

WIEGO Research on Informal Employment: Key Methods, Indicators & Findings

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The twin purposes of WIEGO's statistical and research activities are to inform policy debates about the working poor in the informal economy and to equip organizations of informal workers, and their representative leaders, to effectively engage in these debates in order to demand the legal and policy reforms they need to secure and enhance their livelihood activities. In addition to generating supportive data and research, WIEGO promotes policy dialogues between informal worker leaders and dominant stakeholders, including governments, corporations and international development agencies.

In so doing, WIEGO has found that statistical data and research findings on the size and contribution of the informal economy are needed to *attract the attention of policy makers* and other key stakeholders. That statistical data and research findings on the composition and characteristics of different segments of the informal workforce are needed to *inform policy making*. And that documentation and dissemination of good policies and practices which protect and/or promote informal livelihoods are needed to *inspire creative thinking about policy design*.

This note discusses four key indicators of the composition of informal employment and illustrates, through WIEGO data analysis and research findings, how these indicators intersect with the wider institutional environment to determine the characteristics and dynamics of different segments of informal employment. It begins with a brief presentation of WIEGO field research methods to complement the earlier presentations on WIEGO's statistical work.

WIEGO FIELD RESEARCH

In addition to analyzing statistical data as they become available and analyzing/documenting promising policies and practices, WIEGO engages in field research on different topics of concern to informal workers, including: economic trends; value chain dynamics; urban policies; social protection (including health, occupational health and safety, and child care); laws and regulations; organization and representation; and technology.

WIEGO's field research on different topics includes some mix of the following methods:

1 – Background Research – to inform the conceptual framework of the field research

1.1 *Consultations with Organizations of Informal Workers* – to determine what research topics or issues are most important to informal workers

1.2 *Literature Reviews* – to assess what is known and thought about how the research topic relates to informal workers

1.3 *Institutional Mapping* - to identify key stakeholders and their relationship to/stance on the informal economy and the research topic

2 – Field Research

2.1 *Qualitative Research*

The qualitative component of our research is based primarily on Participatory Informal Economy Appraisal (PIEA) - an innovative method designed to capture systematically the perceptions and

understandings of informal workers, in their own words, in a focus group setting.¹ This method was originally designed for a 10-city study carried out in 2012 to interrogate what impacts three sectors of urban informal workers and their livelihoods, how they respond, and which institutions help or hinder. In that study, each city team² conducted 15 focus groups of about five participants each per sector (Chen 2014, Roever 2014, Dias and Samson 2016). Nine focus group tools – organized around the themes of sector characteristics, driving forces and responses, institutional environment, and contributions of the sector – were used to generate data related to the conceptual framework. The results of the focus groups were recorded into reports of about 10-12 pages, on average, immediately after each focus group was conducted. For the purposes of different studies, the focus group data in three city-sectors—about 450 pages of focus group reports—were coded around different topics: driving forces, costs and risks, technology, health/OHS, among others.

The PIEA methods outlined above have been adopted for subsequent field research on different topics by the WIEGO research team, including a 3-city study of health (Alfers 2017, Chen and Lund 2017), a 3-city study of technology use and impacts (Chen et al 2016), occupational health and safety studies in several countries, and baseline research in several WIEGO focal cities. WIEGO first used a combination of focus group tools and survey questionnaire in two rounds (2009 and 2010) in a study in 14 cities/10 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America of the impact of the recent Global Recession on informal workers (Horn 2009 and 2010). WIEGO also continues to use more standard focus group methods when the PIEA methods are not feasible or suitable for a given research question.

2.2 Quantitative Research

The quantitative component of our field research is based on a survey questionnaire: the design of which is informed by our preliminary research, including consultations with informal worker organizations, literature review, and institutional analysis and, where possible, by the findings of our qualitative research. The sample for our quantitative surveys typically includes the focus group participants plus an equal number from a purposive sample. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools are always translated into local languages with the support of local research teams and partners including informal worker organizations.

2.3 Key Informant Interviews

After the quantitative and/or qualitative research is finished, and preliminary findings are specified, we conduct interviews with key informants from organizations of informal workers, government and other stakeholders to help interpret the field research findings.

3 – Policy Analysis

After the field research is completed, the WIEGO research team and the local organization of informal workers which facilitated the research jointly analyze the findings to draw out the policy lessons and messages: both the lessons/messages specific to the different research sites

¹ The qualitative methodology was developed collaboratively with Caroline Moser, Angélica Acosta, and Irene Vance. It is an adaptation of earlier participatory methodologies developed by Robert Chambers and Caroline Moser with others.

² Each city team consisted of two qualitative researchers, two quantitative researchers and a facilitator from a local organization of informal workers. A member of WIEGO's research team supported each city team through data analysis and report writing.

and samples as well as the common lessons/messages across sites and samples (or sub-groups in the sample). These policy lessons and messages are published and disseminated together with the research findings. WIEGO also seeks to ensure all findings and policy lessons/messages are disseminated in user-friendly formats, ideally in local languages, for worker education and policy advocacy by organizations of informal workers.

In addition to these generic field research methods, WIEGO has developed an Informal Economy Budget Analysis (IEBA) methodology which examines how government budgets address the needs and interests of different groups of informal workers and explores what opportunities exist for informal workers (or their representatives) to participate at different stages of the budget process. The IEBA methodology was developed and tested in South Africa by Debbie Budlender, Francie Lund, Caroline Skinner, and Imraan Valodia as part of a policy process to address the informal economy in Durban. WIEGO then commissioned an analysis of government budgets from an informal economy perspective in four cities: Belo Horizonte in Brazil, Lahore in Pakistan, Metropolitan Lima in Peru, and Quezon City in the Philippines. More recently, WIEGO has added the interrogation of government revenue in using the methodology in Accra, Ghana and Monrovia, Liberia. Debbie Budlender has provided the technical training and supervision for all of the IEBA studies. <http://www.wiego.org/publications/how-analyse-government-budgets-informal-economy-perspective>

Also, over the years, WIEGO has developed and used a methodology for assessing the situation of homeworkers (outworkers who work from their own homes) and other informal workers in global supply chains: building on a manual on measuring homeworkers in garment value chains, prepared for WIEGO in 2001 by Hubert Schmitz of IDS, Sussex and Dorothy McCormick of IDS, Nairobi. <http://www.wiego.org/resources/manual-value-chain-research-homeworkers-garment-industry>

KEY INDICATORS

Through both our statistical and research work, WIEGO has found that four indicators are key to defining the composition of the informal workforce and to understanding the composition and dynamics of different segments of the informal workforce: namely, branch of economic activity, status in employment, place of work and (cross-cutting these) the sex of the worker. WIEGO has promoted the use of all four indicators in the collection, tabulation and analysis of labor force data and in our field research.

1- Branch of Economic Activity

The branch of economic activity – also called “industry” – is defined by the products or services produced by the unit in which a person works or, in the case of own account workers, the person her/himself. In standard usage in both statistics and economics, there are three main branches of economic activity – agriculture and related sectors; manufacturing; trade and other services (also referred to as, respectively, the primary, secondary and tertiary sector) – with many sub-branches in each. To fully understand the informal workforce, it is important to disaggregate “agriculture and related sectors” into agriculture, dairy and livestock production, fishery, hunting and forestry (including collection/processing of non-timber forest products); “manufacturing” into various product lines (e.g. textiles and garments, artisan goods, shoes and sporting goods, electronics and

pharmaceuticals, automobiles and planes); “trade and other services” into two separate branches; and “services” into different services (e.g. IT, construction, personal).

2 – Status in Employment

The two key dimensions of status in employment are a) the type/degree of *economic risk* involved in the job and b) the type/degree of *authority* over the establishment or other workers. Under the existing International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), there are five main statuses: employer, employee, own account worker, contributing family worker and member of producer cooperative. But in today’s globalized and digitalized economy there are increasing numbers of workers who do not fit neatly under one or another of these five statuses: notably, contracted or sub-contracted workers who absorb risks but do not have authority over the establishment or other workers or even the sale of products/services. The well-known new example is the Uber driver; the age-old example is the industrial outworker. With the ILO, as reported by Joann Vanek and Francoise Carre, the WIEGO network is currently working towards the addition of a top level status – “dependent contractor”– to the ICSE during the 2018 meeting of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

3 – Place of Work

Historically, labor force surveys did not routinely include a “place of work” question. This is because it was assumed that most workers worked in so-called “standard” workplaces - offices, factories, shops, hotels or restaurants – which belonged to the employer. In 1998, at the second meeting of the International Expert Group on Statistics on Informal Employment (the Delhi Group), WIEGO made the case that the “place of work” is a key indicator for identifying and classifying informal workers. Increasingly, national statistical offices are including a “place of work” question in their labor force surveys which asks the respondent whether s/he works in one or more of the following places of work:

- Own enterprise/unit/office/shop but separate from own dwelling
- Employer's enterprise/unit/office/shop but outside employer's dwelling
- Market or street
- Construction site
- Own dwelling or structure/attached to own dwelling
- Employer's dwelling unit
- Agricultural field
- No fixed work place
- Other

In our field research, WIEGO has interrogated the costs, risks and benefits of working in different places of work: including, own home, home of others, streets and markets, dumps or landfills.

4 – Sex and Other Demographic Indicators

To understand the roles and status of women and men within the informal economy, it is critical to disaggregate all statistical data and research findings, including on the three indicators above, by sex. Cross-tabulation by age and education as well as sex would be ideal. Other important demographic indicators, which WIEGO hopes to promote as part of our statistical work going forward as data and resources allow, are whether informal workers are from minority racial, ethnic or caste groups and whether they are urban-rural or cross-border migrants.

ILLUSTRATIVE FINDINGS

Over the years, through different research projects, WIEGO and our local research partners have generated significant evidence on the importance of these indicators in both determining and understanding the characteristics of and the costs-risks faced by informal workers. Below is a summary of some illustrative findings on how the wider regulatory environment and/or value chain dynamics, mediated through the intersection of these key indicators, determine the costs, risks and benefits of informal workers.

1 – City Services, Value Chains and Home-Based Workers: Place of Work & Status in Employment

Place of Work - By definition, home-based workers produce goods and services from in or around their own homes. Home-based workers face several risks associated with their homes doubling as workplaces. First, most live and work in homes which are small (often 1 or 2 rooms): which make it difficult to carry out productive work when other members of the household need the same space for other purposes. Second, most of their homes are of poor quality, made of inferior materials, poorly ventilated and subject to flooding or leaks. Third, most do not own their homes-cum-workplaces which discourages them from expanding or improving their homes. Fourth, many live and work in underserved informal settlements with little or no basic infrastructure services, including water, sanitation and electricity. Without secure tenure, either de facto or de jure, and without basic infrastructure services, home-cum-workplaces are not productive workplaces (Chen 2014).

Status in Employment –

There are two basic types of home-based workers: those who work on their own (the self-employed) and those who work for others (mainly as industrial outworkers, called “homeworkers”). It is important to distinguish, conceptually and statistically for policy purposes, between the two categories. Both categories are impacted in the same way by city housing policies and city services. But the two categories operate in different ways and with different constraints within markets. Most self-employed produce goods and services for local markets or customers; while homeworkers produce for value chains, either domestic or global.

In terms of status in employment, homeworkers fall in a grey intermediate zone between being fully independent and being fully dependent, as illustrated in the table below:

Self-Employed, Homeworkers and Employees

Characteristics	Self-Employed	Homeworkers	Employees
Contract	sales contract	employment contract	employment contract
Remuneration	from sale of goods/services	for work (typically piece rate)	for work (time or piece rate)
Contract with	Self	employer/intermediary	Employer
Means of Production	provided by self	provided by self	provided by employer
Workplace	provided by self	provided by self	provided by employer
Supervision	Autonomous	indirect or no supervision	direct supervision

Source: ILO and WIEGO 2003.

Based on our research findings, WIEGO has made the case that lead firms in global value chains download many costs and risks to homeworkers, including the costs of workspace, equipment, energy and supplies and the risk of volatile or uncertain work orders, while paying them very low piece rates.

2 - City Policies/Practices and Informal Traders: Place of Work

In terms of place of work, there are two main groups of informal traders: those who vend on streets or in open-air markets (what organizations of street vendors, SEWA and WIEGO call “natural markets”) and those who trade from built markets. Both groups face risks associated with city policies and practices: but the type of risks vary significantly between the two groups. Street vendors face harassment, confiscation of goods, and evictions. Market traders face the risk of fires as well as other risks associated with little or no basic infrastructure services – water, sanitation, and electricity. These differences between the two groups are well illustrated by the findings from a 5-city study of informal traders summarized in the table below.

Problems Encountered by Informal Traders in Five Cities

	Accra	Ahmedabad	Durban	Lima	Nakuru	Total
Insecurity of vending site	6.71	67.76	49.31	60.14	42.22	45.33
Harassment	8.00	61.18	55.41	43.54	43.97	42.41
Confiscations	3.33	44.08	53.42	21.77	38.35	32.01
Evictions	7.33	63.16	44.90	17.36	27.35	32.39

Source: Roever 2014.

In Accra, the sample was comprised mainly of market traders who pay daily, weekly, monthly and yearly tolls and taxes to be able to trade in built markets. In the other four cities, the sample was comprised mainly of street vendors. In all of the cities, there are regulations and systems for licensing street vendors but local authorities do not issue enough licenses and penalize those who do not have one; and the police feel empowered to confiscate goods with impunity.

Another key variable among street vendors, with a gendered outcome, is the *type of product* sold: the 5-city study found that those who sell perishables (more often women) are more likely than those who sell durables (more often men) to have their goods confiscated or simply “taken” by the police and local officials (Roever and Chen 2014).

3 - City Policies/Practices and Waste Pickers: Status in Employment and Place of Work

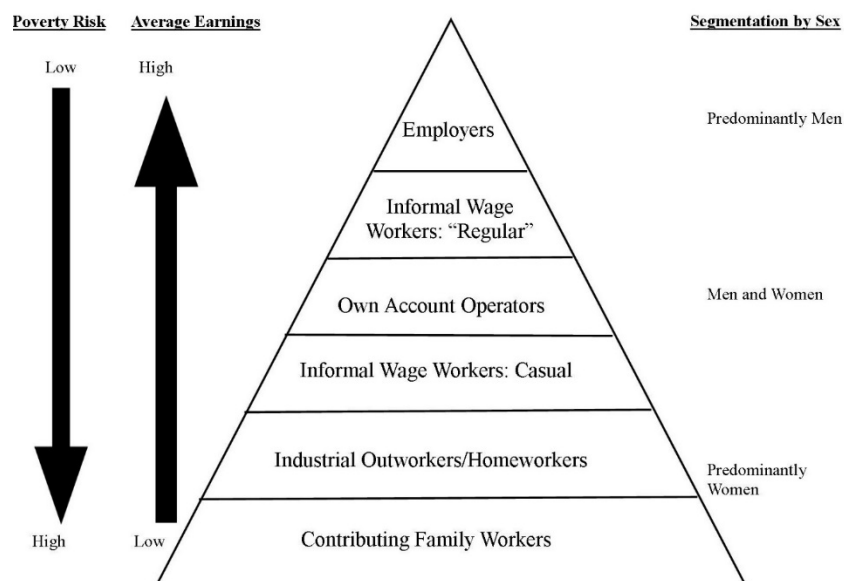
Through our research, WIEGO has analyzed the costs, risks and benefits of government policies and practices that impact on waste pickers by their status in employment (employer, employee, own account worker, member of cooperative) and place of work (streets, dumps or landfills, sorting warehouses). Most waste pickers are own account workers or members of cooperatives: a few (more so men than women) are employers; and a few (more so women than men) are employees. All groups of waste pickers in all locations mentioned two main negative driving forces relating to city governance; government policies and practices and lack/deterioration of basic infrastructure (for storage and sorting). With the exception of Belo Horizonte, where the waste pickers are well organized and have a formal partnership with city government, waste pickers in the other cities complained of harassment by local authorities. Those who work in dumps or landfills face the greatest occupational health risks while those who work in sorting warehouses face the least occupational health risks.

4 - Women and Men in Informal Employment: Status in Employment, Branches of Economic Activities and Place of Work

Informal employment is a greater source of non-agricultural employment for women than for men in three out of the six regions for which data are available: South Asia – 83 per cent of women workers and 82 per cent of men workers; Sub-Saharan Africa – 74 per cent and 61 per cent; Latin America and the Caribbean – 54 per cent and 48 per cent. In East and Southeast Asia the percentage is roughly the same (64 per cent of women workers and 65 per cent of men workers). Only in the Middle East and North Africa is informal employment a greater source of employment for men than for women (47 per cent of men workers and 35 per cent of women workers). Finally, it should be noted that, because in most countries more men than women are in the workforce, men generally comprise a greater share of informal employment than women (Vanek et al. 2014).

In 1998, with funding from the World Bank, WIEGO commissioned reviews of existing literature and statistics on the links between informal employment, poverty and gender by, respectively, S.V. Sethuraman and Jacques Charmes To summarize the research findings and statistical data presented in these reviews, I developed the following graphic (without the poverty risk arrow) to illustrate gender segmentation and gender gaps in earnings within the informal economy by status in employment. Over the years, as data and resources have become available, WIEGO has tested the segmentation model captured in this iconic infographic with national data from multiple countries: the model has stood the test of time and space. In 2004, for the 2005 edition of *Progress of the World's Women: Women. Work and Poverty* (Chen et al 2005) we commissioned analysis of national data that captured the average earnings and risk of being from a poor household of workers in the different segments: hence the earnings and poverty risk arrows.

Segmentation of the Informal Workforce by Status in Employment and Sex: Average Earnings and Risk of Being from a Poor Household



Source: Chen, et al. 2016.

What the data and the infographic show is that there is gender segmentation within informal employment by *status in employment*. In general, women informal workers are more likely to be self-employed than are men, the exception being Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Latin America, both women and men informal workers are split roughly equally between wage employment and self-employment. The self-employed can be further disaggregated into employers, own account operators, and unpaid contributing family workers. Employers comprise only between 2 and 9 per cent of non-agricultural informal employment, with the proportion being higher for men than women. Very few women in informal employment are employers: 0 per cent in South Asia, 1 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 2 per cent in Latin America/Caribbean, and 9 per cent in East/Southeast Asia. As with self-employment in general, women informal workers are more likely to be own account workers than men. The exception is South Asia in which own account workers comprise a larger proportion of men's non-agricultural informal employment than women's. This is because contributing family workers account for a particularly sizeable share of women's informal employment in South Asia. Contributing family workers are the second largest category of the self-employed comprising from 5 per cent of informal employment in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to 12 per cent in South Asia. The percentage of women contributing family workers is at least twice that of men in all regions except Eastern Europe and Central Asia where it is roughly the same. In the sub-regions of Asia it is three times greater (Vanek et al. 2014).

There is also gender segmentation within informal employment by *branches of economic activity*. Very few women work in informal construction and transportation activities, the one modest exception being female construction workers in South Asia. These two sectors are clearly male-dominated. Manufacturing accounts for an equal or greater share of women's informal employment than men's in all regions, except for Sub-Saharan Africa. By contrast, trading activities account for an equal or greater share of women's informal employment in Sub-Saharan Africa whereas men dominate in informal trade in the Middle East and North Africa and South Asia. Services other than trade and transportation (notably, domestic work) account for a larger share of women's employment than men's across all regions (Vanek et al. 2014).

Finally, there is gender segmentation within informal employment by *place of work*. Although the regional estimates do not include analysis by place of work, other recent statistical analyses indicate that women are over-represented in two forms of employment that take place in private homes: home-based work (in the home of the worker) and domestic work (in the home of the employer) (Chen and Raveendran 2014; Raveendran et al. 2013). Recent statistical analyses also indicate that women are less likely than men to be engaged in workshops or factories outside the home; but they are engaged alongside men in public spaces, including to varying degrees, depending on the country, in construction, street vending/market trade and waste picking (Chen and Raveendran 2014; ILO and WIEGO 2013).

4 - Occupational Health and Safety and Informal Workers: All Four Indicators

With regard to occupational injuries, a main obstacle to obtaining statistical data is that neither workers nor their injuries are properly reported: for example, the head-load porter who gets knocked over while crossing a busy street, the waste picker who gets cut by broken glass in amongst the garbage, or the industrial outworker packing firework crackers at home with gunpowder which ignites. But through our research (and our project activities), WIEGO and our

local partners have generated a credible body of evidence on the occupational health and safety risks of informal workers which suggests that the burden of occupational health hazards differs by status in employment, branch of economic activity, place of work and (therefore) by sex within the informal economy, as summarized below:

Informal workers face high health risks. They face relatively high exposure to general health risks because of where they live and work, often without adequate shelter, sanitation, water, or electricity – key social determinants of health. They also face occupational health risks due to what they do, where they work, and the arrangements of their work.

Status in employment, branch of economic activity and place of work have an impact on the health risks and needs of informal workers. Their status in employment places higher risks on specific groups of informal workers: for example, industrial outworkers (more likely to be women) are more likely to suffer injuries than factory workers doing similar work; and casual day laborers in the construction sector (more likely to be men in most countries –except India where large numbers of working poor women are in the construction sector, usually as unskilled manual laborers) are more likely to suffer injuries than regular employees in the construction sector. The branch of economic activity and place of work place higher risks on specific groups of informal workers: e.g. street vendors are more exposed to the elements, pollution and traffic accidents than market traders who are more exposed to fires; waste pickers who work in dumps are more exposed to injuries than waste pickers who collect waste from homes or streets.

Women informal workers tend to face greater health challenges than men informal workers. Women are more likely than men to be outworkers and contributing family workers working from home. In most sectors, except export garments, they are less likely than men to work in workshops or factories. In most regions, except South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, they are as likely as men to be engaged in street trade. They are more likely to be assigned the most menial tasks: e.g., in the waste recycling sector, women and children tend to be overrepresented among those who do the primary collection and sorting of waste. They are conditioned to assume the primary responsibility for caring for the young, elderly and ill members of the household. However, because they tend to work longer hours each day, combining paid and unpaid work, they have less time to access health services for themselves or to accompany young, old and sick members of the households to health facilities (Alfers 2009 and 2011, Lund and Naidoo 2017)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Indicators of Power – Collective Voice and Representation

Two other key indicators, central to WIEGOs research and work more generally, are not often captured in official statistics: namely, whether or not the informal worker is a member of an organization of informal workers and whether organizations of informal workers have effective representative voice (i.e. are invited to participate in policy-making and rule-setting processes). To illustrate the importance of this indicator, in our 5-city study of waste pickers, the city where the municipality has a long-standing formal partnership with organizations of waste pickers, Belo Horizonte (Brazil), is the city in which the lowest percentage of waste pickers reported the following problems: lack of access to waste, lack of access/high cost of infrastructure (notably workshops for sorting, storing and processing recyclable waste), unfair regulations, and

harassment (Dias 2011; Dias and Samson 2016).

Key Findings – Systemic Costs and Risks

The key finding of WIEGO's field research is that informal workers face several sources of *systemic costs and risks*, including:

1 Dominant Narratives which *stigmatize and penalize* informal workers and their livelihood activities as being *non-compliant* (i.e., evading registration & taxation); having *low productivity* (i.e., a drag on the economy); creating *pressure on public space*; and/or being associated with “*crime and grime*”.

2 Biased Policies & Laws which are often burdensome for or punitive towards informal units, activities and workers, including *commercial laws* which are biased towards formal firms with hired workers who operate in so-called “standard” workplaces (shops, factories, offices, hotels, restaurants); *sector laws* which are also biased towards formal firms; and *administrative laws* which are biased against informal activities.

3 Lack of Access to *public space* (to pursue livelihood activities); to *public services* at workplace (basic infrastructure and transport services); and *public procurement* (i.e. right to bid for public contracts

4 Lack of Legal Recognition & Right to Representation

In a 2015 paper entitled “The Costs of Informality to Informal Workers,” Sally Roever, my designated successor as WIEGO International Coordinator, identified four categories of costs borne by informal workers: a) *direct expenditures*; b) *downloaded costs* or costs imposed on or transferred to informal workers through unequal bargaining power and lack of contract enforcement and/or livelihood rights; c) *structural costs and constraints* or losses that result from systemic constraints on the ability of informal workers to work or to enhance their productivity; and d) *implied costs* or costs that further result from the previous categories of costs (Roever 2015).

Future WIEGO Research – Challenge and Dilemma

Research Team - WIEGO has a small research team, most of whom work part-time and have additional responsibilities within WIEGO. If resources were available, WIEGO would aim to build a team of researchers whose sole responsibility was research; and who would, in turn, build a network of researchers.

Research Priorities – WIEGO is committed to continuing to research the costs, risks and benefits of informal workers arising from both the systemic forces outlined above and the different approaches to formalization. During this 20th. Anniversary Research Conference, WIEGO hopes the participants will identify a set of priorities for future research on the informal economy, share what directions their own research on the informal economy is likely to take, and advise WIEGO on what our research priorities should be.

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