

## Asia



*Phakhapon Khamkrachal works as part of the Solidarity Group, a collective of garment workers who now run their own enterprise in Bangkok, providing fair wages and hours in a safe environment. By expanding research and knowledge, sharing good practices, and connecting poor women workers to powerful decision-makers, WIEGO puts a human face on complex issues.*

**I**nformal workers around the world, especially women, face multiple barriers in securing their livelihoods. For two decades, WIEGO has worked with informal workers' organizations to find solutions that improve their day-to-day lives.

Our research—done in collaboration with workers, their organizations, and a broad range of allies—generates a grounded, credible body of knowledge that informs local, national and international policies and movements. For workers' organizations, knowledge is crucial. WIEGO equips them with practical tools, research and data that they can use to advocate for more secure livelihoods.

In addition to helping informal workers build stronger organizations, we help connect them regionally and globally, allowing them to share experiences and learn from each other.



In South and East and Southeast Asia, the vast majority of workers labour in the informal economy, yet informal workers tend to be ignored or excluded from city planning and economic development considerations. **WIEGO** has built strong alliances with established partners, including the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, HomeNets in South and Southeast Asia, and regional/national statistical organizations and the Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics. Together, we help informal workers gain voice, visibility and validity.

# Generating New Knowledge

## Making Sure Informal Workers are Counted

If informal workers are not included in official statistics, they are not seen, and their economic and social contributions are not counted. WIEGO works with national and international bodies to improve the measurement of informal employment in developing and developed countries. This includes working to improve classifications, concepts and methods for data collection, dissemination and analysis. WIEGO has generated widely cited regional, country and city-level statistics on the size of the informal economy and informal workers.

WIEGO's vital statistical work in Asia has shone a spotlight on informal workers. This includes publishing a statistical estimation of numbers and trends for the informal economy in urban India using the labour force data.

Also, WIEGO recently published statistical studies on home-based workers in South Asia based on national labour force data. The Statistical Briefs detail the size and composition of home-based work in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. These briefs fill a significant gap; previously, little was known about these low-income, often invisible workers who produce goods or services in or near their own homes. Part of the WIEGO Publication Series, these are available free at [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org), and can be downloaded and used by informal workers' organizations, allies, or governments to inform policy and planning decisions.

## Groundbreaking Research

The WIEGO-led Informal Economy Monitoring Study (IEMS) examined the contributions that informal workers make to economies and communities, the challenges that they face, and what influences can help or hinder them. The landmark study covered 10 cities, including three in Asia. Research was done on home-based workers in Ahmedabad, India; Bangkok, Thailand; and Lahore, Pakistan; on street vendors in Ahmedabad, India; and on waste pickers in Pune, India.

IEMS garnered international media attention. The reports and briefs produced by WIEGO are informing advocacy efforts in cities worldwide.

## Setting an Agenda for Gender Equality

The United Nations Secretary General's High-Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment brought together leaders from private and public sectors and from civil society to set a practical agenda for advancing gender equality and improving economic outcomes for women. As one of the civil society organizations invited to participate, WIEGO produced a Compendium

of WIEGO-SEWA Case Studies, as well as five policy briefs. Members of the WIEGO Team are on working groups tasked with identifying implementation priorities.

## Key Achievements in Health

New insights into the connection between health and informal workers were revealed through a three-city international research project, including a focus on Ahmedabad, India, and Bangkok, Thailand. The project explored the ways in which informal workers can better access health services.

WIEGO's Occupational Health and Safety project supported studies into the impact of technology on informal worker livelihoods, organizing and work opportunities. WIEGO supported SEWA's project that considered how tools and equipment impact the health of garment workers, sugarcane farmers, kite workers, embroiderers, and waste pickers. The project led to the development of new prototypes. Another project, with mHealth Alliance and Vital Wave, looked at how mobile phones could be used to improve access to health services and for health education.

### WIEGO's Work

WIEGO aims to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through:

- strengthening organizations and promoting representation of informal workers;
- promoting more inclusive policy processes that include informal workers;
- expanding statistics and research on the informal economy, and assisting organizations to make their data needs known to national statistical offices and helping those offices develop methods to produce the data;
- advancing more equitable trade, labour, urban planning and social protection policies to protect and promote the working poor in the informal economy.

WIEGO focuses on four occupational groups:

- domestic workers
- home-based workers
- street vendors
- waste pickers

# Building Capacity, Strengthening Networks



## Home-Based Workers

Home-based workers are the most invisible of all informal workers, yet their numbers exceed 100 million worldwide. Women home-based workers occupy the lowest rungs of global value chains. They are often poorly paid and work long hours in unhealthy conditions. By gaining visibility and recognition as economic contributors, these informal workers can improve their livelihoods. In this struggle, establishing a collective voice is one of their most powerful tools.

WIEGO and our partners have long supported organizing for home-based workers.

### At the Local Level

WIEGO helped build capacity for HomeNet South Asia and its member organizations, as well as worker groups. With technical partner Mahila Housing Trust (of India), we offered training focused on how home-based workers can advocate for better civic amenities such as water, electricity, and sewage. When the home is also the workplace, these services are essential to secure livelihoods.

### At the National Level

WIEGO's Organized Strength for Home-Based Workers, a collaborative research and advocacy project with HomeNet Thailand, significantly improved livelihoods, economic security and legal empowerment of women home-based workers. With WIEGO's support, HomeNet Thailand successfully campaigned for the Homeworkers Protection Act, which entitles homeworkers to minimum wage, occupational health and safety protection, and

*Above: Home-based workers make a wide range of products, from traditional items like the one being woven by this Nepalese woman to electronic components, garments and sporting goods destined for global markets.*

*Photo: WIEGO*

*Below: Viboonsri Wongsangiyim produces Muslim garments in her Bangkok home along with her husband. Like most home-based workers, the couple must deal with difficulties, especially irregular orders and inconsistent income. They joined HomeNet Thailand to access more benefits and to connect to new opportunities. Photo: Paula Bronstein, Getty Images Reportage*



other fundamental labour rights. The legislation impacts millions of workers in Thailand.

### At the Regional Level

WIEGO played an important role in a Regional Conference of City Authorities and Home-Based Workers in Bangkok. The meeting brought together home-based worker organizations from eight Asian countries—Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand—with city mayors and administrators. Discussions highlighted how good civic amenities impact the productivity, livelihoods and quality of life of urban home-based workers, and how much these unseen workers contribute to communities and economies. The conference concluded with the adoption of the Asian Cities Declaration on Home-based Workers. The key recommendations in this document serve as a roadmap for governments and city authorities in Southeast and South Asia while



offering direction and insight for city officials worldwide.

### At the Global Level

In 2015, more than 100 home-based worker representatives and supporters from 24 countries took part in a historic Global Conference on Home-based Workers, organized by HomeNet South Asia and WIEGO in New Delhi. This provided a unique opportunity for home-based workers to exchange

*Home-based workers from around the globe convened in Delhi to exchange ideas, build solidarity and draft a Declaration. Photo: WIEGO*

ideas and build solidarity. Together, they produced the Declaration for Home-Based Workers, which sets out challenges and demands on issues ranging from wages to better housing, from basic services to social protection. The Declaration included a five-year global Action Plan that is being implemented.

## Street Vendors

As a longstanding partner of the global network StreetNet International, WIEGO has helped strengthen the movement of street and market vendors in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In Asia, the focus has been on India and the Republic of Korea.

### India Adopts Law on Street Vendors

The National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI) and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India succeeded, after years of advocacy work, in getting a national law passed in support of street vendors. In 2014, India became the first country to adopt progressive,



centralized legislation in favour of street vendors. The Act has several provisions to protect livelihood, social security and human rights.

*Choral Mauladia sells vegetables at a local market in Ahmedabad. India's street vendors have struggled because of harassment by local officials and displacement by urban development projects. Given these threats, Choral joined SEWA. Photo: Paula Bronstein, Getty Images Reportage*

## Domestic Workers

Working behind closed doors in private homes leaves domestic workers vulnerable to exploitation. Isolation can prevent collective approaches. For these reasons, organizing efforts are extremely important in this sector.

WIEGO supported the launch of the International Domestic Workers Network (now International Domestic Worker Federation or IDWF). Through the IDWF, domestic workers from around the globe are networking and building capacity to fight for their rights. The Thai Domestic Workers Network was instrumental in pressuring the government to pass a Ministerial Regulation for Domestic Workers.

WIEGO implemented, in concert with the IDWF and the global trade union IUF, a project called Economic and Employment Rights: Advancing Domestic Workers'



*The International Domestic Workers Network became the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) in Montevideo, Uruguay in 2013. Photo: Marty Chen*

Leadership in 15 countries. In Asia, these included Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia and Nepal.

## Waste Pickers

WIEGO hosted a Global Strategic Workshop of Waste Pickers in Pune, India. The event brought together 80 waste picker leaders from 34 cities around the globe to exchange information and tactics on becoming integrated into municipal waste management systems. Then WIEGO helped expand the international exchange of waste pickers through development of a website for waste pickers, [www.globalrec.org](http://www.globalrec.org), which covers news and events about waste picker organizations and allies around the globe.

WIEGO has been supporting the development of the Alliance of Indian Wastepickers (AIW) in the areas of research, leadership training, fundraising and occupational health.



*A waste picker with SWaCH, a cooperative of waste pickers' in Pune, India. SWaCH has negotiated a contract with the municipality allowing door-to-door collection of segregated waste. This has considerably improved the waste pickers' working conditions and livelihoods, while providing economic and environmental benefits to the city. Photo: Leslie Vryenhoek*

## WIEGO Experts in Asia

**Sarah Orleans Reed, Bangkok Focal City Coordinator**, has worked in Southeast Asia since 2011. Before joining WIEGO, she provided strategic support to many organizations, including Mercy Corps, the Asia Foundation, CARE, and the Children in a Changing Climate Coalition. In 2015, Sarah led development of the new United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Urban Programming Strategy for Asia and the Pacific, with a strong focus on informality. Previously, she served as Urban Programs Advisor to the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition in Hanoi. She also initiated the South and Southeast Asia Made (SEAM) project to link tourism and ethical garment producers in Vietnam.

**Shalini Sinha, Delhi Focal City Coordinator**, holds a MPhil in Political Science from Delhi University, and has published on gender and pro-poor issues in the Indian and the South Asian context. Shalini has long served as WIEGO's Home-Based Worker Sector Specialist. Her work focuses on developing and documenting decent work and livelihoods opportunities for women workers in the informal economy, especially women home-based workers in urban locations. Earlier Shalini worked as an independent consultant specializing in labour, gender and social development issues with several national and international NGOs and funding agencies.

# Taking the World Stage



**I**nternational bodies and experts regularly assemble to discuss and make decisions that directly impact the lives and livelihoods of informal workers. Too often, these discussions happen in the absence of any informal worker representatives. WIEGO facilitates the participation of informal workers in forums around the globe by including them in our delegations.

*Waste pickers have explained on the world stage how recycling can help reduce climate change while providing much-needed income and helping municipalities manage waste. With WIEGO's help, waste pickers took part the WIEGO delegation at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations, including at this meeting in Tianjin, China in 2010.*

*Photo: WIEGO*

We provide financial and logistical support for travel, as well as technical support at conferences and events to ensure their voices are heard by decision-makers.

These snapshots represent just a small number of the dozens of events since 2006 at which, with WIEGO's support, informal workers were on hand to negotiate beneficial outcomes.

*The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development—Habitat III in 2016—is held every 20 years to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development. In the long process leading up to the Habitat III summit, the WIEGO Network successfully advocated for the integration of informal workers and their livelihoods into the New Urban Agenda document. Informal workers attended preparatory meetings like this one in Surabaya, Indonesia to state their case. Photo: WIEGO*



## Making International Standards—and History

WIEGO ensures informal workers are included in its delegation to the International Labour Conference (ILC) held every year in Geneva.

*WIEGO coordinated a sustained and successful international campaign, led by domestic workers, to secure the adoption of a Convention and accompanying Recommendation on Decent Work for Domestic Workers (C189) at the 100th International Labour Conference in 2011. Philippines and Mauritius were among the first countries to ratify C189; five years later, no other Asian countries have done so. Progress, however, is being made in many nations, including Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia and Nepal. Photo: WIEGO*



*Informal workers had a voice throughout the two-year standard-setting discussion on transitioning from the informal to the formal economy. At the 2014 ILC, workers like waste picker leader Suman More from India delivered a platform, developed in workshops hosted by WIEGO. Informal workers were at the ILC again in 2015 for the adoption of the first-ever international labour standard specifically for the informal economy. It provides a policy roadmap to facilitate transition from the informal to the formal economy in the ILO's 186 member States. Photo: WIEGO*

*At the ILC in 2016, Zehra Khan from Pakistan spoke on behalf of homeworkers during the discussions on decent work in global supply chains. WIEGO helped Zehra prepare her speech and her submission to the workers' meeting on the inclusion of homeworkers. Prior to the ILC, WIEGO and HomeNet South Asia, together with affiliates from 11 countries, had established a platform of demands.*

*At the ILC, homeworkers were recognized as a vital part of global supply chains. Photo: WIEGO*





## Improved Legislation for More Secure Livelihoods

*Marty Chen, WIEGO's International Coordinator, prepares a meal with her host, Devi-ben, during the Law Exposure-Dialogue Programme. Photo: WIEGO*

Law is an essential tool in improving livelihoods and lives, but legal and regulatory frameworks are designed for the formal economy. WIEGO's Law & Informality programme has pioneered an approach that helps informal workers' demands for rights and protections be transformed into law. The programme builds the capacity of informal workers to engage effectively with the law and achieve legal empowerment.

One initiative allowed legal experts to experience the day-to-day reality of informal workers. In partnership with the SEWA Academy and Harvard University (USA), WIEGO created an Exposure-Dialogue Programme focused on issues related to law and informal employment in 2013. Human rights judges, legal advocates and activists were hosted in the homes of informal workers in Ahmedabad, India.

## Going Forward

The movement of informal workers has grown on multiple fronts over the past 20 years. Achievements include concrete policy gains, a robust set of statistics and well-organized, well-informed workers.

WIEGO's Focal City approach concentrates activities and resources at the city level in support of membership-based organizations and their efforts to improve outcomes for urban informal workers. After successful Focal City initiatives in Accra, Ghana and

Lima, Peru, we recently added a focus on Delhi, India and Bangkok, Thailand.

Much still needs to be done to advance informal workers in Asia. New groups and new areas need to be reached. Existing policies need to be enforced and improved policies implemented to ensure workers' rights are protected. And, most importantly, for real, lasting change to happen, informal workers need to be recognized as valuable contributors to society.



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The WIEGO Publication Series contains WIEGO's latest research, available free at [www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org). Visit our blog (<http://www.wiego.org/blogs>) for insight into the informal economy.