadership and administration is decentralized, with the Secretariat being split into Communication (Chile), International (Colombia) and Administration (Brazil), all of which are subject to rotation from time to time. However, there are no formal structures, nor does the organization have office bearers such as a President or General Secretary.

At the moment a majority of the leaders are men, but there is a recognition that this has to change and plans are underway to support the participation and leadership of women waste pickers within the Network. This move comes at an important moment. In late 2011, waste picker leaders from six

" ... there is already a global network as we pass information to each other. It is not necessarily necessary to have meetings. But we know what is happening to each other."

Nohra Padilla, quoted in Refusing to be Cast Aside (Samson, 2010)

countries carried out a mapping exercise in more than 20 cities in Central America. One important finding was that there is a huge percentage of women waste pickers working in those countries, reinforcing the need for a serious approach to gender equality, and women's full participation in the movement.

Resources

Melanie Samson. 2009. *Refusing to be Cast Aside. Waste pickers Organising Around the World*, WIEGO. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Samson-Refusing-to-be-Cast-Aside-Wastepickers-Wiego-publication-English.pdf

Lucia Fernandez. "Towards a Global Network: Waste Pickers without Borders" *Inclusive Cities Newsletter, August 2011*. Available at http://www.inclusivecities.org/blog/inclusive-cities-newsletter-index-august-2011/

RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net

Waste Pickers Challenges and Successes

We look here at two different national networks of waste picker organizations – from Brazil and from India. They have a different history, come from different cultures, have different structures and differing achievements. We also focus on a local association in Senegal that has made major gains for members but is under threat as the dump on which it is based is scheduled to be closed down. We then get advice from the KKPKP on organizing women workers and an example of a technique they use to educate women waste pickers about the Union. Finally we record some of the achievements made by waste pickers and allies in their struggle to influence the global Climate Change negotiations.

Case Studies

photo: Deia de Brito

MNCR works to promote the inclusion of "catadores" into formal solid waste systems

Organizing Brings Achievements. National Movement of Pickers of Recyclables (MNCR), Brazil

Article written by Sonia Dias, WIEGO Waste Sector Specialist.

The year of 2001 marks a landmark in the history of Brazilian waste pickers (*catadores de recicláveis* or pickers of recyclables). In this year the MNCR was formally created in a Congress in Brasília, the capital city of Brazil, attended by around 1,600 *catadores* and their supporters. *Catadores* delegates issued a manifesto – the "*Carta de Brasília*" – where they set out their demands.

The MNCR is a social movement whose main purpose is to organize the *catadores*, promote their recognition and ensure public policies that integrate them into formal solid waste systems. It is guided by democratic principles that ensure collective decision making, political autonomy from parties and industries, direct action to promote the *catadores* and the building of solidarity with the struggles of other marginalized groups. The movement is formed by associations and/or cooperatives.

Ten years after the creation of the MNCR, what have been the main achievements as a result of being organized?

VOICE: There has been a large increase in the number of *catadores* organized into cooperatives and/or associations – around 500 collectives of which 300 are affiliated to the MNCR. Participatory stakeholders´ forums were created for drafting inclusive recycling programs. This has contributed to greater recognition of the *catadores*, and amplified their ability to voice their interests. The formation of an Inter-ministerial Committee for Social Inclusion of *Catadores* (CIISC), where MNCR is represented, is an indicator of the public status they have achieved.

VISIBILITY: The *catadores* managed to get their occupation included in the Brazilian Classification of Occupations (CBO) in 2002 making them visible within the official statistical system in Brazil, thus improving their social status and image. Brazil is the only country in the world that can provide numbers, socio-demographic data, etc. on informal waste recyclers.

VALIDITY: Recognition of the *catadores* as legitimate economic actors is demonstrated by the level of support for their associations/cooperatives and national movement from different sectors. This has resulted in the integration of *catadores*' collectives in local recycling, such as in Diadema municipality, where a Law was passed allowing *catadores* organizations to be contracted as service providers for the municipal recycling scheme.

Additionally, national government has a strong commitment towards developing favourable policies for the sector, indicating that *catadores*´ organizations are recognized by the political system as a legitimate actors. Some examples of the many achievements are:

- The Ministry of the Cities in 2005, created a National Training Program in cooperation with universities to address the need for capacity building in SWM.

- The Ministry of the Environment opened up, in 2003, a special line of funding (US$2.6 million) for waste pickers´ cooperatives.

- Presidential Decree 5940/06 made it mandatory for federal buildings to donate recyclables to the *catadores*' collectives.

- The Brazilian Bank for Economic and Social Development created a social fund for *catadores*´ collectives to use for infrastructure such as warehouses, meeting places, equipment, etc.

- The 2010 National Solid Waste Policy obliges municipalities to draft plans stating alternatives for *catadores*' inclusion in solid waste systems when closing an open dump.

The MNCR has strived towards self-reliance while fighting for public policies. It has encouraged and given support to the creation of local networks of cooperatives for bulk selling and/or processing of recyclables allowing for less dependency on fluctuating recycling markets.

The MNCR is conscious that is only through organizing and social mobilization that the *catadores* can make their voice heard, achieve visibility and recognition of its validity as a legitimate actor in solid waste systems.

Growing Organically: Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

This case study is an updated and edited version of "The SWACHH National Alliance of Waste Pickers, India," in Melanie Samson (2009) Refusing to be Cast Aside. Waste Pickers Organizing Around the World; *updated with the assistance of Nalini Shakar, AIW Coordinator, and compiled by Chris Bonner.*

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers is engaged in highlighting the contribution of waste pickers

The Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) is an alliance of over 30 organizations working with waste pickers in cities across India. AIW estimates that there are more than one and a half million waste pickers in India.

In the late 1990s trade unions, NGOs, university departments started to work with waste pickers in different parts of India. Each group approached organizing and advocacy activities from their different orientations and philosophies: gender justice, caste discrimination, worker rights and the environment. Interaction between the different groups was informal and happened organically according to the member needs.

It was only in March 2005 that eight organizations met together and decided to forge an alliance and form a network. The network was originally called SWACHH, but changed its name to the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers to better reflect the alliance aspect of the work.

The Form

The AIW is not a registered body, since as a strategy the groups decided to allow the national network to grow organically. The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers in Pune functions as the secretariat for AIW, and in 2008 hired a coordinator. There is no written constitution or membership fee although individual organizations contribute by, for example, paying for their own transport to meetings.

Membership

The membership of AIW includes more than 30 organizations. Some are MBOs of waste pickers like trade unions, or cooperatives, most are NGOs registered as public trusts or societies. Some of the organizations have set up cooperatives or companies that complement their activities as a trust, society or union.

Activities

The agenda for working together is driven by the needs of the day and includes responding to changing environments that affect the waste pickers' work. AIW is engaged in highlighting the contribution of waste pickers. It strives to integrate waste pickers into the solid waste management systems in the different municipalities; advocates for inclusion in social security schemes and opposes the setting up of waste-to-energy projects that take away the livelihoods of waste pickers. Activities include:

- supporting organizations to strengthen their capacities to organize waste pickers and integrate them into solid waste management systems

- organizing learning workshops and exchange programmes

- organizing events that bring together a large number of waste pickers on one platform at city, state and national levels

- building support and solidarity among AIW members to effectively address challenging situations at local levels

- hosting and participating in international exchange programmes

- facilitating participation of waste pickers in the UNFCCC (climate change) processes

Successes

AIW is gaining recognition by government officials as an authentic representative of waste pickers. As a result of AIW advocacy efforts the Urban Development Department in Delhi has sent a circular to all State Principal Secretaries advising on the various methods of integrating waste pickers in the solid waste management systems and recommending that they be given identity cards. AIW has been on a government task force to help draft a social security scheme for waste pickers and is represented on a committee established by the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry to examine the Municipal Solid Waste Rules (2000) with a view to integrating waste pickers.

Resources

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers. 2010. "Livelihoods with Dignity." Available at http://wiego.org/publications/livelihoods-dignity

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers newsletters are available at http://www.inclusivecities.org/current/media/

**Challenges and Inspiration: Book Diom,
Association of Collectors and Recyclers of Mbeubeuss, Senegal**

Compiled and written from a variety of sources by Chris Bonner.

Book Diom is an Association of waste pickers who collect and recycle materials at the Mbeubeuss landfill in Dakar, Senegal. The Association was set up in 1995 as a result of waste pickers' frustration with the lack of recognition for their work. They saw that an organization could help build solidarity, provide a place where they could talk about landfill issues, and a vehicle through which they could address their problems.

The objectives of Book Diom are to promote the economic, social and cultural development of their members with support from development partners. Since its creation more than 15 years ago, Book Diom has made many gains in improving the situation of its members and their families. For example, they now have facilities on the landfill such as a health centre, a literacy centre and a credit and savings coop. Training is also provided on important issues such as e-waste.

Book Diom is a registered association. It has a membership of 800 waste pickers among the 1,200 workers on the landfill. It is a membership based organization, with a democratic structure that allows for regular meetings of members and regular elections of its office bearers: president, vice-president, secretary and deputy, treasurer and deputy. It works with a number of NGO partners. Resources to run the organization come from contributions from waste pickers and from partners working at the site.

photo: Demetria Tsoutouras

Book Diom member Harouna Niasse speaks at a press conference at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP17), Durban 2012

But the waste pickers of Mbeubeuss face an enormous challenge. In 2002 the Senegalese government decided to shut down the landfill, but have not yet implemented this as they have yet to find a suitable site for the new dump. The threat still hangs over the waste pickers.

Through the Association, waste pickers have engaged with the authorities and private companies involved around the closure. So far, they have been offered pensions for those over 55 and educational programmes for children under 16, and some small compensation. At the new recycling centre a restaurant, housing and health centres are promised, but yet to be seen. The biggest issue for the waste pickers is the loss of jobs and livelihoods and the divisive way in which the authorities propose to move forward. They have offered jobs to only 350 waste pickers at the new recycling centre. This leaves the majority of members without work and a means of livelihood. It pushes their families into poverty. It breaks down the solidarity built up through their organization. However, the struggle is not yet over.

They are encouraged by the solidarity and support given to them by waste pickers from India, Africa and Latin America and organizations like WIEGO. They are inspired by the visit to India in June 2011 by Book Diom leaders, and the success stories of waste pickers in Pune, India. They have already met with the authorities to put forward ideas for creating more jobs, drawing on these success stories.

Resources

Fanny Chantereau. 2011. "Learning from India." *Waste Picking in Africa*, newsletter Volume 1.1, September 2011. Available at http://globalrec.org/2011/11/13/learning-from-india/

Organizing Women Waste Pickers: "Always start where the women are"

The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers in Pune, India has a strong history of organizing women waste pickers. Surekha Gade, waste picker, and Mohan Nanavare, President of KKPKP, provide the following advice on how to organize women workers.

Always start where the women are. We have to identify the issues of concern, problems they are facing, their culture, traditions, and their livelihoods. Take up the issues and try and show successes. They need to be interested and motivated to join by seeing real benefits of membership. We have to enhance their capacity.

Use methods, language and actions that are familiar to them and with which they feel comfortable. Men should not patronize women. A man should not think he is handing down rights to a woman. Make men aware of gender inequality. In Pune, India, there was a campaign to get men to do the washing in their families.

KKPKP finds that using educational games helps women understand about their situation, and about the importance of the union, organizing and struggle. Here is an example shown in the Organizing Workshop.

The Chained Elephant: Educational Game

(Put into words by Laxmi Narayan, KKPKP)

Objective

To show that:

- Each individual is capable of getting out of her situation and breaking shackles that bind her.

- Sometimes where we are is partly because we choose not to struggle enough to get out of it.

Material required

Flash card or a drawing showing an adult elephant tied with a rope to a small stump and a baby elephant chained to a huge tree.

Methodology

- The facilitator starts by asking participants to describe what they see in the picture and to try and analyze the anomaly in it, i.e. why do you think the baby elephant is tied to something so much bigger than the adult that is tied to a branch/stump?

- Participants are encouraged to think creatively of why this must be so. Usually they will come to the "answer" or reason themselves, which is:

  Baby elephants are usually tied up to trees by their handlers (mahouts), so they can't escape. Try as they might, and whatever pressure or force they put they do not manage to get free. When they grow up and become adults, they stop trying to escape because they don't realize that they can easily get free. Only the symbol of bondage is needed. The chains are not really needed any more.

- The facilitator then asks participants to compare the adult elephant's situation to their/our own. There are so many instances when our strength (physical, numerical, moral or emotional) is actually so much more than that of the "oppressor," whether it is a drunken husband beating his wife, upper caste exploiting dalits or waste pickers being cheated by numerically fewer scrap dealers.

- The facilitator concludes by saying a lot of the shackles that bind us are only in our heads, and if we choose to break free, we can.
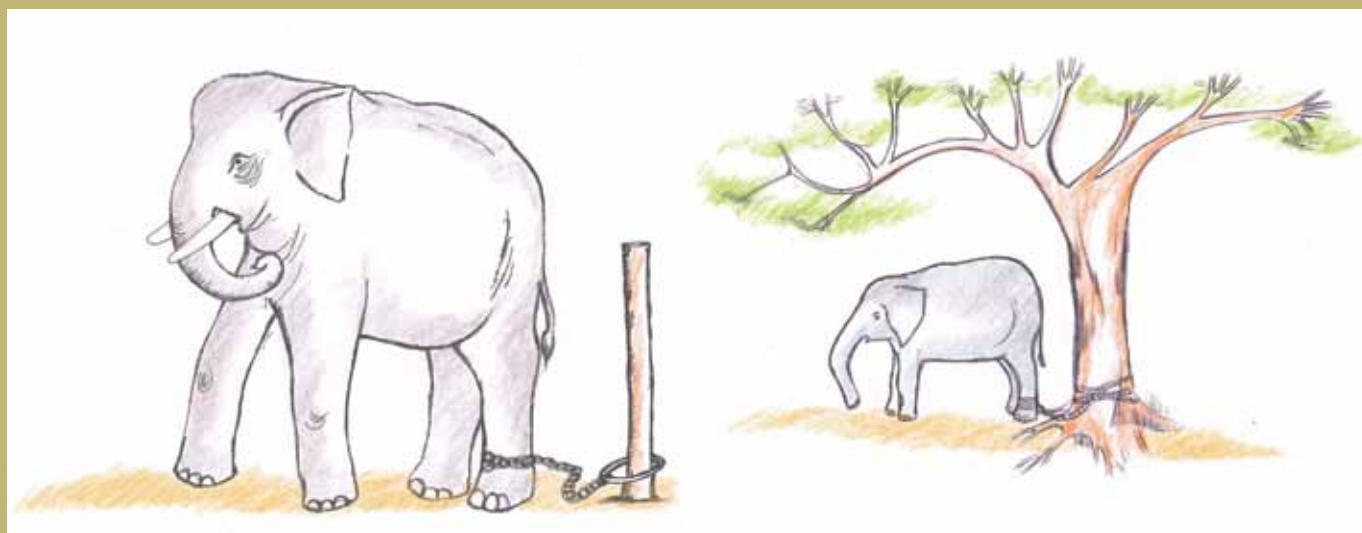
Waste Pickers Mobilizing at the United Nations Climate Change Negotiations

By Mariel Vilella, GAIA Climate Change Campaign Coordinator, with files from and Leslie Vryenhoek, WIEGO, Writer/Editor.

Waste pickers are fighting for their livelihoods against privatization of waste management and "waste-to-energy" schemes that favour corporate incinerators and which burn up their potential earnings. Since 2009 waste pickers around the world have been working with WIEGO and the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) as the "Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and Allies" to raise their voices on the world stage and struggle for recognition of their significant environmental contribution.

The Global Alliance has been participating in the United Nations Climate Conferences (COPs) and making interventions around Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) policies – one of the most important UN financing mechanisms for "waste-to-energy" projects – and the development of a Green Climate Fund. Through these activities, waste pickers have developed a strategic understanding of international climate policies that affect their lives. This has enabled groups from different regions to work together and advocate for their rights in a high profile international arena, building unity, raising their visibility and gaining recognition and validity for their work.

photo: Demetria Tsoutouras

The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers has attended climate change conferences to engage on issues of "waste-to-energy" projects and a Green Climate Fund

One of the important achievements of the Global Alliance's collective organizing and participation in the UNFCCC processes has been their ability to change the conventional wisdom around waste pickers' issues with the public and among decision-makers such as government officials, scientific and technical experts, and negotiators. Interest has been created by the waste pickers' presence at climate meetings, their media exposure and by publications focused on their environmental contribution. As a result, many more NGOs and some government officials and development agencies now better understand and even support the waste pickers' cause. Critical analysis of the CDM, along with intense campaigning to gain recognition, has contributed to the CDM Executive Board's agreement to revise the rules applying to the waste sector (this revision is in process).

Some Highlights

Bonn Climate Change Talks - June 2009: Formulating the Demands – Waste picker organizations, GAIA and WIEGO met and set up the foundations of their common agenda for the UNFCCC negotiation process. They produced a waste pickers' statement of demands that was widely publicized.

UNFCCC Conference, Copenhagen (COP15) December 2009: Reaching a Global Audience – At COP 15, waste pickers shared their experiences and advocated for alternative funding mechanisms to support fair and just solutions to climate change. They gained extensive media coverage and reached a global audience, setting the stage for future gains.

Tianjin Climate Change Conference - September/October 2010: Speaking for Civil Society – A delegation of three women leaders and an activist from the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) spoke at the Conference, including at the inauguration plenary where a waste picker was selected to speak on behalf of civil society as a whole.

UNFCCC Conference, Cancun (COP16) December 2010: Solidarity Action for Waste Pickers' Rights –During COP16, 15 waste pickers (pepenadores) in Northern Mexico were detained for protesting the closure of a dump and the potential privatization of the Solid Waste Management system there. The Alliance members in Cancun quickly planned a protest to show their solidarity and highlight waste pickers' rights. The high media attention increased pressure on the authorities and the pepenadores were eventually released from prison.

UNFCCC Conference, Durban (COP17) November-December 2011: Public Profile and a Forum for Women – At COP 17 the Global Alliance delegation was boosted by a large number of waste pickers from different parts of South Africa – members of the South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA) – who took the opportunity to strengthen SAWPA and raise their national profile. The delegation made its presence felt at many conference events, including the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice march, the CDM Executive Board Meeting, and at a new forum focused on women and climate change where women waste pickers from India were able to express their views on the role of women waste pickers.

"The wonderful part from my travels has been that other waste pickers have started to recognize the value of what they do. None of us really knew that we played such an important part in protecting the environment and mitigating climate change, including me."

Sushila of KKPKP, as told to Maitreya (KKPKP)

Resources

WIEGO website: http://wiego.org/wiego/waste-pickers-united-nations-climate-change-conferences
Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/climate-change/
GAIA website: www.no-burn.org
Mariel Vilella. 2011. "False Solutions to Climate Change." Waste Picking in Africa, newsletter Volume 1.1, September 2011. Available at http://globalrec.org/2011/11/13/false-solutions-to-climate-change-cdm-incineration-and-landfill-gas-systems/
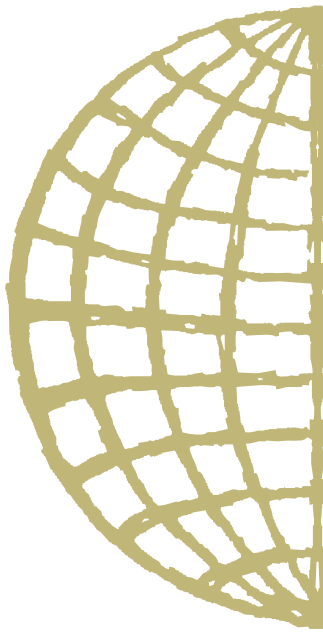
Section Three

Organizing Lessons & Debates: Learning from Each Other

Meetings and conferences provide an opportunity for informal workers from different countries and sectors to learn from one another – WIEGO General Assembly 2010

Organizational Development Challenges

Through coming together and sharing organizing experiences, informal workers are learning lessons within and across sectors and countries. Despite differences in occupations and country contexts, they have found much in common: in their situation as informal workers and in their organizing challenges and strategies.

Drawing on the experiences shared at the Organizing Workshop, this final Section is structured around a selection of the practical organizational development challenges that were highlighted for base MBOs and for networks. The subjects covered are:

- formation and transformation

- developing international networks

- maintaining democracy

- sustainability

- making gains

The material draws out similarities and differences between the four focus sectors, poses questions for debate, and pulls together some emerging lessons and ideas on how to overcome problems.

"These contacts bring shared knowledge and experience that are valuable in and of themselves"

Angelique Kipulo Katani (LDFC)

Domestic worker organizers share their experiences, Organizing Workshop, 2011

Challenge 1

Formation and Transformation: Building Democratic MBOs

Building a new organization, transforming or extending an existing organization, whether at the base level or at national or international levels, involves a group of workers, or a group of existing organizations, with a shared interest. They must come together and agree on the need for an organization that can achieve an improvement in their situation through collective activity. This means establishing the purpose, processes, plans and principles that will enable the organization to be sound and sustainable. Most importantly, the process has to be participative, democratic and follow a realistic timetable.

Against the complexities of the real world, however, an ideal process is not always possible. Often informal workers respond to a crisis, to burning issues or an unusual opportunity with spontaneous and informal organization. In these circumstances they do not carry out careful planning or follow neat steps, but they may harness this initial energy and turn it into something lasting.

"There is no single way of organizing – there are many ways of organizing to achieve our goal."
Workshop participant

It is also never easy to transform an organization, such as from an NGO structure to an MBO (as in the case of some HomeNets in Asia), or from a religious group into a trade union (a route followed by some domestic workers). Established ways have to change, new skills need to be acquired and resources found. There may be resistance from leadership, members or from a supportive NGO due to fear, suspicion or protection of vested interests.

Lessons and Guiding Questions

When forming an MBO or when transforming an existing hybrid or mixed structure into an MBO, some key questions have to be answered. These apply regardless of the sector or level.

A preliminary and essential consideration is how the group members perceive themselves. Do they see themselves as workers? This will determine whether or not the group organizes into a workers' organization or in some other form of association, for example a business association or a for-profit company. Within the informal economy, identities are not always clear.

DEBATE: Are We Workers?

Informal workers often struggle to be recognized as workers: own account workers such as vendors or waste pickers are often labelled by the public and even trade unionists, as "businessmen" or "entrepreneurs" rather than as workers; domestic workers and home-based workers are seen as "doing what women do." Sometimes informal workers don't recognize themselves as workers. Home-based workers often say that, "they are doing a leisure activity or doing it for a hobby," and do not recognize their home as a workplace.

The line between being an employer and an own account worker is often blurred as many own account workers, for example vendors, have assistants who may be unpaid family members or those looked down

upon because of caste, gender, or origin. Some employ workers on a more regular but informal basis and under poor conditions. They claim that they are poor themselves and cannot afford to provide minimum wages, social protection and so on. At what point does a worker cease to be a worker and cross to employer status?

Once this identity is established, then the following questions need to be addressed.

Do we need a new organization?

Is it necessary to create a new organization, or is there already an organization in place that we should join?

A group of informal workers may wish to create their own organization, specifically designed around their circumstances, but many groups of workers may prefer to join an organization that already exists if it provides support and democratic structures appropriate to their needs. It might involve forming a new branch or section of an existing trade union or cooperative, for example. There may be some sacrifices in autonomy and self-identity, but larger organizations are often more financially sustainable and can benefit from shared resources. Before establishing a new organization, it is worth exploring what other options are available. Unity is strength!

What are the key objectives of the organization?

The overriding purpose is always to act with, and on behalf, of the members in their role as workers – own account (producers, service providers) or waged workers – and to improve their position in society, in particular, their economic status.

Within this, it is important to decide on the primary objective: Is it to advance the members' economic/livelihood interests or to struggle for rights and improved working conditions? Is it to challenge local or national government or to have an international voice? This will guide the basic organizational form, e.g. a cooperative or a union; a tight international federation, or a loose alliance.

Who are the members?

Be clear who the organization is of and for: Who will it serve? What common interests bring the potential members together and what might divide them?

Other considerations are whether the members are individuals, existing associations or groups, or a mixture; if associations or groups, is there a minimum membership requirement? Is membership restricted to pure MBOs or will individuals or organizations (NGOs) outside of the constituency be admitted as members? And if so, what is the status of their membership? These latter questions particularly apply when establishing federated organizations.

What are the issues we want to organize around?

Burning issues are often what bring workers together in the first place. Having an immediate issue or issues around which to organize is important. These lend urgency and energy and will form some of the initial specific objectives of the organization, but are likely to change over time. So, the initial motivation for organizing may be around savings and credit but over time, the motives will shift to collective forms of organizing for production or for advancing or defending rights as workers.

"There is a difference between capitalists and workers. In many countries the idea of a worker is confused. They don't see us as workers, when in reality we are workers. If we are not workers then what are we? We see ourselves as workers but government and other organizations are pushing us to see ourselves as entrepreneurs. It is important to make people know that we are all workers and we all have rights"

Guillermo Onofre Flores, FETTRAMAP

What principles underlie the kind of organization we want?

It is good to have an understanding of the principles on which to base the organization early on. Again these will develop, but principles such as democracy and membership control, accountable leadership, gender equality, and financial independence will guide how the organization is established, what form it takes and how leadership should behave.

What form of organization will be most appropriate?

The primary objective(s), the scope, and the principles will all guide the form of organization which is most suitable. But a combination of other factors will determine the actual form: legal frameworks, political situation and history, organizational space and support, occupation of members, culture and gender composition, as well as founding leaders. (See below for different organizational forms.)

What structure will best help us achieve our objectives?

Choose a structure that is capable of effective decision making, and one that is based on democratic principles. Accountability and control by members is easier to achieve at a local level where direct member participation is possible, but becomes more complex with national and global organizations where representation is through leaders. Requirements for regular election of leaders and their recall when necessary; provisions to enable full participation of women; obtaining mandates from, and reporting back to, members; financial contributions, controls and transparent reporting are all essential features to be built into the structures. Legal requirements and the particular organizational form and scope will influence the details.

What resources and support are available to us?

Assess what resources are needed to form, run, sustain and make gains for members. This includes financial resources – self generated and from outside sources – human resources, and other forms of support from members themselves, from NGOs and supportive individuals. With this goes the need to plan for strong systems to look after resources and to make sure resources – both people and money – are controlled by the members for the members.

What do we call ourselves?

Name the organization carefully. Your name should make a statement to the world about who you are. The name is the headline or a quick introduction to the members, potential members and the world at large. But naming is not always straight forward.

DEBATE: Naming Ourselves and our Organization – A Political Issue?

Waste pickers, waste collectors, reclaimers, recyclers? Domestic workers, household workers, helpers? In different countries names have different connotations. In some countries where "informal" is equated with "illegal," organizations do not want to use "informal workers" to describe who they are. Groups of workers are often given derogatory names, reflecting the low status accorded the group by society. A stark example is the use of the word "scavenger" to describe those that collect and sell recyclable materials. Struggles around naming are struggles about recognition, respect and valuing of the work. At a local level, it is easier to agree a name

for the occupation; at a global level it becomes much harder as language barriers and interpretation, cultural norms have to be accommodated.

As well, the name of an organization can tell us a lot about the organization and its members, or it can tell us little. It can be neutral or it can have political connotations. It can disguise the true purpose of the organization for tactical or legal reasons. The names of international organizations (referred to as the "Nets") are discussed under Challenge 2.

What is the context in which we are organizing?

It is very important to analyze the context for the organization. How favourable for organizing is the environment? How favourable are the interest and motivation of potential members, the laws, policies and regulations, the political situation and allies and enemies?

Many organizations run informally, especially in the beginning. But, if the organization is to continue, then there comes a point when the objectives, rules, structures, procedures have to be agreed and recorded in order to ensure democratic control by the members. Usually this takes the form of a constitution. When an organization wants to register (more about this, below) then a constitution becomes a necessity.

Key Elements Required in a Constitution

Constitutions differ according to the type of organization, the degree of formality, legal and registration requirements (if applicable). However, constitutions of democratic worker organizations normally include as a minimum:

Name:	Who are we?
Status:	What kind of organization are we? What is our legal status?
Principles:	What are our underlying values and orientation?
Objectives:	What is the organization aiming to do and achieve?
Membership:	Who is eligible to be a member? What are the different categories of membership? What are the membership procedures, rights and responsibilities?
Governance:	What are our structures, leadership, roles and responsibilities, procedures?
Finances:	How do we ensure financial accountability? What are our financial procedures and controls?
Dissolution:	What happens to assets if/when the organization closes down?

DEBATE: Should We Register?

Deciding to register or not, and what to register as, is a strategic decision on the part of any organization. Some organizations resist registration for political reasons believing by registering they may be co-opted or controlled by authorities or employers. Some are not in a position to register as they do not have a formal constitution or strong governance structures in place, by choice or for practical reasons. Registration is usually a requirement for receiving funds, opening bank accounts and for legitimizing the organization. Non-registration can provide an excuse for authorities or employers not to deal with an organization. Some trade union and cooperative federations

may insist on seeing registration documents before accepting an organization into membership. Non-registration can also make the organization reliant on registered organizations, usually NGOs, to receive and administer funds, with the potential to jeopardize independence.

How and what to register as is often circumscribed by the legal situation in the country. While an MBO may act, look like and even be named as a trade union, it may be registered as an association because, as a union of self-employed workers whose members are deemed "employees," it is excluded from the right to register as a union. Registration as an association rather than a cooperative may avoid tight bureaucratic rules and financial disadvantage.

Across the Sectors:
Focus on Organizational Forms

Although there are many different organizational forms, waste pickers, domestic workers, street/market vendors and home-based workers show some remarkable similarities in the way they organize and the reasons they choose a particular form of organization. However, choices about the particular form are influenced by local circumstances, sector specific factors, challenges, employment status and so on. Table 5 compiles the information from the tables in Section 2 to identify the most common organizational forms found across the four sectors, what advantage each form provides, and in which of the sectors it is most commonly found.

photo: Julian Luckham

KKPKP convenes educational meetings such as this Patient's Rights Forum, 2009

Table 5: A Comparison of Organizational Forms across Four Sectors

Type of organization	Advantages: What it does well	Sectors where most common
Trade Unions	Collective bargaining strength Access to resources and solidarity support Access to decision makers – governments and authorities Recognition as workers and legitimacy in the eyes of public and authorities Representation and collective bargaining Provision and sharing of services	Domestic workers Street/market vendors
Cooperatives	Collective purchasing and/or selling for better prices The cutting out of the middlemen or exploitative agencies Collective ownership of productive resources Sharing of skills and infrastructure Pooling of financial resources and loans Collective learning of skills Provision of services to members Stable membership	Waste pickers Home-based workers
Associations (formal or informal)	Awareness of rights Defence against harassment Collective action/negotiation for space, access rights and facilities (municipalities) Solidarity support Social and welfare schemes Collective purchasing/selling/services	Vendors Waste pickers
Self-help groups	Savings and credit schemes Production support and access to regular work Social and welfare schemes Training	Home-based workers Waste pickers
Migrant worker groups	Solidarity and comfort Social and cultural activities Legal support Empowerment Development of collective worker identity	Domestic workers
Religious organizations	Space to meet Education of employers Skills training Social and cultural activities Shelter/emergency facilities	Domestic workers

Social enterprises	Help to improve product quality	Home-based workers
	Access to markets and marketing opportunities	Waste pickers
	Business skills collectively learned	
NGO or CBO with organized groups	Sharing of experiences	Home-based workers
	Skills development	Domestic workers
	Resources	Waste pickers
National federation, network, alliance, association or movement	National recognition and representation	Street Vendors
	Access to policy makers/government	Domestic Workers
	Solidarity	Home-based workers
	National policy advocacy	Waste pickers
	Long term strategy development	
	Building of common perspective and identity	
National union	Resources and information	Domestic Workers
	National recognition	Street Vendors
	Access to collective bargaining and tri-partite committees	
	Solidarity	
	Legal access	
Regional federation, network, alliance, movement	Wider recognition	Waste pickers
	Access to regional policy makers	Domestic Workers
	Access to knowledge, resources	Home-based workers
	Wider collaboration and solidarity	
Global federation, network, alliance or "networking"	Sharing of experiences, information and solidarity across the world	Street Vendors
	Voice in global forums and with policymakers	Domestic Workers
	Access to global resources	Waste pickers
	Influence over issues related to the market at the global level	

A summary from Sector Analyses: Organizing Workshop

In all sectors, it is important to understand the relationship between base organizations, national organizations and international organizations.

Base organizations are limited to local geographical location or workplace, and focus on the immediate needs and issues of the members. Members can easily participate in activities and decision making. The results of activities and actions are directly experienced or closely observed, making benefits of membership easily understood.

National organizations, whether primary or federated structures, focus on changing national policies, laws and their implementation, or collective economic and social demands. They provide a vehicle where informal workers can formulate common positions and speak with one voice; raise their profile and public understanding, and gain national recognition (formally or informally); engage with policymakers and national governments through advocacy or collective bargaining through their elected representatives. They may have access to information and skills, larger funding sources and support from unions or other influential organizations. Where informal workers form a sector within a national organization – specifically within a trade union –they gain the advantage of established

infrastructure, access through the trade union to government, employers and other influential bodies.

International Organizations (federations, alliances and networks), including regional organizations, help provide recognition; increase visibility; allow informal workers through their representatives to influence international policy and thus national policy; and promote information exchange, learning and solidarity across the sector globally. They also can provide practical support to national organizations by assisting with fund raising, access to international supportive groups such as WIEGO, and education and capacity building.

Every democratic workers' organization experiences tensions between the local members and their representatives at local, national and international level. Each movement develops its own culture – how much it is governed "top-down" by the leadership, how much national and international bodies are given restricted coordinating or networking' functions; how much the "right of recall" is held by the grassroots membership in base organizations, and how much power is delegated to the elected leadership of national and international structures. The issues are generally brought into sharper relief as and when power over financial resources is concentrated in national or international structures.

Resources

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Christine Bonner. 2009. "Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers." *Organising in the Informal Economy – Resource Books for Organisers*, Book 2. WIEGO/StreetNet.

Jan Theron. 2010. Options for Organizing Waste Pickers in South Africa, WIEGO Organizing Series. Available at http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Theron_WIEGO_OB3.pdf

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Activist Toolbox on Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/building-organizations/

Challenge 2

Building Democratic International Networks

"When they join the network, they want to know what they will get out of it."

Sapna Joshi,
HomeNet South Asia

We take a closer look here at the international – global and regional – "Nets" represented at the Organizing Workshop. As informal workers are increasingly combining into larger organizations so that their voices can be heard by national and international governments and policymakers, they are asking critical questions and experimenting with different organizational forms.

DEBATE: Networks or Networking?

What form should our networks take? Should we in fact be talking about networking rather than networks? Do we need a formal organization or should we base our global connections around common objectives and demands, rather than focusing on building formal structures?

The Arguments Against

Loose Networks?

If we have weak formal structures, how are the members to ensure democratic oversight over the activities and policies of the organization – especially if it includes the oversight of money? Who would represent the organization to the outside world? Who would benefit most from the activities? Who would be able to prevent domination by self-appointed leaders? Without open and transparent election procedures, governed by an agreed constitution, decisions will inevitably be taken by those with the strongest voices and deepest pockets.

Formal Organizations?

Building formal organizations would automatically create expensive and time-consuming bureaucracies, dominated by technical experts and (probably male) professionals, removed from the immediate needs and concerns of grass-roots workers. They inevitably become centralized, rule-bound, inflexible and obstruct genuine participatory networking. We need open, non-hierarchical structures that learn from the new social movements and that exploit social networking technologies to the maximum.

All democratic international organizations have to ensure accountability to their membership, and have the ability to coordinate resources and policies. They have to delegate power from grassroots organizations to representatives. On the other hand, their constituent organizations are independent local and national groups close to the grass-roots, and may be perfectly capable of working together as a decentralized network without any need for elaborate structures.

The balance largely depends on two issues: finance and external representation. If the network is responsible for centrally managing significant amounts of money, there is a stronger need for formal, accountable and transparent decision-making structures, with external donors demanding evidence of good financial governance. Similarly, if the network is to represent the interests of its members to external institutions, such as inter-governmental organizations, the representatives need democratic structures in place to ensure that their negotiating positions have the support of the membership.

Across the Sectors: Comparing Network Models

What is most striking about the 'Nets' is how different they are in structure and in the ways in which they have developed or are developing, but how similar in their objectives, challenges and concerns. Key questions are: What kind of network should we build? What are the different organizing models and strategies? How can they be sustained? Drawing on information from Section Two and questions raised at the Organizing Workshop, we have developed a tentative classification of the different models emerging.

The Trade Union Model: StreetNet International

All StreetNet Internationals' members are **MBOs**. NGOs may provide support but cannot affiliate to StreetNet. StreetNet encourages **affiliation by national organizations** where possible but is flexible depending on circumstances. Membership applications are strictly vetted to ensure authenticity and affiliates pay annual **membership fees**.

StreetNet has a **formal structure and constitution**, with **formally elected leadership** (President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc.) from among their affiliates and accountability structures based on representative democracy. Congress is the highest decision-making body and is responsible for policy and constitution making. Delegations are based on proportional representation. Its structure and processes are similar to those found in national and international trade union bodies, such as the Global Union Federations (GUFs).

It has **no formally constituted regional structures**, although it

StreetNet International, launched in 2002, has a formal structure and constitution, with formally elected leadership

encourages a regional spread in electing its leadership, and since 2007 has it been working towards regional coordinating structures based on Regional Focal Point organizations (borrowing the idea from HomeNets).

It has a strong emphasis on **gender equality** and has a built in **quota** for women in leadership.

Its **Secretariat is centralized**, through its International Coordinator and administrative office, but has organizers located in different regions.

The Social Movement Model:
Latin American and Caribbean Waste Pickers' Network

The Network describes itself as a **social movement**. Its "members" are mainly national networks (movements) of cooperatives. It does not have formal affiliates and membership. It is anti-bureaucracy, and **does not have formal structures** and formal leadership positions such as presidents or general secretaries. It does **not have a written constitution** although there are documents setting out its objectives and policy statements and demands.

It operates on an **informal system of democracy** through consultation and through regular conferences with mass participation. The **Secretariat** is approved at the regular conferences and is **decentralized** (from 2010) and subject to **rotation**.

Until recently gender equality and promotion of women leadership was not a key concern but this is beginning to change. It is very strong on ensuring that representation is by waste pickers (or those who were waste pickers) and not employed technical experts or NGOs.

The NGO Model: HomeNet South Asia

HomeNet South Asia is formally constituted as a **charitable trust**, overseen by a voluntary board composed of nominees with a background in support for home-based workers in various South Asian countries. National HomeNets from South Asian countries come together through HomeNet South Asia.

The composition of the National HomeNets themselves is varied but most often they are composed of a **mixture of NGOs and MBOs**. In many cases **NGOs are the dominant members**, although in some cases, such as HomeNet Nepal and HomeNet Pakistan, there is an agreed process to transform national HomeNets into organizations where a majority of the leadership are democratically accountable to home-based workers (see Case Study on HomeNet Nepal, page 64). In the longer term, it is hoped that all national HomeNets, and HomeNet South Asia itself, will have majority representation of home-based workers on their governing structures.

Networking Model: Global Alliance of Waste Pickers

The Networking 'model' describes an approach that does **not** focus on the formation or maintenance of a **formal organization** but emphasizes information sharing and joint activities. It is **programme-based**, rather than structure-based. It is an evolving concept born from learning by doing. Because of the very uneven development and extent of base organizations in different regions and countries, forging a common agreement on the type of global organization has yet to be achieved.

Trade Union-Supported Model:
International Domestic Workers' Network

The IDWN model is one that is **aligned to the trade union movement**, having its base in the Global Union Federation, IUF. Its status is as a **project** within

the IUF, ultimately reporting to the IUF Executive. Not all the domestic workers' organizations associated with the IDWN are trade unions, and not all those that are trade unions are affiliates of the IUF, nor are they forced to become so. This flexible approach on the part of the IUF is very unusual among the formal GUFs, but provides a very interesting model for structures that work to the benefit of fledgling international networks.

The IDWN is currently **run primarily by women** domestic workers (or former domestic workers) through its Steering Committee, having **representatives from most regions**. Although the representatives are not as yet formally elected, the **Steering Committee** runs on semi-democratic principles, with some representatives mandated by a clear membership structure and others consulting as widely as possible in the absence of established structures. Representation is **by region**, either by a regional organization (Latin America, Asia), a national organization (USA), or by (the most) representative trade union(s) where no regional organization exists (Africa).

The IDWN model is aligned to the trade union movement but not all organizational "members" are trade unions

The IDWN's focus has been, in its first years, on campaigning for the ILO Convention, which was a major global mobilizing issue, producing a focus and a unifying activity. Only now, with the Convention adopted at the ILC in 2011, are they turning their attention to what sort of international organization they want to become.

Naming the 'Nets' and other Federated Structures

In naming 'Nets' there seems to be no agreed term to describe different models or forms.

StreetNet, a formal organization, calls itself an Alliance but includes Net in its name. Waste pickers call their loose formation of MBOs an Alliance, but in the Organizing Workshop concluded that an Alliance included NGOs, but a Network was made up of MBOs only. Some national federated structures call themselves associations, while others refer to themselves as movements. There are no hard and fast rules about naming an organization. We interpret names differently.

Most commonly, however:

"federation" implies a permanent, formal and structured organization, although each member retains its own autonomy and identity ("confederation" is a federation of federations)

"network" implies a less formal organization which is more flexible, and less tightly structured – often accommodating MBOs, NGOs and individual supporters

"alliance" typically used when a variety of organizations come together temporarily to campaign around a single issue of common interest but, as we see, it is used to describe more permanent structures as well

"movement" is used particularly in Latin America and implies a social movement (see box) rather than a permanent and formally structured organization

"association" is a generic term for any voluntary membership organization (not only MBOs) and tells us little about the organization

Social Movements – Various Definitions

"...a type of group action. They are large informal groupings of individuals and/or organizations focused on specific political or social issues, in other words, on carrying out, resisting or undoing a social change. Social movements are not eternal. They have a life cycle: they are created, they grow, they achieve successes or failures and eventually, they dissolve and cease to exist." *Wikipedia*

" ... something that people create to press for social change. They are spaces that are made by people to allow relationships between them that can challenge power." *Benita Roth*

"those organized efforts, on the part of excluded groups, to promote or resist changes in the structure of society that involve recourse to non -institutional forms of political participation." *Doug McAdam*

" ... is determined more by informal response of the members than by formal procedures for legitimating authority." *Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian*

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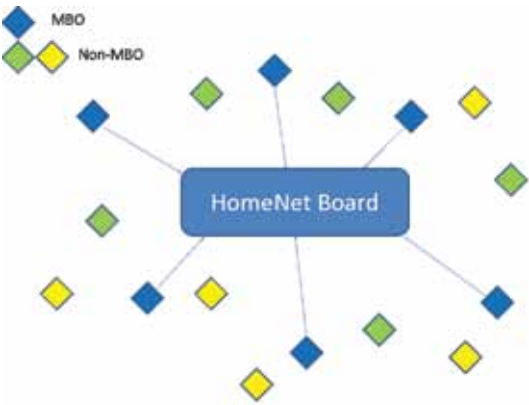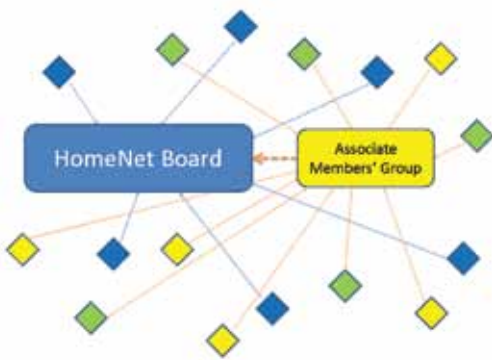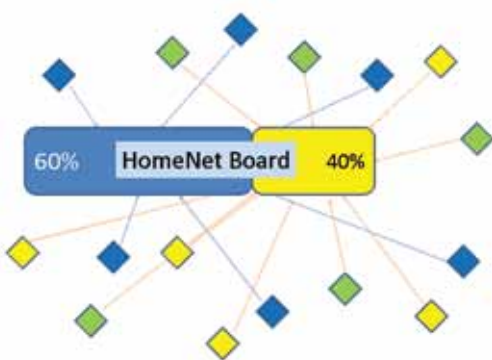
DEBATE: What is the Role of NGOs in 'Nets'?

NGOs play an important role in supporting the development and activities of informal worker MBOs and their national or international networks. Some networks include NGOs among their membership and in their decision making structures, while others are strictly made up of MBOs. Some organizations allow for NGOs or even supportive individuals to become associate members, with restricted rights and powers. Should NGOs be included as members in networks? If so how? There are differing viewpoints but there seems to be

consensus that if NGOs are accorded membership in a network, then control and decision making should be in the hands of the MBOs.

The underlying question is whether or not an organization is representative of workers, and seen to be representative through its constitution and structures. An organization dominated by representatives of NGOs cannot be truly representative. On the other hand, many MBO networks of informal workers are fragile and unstable, at least in their formative stages, and need the close support of trusted NGOs to build strength and capacity. How can these tensions be constitutionally reconciled? HomeNet South Asia grappled with this at a 2010 regional Strategic Visioning Workshop. The three model examples of HomeNet Board structures below were suggested as a basis for discussion.

NGO Representation on HomeNet Board: Three Model examples

	Example 1. Many organizations can be active or supportive in the activities of the network – MBOs and non-MBOs – but only MBOs are represented on the Board.
	Example 2. Only MBOs are represented on the Board, but it is advised and supported by a group of "associate members" of non-MBOs, who may be invited to attend meetings in a non-voting advisory capacity.
	Example 3. A majority proportion (e.g. 60%) of Board members are elected from MBOs, but non-MBO members of the HomeNet are entitled to elect their own representatives as minority (40%) Board members with voting rights.

Source: Strategic Visioning Workshop for HomeNets in South Asia, December 2010

Lessons Emerging

We are still learning about how best to form and sustain international networks, but lessons are emerging as we develop our networks and networking approaches across the sectors. We have learned:

1 - It is necessary to build an understanding of different traditions, cultures, politics, stage of development and to have patience with language difficulties while making a particular effort to ensure good translation. This indicates an approach that is slow and flexible, able to accommodate differences while building unity.

2 - There is no one developmental path towards an international network: some networks develop a regional presence first and others bring national organizations into membership and then work towards regional structures. There is a need to be flexible on how representation is structured, especially in the early stages, as base organizations are very diverse.

#3 - Experience suggests that global networks are more effectively based directly on a membership of national organizations, rather than a federation of autonomous regional networks. On the other hand, regional structures, activities and profile are very important, especially as a means to develop MBOs in those regions which may be weaker than others.

#4 - It is important to build organization at local, national and regional levels in order to build an international network. However, we cannot wait for strong local organizations to exist everywhere before working together globally.

#5 - All forms/models need to strive for democratic functioning in which worker leaders are decision-makers and women are full and equal participants in this – even if in the beginning structures are imperfect.

#6 - NGOs can and do play an important supportive role in facilitating the initial development of international networks, as well as providing ongoing support. What is important is that the NGOs understand their role as supporters and not decision makers, and know when and how to step back and continue support without holding power.

#7 - Where trade unions are supportive, such as the IUF or the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, they can provide the organizational base and ongoing practical and political support, provide legitimacy and respect, and open doors to important institutions like the ILO and the international trade union movement.

#8 - Networks must be built around clear objectives and principles and deal with issues that can have meaning and achieve results for the members. They should consciously link global and local activities.

Linking Global with Local: Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

> *"When we went to UNFCCC in Copenhagen the Indian Environmental Minister didn't want to talk to waste pickers. He was very dismissive. But we worked on him when we got back. He came to our conference where we had waste pickers from all over the country. Now there are two pieces of legislation on waste coming from his office. In one he specifically mentions how to integrate waste pickers. In another on municipal solid waste rules it says that waste pickers must be integrated. Our approach – strategically we did not give up."*

<div align="right">Nalini Shaker, AIW</div>

Resources

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org
HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net
IDWN website: www.idwn.info
Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org
RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net
StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za

Challenge 3

Maintaining Democracy

"Ensure that those who are leaders are those who are living the problem."

Severino Lima Junior, MNCR

What key lessons have we learned about ensuring that democracy and accountability are embedded in the culture and practice of the MBO?

"SEWA has 1.3 million members and has grown fast. How do we sustain this increasing membership? How do we meet all their needs? It seems impossible. Some short term needs must be met like micro finance, but linking them all together is difficult."

Sapna Raval, SEWA Academy

Membership

Maintaining a Strong and Committed Membership

If membership dwindles then power is lost – the head remains but the body is weak. This can lead to all kinds of political manipulation and corruption as leaders turn to others to maintain their position and status and to find resources. So constantly bringing new members into the MBO is important, either through individual membership as in a union, or through building the alliances and networks as among cooperatives, or both. On the other hand, large membership brings its own difficulties and challenges for democracy: divisions may occur, leadership power struggles develop, administration and financial management may weaken. Perhaps the most critical undertaking is to develop and evolve responsive structures, communications and educational programmes that continue to meet the existing and new needs of members.

Full Member Participation in Activities and Decision Making

This is something that an organization tries to build into its structures and procedures, based on mandates from members and reporting back widely. Democracy is always an imperfect process since not every member can directly participate in every activity, decision making meeting, and so on. The difficulties increase with national, regional and international organizations where members have to rely on their representatives to carry their voice, and to report back to them.

photo: Julian Luckham

SEWA Academy helps women members develop confidence and leadership skills and understand the power of collective struggle and organizing

Our organizations have found many different and creative ways to increase participation in activities, decision making and information sharing: dealing with real issues and making activities useful; creative activities and techniques to get across messages; use of electronic communication especially cell phones and e-mail; participatory research; accessible media; empowerment through educational and capacity building activities; visits by leadership; mass activities; and so on.

Leadership

"If leaders are not willing to take responsibility and be fully accountable to our members then we have a system of recalling and replacing those leaders. The Constitution is very important in this"

Gaby Bikombo, StreetNet

Accountable Leaders

Leaders should be elected, a majority from the workers, using clear rules. Elections should be held at regular intervals. Active and informed members are able to hold their leaders to account and ensure they fully represent their issues, demands and views. Because they participate they can give clear mandates to their representative leaders, and demand full report backs and transparency on all aspects of the organization, including finance.

DEBATE: Who Can Represent Informal Workers?

All agree that workers must control their organization and leaders and representatives must be accountable. But there are different traditions and opinions on who is eligible for a leadership position, who can represent the members and what is meant by worker control. For example, the Latin American waste pickers insist that "those who are leaders are those who are living the problem" – in other words, leaders have to be practising or former waste pickers still close to their communities and they must be always represented by such leaders. In India it is common for elected committees to include a minority of paid staff members and/or other persons who are not workers in the sector.

Internationally, representation by paid officials, acting on a mandate from the members, is more common for practical reasons. So IDWN representatives to the ILO and other forums included both former domestic workers who are now full-time paid officials of their union, practising domestic workers and paid staff elected or unelected. At the StreetNet Congress delegates are chosen by their organization and include vendors and paid staff members. Is it important who the actual representatives are if the elected leaders are primarily workers and there are procedures in place to hold representatives fully accountable?

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

No organization with men and women as members will be truly democratic unless women fully and equally participate in organizational activities, including playing an equal role in leadership. A first rule says that "women will not participate unless it addresses their needs" and so making sure the organization takes up the issues and concerns of the women and fully supports them in their struggles is crucial. Again this is easiest at a base level. Networks need to find creative ways in which the concerns of women

members at base level are reflected in national and international activities, through solidarity action, legal struggles that women can easily identify with and see relevance in, campaigns to raise women's recognition and voice, etc.

Women often benefit from having a safe space , for example a women's group or committee, within a mixed organization where they can express themselves freely, gain information and practise skills so they can take up and debate issues with confidence within their organization. Appropriate worker education activities can

Participants at the Organizing Workshop exchange ideas on organizing and democracy

photo: Samson Mulugeta

help build understanding and confidence in a fun way (see KKPKP example, page 79). Learning by doing is perhaps the strongest way of ensuring the development of women who can lead and speak for themselves. When given the opportunity, women emerge as strong leaders who can make an impact, including at an international level, as illustrated by domestic workers at the ILO, or women waste pickers at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences.

DEBATE: Quotas – The Most Effective Way of Ensuring Gender Equality and Women in Leadership?

Some organizations have a quota system to ensure that women are represented in the leadership of mixed organization. The StreetNet constitution demands that the leadership consists of no less than 50 per cent women. This means that 6 out of the 11 Executive Committee members must be women and at least two out of four office bearers must be women. PATAMABA, Philippines, stipulates that 60 per cent of their elected leaders should be women. SEWA is an all-women's organization – another solution to ensuring leaders are women!

DEBATE: Class Divisions Within Organizations

StreetNet has identified that most of its leaders are from the upper segments of the sector, i.e. they are often those who employ others. It can be an issue in families when someone employs family members. In a democratic organization, how do we ensure our leadership is representative of the members and particularly the poorest workers in our sectors?

Independence: Politics and Government Relations

Getting Political

Attempts by MBOs of informal workers to effect serious and long-lasting change for their members will inevitably have to confront the question of politics. A fundamental characteristic of MBOs is independence from governments, employers, religious organizations, donor institutions and political parties. In other words, such institutions (and all others) should be unable to dictate the work of MBOs. Only the members themselves, through democratic procedures, have the right to determine their own organization's policies, programmes and procedures. But what if the members democratically agree to support a particular political party, or develop their own political programme? Or even create their own political party?

In countries with limited political freedoms, it may be that some forms of MBO are banned from political activity. In others, with corrupt political systems, MBOs may decide that contact with political parties can be counter-productive or dangerous.

In some sectors, such as street vending and market trading, the members of MBOs are important political constituencies and potentially have considerable political power. In the context of corrupt political processes this can be very dangerous for MBOs, as the leaders may face the temptation of personal financial gain, power and prestige if they do the bidding of political party leaders. Close alignment of MBOs with political parties can also increase the danger of splits in the movement along party lines.

Relating to Governments

When campaigning and/or negotiating for informal workers' rights and livelihoods, contact with government departments and agencies is inevitable and necessary, and it is often advantageous to have the sympathetic support of government officials, politicians and political parties. Cultivating a relationship with governments and politicians is an important strategy, but the type of relationship has to be carefully thought out, agreed by the organization and transparent at all times.

An effective MBO of informal workers will inevitably be drawn into political (not necessarily party-political) activity. Promoting the rights and raising the public profile of the poorest in society is a fundamental political activity which will find almost certainly find opposition among those with power, influence and wealth.

Resources

Christine Bonner. 2009. "Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers." *Organising in the Informal Economy: Resource Books for Organisers*, Book 2. WIEGO/StreetNet. Available at http://wiego.org/resources/building-and-maintaining-democratic-organisation-informal-workers-icc2

Challenge 4

Sustaining Our Organizations

"Members used to say we are very poor. We had a meeting and said money from outside comes and goes, but for the sustainability of the organization it is only the membership fee that we can fall back on. Our membership fee is $1.1 per year. We also tell our members how the organization has helped them in their work, and how important organizational sustainability is. We do not pay money for anyone to come to a meeting. If money is needed for travel, then half of the money must come from the community. Each member must contribute. When we give them food or tea at meetings we make it very simple. We don't provide elaborate food which we may not be able to sustain. In order to reduce expenses and increase participation of people we get training and we train other people. In this meeting WIEGO has spent a lot of money to bring us here, accommodate and feed us. We need to make sure that this does not become a problem for WIEGO."

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

What do we mean by sustainability? In the Annual Learning Meeting of the Inclusive Cities Project, held in Ahmedabad in 2010, participants agreed that sustainability is not just about money but involves "people, plans and money, and links strongly to the ongoing development of democratic membership-based organizations."

The costs of democracy are high, involving financial and human resources. Compromises are made when resources are limited – for example less participation, delegation to small group of leaders, poor translation, etc.

Many MBOs of informal workers rely to a greater or lesser extent on donor funding. This is especially true for national, regional and global networks. Their costs are high and contributions from member organizations generally only cover a small percentage of budget. StreetNet International, looking ahead, took a resolution at its Third Congress to find ways to generate funds and help sustain the organization. Ideas tabled in the Resolution include, firstly, recruiting more members to generate more membership fees; accepting paid advertising in, and selling of, the StreetNet newsletter; organizing revenue generating activities such as fairs; creating an income generating micro finance institution; and, finally, reducing costs of country activities.

Self-generated financial resources, coupled with careful spending and cost effectiveness, strict financial controls and accountability are key to organizational sustainability. In the Organizing Workshop and the Fund Raising Workshop held the day before, participants emphasized the critical importance of membership contributions for financial sustainability, as well as building an attitude of self-reliance and ensuring the commitment of, and control by, members of their own organization. Other ideas for independent financing include: accessing local resources (not necessarily money) such as from local government, as is the case in Bulgaria where home-based worker local committees have secured free facilities; acquiring rights to provide services via tenders or commissioned work, as in the MNCR or KKPKP examples; providing services to members at a fee, such as in the example of the Street Barbers in Durban, South Africa; and income generation projects.

Members of KKPKP contribute financially to the organization through a yearly membership fee

Human resources are equally important in achieving sustainability. Staff and elected leaders need to develop their organizational skills, including technical skills like budgeting, writing, using technology; otherwise there is an inevitable dependence on professionals who are either expensive, or may come at the price of lack of democratic control. It is important, as well, to actively find sources of support such as donors, NGOs, unions and union federations, cooperatives and coop development agencies, governments, and other informal economy MBOs.

DEBATE: Should the Payment of Fees be a Condition of MBO Membership?

Most informal workers earn little, earn erratically, and are vulnerable to external economic shocks. This is often the reason why some MBOs do not attempt to collect membership fees from the workers – and some networks do not demand membership fees from their affiliated organizations. These MBOs are wholly dependent on financial support from donor organizations.

Most MBOs recognize that membership dues are essential, even if they are small. The regular collection of fees and accounting for income and expenditure helps bind together members and leaders, and helps hold the leadership to account. If sufficient attention is given to the collection of membership dues, even though the total amounts may be relatively small, it may at least enable the organization to function during periods of scarce external funding – albeit perhaps without paid staff or offices.

DEBATE: Is Unity Strength?

Historically, democratic workers' organizations have frequently found that sustainability is best achieved through combining strength with others. By building larger organizations, major savings can be achieved through economies of scale (offices, paid staff, education programmes, etc.) and – in effect – the financially strong can support the weak. This of course assumes that workers' organizations (unions, cooperatives, etc.) representing the more financially stable workers are prepared to accept a level of subsidy to the poorer workers on the basis of solidarity and unity.

There are many national and international examples of MBOs which include membership from among both informal and formal workers, or the relatively financially secure alongside the poorest of workers. Often,

procedures and structures are in place to ensure that specific groups of workers have a high level of independence within the larger combined organization, and/or have guaranteed representation in governing bodies.

On the other hand, merger or integration of informal workers' MBOs into larger organizations will obviously lead to at least some sacrifice of autonomy, and it is not always easy to maintain the distinct culture and responsiveness that can be achieved in a wholly independent structure.

Despite the emphasis on self-reliance, raising funds from external sources is usually a necessary part of sustaining an organization. In the box below are some ideas and tips about fund-raising and proposal writing generated through WIEGO workshops on fund-raising.

Fund-Raising Challenges and Success Factors

Challenges

- appropriate donors in different regions hard to find
- heavy and complicated requirements for proposals/reporting
- language requirements for proposals
- organizations competing for same donor funds
- donor focus on numbers and measurable results
- donors' reluctance to give money for organizing
- donors' imposition of their own agenda that takes us away from our real work
- donor limitations on countries that can apply and on giving to grassroots organizations
- unrealistic expectations about who can co-fund
- donors' desire to give to organizations run by professionals, disempowering workers
- donors' refusal to provide meetings where you can put forward your case
- large amounts of money that are too much for some organizations to handle
- NGO control of funds
- divisions in the organization resulting from successful fund-raising

Success factors

- building donor trust by ensuring that funds are used to achieve the purpose of the organization
- demonstrating that the money will make a difference: using arguments of fairness and using research to show the cost savings made by the groups (e.g. waste pickers)
- understanding donor psychology and using this to advantage
- working in partnership with large and established institutions such as unions, universities
- publicizing international connections and getting international support
- receiving support and assistance of sympathetic "experts" for help with proposal writing
- ensuring that your organization has a good reputation

Participants at the Fund-raising Workshop, Bangkok, March 2011

Preparing Fund Raising Proposals: Do's and Don'ts

DO's

- Find the right donor.

- Adapt to fit donor requirements BUT

- Make sure that you are not compromising organizational independence and needs.

- Create a Proposal Template – then modify as needed.

- Be clear about who you are.

- Be clear about the need and your proposed solution.

- Build a budget.

- Gather supporting materials.

- Ensure you can demonstrate a strong, accountable organization.

- Consider sustainability.

- Be exact.

- Write well.

DON'Ts

- Don't submit after the deadline and expect to be given special consideration.

- Don't send a generic proposal template without adapting it to the specific needs and requirements of the donor.

- Don't send more pages/words than the application calls for.

- Don't use acronyms or jargon without explaining them.

- Don't get the email or mailing address incorrect. Don't send something by email when hard copy is requested, or vice versa.

- Don't leave your organization's survival in the hands of one donor or project proposal.

- Don't compromise the needs and independence of your organization; rather, do not use that donor.

Rhonda Douglas, WIEGO Global Project Director

DEBATE: Money – A Double-Edged Sword?

Given that the overwhelming majority of informal workers are poor, it is extremely difficult to run an organization on membership dues and self-generated income alone. Some of the most basic organizational facilities available to unions and associations of better-paid workers, such as offices, computers, and telephones (let alone paid staff), are difficult to afford unless the MBO has access to external finances. Hence the importance of enabling informal workers' MBOs to apply for, manage and account for money from international development donor organizations.

Yet some claim that there have been more workers' organizations destroyed by money than those who have been assisted. Even modest amounts of external funding can create competition and division between leaders and struggles for control over resources. Money attracts the attention of others, perhaps less honest and scrupulous, individuals and organizations. It can create an enormous strain on the elected leadership to ensure that the money is well managed and is used for the purposes for which it was given.

External finance can also undermine the independence of the organization. As soon as external support has enabled the organization to hire staff, rent offices, undertake professional education and organizing programmes and so on, there is pressure for that money to continue. It is hard to return to a more modest operation with the voluntary effort of the members and unpaid elected leaders when money dries up. When sources of grant assistance are cut, and the contractual conditions become more strenuous, there is a danger that policies and programmes of recipient MBOs are less in response to the democratically expressed needs of the members, and more in response to donor organizations.

Challenge 5

Making Gains – Achieving Success

"Take up the issues and try and show successes. They need to be interested and motivated to join by seeing real benefits of membership."

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

"Make sure that the organization takes up the issues that concern the members and fully support members in their struggles. Vendors will not be part of the organization if it does not address their needs."

StreetNet member

Nobody is interested in joining an organization for its own sake. Informal workers join unions, cooperatives or other MBOs because they see real benefit from doing so.

Successful organizations begin to improve the lives of members in particular and working poor in general in many different ways – some very concrete and others less so. Organizing is about making concrete gains and positive changes to lives as well as defending against attacks on economic positions, physical and verbal abuse and harassment. Key to successful organizations is their ability to do this, while at the same time continually building esteem, confidence, skills, knowledge, and strategic thinking among members.

Perhaps the most important factor is success in building a collective spirit among the members. As SEWA frequently reminds us, an MBO is "of the members, by the members, for the members." Often MBOs, particularly in their early stages of development, face the problem of workers joining the organization with an expectation of immediate personal benefit – access to loans perhaps, or an instant end to police harassment on the streets through ownership of a membership card. Successful organizing must start from an understanding among the members that the gains to be made are through collective decision making, collective action, and ultimately collective power.

This challenge is one that underlies all others. In Section Two we saw the demands and issues that the four sectors organize around. Many are similar such as achieving legal recognition and worker rights, favourable laws and policies, social protection, improving economic and social status and decent and secure income. Here we highlight two important strategies for achieving success: the integration of struggle and economic

Coopersoli is a recycling cooperative in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

development organizations and activities, and collective bargaining (negotiations) inside and outside of traditional forums and with a range of counterparts other than employers.

Strategies for Success

Successful struggles and campaigns over key issues and demands depend on some simple principles:

- good knowledge of the issues concerned (often backed up by good research)

- knowledge of the legislation and regulations concerned

- leaders – women and men – with good negotiating skills

- a substantial membership in the area affected (workplace, local area, national sector …)

- good communications – publicly through the media, as well as with the membership

Successful initiatives are driven by issues that are deeply and widely felt among the members (anger), who believe that their struggle will make a real difference – there must be an expectation for change – not an exercise in futile protest (hope). Crucially, the workers themselves have to participate in the process – and be actively engaged in the campaign (action).

Source: Anger-Hope-Action. *Unite the Union, Change at Work training materials, December 2011.*

"We are going to have to negotiate with those who want to buy our work and for that we must be large, strong, organized, articulate, educated in modern language; we must understand the economy; we must know the law; we must know about international relationships; we must know who we have to talk to and how to speak on an equal footing."

Chilean Homeworker quoted in We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

photo: Asiye eTafuleni

Street vendors from Durban contributed to research on the impact of the Global Economic Crisis on informal workers

Strategy 1: Providing for Different Needs – An Integrated Approach

Because many informal workers do not have an employer, their organizations have to provide for a wide range of needs. They have to provide economic opportunities, livelihood development and often social protection through collective organizations and activities. At the same time they have to struggle for rights as workers, and against exploitative buyers, purchasers, middlemen, local and national government officials. They also need to engage in the broader political and economic struggles affecting the working poor in general. These combined roles may take place in a variety of forms, through cooperatives combining into movements as is common among waste pickers in Latin America; through unions forming cooperatives and other forms of collective organization such as KKPKP in India, the LDFC in the Democratic Republic of Congo or the National Union of Domestic Employees in Trinidad/Tobago (NUDE). SEWA provides perhaps the most extensive and best known model of struggle and development.

An Integrated Approach through Struggle and Development: The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is an MBO of more than 1,200,000 poor working women in the informal economy in India. It was first registered as a trade union in 1972 in Gujarat State. It is now a national trade union and represents self-employed women all over India.

However, SEWA is not just a trade union, it is a movement of several inter-connected types of MBOs of informal women workers. It pursues a mix of what it calls "struggle" and "development." Practically this strategy is carried out through joint action of union and cooperatives and other collective economic organizations. Struggle takes place through Union struggles for rights and improved working conditions; development by providing economic opportunities through cooperatives, producer groups, savings and credits groups among others. All of these economic organizations are owned by the women who are members of SEWA. They put up the share capital and manage and control the organizations through democratically elected boards of worker representatives. SEWA also has specialized units, some run as cooperatives such as the Cooperative Bank and SEWA Social Security. SEWA Academy provides training and research services, and also runs a video co-operative and the Gujarat Mahila Housing SEWA Trust provides housing and infrastructure services.

photo: L.Vryenhoek

SEWA members enjoy many benefits including literacy classes

Strategy 2: Engaging Policy and Decision Makers: Collective Bargaining

"When they are organized, informal workers can win rights and improve their work and social conditions through collective negotiations. Unlike unionised formal workers, informal workers generally do not have permanent and recognized negotiating forums. However, this does not stop them finding ways of overcoming such challenges and negotiating their demands with authorities, or other bodies responsible for taking decisions on a particular issue. Collective negotiations, known as collective bargaining, is a key strategy for organizations to advance and defend the rights and position of informal workers. It can help empower workers. It can start to change power relationships."

(From "Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers," Bonner 2010)

Gains are ultimately secured through various forms of collective bargaining whether with employers, governments, municipal authorities, or others who have power to influence the lives and working conditions of informal workers. In some cases, successful collective bargaining will be the culmination of a long hard fight. In others, it may be resolved relatively quickly and peaceably. In all cases, it involves:

- identifying the key issues

- agreeing to demands that would solve the issues

- deciding on who to negotiate with, and how

- establishing an agreed platform or forum for negotiation

- agreeing on a negotiating strategy

- conducting negotiation

- implementing and monitoring adherence to the agreement

Collective Bargaining: Lessons

Lesson 1: Breaking Through: Recognition and Agreement to Negotiate

Often the establishment of an agreed forum for negotiation can be the most difficult part of the process. It firstly requires identifying who the bargaining counterpart is and then recognition by the bargaining counterpart of the MBO as the legitimate representative of the workers, agreement to negotiate, and then agreement of the detailed terms of negotiation (where, when, who's involved, what's on the agenda, etc.).

Examples of successful collective bargaining by MBOs of informal workers include many different sorts of bargaining counterparts. They may be local negotiations with, for example, market superintendents, individual middlemen dealing with homeworkers, municipal departments responsible for solid waste, or a family employing a single domestic worker. They may involve national negotiations with governments such as National

Alliance of Street Vendors of India's (NASVI) negotiations with the Indian Government for the National Policy on Street Vendors, and HomeNet Thailand's negotiations that resulted in the new Homeworkers Protection Act (page 63). At the other extreme, they may involve negotiations with senior representatives of governments, employers and trade unions at major international conferences on, for example, labour rights, sustainable development, debt or trade.

"We need to negotiate with government at different levels."

Josephine Parilla, Patamaba

"Street and market vendors are self-employed. They don't have an employer/ employee relationship. We consider the government as the negotiating partner. We want to establish negotiating forums at local level. We also want to establish provincial policies on street trading. We believe this is the only way we can develop a friendly environment for informal workers."
Gaby Bikombo, StreetNet

Lesson 2: Marshalling Strong Arguments: Preparation and Research

Good preparation and, in particular, research are essential to ensure that collective bargaining is backed up by well-formulated argument.

"In the face of privatization and the loss of access to waste, we undertook research that showed that waste pickers made a huge contribution to improvements in the environment, as well as substantial financial savings for the municipality. Around 20 per cent of the waste in the municipality is being cleaned by waste pickers. Negotiations with the government led to the award of a waste-collection contract and now around 3000 women collect waste from 300,000 homes. The neighbouring city then invited us to do the same thing and 600 women are involved there. Our fight demonstrated how much these women contribute to the city, but also how much we saved in the municipal budgets. These savings now cover the premium for health insurance for all women in the city."

Surekha Gade, KKPKP

Lesson 3: Building Alliances

Negotiations are often part of a multi-pronged strategy which combines advocacy, collective action such as marches, demonstrations, petitions. In many instances unions, NGOs, researchers, development agencies provide critical support.

In India, the government passed the new Unorganized Sector Social Security Act (2008).

"A lot of people have been working together since 2004 to push for social security legislation that covers informal workers, but implementation across the whole country is a major challenge. How can we bring everyone into the care framework? This requires power and strength."

Janhavi Dave, SEWA

At an international level, collective bargaining can be complex and protracted. As we have seen (page 42) in the successful struggle for the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, the IDWN, supported by the IUF and WIEGO, was active in ensuring that the voice of domestic workers themselves was heard in the negotiations and that they worked effectively with trade unions, campaign groups and NGOs prior to and during the ILCs.

The successful adoption of the ILO Convention was in large part the result of national negotiations between domestic workers' unions and their allies in the broader trade union movement and their counterpart governments and employers' organizations. By the time delegates arrive at such meetings, most have already decided on their policies and negotiating positions in advance. It was essential that there was coordinated lobbying and negotiations to influence delegations before they left their home countries.

> *"We built alliances of NGOs, activists, trade unions, researchers, academics from all over the world to support the adoption of an ILO convention. This helped increase awareness of the situation of domestic workers among governments, unions and employers. It has all helped to increase membership at local, national and international level."*
>
> Vicky Kanyoka, IDWN

Lesson 4: Implementation Needs Strong Organization

> *"It is important to secure favourable laws by working with government. However, once the laws are there you must not rely on government to implement these. It is up to the workers to make sure they are implemented through their strong organizations."*
>
> Severino Lima Junior, MNCR

"We now have a law to protect home based workers (a new Homeworkers Protection Act). Home-based workers now make co-payments with government for social security. Building alliances with NGOs and other civil society groups was important in this process."
Poonsap Tuliphan, HomeNet Thailand

Once gains have been achieved through collective bargaining – new laws, policies, or agreement for higher wages, for example – the MBO must try and ensure that the agreement is implemented. Ideally there should be a formal agreement that includes procedures to monitor implementation, raise complaints, propose amendments, etc. An example might be a garment company that agrees to ensure that all homeworkers in its supply chain are treated fairly, paid at least the minimum wage, etc. Such an agreement needs to be backed up by regular meetings with MBO representatives, when they have the opportunity of presenting evidence of middlemen or supply companies that break the agreement. But as often noted, achieving an agreement at local, national or international level is a huge step and is usually the beginning of a much longer process to ensure implementation and enforcement.

"Implementation of the National Policy on Street Vendors, laws and regulations, is our major challenge."
Mageshvaran Veerappan, NASVI

DEBATE: "Advocacy" or "Collective Bargaining"?

When is advocacy a form of collective bargaining? When is collective bargaining a form of advocacy? What's the difference?

The two phrases are often used interchangeably. "Collective bargaining" is a term used to describe negotiations by representatives of collective organizations, and is most commonly used by trade unions, but increasingly by other MBOs. "Advocacy" is a much broader term meaning to speak in favour of, or promote through various actions, something on behalf of another. The implication is that collective bargaining is done by representatives of the workers themselves, answerable to the workers, on issues raised by the workers; whereas advocacy is something that can be undertaken by people or organizations on behalf of workers who do not have the power to speak for themselves. MBOs often use a combination of advocacy and negotiation to achieve their demands.

Lesson 5: Organizing for the Long-Term

The struggle to make gains is usually long and never stops. MBOs need to have a long term vision rather than a focus only on short term gains. This is not always easy for members to embrace as their immediate needs are so pressing.

In *We Are Workers, Too*, Celia Mather explains how SEWA set up embroidery centres for homeworkers in five locations in east Delhi, India while negotiating with "socially responsible" clothing companies to provide them with work. In effect, SEWA became an agent in the supply chain for garments, in an attempt to improve the livelihoods of its members. This is part of SEWA's strategy of cutting out the middlemen who pay the homeworkers so little, so negotiations were organized directly with international retailers, such as Gap and H&M, and with some of the Delhi-based export houses. Some of these companies claim to have a more ethical approach, and do pay a little more than the normal rates for homeworkers – but not much:

> "The market presses down on rates. We can only get contracts when our prices are close to what the contractors are prepared to accept. So we only get a few more rupees per piece. And we have to accept very low rates when there is no other work."

<div align="right">

SEWA Embroidery Centre organizer, Delhi quoted in
We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

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"A union has its own power and, if you join, you will feel that power."

SEWA Embroidery Centre worker, Delhi, quoted in We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

Nevertheless, SEWA has managed to become de facto recognized by the companies as the legitimate bargaining representative for the homeworkers, establish processes and procedures for collective bargaining, and make some modest gains for the members. Further more substantial gains will only be possible through organization on a wider scale, when MBOs such as SEWA have organized the bulk of the homeworker workforce in Delhi, in India and ultimately throughout the international supply chain.

And of course, the union is able to do far more for their members in the centres than simply bargain for small wage increases. It also opens the door to all the other forms of SEWA self-organization – the "development" part of "struggle and development."

> "Be part of a centre like this. You get many benefits, not just savings and work, but pensions, training, so many things. We have been able to go on pilgrimage. We hold drawing competitions between us. Women who are not organized, come into the union! A union has its own power and, if you join, you will feel that power."

<div align="right">

SEWA Embroidery Centre worker, Delhi, quoted in
We are Workers Too! (Mather 2010)

</div>

Resources

SEWA website: www.sewa.org
SEWA Academy website: www.sewaacademy.org
KKPKP website: www.workerscollective.org

For examples of arguments see: Celia Mather (2010) *We are Workers Too!* Available at http://wiego.org/resources/we-are-workers-too-organizing-home-based-workers-global-economy and Celia Mather (2011) "Myths & Realities about Domestic Workers." Available at http://www.idwn.info/sites/default/files/publications/8%20Myths%20english%20FINAL%281%29%20_0.pdf

Challenge 6

Reaching Out

Informal workers are not alone. As we have seen throughout this handbook, many of the issues they face are shared by workers across the different sectors of the informal economy. Some are shared by workers in the formal economy. MBOs of informal workers often seek solidarity and alliances with many sorts of external organizations.

But solidarity is a two-way street. Most major threats to informal workers are threats to all – austerity measures from banks and governments, global warming, super-exploitation by global corporations, denial of human rights (including workers' rights), corrupt and undemocratic regimes, and so on. Formerly "traditional" trade unions are increasingly reaching out to include informal workers and informal workers are increasingly reaching out to formal unions. Formal economy workers are facing a dramatic world-wide attack on their livelihoods and conditions as work is informalized and jobs are increasingly insecure.

Many MBOs of informal workers take an active part in much broader struggles against poverty, for democracy and for decent work. In some cases, MBOs of informal workers come together in alliance or in permanent structures with informal workers from other sectors, or organizations of the poor, to campaign for common demands. In others, informal workers' MBOs join forces with formal economy unions to strengthen common campaigns and issues. Many informal workers' MBOs (not necessarily trade unions) are able to join national trade union centres, and gain valuable access to regular well-established collective bargaining structures with government.

photo: Demetria Tsoutouras

StreetNet International has built the World Class Cities for All campaign in alliance with unions and social movements

Internationally, individual MBOs or MBO networks have established strong relations with the international trade union federations, or have joined broad international alliances. SEWA, for example, is a member of several Global Union Federations, and as a recognized national trade union centre, is a member of the International Trade Union Confederation. StreetNet has strong links with the GUF, Union Network International, and built the international World Class Cities for All campaign in alliance with unions and social movements. The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers and Allies brings waste pickers from Latin America, Asia and Africa together with support organizations and environmental justice NGOs to offer real solutions for climate change mitigation.

Ultimately, as the informal economy expands worldwide, and a whole generation of workers face a life of insecure or "precarious" work, the nature of work is itself changing. This requires new solutions and new organizational strategies. Informal workers' MBOs have a crucial role in rebuilding the world's labour movement.

Resources

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2. Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers

3. Handling the Day-To-Day Problems of Informal Workers

4. Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers

5. Handling Disputes between Informal Workers and those in Power

6. Collective Action for Informal Workers

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Websites

Activist Toolbox on Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org/organizing/building-organizations/

Confederation of Self-Employed Workers of Nicaragua (Confederación de Trabajadores por Cuenta Propia, CTCP) website: www.ctcpnicaragua.org

GAIA website: www.no-burn.org

Global Alliance of Waste Pickers website: www.globalrec.org

HomeNet Nepal website: www.homenetnepal.org

HomeNet Thailand website: www.homenetthailand.org

HomeNet South Asia website: www.homenetsouthasia.net

HomeNet Southeast Asia website: www.homenetseasia.org

HomeNet South East Europe website: www.homeneteasteurope.com

Inclusive Cities website: http://www.inclusivecities.org

IDWN website: www.idwn.info

IDWN blog: http://idwnilo.wordpress.com/

KKPKP website: www.workerscollective.org

NASVI website: http://www.nasvinet.org/

MNCR website: www.mncr.org.br

RedLacre website: www.redrecicladores.net

StreetNet website: www.streetnet.org.za

SEWA website: www.sewa.org

SEWA Academy website: www.sewaacademy.org

WIEGO website: http://wiego.org.

WORD (WIEGO Organization & Representation Database) of informal worker organizations: http://www.wiegodatabase.org/

Appendix

List of Participants at the Workshop "Organizing in the Informal Economy: Building and Strengthening Membership-Based Organizations"   Bangkok, 3-5 March 2011

Lucia Fernandez	Woman	WIEGO: Global Coordinator: Waste pickers	France
Chris Bonner	W	WIEGO: Organization and Representation Programme Director	South Africa
Rhonda Douglas	W	WIEGO: Global Projects Director	Canada
Dave Spooner	Man	WIEGO: Consultant, Organization and Representation Programme	UK
Ricardo Valencia	M	WIEGO: Latin America Coordinator: Waste pickers	Colombia
Dan Gallin	M	WIEGO: Advisory Committee and Global Labour Institute (GLI)	Switzerland
Sofia Trevino	W	WIEGO: Global Projects Officer and Spanish translator	Canada
Melanie Samson	W	WIEGO: Africa Coordinator, Waste pickers	South Africa
Samson Muluqeta	M	Media Consultant	South Africa
Angelique Kipulu Katani	W	StreetNet International and Ligue pour le Droit de la Femme Congolaise (LDFC)	Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
Violeta Zlateva	W	Association of Homeworkers	Bulgaria
Prof Krastyo Petkov	M	Association of Homeworkers	Bulgaria
Hamida	W	Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA Bharat)	India
Janhavi Dave	W	SEWA	India
Sapna Raval	W	SEWA Academy	India
Phamuang Khanthone	M	HomeNet SE Asia and Nonprofit Association of Laos Development (NALD)/HomeNet Lao	Lao PDR
Sinoeun MEN	M	HomeNet SE Asia and Artisans Association of Cambodia/ HN Cambodia	Cambodia
Om Thapaliya	M	HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet Nepal (HNN)	Nepal
Sapna Joshi	W	HomeNet South Asia Coordinator (HNSA)	India
Poonsap Tulaphan	W	HomeNet SE Asia and HomeNet Thailand	Thailand
Josephine Parilla	W	HomeNet SE Asia and PATAMABA	Philippines
Hillary Dickens Ochieng	M	Kenya Alliance of Waste Handlers	Kenya
Niasse Harouna	M	Association Book Diom des Recuperateurs et Recycleurs de Mbeubeuss	Senegal
Simon Mbata	M	South African Waste Pickers Association (SAWPA)	South Africa
Severino de Lima Junior	M	Red Latino-americana de Recicladores (RED LACRE), and Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis (MNCR)	Brazil
Madalena Rodrigues Duarte	W	RED LACRE and MNCR	Brazil
Mageshvaran Veerappan	M	National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)	India

Monica Garzaro Andrino	W	StreetNet International	South Africa
Gaby Bikombo	M	StreetNet International	South Africa
Sandra Yadira Flores Jimenez	W	StreetNet International and Confederation de Trabajadores Cuenta Propia (CTCP)	Nicaragua
Vicky Kanyoka	W	International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN)	Tanzania
Ida Le Blanc	W	IDWN and National Union of Domestic Employees	Trinidad and Tobago
Fish (Ip Pui Yu)	W	International Domestic Workers Network	Hong Kong
Myrtle Witbooi	W	IDWN and South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers' Union (SADSAWU)	South Africa
Marcelina Bautista	W	IDWN and Confederación Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Trabajadoras del Hogar (CONLACTRAHO)	Mexico
Machababu Malakar	M	General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and Independent Garbage Cleaners' Union of Nepal (IGCUN)	Nepal
Elizabeth Tang	W	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF) and Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU)	Hong Kong
Guillermo Onofre Flores	M	Federacion de Estibadores Terrestres y Transportistas Manuales del Peru (FETTRAMAP)	Peru
Heng Yon Kora	M	Community Sanitation and Recycling Organization (CSARO)	Cambodia
Cheng Khoem	W	CSARO	Cambodia
Channy Khoun	W	CSARO	Cambodia
Suntaree Saeng-ging	W	HomeNet Thailand	Thailand
Monal Kapadia	W	HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet India	India
Surekha Gade	W	Alliance of Indian Waste pickers (AIW) and KKPKP	India
Mohan Nanavra	M	AIW and KKPKP	India
Nuchnapa Bamrungna	W	HomeNet Thailand (Home-Based Workers)	Thailand
Waraphon Pongtanu	W	HomeNet Thailand (Domestic Workers)	Thailand
Preeda Sirisawat	W	FES Thailand	Thailand
Nalini Shekar	W	AIW	India
Elsa Ramos	W	ex ILO	Thailand

The Only School We Have
Learning from Organizing Experiences
Across the Informal Economy

About this Handbook: This handbook details the experiences of organizing among informal workers, and provides information, practical ideas, successful strategies, inspiration and resources for organizers.

It is a resource for those organizing informal workers in any sector, though it is based on the organizing experiences in (mainly) four groups: domestic workers, home-based workers, street/market vendors and waste pickers. It draws on the themes, ideas and information generated at the WIEGO workshop, organized with the assistance of HomeNet Thailand in March 2011, called Organizing in the Informal Economy: Building and Strengthening Membership-Based Organizations.

It aims to provide useful material that can help organizations of informal workers:

- understand more clearly some complex and evolving **concepts**, such as the informal economy and membership-based organizations (MBOs)
- develop a sense of the growing movement of informal workers through looking at the **historical roots** and more recent developments
- share **information and experiences** of informal workers in different sectors of the informal economy
- gain guidance and inspiration from **practical ideas and lessons learned** by organizations
- develop **strategies** to overcome some of the challenges and find **answers** to some of the difficult questions and debates commonly raised.

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WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment
Globalizing and Organizing