



# Linking Commonalities and Struggles

Informal Workers' Exchange in South Asia



Committee for Asian Women

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Informal Workers' Exchange in South Asia

**Report of  
South Asia Conference on  
Informal Labour and Trade Union Organisations**

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**and**

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**Linking Commonalities and Struggles**  
Informal Workers' Exchange in South Asia

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**About CAW**

Committee for Asian Women (CAW) is a regional network of 43 women workers groups in 14 Asian countries that aims to empower women workers to protect, advocate, and advance their rights. Since her birth more than 30 years ago, CAW has become part of the global movement advocating workers' rights.

**CAW's Vision**

CAW envisions a world where all people are free to develop their potential without any form of domination and exploitation based on class, gender, colour or religious belief. This is a world where the common wealth is used for the common good, workers enjoy the fruits of their labour, women prevail against patriarchy, and women workers determine their own destinies.



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# OVERVIEW

**By Dr. Sharit Bhowmick**

**Centre for Labour Studies of the School of Human Resource Management and Labour Relations of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India**

*Dr Sharit Bhowmick, an eminent sociologist, is the Chairperson of the Centre for Labour Studies of the School of Human Resource Management and Labour Relations of Tata Institute of Social Sciences. With several years of teaching experience at the Bombay University and a number of publications to his credit, he has been intimately associated with the informal economy – both formally through his teaching assignment and area of research, as well as by virtue of his association with many organisations of informal economy workers. He has worked closely with WIEGO and is member of the Steering Committee of the Waste Collectors International Conference. He has worked closely with the Cooperative of Tea Plantation workers.*

Dr. Bhowmick gave an overview of the situation of the informal economy in South Asia. He mentioned that informal economy has been growing everywhere in developing countries. It comprises of about 70-72% of the total workforce in Latin America. In India 370 million workers out of the 397 million are in the informal economy, comprising 93% of the entire workforce. Majority of these workers are in the agriculture sector. Informal economy workers in the urban area number 100 million. The informal economy has been growing mainly because of the failure of the expansion of the formal economy. There was a sudden jump in the street vendors after 1997 in countries like Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka when the economy in some countries of Asia crashed. In India, the transition of formal economy workers to informal had started even before that, in 1991, when large factories started closing down and the workforce was pushed to the informal economy.

Indian economy has improved after liberalisation. National Income has grown by 125% in the last decade. Per capita income has increased by 77%. The economy is growing at an average of 9% annually. India is a country with the smallest external debt among developing nations. However, consumption of large sections of the population in India is only about Rs. 20 per day, with up to 837 million spending this amount. Globalisation has increased the inequalities of income. In other countries too growth in inequalities has resulted in the expansion of the informal economy.

However, the informal economy is not a new phenomenon. It has existed for a very long time. Labour laws came into existence after the Second World War. However, the women were not considered separately as part of the work force under these laws. It was during the 1970s that the realisation came that there was something called informal economy, and workers in this sector were playing a very crucial role in the total economy. How is informal economy formed? Unskilled labourers and poor people from the rural areas are pulled into the informal economy as it is easier than entering into a firm within the formal economy. It is low-paying employment. Nowadays, a large section of workers in the informal economy is formed by the workers moving from formal to informal economy because of the loss of jobs. There are two sections of the informal economy at present i.e. people migrating from rural areas and people moving from formal to informal



economy. International Labour Organization (ILO) believes that these two sectors exist side by side, and as the economy grows, informal economy workers will be absorbed by the formal economy. However, this has not happened and it has been found that 80% of the workers are still in the informal economy.

The growth of the informal economy has accelerated because of globalisation, the role of women, and the practice of outsourcing. Large companies are shifting production to smaller production units. Multi-national companies are moving their jobs to poorer countries where the labour is cheaper. In other countries in South Asia, women constitute a large part of the informal workforce. Street vending in Sri Lanka is women-dominated. Women are paid very low wages whether they are waste pickers (WPs), domestic workers (DWs) or doing any other type of work in the informal sector. Their income however, is crucial to support the family. Their illiteracy/low education forces them to work in conditions of extreme exploitation. It has been observed that when women get greater control over income, the incidence of domestic violence goes down. It has also been found that a lot of this money is spent on the education of the children, especially girls.

Two things must be ensured in order to achieve development goals – gender equality and concept of decent work as defined by ILO. Decent work is comprised of the respect for basic rights in addition to a minimum degree of social security. However, it has also been experienced that even though laws are made for the benefit of the labour, they are easily violated, especially in India. Organising women in the informal economy for social protection (unions or other member-based organisations) should thus be taken up. It will help influence the state in passing laws to protect women. When one tries to influence the state, it becomes a political move but unless this is done, one cannot improve the condition of women in the informal economy.

Most of the workers working in the informal economy are self-employed. The state has to see that better facilities are given to them, and there is greater access to markets and credit. There is a national policy for urban street vendors. It has been forwarded to the cabinet but has yet to result into anything concrete. There is also need for a national policy for the WPs or DWs. Because of poverty it becomes difficult to sustain the movements in the informal sector, hence intervention is needed from the trade unions. When such movements are linked with national trade unions (TUs) they get more visibility and help promotes their cause. Unfortunately, too, in the women's movement, the livelihood issue is sidelined. But it must be emphasised that domestic violence is also related to the livelihood issue.

Greater visibility is needed for informal economy workers. There are different types of informal economy workers – street vendors, WPs, DWs and home-based workers who are the least visible. Home Net Asia has played a very important role in organising home-based workers.

Gender equality within the informal economy also needs to be looked into. Translation of the concept into the realities in this sector is difficult. When men enter into a particular area, the women are pushed out. For example, if men come into street vending, women are pushed out and enter into DW or WP work. There is a question of religion, culture, and patriarchy in gender equality. One needs to work for strengthening of women's bargaining power.



## QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS:

**Question:** We are seeing growth rates coming up in South Asia. When we look at the changes, we need to see whether poverty is really declining, and whether women are finding quality jobs. In Bangladesh, women have not seen development and employment. When you say that garment industry has done a lot for women in Bangladesh, it is not so. Furthermore, when women go out to work, are they being empowered or disempowered? This is a big challenge to us as organisers. Capitalism and patriarchy are exploiting gender discrimination. Wages are also a very important issue and I would like to follow up on that in this conference.

**Response:** Women need to get organised. Empowerment does not happen automatically. The power structure within the family needs to change. In the informal economy all physical work is done by the women, and yet they are paid less. For example, among construction workers, women carry the bricks, and cement bags, etc. However, the moment there is mechanisation or if technology is introduced, it is the woman who loses a job and man stays. In addition to mass training and upgrading the skills, increasing the bargaining power is also necessary. Social security is as important as adequate wages. It is vital how one works to change the way the state intervenes in relation to this issue.

**Question:** ILO says that with Globalisation the condition of the informal economy would improve, but does ILO conduct any review of the situation?

**Response:** ILO has realised that Globalisation has increased opportunities but also inequalities. Planning for the poor at all levels must be done. ILO has realised that development does not necessarily mean better income for poor. There are three constituents whom the ILO recognises – employer, employee and the government. One cannot straight away visualise the employer in informal economy; hence it is difficult to raise demands to ILO.

**Comments:** In Sri Lanka after privatisation in 1992, tea plantation labourers were laid off, or forced into premature retirement. These men came into the informal economy. It was the starting point of more men coming in this sector. Previously, there was a system to register with the TUs when one was 15 years old and whenever job opportunities arose, registered candidates were considered for employment. This system was stopped after privatisation. Mostly women went to work as DWs because they had no skill and it was easier to get into. Men went into shops to work as salesmen, porters, etc.

**Response:** In Assam and North Bengal, 52 tea plantations have been shut down and the workers are dying of starvation. The government refuses to acknowledge this. Sometimes people enter into the informal economy when they are in-between the jobs. Though the problem is enormous, one has to take up the challenge. The formal workers of today were informal at the time of World War I. In 1918, workers used to work for 14-15 hours and were exploited. Then they got organised and through TUs were able to pressurise the Government to pass laws. Unfortunately it ended there. Now the Government doesn't have a clue as to what to do with regards to informal economy workers. Tanzania has passed a law for DWs, as have some countries. The other countries too can follow unless there is really a deliberate attempt to keep the wage rates low.



**Question:** How should these three issues be dealt with:

1. sustainability
2. legal reforms status in South Asian economy
3. formulation of sector specific strategies?

**Comments:** In Pakistan, women in the informal economy are being pushed out not only by economic and labour policies but also by rise of religious fundamentalism. Due to poverty and fundamentalism women are staying more at home and working from there. It has changed their preferences and work patterns. The negative impact of religious fundamentalism on women is that women workers are now supposed to be confined within four walls. Pakistan's patriarchal society discriminates against women. There are now religious rulings in two provinces under this regime which have been imposed and intervened in the labour policies in respect of women. What is the effect of such fundamentalism in other Muslim countries like Bangladesh?

**Response:** Religious fundamentalism is a problem because of the fact of male domination. The men are using this to perpetuate the patriarchal system. It is true that the women have borne the brunt of it. One can see it in case of the sports industry in Pakistan. In the football export industry, it is the women who make footballs, but they are paid a meagre amount for their toils. Home-based women workers are paid very low wages. Home-based work means denying them the opportunity to organise and demand better compensation. Home-based work means restrictions in competing with men for better jobs, and being confined to lesser wages. These things also need to be challenged under a religious discourse. A system of exploitation can be challenged from below, not from the top.

**Question:** There are two concerns:

1. the lack of government mechanism and law making machinery, which can be addressed by contract laws. But the Government takes no responsibility to do anything to regularise these issues,
2. the period of work. There is a long history of changes, shifting into different types of work. How do we address this?

**Response:** The Government promised legislation about regulation of work, but its efforts fizzled out. Legislation also has gender bias. ILO came up with a legislation preventing women from working at night. As a result, men got the jobs and pushed out women. But when work shifts started the women came back into night jobs. In export promotion zones, such as call centres, women are employed because they are cheaper resource. Women are now working at night in call centres. Women are contributing to the national economy by sacrificing their wages. Most of our taxes are indirect taxes, which the consumers pay when they buy. This means that the poor also pay. Even a beggar has to pay taxes to eat food. Yet we say that poor women are a drag on society. We fail to calculate their contribution to the society, to the economy. So, all this leads to the importance of organising the women, recognising their rights, and giving them the due strength of their numbers. In the informal economy, women are competing with each other. They have to realise that unless they get together they cannot advance. Sustainability will come when the movement builds up. As women get more and more organised they challenge and raise issues. It will challenge the norms and beliefs of the society – that is why these issues are very important.

**Question:** It is clear that Globalisation has affected the issue of informal economy since 1991. Ninety-three per cent of the workforce is in the informal economy. A Social Security Bill has been



proposed. When this is legislated, everything will be handed over to the bureaucracy. The social security net is shrinking. The formal sector is being pushed into the informal economy. These are very core issues and today's economy is not capable of dealing with them. What has happened to the government's responsibility on food security, building houses, health, etc.? I believe such situations must be prevalent in other countries too. One is looking for the alternative. This should be brought on to the fore in this conference.

**Comments:** The challenge is to organise the women into a movement and sustain it. We always try to see the situation of women at the work place. Women can fight against the patriarchy, violence, state repression – all of it - if she is made confident at workplace. In Bangladesh women agricultural labourers were organising and demanding 40 taka daily wage in place of the 25 taka they were getting. In Bangladesh, too, religion is very important in political and social life. How we can come out of our homes and how we can organise ourselves? How to fight the use of religion is the question. In fact the women fight on that score too when they are organised.

How sensitive the Government is to the organised sector is also an issue. The moment the waste becomes clean; the municipal workers claim right to it. Waste issues are also connected with the environmental issue. In the modern world there should not be any waste cleaners but only WPs. There is a question of the segregation of waste and upgrading the skills. We should see that there are only WPs.

Informal economy workers have a lot of infighting. Unless there is a larger sensitivity to workers' problems, there will be no change.

**Response:** It also depends on the TUs, and how well they sensitise the workers. Even in factories the regular workers exploit the casual workers. We should see that informal economy workers unionise. Only then can they make demands.

**Comments:** The wage level is very low. There are two wage laws in Bangladesh; one was passed in 2006. But they are not very effective. A new policy of protecting the wages is coming up.

**Response:** That is not peculiar to Bangladesh alone. There are also similar laws in Sri Lanka. In India too there is no dearth of good laws. It is just that acceptance and implementation are two different things. Today, do we expect the Government to implement these laws when they have no sympathy to the problems of informal workers? Issue of ID cards to WPs and the Municipal Corporation recognising them is a big step though in a way it seems small in relation to issues that must be addressed. You need innovative ways of Organising DWs.

**Comments:** It was easier to form TUs before but now things are different. Whenever we are organising, there is a large degree of caste hierarchy. The work is also divided on the basis of caste. We need to get deeper understanding of this. Whenever we make suggestions to Labour Commissioner about regularising, we get no cooperation. The policy is to take away all the rights of the labourers.

**Response:** It is not a question of caste. It is the question is of sensitivity about the work informal economy worker is doing. But when women organise they can raise these issues.



**Comments:** We must change the mindset of the society and trade unionism. We must bridge the gap between formal and informal economies. It is very important how we can make laws and implement them.



# ***DOMESTIC WORKERS***

## **General Conditions and Trends in Different Countries**

### **BANGLADESH:**

There are 300,000 people working as DWs, mainly in the urban areas. About 90% of them are female, and some 20% are child workers between 9-13 years of age. Sometimes family members send the daughters/women to work. There are no safety measures. Working conditions are bad. Men abuse the women and the sexual harassment goes unreported. No organisation directly works for these workers. There is no legal protection. The wages are low, falling between 300 to 1,000 Taka (or \$5 and \$20) per month. Most of them are full-timers living with the families. The full-timers have no leave or any other benefits. A new law was passed in 2006 setting the minimum employable age at 16 years. The Bangladesh Labour Law has also left out agricultural labourers along with DWs. The law enacted in October does not cover DWs. Some human development organisations want to improve working conditions.

### **HONG KONG:**

The estimated number of DWs (local part-timers) is between 40,000-60,000. For migrants from mainland China it is 200,000. The situation in Hong Kong is similar to those in other countries. There are issues such as low education, exploitation, abuse and harassment. There is also lack of training. They have no skills and no knowledge of cities. There are safety problems. There is a demand for a work contract from groups such as those in the Philippines and Indonesia. The union thinks that since the DWs don't get any benefits otherwise, a contract should be able to provide some. In the Philippines they already have a domestic workers bill. The DWs market is booming and getting bigger. Because of more demand there is also an increase in the business of middlemen and agencies hiring DWs. There is no regulation of these agencies. Some agencies change the names of the workers. The DWs in China, Indonesia, and Philippines are not allowed to go out of the homes they work in. This makes organising them difficult. So the groups working with DWs are using religion to organise them. The Philippine population is mostly Catholic Christian so the groups are using the pretext of religious education to organise the DWs. In East and South Asia women DWs don't use their own names. They are treated as slaves. However new term are being used: in Korea they are called 'household managers'; in Hong Kong, 'Domestic helpers'; in China, 'Domestic Workers'. There is a serious problem for middle-aged women DWs. In East Asian countries middle aged women find it very difficult to get jobs, and if they do, wages are very low. They work as part-time DWs. There is no legal protection for them. The labour laws do not recognise DWs as workers except in Hong Kong. But the law in Hong Kong recognises a person as a DW only if she/he works for 18 hours a week with one employer. If she is working for less than 18 hours a week for one employer she is not entitled for benefits under the law. Usually the DWs work for 8-10 employers. Since the working hours are less than 18 per employer, they get no benefits. In other countries the workers under the labour law are only those working in the formal economy. So there is demand for separate law for DWs. In Hong Kong where there is already Law, the demand is for inclusion of other aspects. In



Philippines groups have successfully implemented a DWs registration programme in Quezon City.

## **INDIA:**

### **Karnataka State:**

Most of the women working as DWs in Bangalore, the metro city in Karnataka, come from surrounding rural areas. They have neither education nor skills. Most of them live in the slums for a long time, but there are also new migrants. This leads to competition. Old workers demand higher wages whereas the newer ones are willing to work for less. The employers take advantage of this and are able to keep the wages low. Generally adolescent girls accompany the mothers and automatically get into the trade. There are also children dropping out of school. Younger male children below the age of 25 who have no other skills also work as DWs. A large number of rich people in the city have properties in villages. These families bring the children of the people working on their fields to work as DWs in their city homes. These DWs face sexual harassment, violence, even murder. There are 18 cases of suspicious deaths of young girls recorded in police stations. The police are always on the side of employers. One common allegation in respect of DWs is theft. They are looked down upon because of their *dalit*<sup>1</sup> caste. Women have committed suicide because of such allegations. They are also beaten and harassed in the police stations. The wages from one job ranges from Rs 200 to 800. They generally work in 5 houses and earn an average of Rs. 1500 in total. We are trying to change the mindset of the employers about untouchability. We are demanding the recognition of dignity of work. The DWs are not allowed to use the toilets which they themselves clean. Left-over food is given in plastic containers kept outside the house or near the door of the bathroom. There is no basic notion of employer-employee relationship or concept of minimum wage. An estimated 99% of DWs do not have weekly day off. There is no medical leave. They are now allowed to rest even if they are not feeling well. There are no other social security benefits. Women and young girls have reported of sexual harassment in Bangalore. The political situation, too, is not conducive. There have been incidents where children were rescued from the homes of the politicians and high level bureaucrats. No punishment was meted out to them, only compensation was taken. Justice for DWs - children or women - does not exist in the current system.

We rejected the Minimum Wage Notification introduced in 2004 because it provides for a basic salary of Rs. 1600 for 8 hours of work, and a 5% annual increase (the raise is 10% if there are than 4 people in the family). There was also one weekly off day. There is no provision of bonus. We are asking for living wage not minimum wage. At least the DWs are recognised by the government. But generally the government is not responsive. We are trying to have a system of registration, so that the years of service can be recorded. We suggested starting registration at the ward level. This did not come about. Then we said that we would start data collection at our own level. We are trying to introduce master cards for attendance. The workers too have to be bold to use this. Now as per the present notification, an hour's work for three tasks earns Rs.261. For eight hours, it is Rs. 2,028 which also includes baby-sitting. We oppose baby sitting because it requires different skills and has more responsibility. There is a provision for registration of all unorganised sector workers with the Labour Welfare Board. The membership fee is Rs. 9 for a year and the members are able to utilise facilities after 3 years of registration. There is also an insurance scheme for DWs.

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<sup>1</sup> It is the lowest caste people who were earlier (sometimes even now) treated as untouchables.



Once, an article was printed in the newspapers about the DWs. It said that “the DWs are very irresponsible and do not go to work on time. It gives the families tension since both the members are working. If the DWs do not keep the time, it disturbs their schedule.” The newspaper had printed only the employers’ point of view in the article. The Union demanded that the DWs’ view should also be published. The TU held an agitation on 8<sup>th</sup> March (International Women’s Day) to raise demands; and asked the DWs to claim that day as a holiday. It had also invited the press to cover the issue. However, only a few people from the press turned up. Instead of trying to understand the issues, they started making fun of the DWs saying that they too (the journalists) didn’t get holidays – and asked the DWs to sit in protest on Kaveri issue.<sup>2</sup>

## Maharashtra State

**Mumbai City:** Our situation is more or less similar to Pune. The DWs are vulnerable to abuses and violence. The problems are invisible and go unreported. When they work in high-rise apartments there are no safety measures. If accidents happen there is no social security. The government does not take any responsibility. There is no minimum wage. They get anywhere between Rs. 1,000 and 3,000 per month depending upon the number of families they work for.

**Pune City:** There are around 60,000 to 100,000 domestic workers (DWs) working in Pune city. They are facing number of problems such as long working hours, low wages, insecurity, etc. Some 80% of them are part-timers who go home after the work is finished, while 20% are full-timers living with the families. They work with five to 10 employers. The wages are around Rs. 1,500-3,500 monthly. In 1980, we started organising these workers. We demanded one month’s extra payment as a bonus during the *Diwali*<sup>3</sup>. Now we are trying to get a wage raise and gratuity. There is no special enactment for DWs in the state of Maharashtra, not even minimum wages enactment. We are fighting for minimum wages and social enactment. We are also demanding for a weekly day off and paid holidays. The DWs are living in slums where basic infrastructures such as roads, hygiene sanitation, drinking water, etc. are not available. There are 525 slum areas in Pune city.

## Tamil Nadu State

Lot of women are getting into the DW sector. The work that DWs are doing keeps on increasing but the wages remain stagnant. Because of poverty and low family income, even children are sent to become DWs. The wage structure in Chennai, the metro city in Tamil Nadu, is Rs. 2000 for working with seven to eight families. In a smaller city like Madurai, the rate is 50% of that. The Tamil Nadu Government has passed a Domestic Workers Law and the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board was formed in 2007. DWs are unionised and the unions are registered with the Board. Tamil Nadu also has the Manual Labour Act of 1999. Earlier this Act did not extend to DWs but now they have been included. Registered workers get following benefits:

<sup>2</sup> There is an argument between the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu about the distribution of water from the dam built on Kaveri River. The farmers were protesting and agitating about that at that particular period in time.

<sup>3</sup> *Diwali* is the biggest Hindu festival and is celebrated for 4 days in the month of October or November depending upon the moon calendar. Families incur a lot of extra expenditure as a lot of sweets are bought and new clothes are purchased to celebrate the event.



- Educational support of Rs. 1,000 per year per child (up to two children) for children studying in the 10<sup>th</sup> standard
- Educational support of Rs. 2,000 support per child (up to two children) for children studying in college. This amount is Rs. 4000 if they live in a hostel.
- Financial support of Rs. 2000 for marriage expenses for up to two children. We are fighting for Rs. 6000.
- Maternal benefit of Rs. 6000 for the first two childbirths.
- Insurance coverage by Welfare Board: Rs. 50,000 in case of partial disability, Rs. 100,000 in case of death.

Now the notification about minimum wage is being worked out. TUs, government and employers are represented on the Board. To get these benefits, the DWs have to be part of the registered TU. Most of them are part-time workers. However, they work for more than 14 hours. There are also incidents of DWs being murdered, and the cases being reported to the police as suicides. When the employers want to get rid of the worker they fabricate excuses and sack her. A common reason for sacking is taking leaves. If the DWs take leave for more than two to three days in a row, they are sacked.

## **NEPAL**

Right now there are two categories of employers of DWs. The rich employ about four to five DWs while people from the middle class usually employ only one. In Nepal too, there is an issue of low wages and sexual harassment. Part-time workers get around NPR 1,500 (Nepali currency). For full-timers the money is sent directly to their homes, hence they may not know how much they are getting or even if they are getting anything at all. Generally the wages are between NPR 200 and 300. There are 100,000 adult DWs in Nepal, may be more. There are also under-aged DWs who are kept invisible. Another reason for sending the children to Kathmandu to work is to keep them safe from Maoists and save them from being kidnapped or murdered. Some laws are in place but these are not specifically for DWs. The political situation is very unpredictable. Only Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, is developed. Sometimes the employers say that they would not pay the wages but send the child to school instead. However, for most part of the year the schools are closed because of Maoist activities. The Government is now coming up with a Bill for DWs.

## **SRI LANKA:**

Most of the women working as DWs come from plantation areas to cities like Colombo. Those who work as DWs are mostly illiterate women and other women who could not get a job. They earn about LKR 4,000 (about 2,000 INR) per month. The working hours are very long. They work for 18 hours in a day, getting up at 4 a.m. and going to bed at 11 p.m. They do not have any social security benefits. Twice a year they get holidays. The maximum days of leave at one time are not more than five days. They are not treated with respect by the employers. In addition to low wages, they also have to face sexual harassment. There is no legal provision for DWs. Employers do not allow them to ring up family members and talk to them. For incoming phone calls, too, there is no privacy, and they have to talk in front of the employers. No letters are allowed. Though they are living with the family they have no separate room and have to eat left over food. They do not even get to eat on time. There are murders, too, if they get pregnant or because of the fear of exposure. There is also police harassment as the DWs are mostly Tamil



and police think they may have links with the LTTE.<sup>4</sup> If the DWs demand more salary, the employers threaten that they would go to the police. The DWs live in constant fear. The Red Flag Union is the first movement working in this sector. We are trying to organise the DWs within the country. We are working district-wise and are in the process of registering them in a union. We are using leaflets to generate awareness and holding discussions with DWs to organise them. The TU representatives in each district organise these workers and give them training.

## **Strategies, Challenges, Successes and Setbacks**

### **General Strategies**

The group discussion examined various strategies used in different countries to mobilise the DWs.

#### **BANGLADESH:**

- Raise voices through networks
- Use leaflet for the workers and the households to generate awareness
- Demand for law; to submit to the labour ministry a MoU for a draft policy which includes issues such as age requirements, definition of DW, working hours, etc.
- Advocacy on issues
- Appeal to the citizens through flyers
- Use of internet to circulate the information

#### **HONG KONG:**

One cannot go door-to-door to contact the DWs in Hong Kong. There are coaching classes for the DWs. Before the union started in 2001, we used to go to the training classes to make them aware about the existence of the union and its importance. There was no funding and the union had to support itself. The DWs have to pay membership fees of Rs. 600 per year. We organise our members at the district level. At present, we have 5 district groups. There are weekly, fortnightly and monthly meetings for different group for sharing experiences and problems, and also for learning skills, including cooking. There is sharing about labour rights, bargaining skills, and how to negotiate with the employers. This exchange raises their confidence. There is a core group meeting monthly. Other members are also free to join if they want to contribute in any way. All members meet yearly in the AGM. Monthly meeting are conducted to discuss union action plans and district meetings to organise their strategies in their own districts. Lot of rallies are organised by district groups. Press conferences are held to take up a particular case. Advocacy is done through press conferences, rallies, and media to pressurise the Government.

#### **Strategies in Hong Kong:**

- Meet the DWs when they are attending training classes to give information about the union
- Organise the members at the district level
- Hold meetings for sharing experiences to raise their confidence

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<sup>4</sup> Liberation of Tamil Tigers Elam is a separatist organisation fighting with Sri Lanka Govt. for a separate state.



- Conduct core group meeting monthly to plan
- Organise rallies
- Pressurise the Government through media
- Hold press conferences
- Advocacy for rights

## **INDONESIA:**

There is a network of NGOs working for DWs and child workers. They have DW schools in Indonesia. Awareness raising is done through these schools. The DW union organises village groups. Some meetings are held where they work, some where they live. They also have savings groups, and sharing takes place in these group meetings. The union members go to these meetings to generate awareness. The 15th of February is DW day. They are demanding employment contracts. If abuse takes place in a village, the village group takes it to the union.

Village people are mobilised through awareness building. They are gathered on the pretext of religious studies. Since religion is a very important part of society, the employers cannot deny them going out. They are not allowed to go out for any other reason. After some years, these DWs form their own groups which are called "Operators". There is an NGO which runs a school in skills training for DWs. This school is used by the TU to generate awareness. This school in Jakarta produces best DWs and there is a demand for DWs who complete trainings from this school. The school has a contract system and negotiates with the employer for terms and conditions. So even when there is no law, this contract gives bargaining power to the worker.

### **Strategies in Indonesia:**

- Awareness building
- Use of religious studies to mobilise the DWs
- Establish contacts with the DWs through skill training school
- Coordinate with the school to get better terms and conditions for the DW

## **INDIA:**

### **Karnataka:**

- Approach individuals first through home visits to create awareness and explain our perspective to them
- The next step is to form groups and explain the importance of unions
- Conduct separate meetings for young and old women
- Hold weekly meetings in the locality to build awareness
- Visit apartment complexes to meet the DWs working there and also the child workers
- Give them our contact numbers and ask them to contact in case of problems
- Holding a core group committee meeting once every 15 days. This where the women become leaders and start taking initiative.
- DW Union meeting once every 15 days at the union office
- Give skill training and placement. Skills related to housekeeping, cooking, child care, baby sitting.
- Network with various child labour as well as other groups and raise our voices wherever, whenever possible
- Exposure programmes



## **Maharashtra:**

### **Mumbai:**

- Awareness raising about their rights
- Motivate them to join our movement
- Fulfil their immediate needs such as education, ration-cards, housing, etc.
- Improve confidence
- Create network of NGOs working for labour issues
- Lobbying and advocacy for DW Labour Bill
- Take up cases/problems against employers and follow up
- Use of the media
- Meet the full-time workers in Church on Sundays as otherwise it is difficult to catch them
- Create awareness and conduct personality development sessions for them
- Encourage them to come to us with their problems

### **Pune:**

- Strikes to raise demands
- Processions and agitations
- Use of media to create public opinion
- Propaganda and public appeals
- Use of pressure tactics such as not letting anyone work with the employer who refuses to raise wages
- Defining rates and preparing rate cards
- ID cards for union members
- Counselling through the union office
- Provide help in problems
- Take help from experts such as lawyers whenever necessary
- Organise training programmes for members
- Home visits by activists to increase the membership

## **Tamil Nadu:**

### **G.N.D.W Union:**

- The most important strategy is to generate awareness. We have meetings every month in which information is disseminated.
- Build awareness about rights. We ask them to demand for their rights since they too are paying taxes, and tell them that unless they come out with their demands the Government will not take action.
- Hold the elected politicians accountable. We ask the DWs to go back to the elected politicians who come to them for votes and make promises, but then forget. We tell them that they should approach them and remind them of promises, and get the facilities.
- Another strategy is to celebrate important commemorative days: January (DW Day), 1st May (Labour Day) and 8th March (Women's Day). These celebrations help them to understand the importance of these days and the purpose behind them.
- Build awareness about different aspects of working conditions. We create awareness about overtime, long working hours. The couples can go out to work because the DWs take care of the household.
- Address domestic problems of the DWs, their life issues to reach them



### **Penn Thozhilalar Sangam:**

- Work first with DWs working in the affluent localities and slowly build our identity.
- Take up issues of violence at work.
- Form local committee to talk about issues to the employer.
- Empower them to bargain for their issues.
- Lobby and advocacy – we insisted previously that every woman must earn at least Rs. 15 per hour, now we are asking for Rs. 20 an hour.
- Publish our demands through pamphlets.
- Demand from the State Government for housing for DWs.
- Participate in local politics.
- Handle cases of domestic violence.

### **NEPAL:**

- Use the Children's Club to organise small programs and encourage children to join.
- Distribute pamphlets to throw light on the issues of DWs.
- Train part time DWs in different skills such as stitching so that they can have other job opportunities to earn income.
- They can also become members of the union after this training and get ID cards for one time membership of NRP. 10.
- Use solidarity of different clubs and union to raise the voice and enlist police cooperation
- Celebration of Labour Day

### **SRI LANKA:**

- Use festival days to get in touch with the DWs as they are not available to go out otherwise. At festival times they are home and can be contacted. We just tell them that this is get-together for the festival.
- Another strategy is to tread carefully in the beginning and have just informal talks with the DWs. If they know that they are speaking to a union member, they become scared of losing their jobs. We have to slowly introduce the subject of their working conditions.
- Another strategy is to use informal training. We slowly build their awareness without telling them that it is training.

### ***Specific Strategies to Build Women's Leadership***

Different strategies are being used to build women's leadership. Some of them are:

#### **INDIA:**

##### **Karnataka:**

Cooking competitions are organised, where information about human rights, child rights, etc. is given at that time. A placement centre for the DWs has been established to keep their interest in the union alive.



**Maharashtra:**

The women are encouraged to send representatives from among themselves when delegations/visitors come.

**Tamil Nadu:**

There is a Labour Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu through which women learn to interact with different level officials in the administration. Already, 50 women leaders have approached this in the last two years.

**HONG KONG:**

Experience sharing and in-depth training is arranged for women leaders to handle the cases of the DWs.

**NEPAL:**

Programmes are organised by unions to educate the DWs. The women are then asked to train new members.

**SRI LANKA:**

Gender awareness programmes are conducted. Information is given about the qualities leaders need. TU objective is to build up women leadership in the TU itself.

***General Challenges***

**BANGLADESH:**

- To overcome the legal barriers
- To change the attitude of the politicians
- To break the broker system and the brokers' control over the DWs (The broker is the only contact point because the families don't know where the member is working in the city)

**HONG KONG:**

- To strengthen job security
- To generate resources to organise the DWs as they are scattered
- To acquire bargaining power as the employers too are scattered
- To keep the interest of the DWs alive, because immediate results are not tangible
- To change the mindset of the NGOs who organise the DWs in the first place, about letting go of their control and allowing the DWs be independent



## **INDIA:**

- To keep them organised is the biggest challenge
- To get government recognition and protection of DWs
- To ensure decent minimum wages for DWs
- To get media coverage on social issues
- To get fixed wages
- To overcome resistance to employing DWs through an agency
- To build professional approach to employing DWs (keeping regular working hours, ability to inform in advance about taking leaves of absence)
- To maintain record/evidence/proof of work (which is required in police cases)
- To stop the competition among the DWs which is pushing down the wages
- To overcome the resistance of middle-aged DWs in becoming union members

## **NEPAL:**

- To overcome the problem of low literacy and difficulty in giving training because of this
- To find convenient time for activities as these also take place during school hours and thus disturb the Children's Club's education process
- To organise the group since members are located all over Nepal, and Kathmandu is the only developed city
- To get them registered

## **SRI LANKA:**

- To overcome resistance from employers against the Organising of DWs
- To overcome resistance from top lawyers and police as they don't want things to change

### ***Specific challenges for women's leadership:***

- No dignity in women's work
- No collective feeling as women, low self-image, self-neglect as workers, no value to own work
- Male chauvinism prevents women from becoming leaders
- Even the women don't encourage other women to become leaders
- If some woman takes initiative, other women will carry tales to her husband and that would prevent her from taking stage next time.
- There are internal rivalries
- The members have to hide from their husbands when they attend the meeting. There is no support from the husband.
- Emotional loyalty is built because the employer is also a woman. So getting out of this relationship and become a militant is a challenge. Another problem is that the women who are secure and well-off are becoming leaders and the ones suffering remain in the background.
- Women DWs have to be professional in their work. It will change the way we work.



## **Successes**

- Changing the nomenclature/terminology to DW, (household workers instead of domestic help, servants etc.) in Tamil Nadu.
- In Karnataka, the fact that women have come forward to claim their rights is a success. They take steps by themselves and ask for salary raise. They are forming assemblies and recruiting new members to the union. The DWs have formed groups and are addressing the issues of child workers. There are independent actions.
- Leadership from DWs is emerging in Maharashtra.
- They are coming out as groups which they never used to do in Tamil Nadu.
- Finally there is help from the Government in three districts in Nepal. There is also insistence on registering DWs. Their payments and work issues are addressed. A federation of unions has also been formed.
- Mrs Pattamma who is part of the TU is a bold leader and is able to handle any problems and finds solutions in Sri Lanka.

## **Setbacks**

- Apathy and indifference of government officials
- Hierarchy among the workers are the big setbacks.

## **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS:**

**Comments:** In Pune, India, PCDWO has organised several campaigns for DWs' rights. Pune City is expanding and so is the number of DWs. At the same time several organisations have come up to address their issues, which is a welcome situation. PCDWO's strategy is to advocate DW issues with the government; but they also believe that it is a long term struggle. Hence, before lobbying for the issues with the government they should build pressures from the local level to raise their demands. Most DWs work or live in close vicinities, so it is easy to organise and mobilise them.

In Hong Kong government provides some identity card so that it is easier to recognise them. They are also given training in skill development. Employment is obtained through agents. But they do not get benefits of any welfare scheme or mechanism. Presently, there is a shortage of DWs in the cities, so they get them from villages.

In Indonesia, there is no facility for registration. In Philippines, they have begun to register, but that system is used simply to track them. There is no legal protection. Trade unions are working towards better protection.

In Sri Lanka, the domestic work is still not recognised in the national system. Though the number of workers is huge, their existence is inadvertently ignored. Only independent bodies and organisation have recognised their issues and work to integrate them into the system.

In Bangladesh too, there is no provision for registration and legal protection. The October 2006 labour law was concerned with other labour workers, but not domestic workers. But the organisation (BILS) is pushing for a government policy to be in place by September 2007.



**Question:** How many organisations/groups are there? And how if ever, do they coordinate with each other? Or do they work together?

**Response:** There are three different registered associations of DWs in Pune. These three organisations have different political affiliations, working style and approach, but their mission is collectively the same – to work for the rights of domestic workers. This brings them together for cross-sharing on their different issues.

One of those three organisations is the Pune District Domestic Workers Union, which was formed in 1980. After its formation, the union took to organising a lot of strikes against the discrimination and unfair treatment of the workers. It was able to work to increase the wages of the workers.

Earlier the organisation worked with only women. It is an old organisation and has been working for over 25 years on women issues. But the rights and issues of DWs were taken up only in the last eight years. It believes that the government and the authorities should be more accountable to DWs than to the employers. If any policy has not been promulgated, it would do little to approach the lower-end consumers directly.

Pune is a huge city and DWs, or what we call *bais*, have a big contribution to the city's progress. Their employers, usually the housewives, have now started to realise the workers' importance. So now they are starting to be aware of the issues and needs of domestic workers. But the issues of women DWs are not so different than those of other informal workers, who have a similar agenda. But DW groups are usually easier to work with because most of them stay together in one particular area. So we organise them according to their place of stay.

For many years there was no rise in the wages of the DWs. But after Organising and striking, a wage rise was achieved. PCDWO was formed. Pune is a growing city and there is a big job market in DW sector. As such, there is a need to form different unions in different areas corresponding to the growth of the city. The organisation is of the opinion that this is a long term struggle, and they can make demands and fight for their rights by way of strikes even before the government makes laws. So their strategy is to use this instrument and get their demands. If women organise at hamlet level, it is possible to get demands in those particular localities. At the same time the organisation is also conscious of the struggle of getting legal protection and act for the entire informal sector women.

**Question:** What is the mechanism for regularisation of work, minimum wages and pushing their demands? Though the unions in the Pune city are strong, but have they been able to establish mechanisms for registration of the individual DWs?

**Response:** When this fight started, the organisations pushed for a bill for registration. There were reactions about pushing for a Bill, which can spoil relations between employers and employees. So the resistance to Bill is there.

**Question:** Is there a state mechanism for registration of domestic workers in India? Of course, independent bodies and unions have their own registration system, but does the government have a similar policy?

**Response:** There is strong work among trade unions in Pune but not in the state as such. And to push for legal protection, we need to work at the state level. Currently we are pushing for a draft



bill to be tabled in the Assembly. All the organisations are unanimous in this demand. However a state mechanism to register the DWs does not exist.

There is a State mechanism in Tamil Nadu for registering the DWs called the Labour Welfare Board for the informal economy, in which DWs are included. The DWs can individually register and renew membership annually. After three years of registration they get many benefits from the Board.

**Question:** Is anybody working on the issue of DWs being exported to the US, which in reality is a case of human-trafficking? How can we make the Labour Commissioner more responsible? We raised issues with the Labour Commissioner in the US and got compensation from the employers for the DWs without going to criminal court. Segregation of criminal issue may provide some solutions and the compensation received was quite substantial.

**Comments:** A lot of children are trafficked across cities or city borders for employment as domestic workers. But many of them end up into prostitution. *Stree Jagruti Sanghatna* has been working on this issue.

Trafficking is very serious issue especially in mainland China. Girl children of the village farmers go to the cities to work in factories and as DWs. There are women associations in every village which act as kind of middlemen in providing work to these girls. There are also some private agencies. There is no regulation of these agencies. Information about the workers and working conditions is not available. Sometimes the girls go missing. There is a huge demand for domestic workers. Though migration is a natural phenomenon and can't be stopped, it has to be organised properly. So in all villages in China, there are 'All Women Associations', which work to regulate and oversee the movement of women to the cities for the domestic work. But these associations have not been so successful so far.

Trafficking is a complicated issue. It happens because the informal economy is unregulated. To put it in perspective, we are not anti-migration. This issue can be solved if we recognise them as workers and regularise the system.



## **Summary: Domestic Workers in Asia**

<b>Background</b>	<b>Situation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mostly women and children</li> <li>▪ Most under-valued and unpaid work</li> <li>▪ Low or no education</li> <li>▪ Seen as the “slave” “bonded” labour and being kept at home</li> <li>▪ Low caste, poor, ethnic minority, indigenous people – most underprivileged sections of society</li> <li>▪ Migrants from rural area or conflict zones – there is also external migration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Full time stay-in / full-time or part-time not stay-in</li> <li>▪ Full-time work: long working hours, more than 10 hours and no rest days</li> <li>▪ Part-time work: casually employed, too few or too many employers, no rest days</li> <li>▪ Low wages (usually lower than minimum wage) or no cash payment (payment is in kind, in the form of food, shelter or schooling support)</li> <li>▪ Bad working and living conditions</li> <li>▪ No means of visualising/quantifying the work load – employers always underestimate the time and workload and hence are demanding</li> <li>▪ Serious occupational strains and illness</li> </ul>
<b>Working Conditions</b>	<b>Demands</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No legal protection since they are not recognised as workers</li> <li>▪ No access to social security schemes</li> <li>▪ No work contracts – open to hire and fire</li> <li>▪ No health insurance/medical benefits or any worker’s benefit</li> <li>▪ Unorganised</li> <li>▪ No negotiation power – employers are scattered</li> <li>▪ Behind closed doors – isolation from society</li> <li>▪ Sexual, mental, physiological abuses</li> <li>▪ Mental stress and suicides</li> <li>▪ No personal life /privacy – no time for leisure, even delay of marriage</li> <li>▪ No job skill upgrades / learning opportunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legal reform and protection policy</li> <li>▪ Domestic work to be recognised as a form of work</li> <li>▪ Rights of association, in any form</li> <li>▪ Some countries demand for specific local ordinances/ regulations/ bills or law only for DWs</li> <li>▪ Some countries demand for specific legislation to regulate all informal workers, including DWs</li> <li>▪ Some countries try to make use of the existing law/ordinance that can be applied to DWs needs/protection</li> </ul>



## **Asian Domestic Workers' Network**

*“Modes of Collective Bargaining and alliance building specific to these sub-sectors and other sectors have helped win concentrated gains, as well as lessons”, says Ip Pui Yu.*

Ip Pui Yu made a presentation on the Asian Domestic Workers' Network (ADWN). She noted that in the past three days the participants had been discussing about invisibility of women in the informal sector, how they do not have an identity, and how they are almost inconspicuous.

Domestic workers work in very disadvantaged conditions. They have no power to negotiate with their employers. There is also no possibility for tripartite negotiations. Therefore one needs to have good strategies and policies for interventions. Demonstrations are a good strategy through which concerns can be raised and pressure applied to agents or employers. One can also distribute leaflets giving information about misbehaviour of employers and agents, and put them to shame. One can have legal protection for the DWs. There is also an instrument of non-cooperation at work. If the employer refuses to raise wages, the DWs can be asked not to work and not compromise on low wages. DWs need to have strength to turn down such jobs. One has to continuously discuss their issues with the employers. Domestic workers are behind closed doors. The area of their work is restricted. It is difficult to register them. It is difficult to get government to recognise their status. All this also depends on the political situation in a particular country.

There is already a presence of strong networks in both areas of migrant DWs and child DWs, with an impressive array of research and coordinated advocacy. However, there is still a vacuum in terms of Organising local domestic workers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to support and develop the Organising of DWs at the national level, along with country and regional research. A link is a missing in terms of communication, information exchange and joint struggle among DWs in Asian countries. Therefore, there is a need to build an Asian network base of DWs for experience and knowledge sharing, to initiate actions to strengthen our demands and gain the rights for DWs.

### **Membership**

At present, ADWN has 11 members:

#### Regular members:

- ❖ India: North Eastern Regional Domestic Workers Movement;
- ❖ India: Penn Thozhilalargal Sangam (Women Workers' Union)
- ❖ India: Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Union (Exco)
- ❖ Nepal: Nepali Independent Domestic Workers Union (Exco)
- ❖ Indonesia: Tunas Mullica Domestic Workers Union (Exco, Secretary)
- ❖ China: Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union (Exco, Chairperson)

#### Associate members:

- ❖ Nepal: CWISH



- ❖ Sri Lanka: Red Flag Women Movement;
- ❖ Pakistan: Working Women's Organisation
- ❖ Indonesia: Rumpun TND
- ❖ Indonesia: Jala PRT, National Network of Domestic Workers Advocacy

- ADWN was officially formed in 2005 as an outcome of an Exchange Workshop of Asian DWs in Hong Kong in 2004
- It is the first Asian-based network that links up local adult DWs' organisations
- Currently Committee of Asian Women (CAW) is acting as the secretariat of the ADWN
- The network comprises of local adult DW organisations/unions and NGOs from Asia
- Membership comprises of two categories – regular and associate members
- Regular member: DW self-organisations
- Associate members: Support organisations for DWs

### **Comments made after the Presentation:**

“I am a member of ADWN, but I am not aware of what is happening. We are at early stage in the network. We need to meet and invite each other to see our work and exchange information, experiences.”

“In garment sector there are common minimum wages. We need to understand what our common issues are so that we can lobby for them. Most basic issue as I understand is that of wages. By next year we need to have a common minimum programme. At the moment not many people know about the network. We need time and space for discussion and develop our strategies.”

“Along with minimum wage we also have to focus on sexual harassment issues and treatment by the employers; and define our strategies accordingly. There are several DWs migrating in the Middle East countries where there have been cases of accidents.”

“A common point is mental, sexual and physical abuse. Minimum wage is one thing, but there are other benefits, if we push for minimum wages we may lose other benefits. What would be the strategy on that issue?”

**Response:** The membership is open for every one to apply. Just fill up the application form and send it by email. The more the members better it is for the network. Asia Domestic Worker Alliance (especially for migrant workers) was inspired by ADWN.



## **Stories of Domestic Workers Organising**

How we united...

Pune City Domestic Workers' Organisation

(The story of the evolution of a DWs' organisation in their own words)

In the 1980s, we were working for very low wages. We had to depend upon the benevolence of the employer for a raise. There were many problems, but no collective action. Then an incident of an employer sacking a DW occurred. It was like a last straw on the camel's back. This incident triggered mass agitation because dissatisfaction was already fermenting. The women spontaneously gathered and started a procession. About 3,000 women gathered and started walking on the road. We met up with the President of Pune Municipal Corporation and the President of Life Insurance Corporation Workers' Union. They asked us what we were agitating for and what our demands were. We didn't know anything. They asked us to meet them at night for discussions. They advised us on how to go about raising demands. Then we realised that we had to demand from our employers benefits such as bonuses, weekly holidays, payments in proportion to the number of people in the house, etc.

Thus, our struggle started. We initiated processions and raised demands. The media too helped by giving publicity to our issues. We went on a strike in which 10,000 women joined. Our demand of one month's salary as bonus for the *Diwali Festival* was accepted and has now become a norm. We are running this organisation since 1980.

The instrument of strike proved to be very useful for us. It happened spontaneously because the frustration about working conditions and wages was already widespread. The strike first started in Pandavnagar area and had a cascading effect. DWs in other areas, too, started going on strike.

Although we are united now, it is still not easy for us. There are allegations of theft against us. Whenever theft occurs in the households, we are the first ones under suspicion. The employers complain to the police without proof. The police come to our houses and search them. They harass us. Sometimes the accused is kept in police custody and is beaten up. The names of the accused are given to the press and are published in the newspapers. Many a times it was found that the employers themselves or their family members are the thieves.

There was a case where one woman was caught by the police in a theft case. The union members told the police not to keep her in the custody and took turns to accompany the woman in the police station. Finally it turned out that the jewellery was stolen by a young man who worked there while this woman had gone on leave. When the police caught him he confessed to the theft.



In another such incident, the nephew of the employer had stolen jewellery. The police had arrested a young girl and her mother living nearby. These women approached the union for help. We are well versed with the laws and asked all sorts of questions to the police. We in fact guided the police in inquiring about everyone who had visited the house on that day. Then it was revealed that the employer's brother had taken the gold. We threatened the employer that we would go to the media to reveal the name of the real thief. . The employer withdrew the case.

Now our union has organised a programme awareness generation among DWs working under the jurisdiction of 18 police stations and 80 police *chowkis*.<sup>5</sup> We are initiating processions with these women and demanding not to treat the DWs as thieves, not to detain her, not to beat her, and not to print their names in the newspaper unless the theft is proven,.

**Padma Sutar** has been associated with the union for last 27 years. 'Like my mother before me, my daughter is now working in this union. I have seen how they used to treat us that time. They wouldn't allow us to touch anything in the house. We were untouchable. There was no other opportunity to earn income so we had to work. I had to work as DW because my husband did not earn much. Though the wages were low, we did not have the courage to argue with the employers for the fear of losing the job. Forty years ago, I used to work with 14 families and earn Rs. 70 per month. I used to work for 12 hours and then go to my own home to do more chores. There was no time to socialise. When the sacking incident happened, I led the women to go out from their houses.'

The women are scattered, living in different areas. It is a problem how to communicate with them, and how to get them together since they are free only at night. We went to women's homes at night to each slum area and talk to them, often till late night. It took a lot of effort to build this organisation.

During meetings of the DWs, we ask them to record information such as the address and telephone number of the employers, number of family members in each family they work in, etc. We need such information when the DWs are sacked. We collect information on how many lost jobs when they demanded pay raises, and tell each one to register her complaint in our office. On receiving these complaints, we send a letter to the employer. If the first one goes unheeded, we send two more. Some employers visit us and ask for explanations.

Sometimes they also have complaints about the DWs. Then we explain the calculations and basis of rates. The gratuity amount is also calculated based on the years of service with the employer. This is equivalent to 15 days' pay multiplied by the number of years of work. If she is sacked we demand one month pay per year of service as compensation.

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<sup>5</sup> Small police posts coming under a particular police station



We have been successful in getting gratuity. This has been possible only because we have become organised. When the employers realise that no one will work unless these payments are made they pay up. If they don't, we don't let anyone else work there. These pressure tactics also work. We demanded four days off in a month, and extra pay if there are guests in the house--extra money for extra work. The women derive strength from the union.

The women are not yet fully aware about the union. We have to go to more of them to convince them. The union has given us such strength that we are able go everywhere to convince the women to join. We ask for higher wages when the prices rise. The women don't know how and what to talk about with the employers. We empower them and encourage them to speak. Our members number anywhere from 3,000-10,000. Membership is floating. We charge Rs. 25 as annual fee. We manage to keep in constant contact with 3,000 members. Meetings are organised in our office or slums.

We discuss issues about working conditions and payment in the union meetings. Decisions are informed to the rest of the members. We also started having meetings in slum pockets. Sometimes when we make demand for higher wages we also lose jobs. Then we tell others not to work there, so the pressure is maintained. Young girls also work with their mothers but also go to schools/colleges. They too are members of the union.

We have started a family counselling centre, where we handle cases of domestic violence. We send letters to the husbands/families and ask them to come and see us. We counsel with the family members. If they don't respond to the letters, we go to their houses to talk to them. If their attitude is reasonable we work for compromise and send the woman back. Most of the time, they listen to us and cooperate. Both parties are together during the counselling. We also counsel about alcoholism and de-addiction. We intervene in the matters of wife-beating. We tell the husband that if he beats his wife we will beat him. Sometimes the dowry is the cause of discord. The girls are sent back to their parental homes within two months of marriage if they don't bring the things that are demanded. We intervene in those cases, too.

*Medha Thatte added that the office was established by the DWs. They had to fight very hard to organise and set themselves up. They fought against the slum-lords, illegal liquor shops, and alcoholism of the men. The women agitated and compelled the owners to shut down the liquor shops and also compelled the police to act. Since then, the incidents of alcoholism and violence have reduced drastically. The wages have also been increased. The women are now confident and empowered and are ready to help others, help other movements too. Now there is a unity among men and women and even children – young and old alike.*



There are an estimated 600,000 DWs in Pune City. Pune City Domestic Workers' Organisation (PCDWO) was established in 1980 to raise various demands of the DWs and organise them into a union. Since then, many successes have strengthened the organisation. The DWs went on strike in 1986, 1992, 1995 and 1996 in various parts of the city. Local advocacy is the major activity of PCDWO. It has also networked with other larger organisations for collective action. In 2002, PCDWO prepared and presented a model of an Unorganised Workers Bill. The organisation has prepared a rate card which has defined minimum wages per chore such as washing clothes, cleaning utensils (rate per person), cleaning and dusting the rooms (rate per room), and cooking meals for a family of four.



We are empowered...  
Pune District Domestic Workers' Union  
(Experiences of DWs)

**Jaya Ghatge said** "I work for Akhil Bharatiya Janawadi Sanghatana. The union working for women issues is 25 years old. We realised that while working there are a number of problems the DWs are facing. I myself am a DW and also a union worker and activist. Our membership has grown to 25,000 in last four years. The union fights on issues and participates in different movements/campaigns of other informal workers. We are now fighting on the issue of ration card<sup>6</sup> (on behalf of the poor women who do not have them). We also look into the problems the DWs face at the workplace.

The payment is from INR 100 to 1000 depending upon the locality, type of work and number of persons in the family. There are no fixed wages for particular types of work. The wages are anyhow, always low. There are accusations of theft. We also face problems such as no timely payment or cutting of salary if leave is taken. There are no increments either. There is no extra payment for extra work. Even if a bonus is given, the employers will extract extra work during the festival time. Hence we refuse to call it a "bonus". Our demands are – one month's salary as bonus; pension; no extra work after we come back from leave; fixed holidays; and sick leave. Currently, there are no fixed leaves as such, but we take leaves whenever we want to.

**Rekha Kamble** explained the working of the union. "We have a meeting on the last Sunday of every month. The union handles different types of problems. We will continue our fight for demands, but the women must unite in making these demands. Ours is a national organisation and is fighting at national level."

**Jaya added,** "We meet every Wednesday and discuss problems, review situation and plan for the next week. A committee is elected once in every three years. We have the main office in Bhavani Peth area. Ours is a structured organisation. There are simultaneous meetings in other parts of Pune. Our strategy for uniting was to take up their problems and to communicate by word of mouth. We are still trying to reach all DWs. We are sure the membership will grow.

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<sup>6</sup> In India there is public distribution system which distributes essential commodities such as grains, cooking fuel (kerosene), edible oil, at subsidised rates to below poverty line families. To claim these items, they need to have ration cards which are issued by Govt. Department. Illiterate women do not know how to obtain the ration cards. There is malpractice in the issue too.



“The women now have insurance policies through the union. A premium is INR. 50 has coverage of INR. 50,000 for death. One woman died last year and her family got Rs. 50,000 from the insurance company. This also helps us in increasing membership. The membership fee is Rs. 30. One has to pay additional money if one wants to get an identity-card.

“We hold processions many times. We take up issues related to all formal and informal workers; and also other issues such as Globalisation, and police atrocities.

**Phadtare** recounted one incident of rape and murder” “A 7 year old girl was raped by four men. They killed her and threw her body into the river. We went to the police and compelled the police to arrest the responsible persons. They were arrested but two were later let off. There was another case of molestation. The victim went to the police but they did not register her complaint. She came to us. We told her to show her I-card to the police. When the police realised that she was the member of the union, they registered the complaint and arrested the person. There are many cases of violence which we take up.”

**Sarasvati**, the President of the Union said, “We still have many challenges. The government’s economic policies are not favourable to women. The union finds it difficult to get their rights recognised – right to ration, right to food, right to health, right to education – no matter how much we organise and fight in different ways. When the women come into the contact with the union for a length of time and join various activities, their understanding grows. Though things are understood, there is difficulty in making them happen in practice. There are still many women who are not members and have different goals. Hence there is limitation to the strength. The government should make laws for social security of informal workers, till then nothing will change.”



## **Other Domestic Workers Group Presentation:**

### **Strategy: Organising and Mobilising**

- Meetings – informal discussions, weekly, monthly, core group
- Awareness Generation
- Posters, leaflets, rally, demonstrations, street theatre, newspaper, clippings,
- Day observations – Jan (DW day), March (Women's Day), May (Labour Day), June (Child Rights Day)
- Deal with family problems
- Networking NGOs, TUs
- Lobbying
- Advocacy
- Door to door survey
- Training – skill, awareness
- Education programme for DW's children
- Registration/ID card
- Media support
- Handling cases
- Village committee
- Village operators system
- Exchange programme
- Using religion

### **Challenges**

- To ensure minimum wage
- Pass legislation for protection of rights
- To organise the DWs
- sustainability
- Opposition from employers
- Media Support
- Overcoming legal barriers
- Building professional approach
- To change the attitude
- Taking up cases
- Competition among DWs
- Ban on TU
- To get data
- Scattered, difficult to organise
- Non-cooperation from police and government officials
- Lack of resources/work load
- Independency/Control
- No collective bargaining skills
- Existence of Broker system
- Not recognised



### **Successes**

- DW coming forward to take up issues
- Self assertiveness by DWs
- Recognition
- Readiness to come out
- Curriculum
- Formation of TU
- Membership increase
- TU/NGOs work together
- Notification on MWA/ban on CDW

### **Strategy: Women leadership**

- Gender awareness/skills
- Enabling to handle cases
- Encourage to deal with police/government officials
- Committee
- Demonstrate process within organisation

### **Successes**

- Able to handle cases
- Training of the Domestic Workers



# HOME-BASED WORKERS

## General Conditions and Trends in Different Countries

### **BANGLADESH:**

Home-based women workers (HBWWs) are part of the informal economy. HBWWs are low paid and regular working hours are not allotted to them. They have no access to the market of their products and thus, face the brunt of unfair business practices. They are victims of middlemen or agents. There is no protection for women. Their labour has no dignity. It is not recognised by even the family members. New mothers often lose their jobs. There is no provision for maternity leave or job security (*this is true in all the 3 countries*).

### **INDIA:**

The main reason for the women to get into home-based trade is unavailability of financing from banks. There are various opportunities for them such as repackaging, home-made snacks, *papad*<sup>7</sup> making, gem cutting, etc.

However, in Tamil Nadu the situation is better because there is a Labour Board. It was formed in 1980 after construction workers fought for their rights. The fight turned into a massive movement. Government admitted that there was no social security for the workers and declared some provisions such as compensation for accidents occurring at the work place. In 1994, the Labour Board was formed. Today women can demand for maternity benefits through the Board.

The registered workers become members of the trade union. About 8,500 women are registered with the union. They get accident benefits, maternity benefits and several other facilities. What started in Tamil Nadu has now become a charter for India.

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<sup>7</sup> *Papads* are made from different types of flours and are sun-dried. At the time of use, they are either deep-fried or roasted.



## **NEPAL:**

Women's mobility is restricted because of their household responsibilities. Childcare is considered a woman's responsibility. Older people (in-laws) in the house refuse to take care of her children; hence she is confined within her home. She is left with no other choice but to work from home in the informal economy. She is allowed to work away from home only after her children are grown and have finished schooling. However, if she is at an advanced age, there are not many opportunities for her in the formal economy. Therefore although women are educated and have capacity to work and earn their living; they are prevented from becoming economically independent.

The women generally get into knitting in the winter garments trade. The wool available in Nepal is rough and presents health hazards. The articles she prepares do not fetch a good price. She is dependent on middlemen to sell the articles. For example, a woollen cap which may take days for her to knit fetches only NRP 15, while the middlemen sell that for NRP25 (Nepali currency). They also make paper articles such as lamp shades. These shades have very intricate designs and require much skill. There is also good demand for them. However, women get meagre pay for them.

Another problem is that of older women who are left alone to fend for themselves as their children do not look after them. Their plight is worse. They make wicks for oil lamps. 10,000 wicks are sold only for NRP 10!

The summary is that there is more work for lesser wages. Long working hours also deprive her children of her attention which is essential for their healthy growth. In some cases children are forced to work and help their mothers in household chores as well as in production.

The situation is so depressing that women find a way out by immigrating to other countries. So they take up jobs in other countries such as Qatar and India, where they become employed mostly as domestic workers. Many of the women working in other countries are sexually harassed. In recent times there have been several cases of HIV/AIDS infected women, who are humiliated and sent back to their own country. The humiliation of deportation follows them to their home country, too. Once back, they are demeaned, homeless and ostracised by society.

## **PAKISTAN:**

Low wages against excessive working hours, sexual harassment at work place, and other types of exploitation at work place describe the plight of HBWWs in Pakistan. Most of the women are unskilled or semi-skilled and there are no institutions to train them. HBWWs are typically scattered. Therefore, it is difficult to educate or train them, or provide information, and to organise them.

Because of illiteracy, women's self-confidence is very low. Lack of knowledge, patriarchal system and social subjugation affects their negotiating capacity. The middlemen control the terms and conditions of the trade. Patriarchy promotes their submissive role. Their mobility is also a big issue. Women are confined to their homes. Social pressures curtail their mobility thus affecting their progress.

In Pakistan women are involved in dry fruit peeling occupation. It is a tedious job. The market value of the peeled dry fruit is very high, but the profits go to the traders and only meagre wages



are handed out to women who actually do the work. Another industry which employs HBWWs is garments. The boutique owners get the garments stitched from HBWWs and sell them at a very high price. Many art and craft items are made by HBWWs which are sold by shops at the Urdu Bazaar. Women spend a lot of time in making these pieces but get very low returns for their efforts.

### ***Legal Framework Available***

Except for India (and only in some parts), there is no existing legislation for informal workers in other countries.

#### **BANGLADESH:**

There is no legal framework at present for HBWWs in Bangladesh. They work in the informal economy and are not registered with union. There is a need for separate law that will help these workers. The laws can be adapted from the formal sector and revised as required. There are no government agencies to which these issues can be raised. Neither are there any trade unions which would address the HBWWs issues.

There are 13 divisions of the Urban Poor Empowerment Centre in Bangladesh, where jute product developers are organised. Here they come together and discuss their problems.

#### **INDIA:**

In India, under the Factory Act any establishment where 10 workers are employed and production is done using electricity, is called a factory. The Act is not applicable to HBWWs because they work independently most of the times and alone in home environment.

Organisations in India are trying to change the old colonial rules made during British Raj.

#### **NEPAL:**

In Nepal there is no legal protection for HBWWs. Therefore the trade union is lobbying for it.

#### **PAKISTAN:**

In Pakistan all the schemes are hijacked by men, there is no social security policy for HBWWs.

There are no government schemes or civil society networks to support these women. They work in hazardous situations and have no health benefits or social security. Because of the nature of their work, they are scattered and as such are not easily linked with any movement or trade unions.

There is no record or statistics as to the number of HBWWs, DWs or Waste Pickers (WPs) working in the country. These workers remain invisible and are prey to exploitation. It is easy for companies to outsource jobs and get the intricate/delicate work done by HBWWs.



So far the government has neither recognised them nor made any attempt to provide legal protection, even though there are policies and legislations for the formal sector.

It is a big question whether we should revise the definition of who we consider to be workers. The word 'worker' is associated with the industry. As such, workers are usually defined as industrial workers, and not informal workers.

So we are considering whether to:

- propose independent legislation for women workers
- assert and penetrate into the existing laws
- define home-based workers also as 'workers' so that their dignity can be recognised

### **Strategies, Challenges, Successes and Setbacks**

There are no proceedings in Bangladesh. In Tamil Nadu in India, the Tripartite Labour Board has been constituted which covers HBWWs for social security. The Social Protection Bill is pending in the Indian Parliament. In Nepal, a TU delegation has met with Labour Ministry with regard to **the** Minimum Wages Act. It is hoped that it would soon be activated. A Social Protection Bill has been prepared in Pakistan and has been presented for consultation.

#### **CHALLENGES**

In India trade unions lack unity. There are several federations which need to come under one umbrella. There is also a major issue of policy. There are too many laws that one needs to follow if one has to campaign for one's rights within the informal economy. It gets very complicated.

In Pakistan, the trade union leaders are pro-government and are mostly corrupt. Political instability is another major issue.

In Bangladesh, government policies do not reach the needy. Hence taking them to the needy is a challenge.

#### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Getting accident benefits for HBWWs in India was a major achievement of the construction workers' movement. The establishment of Labour Board in Tamil Nadu is a big success. HBWWs workers can now be registered under the Labour Board at least in Tamil Nadu. We are continuously bargaining for better and equal wages for women.

In Nepal, a trade union delegation met with the labour ministry to promote a protection policy. We are primarily focusing on women in the informal economy. Women are easily intimidated and agree to work for low wages. The threat of losing the job is always hanging over their heads.

In Bangladesh, trade union federations called Labour Welfare Foundation are working for the rights of formal and informal economy sector workers. They have succeeded in setting up a safety net for women where they get access to healthcare, rationing, etc.



In Pakistan, there are cooperative establishments which provide several facilities for HBWWs. These cooperative centres sell embroidery work, bead work articles, garments, shoe accessories and similar products made by women in the local market. We have an active helpline for HBWWs in Karachi and Lahore. Women leadership qualities in the cooperatives have been cultivated. The fact that they are in cooperatives is an indicator of their courage to challenge the prevalent system and oppressive patriarchal culture. It is observed that the lifestyle of these women improves over the time. They have formed theatre groups and actively participate in awareness generation among women. They are fighting for issues related to middlemen/agents.

In all these countries, a social protection bill has been proposed for adoption in the parliament.

## WAY AHEAD

There is need to develop social security bills in which benefits for HBWWs working in the informal economy, and the mechanisms to provide them will be established. Similarly, fund allocations have to be determined. There also must be a tribunal to address legal conflicts that arise. We also have to address issues related to job insecurity and piece-meal wages. The vulnerability of HBWWs has to be addressed.

The national development policy of 1997 has to be activated.

## Summary: Home-based Workers in Asia

General Condition	Legal Provisions Available	What we have done	Challenges	Achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low pay, unequal wages</li> <li>▪ No direct access to the market</li> <li>▪ unfair business practices</li> <li>▪ scattered/unrecognised/invisible/unregistered</li> <li>▪ restricted mobility due to patriarchy, culture and religion</li> <li>▪ Sexual harassment/exploitation discrimination</li> </ul>	<p><b>India:</b> Tamil Nadu state has labour boards, compensation laws and social protection for all types of informal workers</p> <p><b>Pakistan:</b> No specific legal provision for informal workers</p> <p><b>Bangladesh:</b> No provision for social protection</p>	<p><b>Nepal:</b> Minimum wage Act has been proposed to the Labour Ministry</p> <p><b>Bangladesh:</b> no proceeding</p> <p><b>Pakistan:</b> has developed a social protection bill and presented for consultation</p> <p><b>India:</b> In Tamil Nadu: Tripartite labour board</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patriarchy</li> <li>▪ Religious fundamentalists</li> <li>▪ Cultural Barriers</li> <li>▪ Liberalisation/Globalisation/privatisation</li> <li>▪ capitalism</li> <li>▪ Fragile/corrupt trade union leadership</li> <li>▪ lack of unity among trade unions</li> <li>▪ Labour legislation/Ordinance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All women workers can be registered under labour board (Tamil Nadu, India)</li> <li>▪ Safety net by Labour Welfare Foundation in Dhaka for formal and informal groups</li> <li>▪ Co-operatives established in Pakistan</li> <li>▪ Social Protection Bill (India, Pakistan &amp; Nepal)</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unskilled/semi skilled labour no job/ work security</li> <li>▪ no facility for skills improvement</li> <li>▪ no fixed working hours</li> <li>▪ no health &amp; safety equipment</li> <li>▪ double burden work</li> </ul>	<p><b>Nepal:</b> no legal protection available for informal workers</p>	<p>covers HBWWs for social security; Social protection bill is pending in the Indian Parliament.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Government labour and Economic Policies</li> <li>▪ Political Instability</li> </ul>	
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## **Stories of Home-based Workers Organising**

### *Bidi* Rolling – A Home-based Trade

*Bidis* are a cheaper form of cigarettes. It is mostly poor people who cannot afford cigarettes are the ones who smoke *bidis*. It is a big business in India and many large companies are involved in *Bidi* production. In Pune city alone, there are about nine big and small *bidi* companies. The actual production of *bidis* is outsourced. Usually poor illiterate women are employed in *bidi* rolling, which is a home-based business.

The usual practice is to issue raw materials to women and get the finished product from her. Each *bidi* roller woman gets a packet of *tendu*<sup>8</sup> leaves, tobacco, and rolls of cotton thread from the company. Everyday they get 250 gm of *tendu* leaves and 170 gm tobacco. A roll of cotton thread is given once in a month. The raw materials are given in measure quantities, with each unit expected to produce about 1000 *bidis*. For every 1000 *bidis* rolled, the payment is INR. 54.30 as wages. They are expected to make bundles of 25 *bidis*. Each *bidi* is checked before the payment. If there are any rejections, which often happen, the cost is borne by the women. The next batch of raw material is given only after the first one has been accounted for and the women have given the finished *bidi* bundles. It takes them about 10 minutes to make 25 *bidis*. Skilled hands can make 1000 *bidis* in about four to six hours. The *bidi* bundles are transported to the companies for further processing and packaging. There is a collection centre in each colony where the *bidi* bundles are submitted. The product is then taken to the company which is located in the central part of Pune City. The market price of a bundle of 25 *bidis* is only INR.5.50, while the retail price for 1000 *bidis* is Rs.220.

There are many problems with the distribution of raw materials. Although 250 grams of *tendu* leaves are given, many of the leaves are torn or crumpled and this not suitable for rolling. *Tendu* leaves have to be softened by soaking in water, and then cut into rectangular shape in the exact size required. A specific measure of tobacco is placed on it and then rolled. The *bidis* are rejected for different reasons such as if these have chipped ends, if these are less than or more than required length, if the end is not perfectly closed, etc. Thus the women end up bearing the cost of the wasted materials and also wasted labour.

<sup>8</sup> *Bidis* are rolled in dry leaves of *tendu* plants



Most of the time women are not able to complete the target of 1000 *bidis*. Due to fall in the demand, the production of *bidis* has also fallen. Due to all these internal and external factors they are only able to make about 700-800 *bidis* per day which ultimately reduces their daily wages. Women have to bear losses of about INR10 per day due to wastage.

The permanent worker gets a benefit of 4% as gratuity, an 8.33% bonus every year, and a 12% provident fund contribution from the employer. Permanent workers are those who are registered and have an identity card issued by the company. The payment of wages is made weekly. Each day's wages are recorded at the office register and also on the card provided by the company. They have to produce this card when they are submitting the *bidis*.

About 95 percent workforce in this business consists of women, either as workers or as clerks at administrative level. Those who work in the factory get a monthly salary, which ranges from INR. 1,500 to INR 2,000. This is much less than what the law (Shop Act) provides for as the minimum wage, which is INR. 4,200 per month.

Unfortunately, the women are not even aware of how the work of tobacco rolling could be hazardous. One *bidi* roller said that she has been doing it since she was child. She helped her mother do it and got into the trade later. She believed that since the materials are natural products, it wouldn't affect her. She admitted that tobacco is actually strong but also believed that it does not have any direct effect on their health. But on the other hand there are complaints of backache because of bending continuously for hours of rolling *bidis*. The skill of *bidi* rolling is passed on from mother to daughter. Thus, daughters also get into the trade. There are no men in the trade. Some women have additional occupations such as tailoring, but usually they never leave *bidi* rolling.

One organisation working on health issues did a survey on the hazards of passive inhaling the tobacco odour while rolling. The result of the survey did not attribute any specific effect directly related to inhaling tobacco odour. There are also no significant cases of tuberculosis either in the area. The President of CITU said that only 10-15 (!) cases were observed in the last year. District Health Department provides a facility for mobile health services. An ambulance visits the slum community every week to provide primary health services. Doctors are available for consultations and give medicines on minor illnesses.



As to developing women leadership, one comes across a hurdle. Women are not willing to take on leadership roles. They are too involved in daily chores to take on added responsibilities for their community. To do this work, they would have to spend lot of time on the organisation and lose daily wages. There is also added cost of travel which they cannot afford. Hence, they leave all the action to the president of the union. They do however, attend all the meetings and campaigns initiated by CITU, but cannot pursue and fight for their own issues.

*Bidi* rollers were given a housing scheme in 1991. Single room houses of 200-210 sq.ft. were allotted to women under the scheme, with ownership papers under their names. It is better than the slums they lived in earlier. About 540 rooms were built under this scheme, and cost of one house is about Rs.25,500.

CITU was formed in Pune City in 1992. It is affiliated with one of the communist parties in India. In the same year it was formed, it took up the issue of *Bidi* rollers in Solapur City. Women leaders took initiative, built contacts with the workers, organised them, talked about their rights and mobilised them. Their issues were raised and addressed. In 1991 they got housing schemes in Solapur and Nagar cities. Efforts were made to bring similar scheme to Pune too, which also bore fruit.

CITU is not dominated by men. In the *bidi* workers' union majority of the members are women. Out of the total 17 board members in Pune Committee, only 3 are men. It took CITU 14 years to convince the women and get them on the board. When the organisation started, there were no women leaders. Hence it fell upon Mr. Pawar, the union president, to take on the responsibility.

At the Solapur City branch, all board members are women. However, since in Pune the colony of *bidi* workers is located on the outskirts of the city, travel time and cost becomes an issue. Hence, it has been difficult to develop women leadership. There are about 7,000-8,000 members of CITU out of which 800-900 are women. The registered members are issued an I-Card of CITU. There are benefits such as life insurance (50% of the premium is subsidised by the Government.). There is a member committee, consisting of 85 women and 2 men. CITU believes that opportunity should be given to women. The union has worked towards protecting women and has campaigned for their legal rights. There have been rallies and demands for raising wages. However, the raise given has so far been very little.



**Other Home-based Workers Group Presentation:**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Successes</b>
<b>Organising and Mobilising</b>		
<b>Bangladesh</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use celebrities to promote concept of TU</li> <li>▪ Change mindset of society and state by building awareness</li> <li>▪ Advocacy interventions and discussion with people</li> <li>▪ Develop communication materials, and use media</li> <li>▪ Campaign for equality and dignity</li> <li>▪ Give equal status to women</li> <li>▪ Form cells of working women</li> <li>▪ Raise their issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognition as workers</li> <li>▪ Patriarchy</li> <li>▪ Lack of bargaining capacities</li> <li>▪ Information dissemination to HBWWs</li> <li>▪ Lack of resources</li> <li>▪ Sustainability of the organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishment of Forum for informal economy working women</li> <li>▪ Articulation of issues by members</li> <li>▪ Bargaining power</li> <li>▪ Unity</li> <li>▪ Good rapport with the local government</li> </ul>
<b>India</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct social and economic surveys</li> <li>▪ Form tripartite boards</li> <li>▪ Lobbying and Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Campaign</li> <li>▪ Work with an integrated approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustainability</li> <li>▪ Viability</li> <li>▪ Fundamentalist approach</li> <li>▪ Caste</li> <li>▪ Customs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Networks</li> <li>▪ Business visibility and recognition to informal economy both at national and international level</li> <li>▪ Policy interventions</li> <li>▪ Institutions to support HBWWs (banks)</li> <li>▪ Generation of resources to partly sustain the organisation</li> </ul>
<b>Nepal</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Home visits</li> <li>▪ Learn details about the person and her occupation</li> <li>▪ Provide free skills training to rural women</li> <li>▪ Organise capacity building trainings</li> <li>▪ Establish linkage with street vendors</li> <li>▪ Conduct group meeting at ward level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Low wages</li> <li>▪ Job security</li> <li>▪ Marketing</li> <li>▪ Illiteracy</li> <li>▪ Political unrest</li> <li>▪ Patriarchy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Submission of a Bill</li> <li>▪ Unity</li> </ul>
<b>Pakistan</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct meetings and motivate them to become members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patriarchy</li> <li>▪ Low mobility</li> <li>▪ Job insecurity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in wages</li> <li>▪ Social Protection Bill initiated</li> </ul>



Strategies	Challenges	Successes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct seminars to build awareness and involvement in the activities</li> <li>▪ Give information on the basic rights and legal rights</li> <li>▪ Provide training in skills, decision-making processes and electoral politics</li> <li>▪ Enhance leadership qualities, negotiation skills to deal with investors, middlemen and contractors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of leadership skills</li> <li>▪ Informal structure of cooperatives</li> <li>▪ Pushing for legal protection bill</li> <li>▪ Getting social benefits for HBWWs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Basic awareness about their rights generated.</li> <li>▪ Take active part in politics</li> <li>▪ Increase in work because of good communication/ rapport with contractors</li> <li>▪ Integrated approach has helped keep high morale</li> <li>▪ Pooling of resources – collective thinking because of the cooperatives</li> <li>▪ Direct access to market</li> <li>▪ Learning opportunities for small groups</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Setbacks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Law and order situation - many initiatives collapse due to the poor law and order situation</li> <li>▪ Losing trust of workers due to inconsistency</li> <li>▪ External forces</li> <li>▪ Calamities - natural and man made calamities/disasters</li> <li>▪ Political unrest</li> <li>▪ Unable to generate proper mobilisation and awareness towards trade unions and social organisation.</li> <li>▪ Poor community is vulnerable to external forces, such as political unrest and calamities and thus affects our work.</li> <li>▪ Lack of financial and human resources</li> <li>▪ Lack of enough support from government and its machinery.</li> <li>▪ Inconsistency in formulation and implementation policies due to political shifts or changing governments</li> </ul>			
<p><b>Women's Leadership</b></p>			
Strategy	Challenges	Successes	Failures/setbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training</li> <li>▪ Campaigning for leadership</li> <li>▪ Forming theatre groups (role play/skits)</li> <li>▪ Celebrations of the days</li> <li>▪ Street mobilisations, giving them visibility by encouraging their participation in agitations/processions and other activities</li> <li>▪ Exposure visits</li> <li>▪ Open opportunities to come in and articulate issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patriarchy</li> <li>▪ Family Responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Social taboo</li> <li>▪ Lack of confidence</li> <li>▪ Illiteracy</li> <li>▪ Insecurity</li> <li>▪ Financial resources</li> <li>▪ Caste/customs</li> <li>▪ Not involved in decision making processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Courage</li> <li>▪ Initiative</li> <li>▪ Understanding of situation, issues and outside world</li> <li>▪ Commitment</li> <li>▪ Knowledge</li> <li>▪ Determination</li> <li>▪ Decision making position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ego</li> <li>▪ Undemocratic attitude of society and person (family)</li> <li>▪ Issue of morality</li> </ul>



## **Discussions**

### **BANGLADESH:**

In Bangladesh we also have *bidi* workers. They get 10 Taka (Bangladesh currency) per 1,000 *bidis*. The occupation is believed to have health hazards. With assistance of ILO, children are protected. The organisation gives inputs on health issues and effects of tobacco on health. Parents are assisted in sending their children to schools. In home based work, women's identity is lost. They are not recognised as workers. These problems are not understood.

### **INDIA (Gujarat):**

Women take up several occupations such as *bidi* rolling; quilt making, appliqués work, and making other products. We have a Bidi Welfare Board. The same law is applied for other occupations too. Women get identity cards and benefits such as subsidised housing, scholarship, uniforms, and provident funds. We have a women's housing scheme for 323 women. The State Government provided land and SEWA Bank gave loans at nominal interest rates. The house is a small room of 25 ft by 25 ft.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is active in nine States of India, and has nine TUs. The TUs formed by SEWA are independent organisations and not affiliated to any political party. There is also a federation of the unions, the SEWA Bharat Federation. The federation is working towards getting all the HBWWs such as women working in jute industries, pharmaceuticals, *bidi* workers, etc. under one umbrella.

### **NEPAL:**

In Nepal we do not have HBWWs in the *bidi* trade, but our women make *sala* (scented incense sticks). We sell 10-12 candles at NPR. 2 per candle. Women are also involving in pickle making. Pickle pouches are sold for NPR 25. We train women to make pickles and incense sticks. The union takes responsibility of marketing the products of the registered women members.

### **PAKISTAN:**

In Lahore we have helpline for working women, particularly HBWWs in the nursing field. *Bidi* is not smoked in Pakistan; hence there are no *Bidi* rollers there. There are cigarettes and drugs, but women are not involved in such trades. HBWWs are involved in making garments, paper flowers, decoration articles, ribbons, motor cycle parts, etc.

But women are not allowed to meet men or talk to them. Hence they cannot negotiate with middlemen and are forced to accept the rates decided by them. We have no laws for HBWWs. Women can get jobs in factories where they can get a salary of up to PKR 4,600 (Pakistani rupees); but very few women take up such jobs. We do not have women street vendors either. In urban areas educated women work in banks or private schools. Very few women teach in public schools. Recently women were appointed as traffic police in Lahore. In some select areas, we have women in the police force too. However, women's mobility and visibility is low in Pakistan.

### **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS:**



**Question:** Since the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has been Organising *Bidi* rollers, has it looked at the space for work of HBWWs in the residential areas?

**Response:** Most of the HBWWs houses are in slums, which are usually illegal although they have paid for it. The town planning department has no land to give to these women in close premises. So it is difficult to get spaces for women. Rehabilitation is a big issue. SEWA has tried to lobby for it but has not succeeded.

**Comments:** In Sri Lanka, the government asked the women in fish drying business to move away from the sea shore. These women used to use the land to dry their fish. This has affected their livelihood. The same place is now given for hotel constructions.

**Question:** Is there a social security scheme for *bidi* workers?

**Response:** They are eligible for children's scholarships, maternity benefits, housing, and provident fund. SEWA tries to mobilise them to take privilege of various schemes available for people living below the poverty line. SEWA makes it a point to see that the benefits of the schemes reach the needy.

**Question:** What was SEWA's strategy during the period of political unrest?

**Response:** One-third of SEWA's members are Muslim workers in the informal economy. But within the organisation, SEWA has secular and democratic approach. They are elected according to their trades. They are identified as workers, irrespective of their caste, creed or locality. We spread the message of equality down the line.

SEWA cannot prevent riots, but after an episode of rioting it saw an opportunity to work with women, who had no livelihood and no work. SEWA worked in both Hindu and Muslim camps. It taught women different skills such as making paper envelopes.

**Question:** Do children also participate in making of *bidis*?

**Response:** Children mostly work after school hours. They do not directly work in the process of making *bidis* but help their mothers in cutting the leaves, running errands, etc.

**Question:** Children helping their mothers make *bidis* is not a question of just child labour, since the entire family is employed. The family shares the work at times but the payment is made on the piece rate basis and is given to one person. In a way, it can be seen as total exploitation. Have there been any efforts of negotiations?

**Comments:** In 1972 SEWA started work with *bidi* workers. During that time people got INR3 per 1,000 *bidi* s. Now they get INR 44 per thousand. In Pune, the rate is INR 54 while in Solapur City it is INR 28.

In Tamil Nadu there are women's workers' unions. The *bidi* tripartite wage negotiation is established. Buying prices are higher compared to other places. In Chennai, it is INR 70-80. The union made a lot of noise in the beginning and did not accept the prevailing rates, so perhaps this is why they are paid better.



What was observed in the field visit that many *bidi* s are rejected for some or the other reason. The cost of rejection has to be borne by the women. Hence, ultimately the actual buying rate is much lower in practice. But women are ready to bear the loss.

In Pakistan, women work in dry fruit peeling, paper work articles, etc. There are more than 80,000 women in such informal sector trades. But there are no facilities or benefits or social security for them. The Women's Workers Helpline is a civil society organisation trying to organise them. So far it has established 11 cooperatives based on trade categories. Here she gets to share about her work and work related issues as well as talk about her domestic problems. The organisation provides them facilities such as space to work, subsidised food, training on skills leadership and negotiation, and information about their occupation and the product.



# WASTE PICKERS

## General Conditions and Trends in Different Countries

The issues of waste collectors – or waste pickers (WPs) – as they are called henceforth in this document – vary according to the country's financial state, the locality, background, community, social pretext and a host of other factors.

## Strategies, Challenges, Successes and Setbacks

### *Strategies*

#### **BANGLADESH:**

In Bangladesh, there are mainly two categories of WPs – old people and children. The old people take to this job because this is the only way to earn some money. The children are usually destitute, living on streets. These children are the victims of mental, physical and sexual abuse. Repetitive abuse also forces some of the girl children into prostitution. The older WPs rag the children, and even rob them of their money. *Karmojibi Nari*, an organisation working with WPs, has a law and mediation centre, and has opened a school. Children in the school are organised into groups of 10. The school combines study with work. The children are able to earn money and save it with the centre. This is done with a view to pull them out of waste picking by providing opportunity for other types of work.

In Bangladesh, a lot of *tokai* bins have been put up in many places. A forum called the UPEC Centre has opened elementary schools for the children. *Karmojibi Nari* is intent on organising the informal workers. BJSJ organises the trade unions locally. They not only work for financial development of the workers but also for their dignity and better work conditions.

#### **INDIA:**

**Delhi:** The families of WPs usually think that more members doing waste-picking work means more income. So the entire family goes into waste-picking, even the kids. Since this trade does not require any qualification or skill whatsoever, it is the easiest to join. Hence, a lot of people get into it.

An important aspect of waste-picking in India is that it is informal but at the same time organised. Waste-picking has an organised hierarchy in India; and there is a distinction between formal and informal workers according to their municipal affiliations. At the lower end of the hierarchy are the individuals who pick waste. These people go and sell the waste to *Kabadiwallahs*<sup>9</sup>, also called "wholesalers". The wholesaler then sells the waste to small recyclers, who segregate the waste

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<sup>9</sup> Waste buyers – who purchase recyclable waste



into categories, like paper, plastic, glass, and others. They sell large quantities to the big-end recyclers or recycling factories.

**Madhya Pradesh:** *Jan Vikas*, an organisation in Indore City, has been working for women WPs since last six years. Women WPs generally belong to scheduled castes. They might not necessarily belong to Indore City, but have long since been living in the slums of the city.

To support these extremely poor women, Jan Vikas has formed a cooperative society. So far more than 500 women have registered as members. The cooperative has worked with more than 1,000 such women till date. The cooperative supports their income generating activity by buying and selling the waste they have collected. It was found that the meagre earnings of the women are mostly spent on treating illnesses, because they live in a situation of poor hygiene and nutrition. Since health is a big concern, Jan Vikas has initiated a health insurance scheme for them. The organisation also gives them an opportunity to save money through savings schemes.

*Jan Vikas* conducts welfare activities such as providing non-formal education for their children through a bridge school. The cooperative society is well established now has earned wide recognition. The municipality too involves these women in the production activities such as paper recycling from the collected waste. Most importantly, the society has been able to provide identity cards to these women so that they can be properly organised and facilitated.

**Maharashtra:** Formal and informal workers usually have a lot of conflict between these two sectors. The workers of the municipality corporation belong to the formal economy workers, and have a regular salary, job security and allocated areas, although they of course have their own share of problems. But the unaffiliated, informal economy workers have an unstable financial status and area-based conflict. Since there is a proposal to privatise waste collection in all areas under the municipal corporation, informal economy workers, who are huge in number, would be out of their jobs. The municipal corporation should realise that these informal economy workers are actually saving a lot of public money by picking the garbage voluntarily. So, there has to be a means of at door-to-door collection to be rightfully given to informal economy workers. Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) is working towards merging these two categories of workers. Moreover there are two types of WPs; those who pick garbage from any available area, and those who pick from the dump site.

The general attitude in society towards WCs is submerged in biases. The WC belongs to disadvantaged groups of the society, they primarily belong to dalit castes and poor classes, so these anti-class and caste biases prevail. Gender related issues thus are secondary.

#### **NEPAL:**

GEFONT is a network which has 24 unions, with more than 2,000 women workers as members. The union provides them with informal and formal vocational training. But recently, it has been focusing more on the plastic waste pickers as their numbers have been excessively increasing in Nepal. The union tries to provide them with education and financial opportunities. The great achievement of the union is that it has been able to bridge the wide gap of caste differences through its programmes. Earlier, only low caste people used to get involved in the union. However, the 'high-caste' people also realised that such programmes help economic stabilisation, and they too joined.



Just like other countries, the major problems of these workers are money, education and health. The factories or the waste-buyers exploit the workers by paying less and making them work more. In Kathmandu alone, there are 5,000 WPs.

These WPs collect waste using variety of transportation – from municipal trucks to wooden carts and cycles. Mostly these waste-pickers look miserable, sick and exploited. The union staff members even go to their homes sometimes to seek them out and offer help. Even the municipality pays them less for the waste they sell.

### **PAKISTAN:**

In Pakistan, the WPs collect and sell the waste individually. Conventionally, their foremost problems are the lack of education that resulted in limited opportunities for earning. They live in a condition of utter destitution. They usually collect waste during the night, thereby also posing a security problem. Since most of the WPs are Afghani women, language is also a big barrier for them and restricts their income generating opportunities. It is very hard to keep track of these women, because they can migrate quickly. Moreover, the Afghani people do not integrate with the local society and keep to themselves. Apart from the Afghani WPs, there is another community of WPs who also face similar problems.

Hawkers collect their own garbage and dump it in one place, which is usually near residential area, and creates health hazards. There is no proper government machinery to clean it. The waste is usually dumped on the outskirts of the cities. Some girls who started picking the waste went missing and nobody knows what happened to them.

### **SRI LANKA:**

A large number of people collect not only waste in general but specific types as these wield a better price than regular waste. Some collect empty bottles and glass, while others also collect waste paper to sell to paper factories. Sometimes they can even be seen collecting chocolate wraps. But whatever they collect and sell, these people still get a very unfair deal and low price, which keeps them financially unstable. A lot of children, too, are into waste-picking even though the minimum legal working age is 14.

My union collects garbage from a specific area available for the WPs, and also segregate useful waste. Since Sri Lanka has been going through a constant state of civil war and political conflict in the last 25 years, a large number of people, mainly women, have been displaced from their homes. They are on a constant trail of displacement and migration. A lot of them take to living in refugee camps, where the situation for women is also bad. Our union wants to work with such displaced women, but due to the civil war and security norms, reaching out to these camps has become almost impossible.

Also, the workers are afraid to work with us, especially after the 1977 government with which the trade unions in Sri Lanka got into a lot of trouble. The trade unions had instigated a strike and as a result a majority of the people was sacked from their jobs. Hence, the workers are scared to join unions.

### **Challenges**



## **INDIA:**

**Maharashtra:** In Nasik where *Lok Vikas Samajik Sansthan* works, there are more than 8,000 WPs. Earlier there was an allocated garbage dumping site where around 20 women worked. They used to work from 10 am to 6 pm. Recently, the dumping ground has been closed making the women jobless. *Lok Vikas* has tried to rehabilitate these women by re-employing them. *Lok Vikas* decided to collect waste from homes of the people. Each housing society in the area was contacted and was appraised of the scheme. The charges proposed were a flat rate of only INR 20 per month per house. However, the people were not willing to cooperate. They either got into arguments with the WPs or wanted the charges reduced to INR 10. It is a challenge how to sensitise the people and resolve this conflict.

**Pune:** There are soon going to be changes in the management of garbage in India and Pakistan. These changes are going to make a huge impact on the workers. There is evidently a need to properly administer these changes and strategise on how a smooth transition can be brought about. It is a legal issue.

### ***Legal Frame Work Available***

## **BANGLADESH:**

In Bangladesh, the main concern for organisations is creating a social safety net for the workers. However there have been some improvements achieved for formal economy workers.

## **INDIA:**

### **Delhi:**

In Delhi, there is a lot of emphasis on domestic composting, which requires Organising a lot of awareness programmes for the informal sector workers. Mostly there is need for informal economy workers to fight for the exclusive right for door-to-door garbage collection, and not be given to the formal economy.

### **Maharashtra:**

**Mumbai:** Since 1998, *Stree Mukti Sanghathana* (SMS) has been working with women rag-pickers in Mumbai. It has introduced a micro-finance group, ID card system. A federation of rag-pickers has also been formed. One should not forget that rag-pickers usually fall under below poverty line and need a lot of financial support. So far, Mumbai Municipal Corporation has given five places to SMS for waste collection. SMS is fighting for two more places.

SMS focuses more on solid waste management. It takes contracts for the workers. The members collect garbage from a place and make compost. SMS has executed 50 such projects. It is not that composting is a new procedure in India, since awareness of it already existed more than two decades ago. India still has composting machines in Delhi installed in late 1980s, but they are either left unused or are damaged due to the processing of improperly segregated waste.

**Pune:** The labour department and Municipal Corporation have a difficult role to play. In India since 2000, the municipal corporation has put in place certain laws and regulations, like the segregation of solid waste from other types of waste. It also requires that no waste product be



burnt due to environmental issues. But even among such workers, women are the lowest level, so the Municipal Corporation should seriously work on facilitation of these workers.

Paper and cloth waste products can be recycled to make envelopes. In Pune City, we have been teaching women workers how to recycle. It is also being done in Sri Lanka and Nepal. This is small example of how women empowerment can be done, and for policy frameworks not to stuck on paper but implemented.

KKPKP has registered as a trade union. The union's main concerns were the harassment faced by workers by the police and other groups. So, KKPKP asked the corporation to give them some sort of official identification, to which they agreed. After the distribution of ID cards, the number of harassment cases went down. Also, to encourage all the workers to save money, KKPKP formed a credit cooperative. Later, it also offered life and other insurance schemes.

Currently, KKPKP is lobbying for door-to-door collection of waste by informal economy workers. It also helps the women in compost processing to augment their income.

Strategically, a lot of stakeholders are involved in waste picking, the municipal corporation, environment department, state government, central government, and the citizens whose scrap they collect. All these stakeholders have their own roles to play. KKPKP is well prepared to advocate each stakeholder accordingly based on their interests--or if not, then stand up and revolt. Its demand is that even if the government privatises this sector, the women rag-pickers should at least be allowed to get scrap from the carts. Or if not, they should be provided with other livelihood alternatives such as composting and weaving. The municipal corporation should recognise that the work of these rag-pickers saves them saving almost INR 5-6 lakhs everyday!

#### **NEPAL:**

There is no legal recognition of waste pickers . The municipality does not concern itself with the employment of WPs or their regulation. So people individually go to pick garbage and are not a part of any group, either formal or informal.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

- Different organisational forms
- Media
- Local leadership
- Skills training. Since waste-pickers are known to have no skills, one intervention in this regard is to uplift their work culture and creating the concept of 'dignity of work'. The collectors are also trained in composting, running bio-gas plants, using plastics to make looms, etc.
- Innovative ideas
- Research as a tool to understand their position, their economic contribution and to establish a value-chain.
- Database of information on workers
- Environmental lobby
- Alternative work options
- Change in work
- Building alliances to prevent the marginalisation of the workers to some extent.
- Getting all stake holders together to create pressure on the waste generators to be more sensitive to this issue and contribute.



- Networking with common allies against common enemies

#### **CHALLENGES:**

- Scattered communities make them difficult to organise and regularise.
- Aggressive and conservative community with respect to gender, caste discrepancies and the struggle for survival. Instead of an internal conflict, constructive leadership inside the community should be encouraged and the women who are involved in this profession are usually very strong in their commitments and work.
- Fight for survival
- Formal sector's roles and positions should be linked to the waste collectors. However, this is one of the biggest challenges.
- Original sympathy is lost soon
- Illiterate, very poor, etc.
- Education actually seen by WPs as a negative value because it could ruin their lives. According to them, once they are educated to some extent, they would not continue with their waste-collecting job, while after education there are very less possibilities of getting potential jobs. So they end up losing on both counts.
- Cultural differences
- Marginalised on all counts

#### **SUCCESSSES AND LEARNING:**

- Very good policy framework
- Rules related to ULB's environment, plastic
- Greater sensitivity among municipal officer
- Cross-sharing regarding officers
- Integration models
- Good national networking
- Need to get formal sector onboard
- Civil society's position
- Starting young children's education
- Setbacks- There has been no way of avoiding conflict with the formal sector so there is a need for to build awareness and understanding.
- Cultural practices are to be taught at home like not throwing or squandering waste, and waste segregation

#### **QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS:**

**Comments:** There should be more focus on giving educational opportunities. The biggest challenge is that when waste picker children are sent to convent schools, their peer group consists of children of drivers and domestic workers, who usually subject them to ill-treatment. Therefore the drop-out rate of these kids is extremely high. Hence, some measure must be taken in this regard. There are also a huge number of child-workers involved in waste-picking who lose interest in education as they grow up. So, vocational trainings might be a solution to this situation. In Delhi, more males are involved in waste-picking, and so in Nepal,



The MSW 2000 rule was established in India for the municipality but is being ignored till date. However at times, to prove that they are doing something in this field, they bring in contractors and take initiative to keep the city clean. If they do it, the WPs lose their work. Moreover unemployed males want to get into that contract-group, while sidelines the women.

Along with the lower caste, more people from the middle class are coming into this profession.

**Question:** Some years ago, harassment of waste pickers was a prime issue. So what is the situation today among waste-picker's groups?

**Response:** The WPs are regularly accused of being thieves. However the research reveals that there are no convictions so far. Instead, there was an incident where the police had taken money from the WPs who were falsely accused. The organisation revolted against it and forced the police to return the money. Public harassments in different forms are persistent till date.

**Comments:** In one incident, a woman found a mobile phone from the dumping ground and she returned it to the organisation. The organisation returned the mobile to its owner. This woman's honesty was felicitated in different functions.

However, similar cases of recognition for such good deeds are very few. *Chintan* has initiated a programme where the workers can act as informers to the police, since they are at many places at all times.

In Nepal, the home-based workers are in utter misery. They bring their children along with them to cities. But their income may be very inadequate to cover costs like rent, which is usually high in places like Kathmandu. So, many of the women enter into prostitution. Trafficking is another big issue in the villages. The children in the village need to travel long distances to go to school, so there is always a fear of kidnapping and trafficking.

There is a strong caste and gender bias in India. In Delhi, a group named *Parivartan*, consisting of 10-15 female police officers were appointed to work with waste-pickers, and protect them from different hazards such as sexual harassment, etc. This was one good example of working with them, but this can only be observed in few of the districts.

The population of Pakistan is increasing day-by-day. Many people live in camps outside the city limits. Children get into waste picking but most of the times they are the ones who are picked up and sold. No initiative has been taken to help them in this regard. Along with that, as they live in camps and move from one place to another, Organising them becomes a great problem.

In Bangladesh, little kids are involved in waste collection, and are also into drugs. So this issue has also become one of the urgent one, and *Karmojibi Nari* is seeking to look into this matter.

The same problem is seen in cities like Mumbai as the drug addicts enter into waste-picking for easy money. There are other occupational hazards like tuberculosis and skin problems, and lack of space for storage and transport. However these hazards are not much discussed.

Among men WPs, alcoholism is an excuse so that they can work in the dirt. They claim that alcohol numbs their sense of smell. However, women also collect waste and they do not have problems of alcoholism. Additionally, they have other responsibilities, like their family, children, etc.



### **Summary: Waste Pickers in Asia**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Successes</b>	<b>Setbacks</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Different organisational forms</li> <li>▪ Media</li> <li>▪ Local leadership</li> <li>▪ Skills improvement and training</li> <li>▪ Innovative ideas</li> <li>▪ Research as a tool to understand their position, their economic contribution and to establish a value-chain</li> <li>▪ Database</li> <li>▪ Local leadership</li> <li>▪ Symbolic Programs</li> <li>▪ Environmental lobby</li> <li>▪ Alternative work options</li> <li>▪ Building alliances</li> <li>▪ Getting all stakeholders together to create pressure</li> <li>▪ Networking with common allies against common enemies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scattered community</li> <li>▪ Aggressive and conservative community</li> <li>▪ Fight for survival</li> <li>▪ Formal economy's roles and positions</li> <li>▪ Original sympathy lost soon</li> <li>▪ Illiteracy, poverty</li> <li>▪ Cultural differences</li> <li>▪ Marginalised on all counts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Very good policy frameworks</li> <li>▪ Rules related to ULB's environment, plastic</li> <li>▪ Higher level of sensitivity among municipal officer</li> <li>▪ Cross-sharing on official appointments</li> <li>▪ Integration models</li> <li>▪ Good national networking</li> <li>▪ Need to get formal sector onboard</li> <li>▪ Civil society's position</li> <li>▪ Starting young children's education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No escape from conflicts with the formal sector</li> <li>▪ Cultural practices such as, not throwing or squandering waste, the segregation of waste from home into wet and solid waste</li> </ul>



## **Stories of Waste Pickers Organising**

### **WASTE PICKERS OF PUNE**

#### **SITE 1: University of Pune**

The University of Pune has a waste management department in which KKP KP has been able to integrate independent women workers as employees for door-to-door waste collection. The women in this group collect waste from in and around the University premises. Each worker is given a wheel cart with waste dust-bins, and two different *saris* to be worn as their uniform. There are tin shades in the university in which the waste is dumped for segregation. The shade protects the waste from the rain as well as provides shade to the workers. The workers are not registered with the government, but are members of KKP KP, an independent union.

Earlier the University had two different providers of dustbins, Ghole Road and Aundh Road. At present, Ghole Road waste containers have been removed because its authorities demanded segregation of wet and solid waste before collecting the bins. But after integration of waste pickers as employees, the Ghole Road authorities said that since segregation was already done there was no more need for bins. Therefore, they terminated the provision and took back all the previously provided bins. Now the problem is that since there are fewer bins, they get filled up faster and require emptying faster, too.

However, the University affiliated workers were dissatisfied with the integration of the KKP KP registered workers. Some employees had lost their jobs after these women workers were hired. Apart from this, the formal university workers were concerned that since the Ghole Road bins were removed, the people from the college departments have started dumping the waste on the ground, which has increased their work.

**Vatsala Padurang Gaikwad** is 47 years old and has been collecting waste in the past 11 years. "I have been working in the University in the past eleven years but it has been only been two years since I started working as a WP with KKP KP. I have a three-year contract with them. My life has improved so much after KKP KP that I will renew the contract.

"Usually I work from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 pm. I have five daughters and one son. I am the sole earning member in the family. My husband left me to marry another woman. Presently, I earn around INR 1,500 per month. I also get bonus if I segregate and collect any other materials from the waste products.

"We can also save money on a monthly basis in the cooperative society formed by KKP KP. The women usually save up to 100 rupees per month. We are provided with a protective mask and hand gloves for safety against skin diseases and air borne diseases. The university gives us I-cards too. For collecting waste from houses, we receive a flat rate of INR10 per month per house.

"We have a supervisor for our work. So if any problem arises, or if the any of us is suffering from any health or financial difficulties, the supervisor helps us. She goes to the worker's home and gives whatever support that is required. The supervisors also fight for



our rights. For instance, once the University asked us to sweep the roads as well. This is not our regular work and the University did not propose any extra payment for this extra work. In such cases, supervisors take up the issues with the authority.”

The most hazardous problem faced by all these workers is the randomly thrown chemical waste. Since these women are usually illiterate, they unknowingly pick up chemical bottles that are discarded, and many times they accidentally get hurt or burnt. There was one such incident where a woman worker got injured. And since these women have the habit of putting their hands in the wastes, they tend to get wounded not only by chemicals but also by the glass pieces or sharp objects. The danger of catching skin diseases is ever-present.

An opinion was expressed that the problem of waste being thrown at the site where those bins were previously placed could be solved by planting a few trees. Another concern was the intense lobbying of organisations like the UN for coming up with plans for landfills. Recently new landfills are being engineered and constructed in Delhi. But decreasing the quantity of wastes should be the primary solution.

## **SITE 2: D.P. Road Housing Societies, Aundh**

In Aundh area in Pune, door-to-door collection of waste of 500 households is being done by a KKPKP-organised WP group. The women receive only INR 10 per month for each house for collecting garbage. The collected waste is then segregated by the women and then turned over to designated municipal corporation vehicles. However, there is no fixed schedule for the arrival of these vehicles, and one of the workers has to remain until the vehicle arrives, sometimes until late into the night. The workers get paid by the municipal corporation.

### **Jaganath Babuji Gaikwad and Mangla Jaganath Gaikwad**

The Gaikwad couple collects waste from houses along the D.B. Road. We met them at their collection ground, which was full of waste bags, waiting for the municipal truck to arrive.

The Gaikwads shared that a big problem they encounter injury when putting their hands inside the garbage bags and bins while segregating waste. Sometimes there are syringes and glass pieces inside and they get hurt. The second problem is that people do not segregate their waste. Despite trying to raise awareness through pamphlets and personally asking many house-owners to do so, the practice of dumping all types of waste together still continues. Normally on one working day, these people collect waste from around 10-20 buildings.

The Gaikwad family has four children. Two daughters and one son are married. The youngest son does painting jobs. In India, weddings are a big expense and mostly families take responsibility for it. Mangla gave up her hard earned savings for her brother-in-law's marriage too.

Mangla is the Vice President of the credit cooperative of their union. She is happy and satisfied with her work. The union provides uniforms to the workers on a cost-sharing basis. Mangala proudly showed her sari which cost her INR 75.



Women can acquire a loan of INR15,000-20,000, at 3% monthly interest rate from the cooperative society. The repayment period is 36 months. The repayment however, is a major issue. There are many defaults and the society staff members have a difficult time following up on the outstanding balance. Sometimes they also have to take away household goods from the defaulters. They are returned once the payment is made. The society spends one-third of the interest collection to sponsor prizes for school children.

However the union does not have any health policy. The women have to shoulder the finances if they fell sick. Another option was to take a loan from the cooperative. However, there are health hazards and many times waste collectors fall seriously ill.

### **SITE 3: Slum area in Rastha Peth, Pune**

Participants went on a visit to a *kabadiwallah*, or a primary level waste buyer. His unit was located inside the slum area in Rasta Peth, in the old city area. The place was a huge and tall room built from loose bricks and wood or tin planks. There were huge bags of waste piled on the ground. A few workers were working in the background segregating the waste.

The small time waste collectors (retailers) usually get INR 5 per kilogram of waste they sell. The *Kabadiwallah* explained that there is no discrimination of any sort, and anybody from any group, gender or religion can come and sell their waste to him and would get the same rate.

He also explained that thermocol and fibre are not accepted for recycling because of their dangerous effects. Glass, plastic and paper waste is recyclable. On the other hand thermocol and fibre cannot be recycled because in order to be processed these have to be burnt, which emanates harmful gases into the atmosphere.

#### **Sangeeta Vijay Adagaleslum**

Sangeeta is 37 year old. She is a waste picker who she lives in the Rastha Peth slum area. Her shack is situated at the end of a narrow lane in the area. Her two-storey house is made up of two rooms, one on top of another, each measuring just 8 feet by 8 feet. Though the rooms are extremely small for her family of 5, there are modern gadgets inside such as gas stove, cable television and VCR system. There is a common toilet which all the slum-dwellers share.

To reach the upper room, her house does not have any stairs inside but an iron ladder resting on one side of the wall and goes through a man-sized hole on the ceiling. It almost looked like an attic. While the team was there sipping tea, her children were peeping through the hole. Her life represents numerous other people who dwell in slums.

Sangeeta's husband passed away a few years ago and now she is living with her mother and three children. She is the sole earning member. She says the money is adequate for their household needs.



#### **SITE 4: Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation and SNTD Women's School**

The Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) waste collection office is located under a highway bridge. Right next to the door is a huge weighing scale used for weighing the waste sold by WPs. But unlike in other places, the waste-collectors get a receipt of the sales they make, so that they can calculate their sales and money properly. There is a proper database and storage of information of all the sales involved.

The PCMC also gives a 10% bonus to the women who sell waste worth INR25,000. Currently, 40 women are working there. Usually they get INR150 per day. Both segregated as well as desegregated waste is collected by the PCMC. However, the buying rate for segregated waste is higher.

PCMC is also trying to promote contracts with offices and institutes for direct waste collecting. Currently, IT giants like Wipro and Infosys have a contract to send their paper wastes to this collection office.

Buyers come here to buy the segregated waste, and a profit margin of 25% is put on the selling price. But as shared by the workers there, the rates keep vacillating during times like rainy season.

#### **DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:**

The issues in waste-picking or rag-picking are similar in most South Asian countries. Its cultural contexts however, may be different in different nations. In India, the major difference is the presence of different levels of organised or unorganised selling and buying of waste products. While in the other nations, there are relatively less organised groups and levels involved. In Pakistan, the number of rag-pickers is dominated by Afghani migrants. And in Sri Lanka, the majority of rag-pickers are women. While in Bangladesh, there is a stark presence of child labourers in rag-picking.

It was also seen that in all nations, rag-pickers are discriminated on the basis of their caste or gender. The working conditions of waste pickers in all countries are miserable. Especially problematic is the absence or non-usage of protective hand-gear, thereby exposing the workers to a host of possible skin and other diseases. The income level is relatively fine but the working conditions are still pathetic.

It is evident in India, Nepal, as well as all other countries that there is a very crucial and close linkage between formal and informal economy workers. While other countries seem to have a serious lack of legislation, policy and implementation of any regulations for the workers, in India there is a better social security. The municipal corporation has rules for the composting of solid-waste and urban and local body Acts. States like Gujarat has contractual regulations, and Maharashtra has door-to-door regulation for waste-picking. But as usual, these policy responses represent a good bird's eye view, but their implementation is still faulty.

There seemed to be two common challenges and strategies faced by the organisations and unions in all countries: a) caste, class and gender exploitation; and struggles with the police, finances; conflict between formal and informal groups, and the area restrictions; and b) upgrading skills, which seems to be an urgent and extreme requirement. The workers have to be trained for



better skills in composting, bio-gas generation, etc. More education should be introduced and more trade unions should get active in this issue.



# **POLICY ADVOCACY**

## **Streetnet: The Experience of Intervention with Street-vendors**

*Shalini Trivedi, a Policy Coordinator at SEWA, was a practicing lawyer at the Gujarat High Court till 2001 before joining the organisation. She has successfully dealt with 50 cases pertaining to human rights relating to social discrimination. She has been lobbying and advocating for the issues of street vendors at the state and national level. She has led the Workshop on Umbrella Legislation for Informal Sector organised by NASVI - a network of vendors' organisations across the country initiated by SEWA. She has participated in a number of national and international level events for advocacy of these issues. She was a part of Amicus Curiae appointed by the Supreme Court of India to look into the working conditions of the salt workers of Gujarat; and has advocated and lobbied with Central and State Government Officials to formulate the method through which 15,000 bidi workers avail of the Bidi Provident Fund.*

Vendors are the toughest from among the informal workers to fight for. They are governed by the Bombay Police Act 1860 and Bombay Provision Municipality Act which consider encroachments on roads as illegal. The first case in this regard was fought by SEWA in 1982, which went to the Supreme Court. It argued that the vendors have a right to livelihood. The Court acknowledged the right of livelihood but ordered the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) to provide a market place for the vendors. However, the place provided had no facilities like drinking water, toilets, etc. It would have been difficult for the women to go there. Even then, in order not to lose the case, we accepted the decision on the condition of providing mandatory facilities in this market place like water and toilets. However, till date nothing has been done about this by AMC. The success was that the right as a vendor was recognised. Because of this case, the vendors were distinctly recognised. SEWA has to continuously fight on their issues. Sometimes it wins and sometimes loses, sometimes it takes a middle path so that the community does not suffer.

One has to remember that the Supreme Court is not vendor sensitive. It is most important to try and find new strategies to solve the problems at local, state, national and international levels. One has to use multiple strategies for different stakeholders to be effective. There are four stakeholders who oppose the vendors: police, municipal authority, shopkeepers, and residents.

SEWA uses different forms of advocacy and lobbying strategies such as rallies, leaflets and mass meetings. On one occasion it used media, and with a good slogan which was attractive and effective, caught the people's attention. Media gave good coverage and it put government under a spotlight. Thus the vendors were protected and reinstated.

### **Local Level Strategies:**

In one case SEWA took help from the elected Corporate to overcome the resistance of the residents. The vendors were evicted and lost their livelihood for six months. Now they have been given a place to sell their products.

In another case, the Chief Minister ordered them to be evicted. They are seen as a blot on the landscape and the beauty of the city and have to be removed from the spot. However, the residents supported the vendors in this case. SEWA asked them to send letters to Ahmedabad



Municipal Corporation (AMC). Daily hundreds of letters were sent to AMC requesting to let the vendors stay. This strategy worked and they were allowed to stay.

### **State Level Strategies:**

A policy was drafted and given to the Government. There were elections in the meantime and the party in power changed. The new Government did not sign the policy, and so the struggle is still on.

### **National Level Strategies:**

A network of all vendors groups was initiated, and National Association of Street Vendors of India was formed. Through this association SEWA pressurised the Government to form a policy on street vendors. Now there is a national policy in place.

There is no urban land available for these vendors. Even in Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Reconstruction Mission there is no space for vendors. When the issue was being addressed by the court, we approached the court during the hearing of the case. The judge sympathised with the issue but wondered where she would park her car if the space was given to the vendors! Hence, one also has to fight perceptions of the people. SEWA asked that no vendor should be displaced till it had negotiated with the AMC. There is a blanket order to stay in Ahmedabad not to evict the vendors as a response to SEWA's public interest litigation (PIL). However, it is not followed by AMC workers. They still beat the vendors and harass them.

SEWA designed, printed, published and distributed thousands of leaflets to generate awareness. It received feedback and support from allied groups and support groups. Finally AMC had to let them stay in their original place. Now a new problem is the concept of world class cities. In this process street vendors are yet again thrown out of the market.

SEWA has developed market committees which advise the vendors on marketing strategies – presentation, cleanliness, attractive display of goods, etc. These things have become essential, because the vendors now have to compete with supermarkets like Subhiksha and Reliance. Hence, they are encouraged to use attractive packaging. One has to constantly think of alternatives. SEWA could have launched campaigns against the Reliance Mall but that is not going to help improve the current situation. So it decided to train and provide negotiation skills to vendors, as well as packaging skills, education on hygiene, and use of plastic bags etc. We also equipped them with packaging machines.

In these kinds of interventions it is essential to conduct a market study and be well informed. SEWA did a market study and found that there are 154 markets in Ahmedabad city. There are 50000-70000 vendors in the city but it would be easy to accommodate all of them since they are located sparsely. In the Manek Chowk area where SEWA intervened, there are a lot of illegal encroachments on the roads, including shops extended and covering the footpaths, illegal parking, double parking, and *rikshaw*<sup>10</sup> stops. But the blame of congesting the traffic always falls on the vendors. Once the AMC authorities came to destroy the illegal extensions of the shops and evicted the vendors.

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<sup>10</sup> A three-wheeler vehicle ferrying 3 passengers at a time across the city



SEWA's proposed solution was to rearrange the area in such a manner so as to accommodate the vendors properly, and at the same time increase the 50-metre road space to allow even a bus to pass easily. We presented this plan to the AMC, but they said that the decision was in the hands of politicians. We went to the court and asked the judge to see the solution in a holistic manner. But the judge said his hands were tied. Nothing further happened. Now we are planning to get the shopkeepers on our side.

Another strategy is exchange visits, forming a model law for vendors. In Delhi, space was allocated for a women-only market in response to a PIL.

Streetnet is an international organisation that supports vendors' issues all over the world. It envisages world class cities, where vendors are an integral part. SEWA succeeded in getting a market place for women vendors--an issue which it raised with the World Bank. After a lot of consultations and deliberations, the World Bank approved INR 2 crores grant for the vendor's market. We are not aware when it would be implemented.

#### Important Points

- Use different strategies
- Go with the system and against it at different times
- Use network
- Try to bend political will
- Take a holistic approach

#### QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS:

**Question:** These engagements are very interesting because earlier ones were applying traditional method of unionising but also polarising between employers and employees. We have to find some middle path. We need to take city planning on board our strategies. Would you share your experience on this?

**Response:** There are always innovative strategies and methods of involving town planners and architects so that the vendors could be accommodated. We explore all avenues first and then knock on the court's door.

**Question:** What is the attitude of the male vendors [towards the women-only market]?

**Response:** Vending is a family business. Both men and women are in the business. Changing the mindset of the vendors about cleanliness is very difficult. SEWA has linked paper-pickers with the vendors. When the vendors go away, paper-pickers come and pick up the papers and thus the cleanliness is maintained.

**Comments:** Under JNUURM, 100,000 families are going to be evicted in Tamil Nadu. We do not have the same kind of relationship with Chennai Municipal Corporation, and other organisations that SEWA has. SEWA is large enough to be in a position to have dialogue with the State. Every



city has to evolve that kind of culture. It is not only the vendors that are facing these problems. We need to make the issue wider.

**Question:** The vendors and shopkeepers have contradictory interests. There is competition among them. How was your experience in getting consensus of the people, political parties and other stakeholders?

**Response:** Sometimes we are not heard despite having such strength. We have to change our strategies depending upon the locality, too. Sometimes SEWA does not interfere but tells them to go to the Corporate directly and try to solve problems by themselves. We back them with support. We use the strategy best suited for the purpose. If one fails, we try another.

**Question:** Do you ask the vendors to charge fixed rate?

**Response:** We do not interfere in that. We just negotiate with the AMC. But yes, there is a market committee which may advise them about the need for having fixed rates.

**Question:** How much is SEWA's experience being replicated in other states? Does SEWA have presence in South Asia? What about the migrant population?

**Response:** SEWA is working in nine states of India, and similar work is going on. There are such markets in MP, Orissa (all the vendors were given stalls). It is being replicated. SEWA is associated with network of all the HBWWs in South Asia. There is migration from other states. The women generally also get into DW market.

**Question:** What is the caste composition of the vendors you are working with? How do the political parties respond to your Organising?

**Response:** Mostly all of the vendors are lower caste Hindus. SEWA has no political links.

**Question:** They sell the vegetables on bicycles in Nepal, and throw the litter around. Cleanliness is an issue. Does SEWA do anything about cleanliness? Does it give any training?

**Response:** There is a fine of INR 150 for throwing litter. However it still happens. We have to educate them all the time. We made them buy a particular type of waste bins, which they used instead to put water and washed vegetables in. It took tremendous efforts and training, repetitive training. Cultivating cleanliness takes huge amount of effort. We raised the penalty to INR 350. Then gradually littering reduced. We have trade committees which meet in a month to discuss the issues in that particular trade. We disseminate information through the committees to spread message of cleanliness.

**Question:** What is the implication of caste composition, police protection and political parties? Markets are developed invariably. How do you plan to compete with companies like Reliance and other such outlets?

**Response:** SEWA is not making cosmetic changes to vendors' appearances. It wants to organise them. It is not very good for them to sit in a haphazard manner. We all know that Reliance is here to stay, so we have to make our product competitive. We need to sustain our livelihood and have to do what it takes. There are 154 markets and SEWA wants to reach all of them.



Vendors are mainly Hindus; few are Muslims, Patnis mostly. Political will was apparent in Jamalpur area. SEWA itself has no political links.



# ***ACTION PLANS***

## **Framework for discussion:**

- Objectives
- Planned activities
- Expected Results
- Time Frame
- Geographic Specificity
- Resources/support required

## **Action Plan by Domestic Workers Groups**

Three common key issues that have to be worked on – in each country

- Recognising DWs as workers
- Framework/structure for minimum wages
- Legal protection and social security

<b>Locally (country)</b>	<b>Regionally (Asia)</b>
<p>Bangladesh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1 and 3<sup>rd</sup> to be addressed through a national seminar</li> <li>▪ Lobby with government. using the seminar platform</li> <li>▪ We also would like another sharing meeting after one year</li> <li>▪ Use media and publications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Website to share information – news – activities so sharing across nations happens continuously and issues can be taken up regionally. There already is an e-group in Indonesia which can be used for this purpose (something like blog). We take the responsibility to post issues/incidents on the website</li> <li>▪ Ip Pui Yu takes the responsibility of the e-group</li> <li>▪ Conduct rally/ demonstration on the same day in January across nations on the issue of recognition of DWs and legal protection (it can mean different things in the local context); design slogans</li> </ul>
<p>Nepal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lobbying with the government for compulsory registration process – till December</li> <li>▪ National seminar for DWs to be organised and supported from other TUs</li> </ul>	
<p>Maharashtra:</p>	



Locally (country)	Regionally (Asia)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Signature campaign, demonstrations, poster campaign</li> <li>▪ Use festivals</li> </ul> 1 year	
Tamil Nadu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Posters, mass contact with DWs on the notification, criteria for fixing the wages, lobby with the advisory committee</li> </ul> 4 months	
Karnataka: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the districts for reaching out to the DWs</li> <li>▪ More work on minimum wage notification and the means for demanding the wages</li> <li>▪ Strengthen worker's representation in the labour welfare board</li> <li>▪ Help the child DWs by reaching out and cooperating with the NGOs working with them</li> </ul>	
Sri Lanka <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lobby with other TUs for recognition of DWs</li> <li>▪ Use the media and publications</li> <li>▪ Use research to lobby with the TUs and the government.</li> </ul> Time : 1 year	
<b>Support</b>	
Tamil Nadu CAW support for convening women workers to be held in Tamil Nadu	CAW support in giving information about laws – collect all the relevant laws present in Asia
Collect all laws in different states in India and disseminate to the other members – Sister Christine takes the responsibility	Support in developing a website for the region



### **Action Plan by Home-based Workers Groups**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Planned Activities</b>	<b>Expected Results</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Geographic Specificity</b>	<b>Resources/support required</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organising</li> <li>▪ Rights – TUs</li> <li>▪ Policy</li> <li>▪ Betterment and empowerment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness campaign</li> <li>▪ Formation of groups for income generation</li> <li>▪ Consultation meetings with other groups</li> <li>▪ Exhibition of the home products on festival days</li> <li>▪ Use of print and electronic media –</li> <li>▪ Partnership with local government.</li> <li>▪ Networking with TUs &amp; women organisations</li> <li>▪ Need and demand driven programmes</li> <li>▪ Advocacy and lobbying at local, national and international levels</li> <li>▪ Tri-partite boards</li> <li>▪ Formation of South Asian Network</li> <li>▪ Services, facilities,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leadership of women</li> <li>▪ Members' ownership of groups</li> <li>▪ Sustained work</li> <li>▪ Strong TUs/ organisations</li> <li>▪ Consensus for a new law</li> <li>▪ Enabling environment</li> <li>▪ Sustainability of groups</li> <li>▪ Publicity and promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 1-3 yrs depending on the type of activity</li> <li>▪ 1 ½ yrs to form and work under SANW &amp; then a meeting to review the policy formation (enactment of law)</li> <li>▪ Quick – within six months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Depending on strength of each organisation expansion of activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consultation meetings and South Asian Groups Network CAW's support is needed</li> <li>▪ For organising new groups CAW/ADWN support required</li> <li>▪ Information sharing by CAW secretariat and network group members</li> <li>▪ Capacity for building of the organisations</li> </ul>



Objectives	Planned Activities	Expected Results	Time Frame	Geographic Specificity	Resources/support required
	trainings ▪ Marketing linkages				

### **Action Plan by Waste Pickers Groups**

Objectives	Planned Activities	Expected Results	Time Frame	Resources/ support required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Change the attitude toward the waste and WP</li> <li>▪ No child labour</li> <li>▪ National policies on WPs</li> <li>▪ South Asia loose network</li> <li>▪ Formalisation of Indian network</li> <li>▪ Share Indian experiences</li> <li>▪ Avoid displacement of WPs</li> <li>▪ Promote resource recovery</li> <li>▪ Decentralised waste management</li> <li>▪ Education and training to change attitude towards waste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research in other countries</li> <li>▪ Researches on – gender, children, education, legal situation, SWM, health care, study of schemes</li> <li>▪ Internal alliances with the environmentalists civil society, formal sector waste workers, municipality</li> <li>▪ Rights-based policy advocacy</li> <li>▪ Support from media, and political groups</li> <li>▪ Development of own leadership among WPs</li> <li>▪ Health and safety</li> <li>▪ Develop IEC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dignity to WP</li> <li>▪ Experience sharing</li> <li>▪ Exchange</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 6 months to initiate activities</li> <li>▪ India National Meeting in 2008</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share technical resources</li> <li>▪ Use existing organisational resources to extend work</li> </ul>



# ANNEXURE

## Annexure I : Expectation Fulfilled

### What we expected

- Acquire experiences from others
- Learn and benefit from each other
- Women's perspective, share and learn migrant population issues which is prevalent in Delhi
- Learn and share experience of home-based workers
- Learn and share from each other and regularise the whole sector and support labour progress
- Understand each others problems and discuss issues with others
- Learn from each other and common understanding...as independent and labour organisation and largely for women's organisation
- Gain information and policy
- Share experiences and how policies and decisions taken here can be applied
- Know waste picker issues
- Learn good practices in the South Asia
- Strong network for the Asian groups
- Build strong solidarity at national and regional level
- Sharing of legal position and social security from other countries
- Build strong network within the South Asian groups in the informal sector
- Fruitful learning and built solidarity among ourselves
- Form south Asian network of waste paper picker
- Strong solidarity
- South East Asia network...for waste pickers
- Learn about issues in South Asia
- Share experiences and establish strong network for waste picker
- Awakening of entire informal sector...strengthening and clarifications
- Get some sort of solutions to take back

### What we got

Three questions were posed for verbal feedback.

1. What were really useful learning points?
  2. Fulfilment of expectations
  3. Specific suggestion for improving this programme
- Sharing experience was very valuable. We all have similar problems; had a good time; and to realise we need to work together. We gained understanding of common issues.
  - It has been a great opportunity to learn about other countries' experiences which we can use in our programme, for example how they have organised DWs in Pune. This is the time to work together for workers' legal protection and address violence. If you can organise such experience sharing for other TUs, they can also learn.



- Learning how to organise in different manner, and other organisations work was useful. Group discussion on building a network of DWs and detailed issues of minimum wages gave insights. Our differences and our similarities were highlighted. We gained insight into other sectors (WP or HBW) too. It was a wonderful opportunity to stress the need to work together. Logistics and communication were wonderful.
- We had a lot of information and sharing about the Asian situation which we didn't know. There are common links and issues in these different sectors on which we can work together.
- Understanding work of different organisations in different countries was very useful--most importantly that there has been a law in the South India but Maharashtra government is not responsive though considered progressive. Unorganised economy should be protected is the political agenda but it is not enough.
- Understanding of problems which are common across countries was useful. We must build a very strong association to solve these problems because working alone is not enough to achieve the objectives.
- We became aware of problems. Exposure visits were very good. There was a good sharing by countries. It was good to see how the people work at the ground level (HBW). Something will definitely come out of this.
- Knowing other peoples' problems and ideas sharing was good. It would have been good if informal economy workers had been present. Cultural activities at night would have been good.
- It was a very good experience. I learned a lot. This information will help me in my work.
- I have learned a lot from different countries and had an opportunity to share my country's experience. It would help my organisation.
- It was good to know about other sectors and the situation in other countries. I have some things which I can take back now. I hope that we can continue this start we have made and make a strong network, through which we can share issues and concerns of advocacy together.
- 50% of the expectations were fulfilled. I would have liked to have discussions with more DWs. They should have been involved with the programme.
- Arrangements were very good. It was good to learn that other countries also have same problems. I hope we will work together.
- We have common issues. We hope that we will be able to make a policy at the international level through this strong network. We have only just unionised the DWs and sharing of this experience has given us a lot of knowledge on how we can deal with the problems.
- We have been associated with CAW since 1999 and have witnessed the change from just Organising to thinking and making policy changes. This was a good exchange.
- I learned quite a lot. The field visit was a very good learning experience. The programme was well organised. I will use the learning in my country. The logistics were very good.
- The programme was well organised. It gave a good opportunity to meet people from different countries. The faculty was good. There was a lot of learning. Representatives from governments should have been invited so that we could have submitted a memorandum of our demands.
- It was a good opportunity to meet the people and learn about different strategies in different countries. We do everything and don't give the government responsibility to do anything. We should approach the government and get the demands. There should have been workers' representation in the conference. Also, there was a language barrier because of use of English. Similar problems are observed even across sectors. There should be legal training to WPs.



- It was very fruitful sharing of experience. It was inspiring to know that so many groups are working for DWs. We need to have stronger network and solidarity among us. There should be more unity and involvement to help other groups to know about these issues. I have to start from myself, to communicate with the others. We need someone to take the initiative to let the others know about what the group is doing. We will continue to fight for DWs and hope that leadership grows among them and they learn to self-organise, self-manage and become people power.
- The workshop helped us to strengthen our own network. The concept of developing something among SAARC countries is good. We know what is happening in Western countries but don't know about SAARC countries. More exchange like this towards women's causes should be made possible.
- Two days should have been entirely allotted to interactions among sectoral groups. The interactions would have been more intense. On the third day, we could have come together for sharing.



## Annexure II: Programme

Day	Time	Programme	Objective
1: 19 <sup>th</sup> August 2007	9.00- 9.30	Registration & Tea (KKPKP)	Registration
	9.30- 10.00	Introductory session (KKPKP representative & CAW Exco:Shirin- Opening Speech)- 5 minutes each) & Expectation Check from participants: by KKPKP	Introduction & Expectations from participants
	10.00- 10.30	KKPKP and CAW (Deepa/SH) Briefing: programme flow/logistic matters	Logistics of conference & Programme briefing
	10.30- 12.00	Plenary 1 Setting the context: Keynote address: Comparative Overview of Workers in South Asia's Informal Economy (features, country specificities, law and policy) Sujata Gothoskar (Moderator: Shrin Akhter, CAW)	Understanding the informal sector, cross sectoral, national, cultural context
	1.00- 2.00	Lunch	
	2.00- 3.30	Theme I: Sub-sector discussions: <b>Situational and policy intervention/legal reform:</b> characteristics of work in that sector, the challenges this presents and emerging issues (facilitate by Menaha,CAW) – each CAW and KKPKP will go to different sub sector to “observe” the discussion (Deepa-HBW/Siewhwa-DW/KKPKP-WC)	Understand the overview of each sector, DW, WC, HBW Situational analysis Emerging issues Legal Situation
	3.30- 4.00	Tea Break	
	4.00- 5.30	Discussion Sectoral presentations -3 GROUPS Presentation 10 mins – 20 mins discussion	
		Recap by facilitator, overall -Menaha	
2 20 <sup>th</sup> August	9.00- 9.30	Briefing : for exposure visit -(the organisations) (each sectors: DW/HBW/WC	Exposure trip objective: To understand the



2007	<p>9.30-3.00</p> <p>3.00-5.30</p>	<p>(facilitate by KKPKP) Exposure visits (facilitate by KKPKP)</p> <p><b>Theme II Sectoral Group discussion: Empowering the workers: Sharing of “Organising and mobilising strategies “ -based on visits and their own countries experience</b></p> <p>Facilitate by KKPKP</p>	<p>local dynamics of workers Share experience of Pune organisations the living and/or working places of the DW, HBW and WC Pune; face to face interaction with actual workers from 3 sectors; exposure to organisational types, levels of sectors Participants divided into 3 sectoral groups and visiting (field visit, exposure and group discussions)</p>
3 21 <sup>st</sup> August 2007	<p>9.00-10.30</p> <p>10.30-11.00</p> <p>11.00-12.30</p> <p>12.30 – 2.00</p> <p>2.00-4.00</p>	<p>Sharing of Sectoral Discussions: Theme II Facilitate by KKPKP</p> <p>Tea</p> <p>Continue: Sharing of Sectoral Discussions: Theme II Facilitate by KKPKP</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Plenary II: Speaker 1 : Modes of collective bargaining and alliance building specific to these sub-sectors and other sectors which have helped to win concrete gains - as well lessons learnt from failures Tamil Nadu construction workers union-</p> <p>Speaker 2: Theme III: Policy Advocacy (local, national and global level)</p>	<p>Sectoral Discussion of Theme II: To examine strategies in organising and mobilising informal workers in each sector To examine development of strong informal workers organisation and women worker leadership</p> <p>Plenary II: Learn about the strategies /best practices/success stories across sectors in collective bargaining,</p>



		<p>Street Vendors experience STREETNET (Moderator: Deepa, CAW)</p> <p>4.00 – Tea 4.30</p> <p>4.30 – Film on quarry workers/waste collectors 5.00 Discussion (Facilitate by KKPKP)</p>	<p>advocacy, Organising and alliance building (can be local, national, regional and international)</p>
<p>4 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2007</p>	<p>9.00- 10.00</p> <p>10.00- 11.30</p> <p>11.30- 1pm</p> <p>1.00- 2.00</p> <p>2.00- 3.00</p> <p>3.00- 4.00</p> <p>4.00- 5.30</p>	<p>Plenary 3 : Recap: Presentation from 3 representative of 3 sectors (DW/WC/HBW) – facilitate by Menaha,CAW</p> <p>Action Plan- discussion (tea break in between) -facilitate by Menaha, CAW &amp; KKPKP</p> <p>Plenary 4: Sharing of Plans (Facilitate by KKPKP and Menaha,CAW)</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Sharing of Conference Experience Session evaluation (fill the evaluation form and verbally both) (Facilitate by KKPKP and Siew Hwa, CAW)</p> <p>Street Play and discussion</p> <p>Closing note: (facilitate by KKPKP and Shirin, CAW) Administration &amp; Accounts (KKPKP and CAW)</p>	<p>To recap what had been learned in the last 3 days</p> <p>To identify common needs/demands To work on feasible common plans of action To arrive at common needs/demands To work feasible common plans of action as sub regionally across sectors</p>



### **Annexure III: List of Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Country</b>
Shirin Akhter	Karmojibi Nari.	Bangladesh
Maruafia Noor	Karmojibi Nari	Bangladesh
Salma Liaqat	Women's Workers Org	Pakistan
Bushra Khaliq	Women's Workers Helpline	Pakistan
Danwar Sonu	GEFONT	Nepal
Pode M.D	GEFONT	Nepal
Shreshtha L.D	DEFONT	Nepal
Menaha Kandasamy	Red Flag Movement	Sri Lanka
Darshini Sivanathan	Red Flag Movement	Sri Lanka
K.D.G Wickramaarachchi	United Employees Union	Sri Lanka
Ip Pui Yu	Asian Domestic Workers Network (ADWN)	Hong Kong
Nazma Yesmin	B I L S	Bangladesh
Lee Siew Hwa	CAW	Bangkok
Deepa Bharathi	CAW	Bangkok
Pornpan	CAW	Bangkok
Yamini Parikh	SEWA Union	India
Pratibha Pandya	SEWA	India
Lavanya Marla	Chintan	India, Delhi
Mrs. Mary	G.N.D.W Union	India
Sr. Clara	Tamilnadu DW Union	India
Fr. George Payatikat	Jan Vikas.	Indore, India
Rekha Gaikwad	Lok Vikas Samajik Sansthan	Nashik, India



<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Country</b>
Jyoti Mhapsekar	Stree Mukti Sanghatana	Mumbai
Sujata Mody	Penn Thozhilahar Sangam	Chennai, India
Geeta Menon	Stree Jagruti Samiti	Bangalore
Shankuntala	Stree Jagruti Samiti	Bangalore
Sr. Christin Mary	National Domestic Workers Movement	Mumbai/Pune
Medha Thatte	Pune Shaheer Molkarin Sanghatana	Pune, India
Sandhya Phadke	Pune Sheher Molkarin Sanghatana	Pune, India
Usha Datar	Pune District Domestic Workers	Pune, India
Anagha Joshi	Documenter	India, Pune
Sangeeta Gandhi	Documenter	India, Pune
Laxmi Narayan	KKPKP	Pune, India
Shabana Daler	KKPKP	Pune, India
Poornima Chikarmane	SNDT/KKPKP	Pune, India
Nalini Shekar	KKPKP	Pune, India
Prashant Warke	Translator (Marathi)	Pune
Sanam	Translator (Hindi)	Pune
Avani	Translator	Pune
Gurleen	Translator (Hindi)	Pune
Prithvi	Translator	Pune
Pudum Baishya	Translator (Hindi)	Pune
Bharati Iyer	Translator (Tamil)	Pune
Padmadhar	Translator	Pune
Omkar	Translator	Pune



<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Country</b>
Rinzi	Translator (Nepali)	Pune
Subecha	Translator (Nepali)	Pune
Smiriti	Translator (Nepali)	Pune
Vasundhara	Translator (Nepali)	Pune



## **Annexure IV: Film Screening - Labournet**

### **Film on Construction workers- Labournet**

Labournet is a network of construction workers, builders, contractors and general public. It works towards protecting the rights of construction worker and provides them with facilities and social benefits.

Labournet takes membership fees from all this members. Annual membership for workers is INR100; for individuals it is INR.3,000; and for builders it is very high.

In return of this membership builders and individuals get good reliable and skilled services and workers get job opportunities and trainings to improve skills and know-how in his profession.

There are more than one lakh construction workers in Bangalore and about 4,500 workers are registered in Labournet. It works like call centre. Individuals or builders have to call to get skilled workers. Workers are trained in negotiation skills and accounts so that they are able to deal with their employers independently.



## **ACRONYMS**

WIEGO	Women in Informal Economy Globalising and Organising
ILO	International Labour Organisation
WPs	Waste Pickers
DWs	Domestic Workers
TUs	Trade Unions
ID	Identity Card
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
INR	Indian Rupees
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
HBWWs	Home-based women workers
PIL	Public Interest Litigation
AMC	Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
NPR	Nepali Rupees
PKR	Pakistan Rupees
LKR	Sri Lankan Rupees

“

*In many countries in South Asia, women constitute a large part of the informal workforce. Street vending in Sri Lanka is women-dominated. Women are paid very low wages whether they are waste pickers, domestic workers or doing any other type of work in the informal sector. Their income however, is crucial to support the family and the society.*

*Two things must be ensured in order to achieve development goals – gender equality and concept of decent work as defined by ILO. Organising women in the informal economy for social protection (unions or other member-based organisations) should thus be taken up. It will help influence the governments in passing laws to protect women. ”*

This is a report of South Asia Conference on Informal Labour and Trade Union Organisations organised by Committee for Asian Women (CAW) and Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) in August 2007 in Pune India.

The conference brought participants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Thailand and India to share experience and discuss organising strategies for women workers in the informal economy, especially waste pickers, domestic workers and home-based workers.



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