

A Tribute to Dan Gallin by Renana Jhabvala, Chair of SEWA Bharat and Co-Founder and Former Board Chair of WIEGO

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Dan was the first Director of the Organisation and Representation Programme and we in WIEGO were very lucky to get him, as he had just stepped down as General Secretary of the IUF. I knew him from the mid-eighties, and he was a hero for SEWA as he was perhaps the only leader in the trade union movement who said that informal workers, including the self-employed, were indeed workers and he fiercely argued that they should be organized. And so IUF was the first International Trade Union to admit SEWA as a member and since then has actively promoted informal workers.

However, I got to know him really well during the campaign for the ILO Homeworkers Convention. In 1988, he worked with SEWA to get a resolution in favour of a Convention for Homeworkers passed in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) General Assembly. In fact, he sat with me at the IUF kitchen table and drafted the resolution himself! And after that, although he was always very busy, he would take time out to meet anyone from SEWA who came to Geneva and advise us on how to influence the trade union movement. The campaign during the International Labour Conference was practically run from the IUF office, and when we were uncertain, or felt we were losing, we would ask his advice, and his answer was always, "Keep on fighting".

Marty Chen and I asked Dan to join WIEGO as organizing at the international level was an important part of how we envisaged bringing the voice of the informal workers to international forums, and Dan was the expert international organizer. However, we did not realize it was a difficult task to combine research and policy and organizing, and even more difficult to get everyone to agree on what was important. Dan thought we should be more like an international trade union: a sort of IUF for informal workers; the researchers and policymakers thought we should focus on research and policy as that is what informal workers need and are unable to do for themselves. We had a very tense time discussing the WIEGO constitution in Bellagio. Dan thought the board should be elected, the researchers thought they should be nominated and we all left feeling disheartened.

Finally, we set up a committee and to everyone's surprise, with a lot of bonhomie Dan, Marty, Biff and I worked in Marty's room at the hotel in Ahmedabad and agreed on a 'hybrid' constitution! We worked all day and in the evenings Dan and Marty illegally drank whisky and Biff and I went to the gym.

This is what Dan wrote to me when I reminded him of this time:

"I remember that I was not very happy with the final constitution we came up with, I thought we had set out to draw a horse and had ended up drawing a camel, but, as you noted, it served us well. By the way: I must correct you: it was "whisky" (Scotch). The spelling "whiskey" refers to the American variant (bourbon, made from maize). I remember it was Scotch."

During his term as ORP Director, a number of new internationals were supported by WIEGO. StreetNet was already formed but received both funds as well as moral support and good advice from Dan; HomeNet International unfortunately fell apart, but HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet South East Asia were formed as was the International Domestic Workers Federation.

Dan was great at strategy, and he knew almost intimately the political situation in each country, so his guidance and advice were invaluable. His speeches were always inspiring, as they were both analytical as well as imbued with a fighting spirit; and on a personal level whenever I talked to him, I came back enthused and energised.

Dan shaped WIEGO in many ways. He was the trade union presence in WIEGO and made sure that we never forgot that we were part of a world-wide class struggle. He helped to create structures and policies in WIEGO, which are still unique, and which provide the frame for WIEGO's work. The establishment of the ORP Advisory Committee was due to his understanding of how decisions in WIEGO should be discussed, prepared and finally taken, and today is one of the important decision-making bodies within WIEGO. I think he always thought of WIEGO as part of the class struggle in which had been engaged his whole life and perhaps will continue to be engaged wherever he is now.