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WIEGO MBO Newsletter



A Newsletter for Membership-Based Organizations of Informal Workers

GREETINGS FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES!

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. We love to hear from you! If you have questions or comments, or would like to submit content for the next issue, please email us at wiego@wiego.org.

Meet Some Amazing Leaders



Elizabeth Adjei (top) & Florence Lushika (bottom) at the WIEGO General Assembly in Indonesia, November 2014

Photos by Patricia Carney



Candle-lighting ceremony for women leaders at WIEGO GA in Indonesia, November 2014
Photo by WIEGO



In November 2014, WIEGO held its 6th General Assembly (GA). The theme of this GA was “A Global Assembly of Women Leaders in the Informal Economy.” Participants at the GA included representatives of WIEGO member organizations (membership-based organizations of informal workers or MBOs). Many of these representatives were women leaders in their individual MBOs. These leaders have backgrounds in a range of occupations including street vending, agricultural work, waste picking and home-based work; they also have a range of experiences including organizing, advocacy and research. We were lucky to have the opportunity to interview a sampling of these women leaders, and we are grateful that they agreed to share their stories.

Cecilia Susiloretno was an activist and researcher for a variety of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. Through this work, she was involved in research about homeworkers since 1989 and in organizing women homeworkers since 1992. There was no organization or government office focused on helping homeworkers until, in 1995, Mitra Wanita Pekerja Rumahan Indonesia (MWPRI, now HomeNet Indonesia) was formed. Cecilia has been the National Coordinator of HomeNet Indonesia since 2006. Cecilia noted that it was very difficult for the women to go out and express their desire for rights as workers, and so her organization provides training for empowerment, capacity building and how to organize themselves. Cecilia’s organization, HomeNet Indonesia, was a hosting partner of this GA.

Charity Mandishona is the Women and Gender Coordinator for the

Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA). The organization, an affiliate of the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), was formed in 2002. ZCIEA’s membership covers many sectors, including vendors, small-scale miners, carpenters, welders and cross-border traders who import and sell goods from South Africa. ZCIEA’s work includes advocating for rights and social protection as well as “transforming informal economic activities into mainstream activities”. One important focus has been on rights-based training. A rights awareness manual has been developed, and paralegals have been trained to advocate for informal workers.

Elizabeth Adjei represents Informal Workers and Vendors Association of Ghana. After completing some of her education, Elizabeth had health problems that prevented her from furthering her studies, so she became a distributor of beverages in the informal sector. Then she became a cook in the food industry, working on her own. Elizabeth wanted to join an association, where she felt many voices together, within the food industry, would be heard. A friend led her to the Indigenous Caterers Association of Ghana, which became affiliated with StreetNet. Through StreetNet’s affiliation with WIEGO and in partnership with local government, Elizabeth and others from her association participated in workshops conducted by WIEGO, which covered topics on business and leadership skills and occupational health. Due to the high illiteracy rate among members (99%), prior to the workshops, members were unaware of hygiene practices and knew nothing about bookkeeping. Elizabeth says, “with the workshops,

we are enlightened, and things are up.” The biggest challenge now is micro financing. Current loan interest rates are often higher than profit margins and difficult to pay back. Elizabeth believes a workshop that would educate members on how to save money and set up petty loans among themselves would motivate and empower them to realize this possibility.

Florence Lushika is Deputy Secretary General of AZIEA (Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations). She has been with AZIEA since 2006. As a leader of AZIEA, Florence encourages and empowers women to be active as street vendors, market traders or organizers. Florence is proud of her organization’s literacy trainings. After women went through the training they could read and speak English. They could open bank accounts and sign, which they were unable to do before. A challenge faced with these trainings was to get women from their working place to another location for the training. The women feared they would lose their lot (the municipal council wouldn’t allow the organizers to enter the markets to do the trainings, fearing political affiliations). The trainings were scheduled at times when sales were slow – when people would not be passing through the market -- and a location was found within walking distance. Still, it was a big challenge because vendors feared losing their business. But for those who did attend the trainings much was gained, and they did not lose their space at the market. At WIEGO’s General Assembly, Florence was struck by the concept of the three V’s: Voice, Visibility and Validity. She sees women’s leadership as an important component of voice,

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Updates from WIEGO's individual members

Thanks to **Gisèle Yasmeen**, one of WIEGO's individual members, for sharing her news. **Gisèle Yasmeen** and **Narumol Nirathron** published a multimedia policy brief for WIEGO in the summer of 2014 which has inspired a similar initiative focused on Vancouver, Canada, in collaboration with the [Vancouver Women's Health Collective](#). Yasmeen and Nirathron's WIEGO policy brief "Vending in Public Space: The Case of Bangkok" is [available on the WIEGO website](#) and has embedded videos. Also, in October 2014, **Gisèle** was appointed Senior Fellow of the University of British Columbia's Institute of Asian Research.

We would love to hear from all members. Please write to us at wiego@wiego.org to share your news.

Home-based workers take the opportunity to meet at the General Assembly

A lunchtime meeting of home-based worker representatives and those working with home-based workers was hastily convened during the General Assembly. We were able to share brief reports on activities in South and South-East Asia, Africa, Latin America and East Europe. It was most encouraging to learn that home-based workers are becoming more visible globally. **Renana Jhabvala** gave a short history of organizing home-based workers and said that we had to think ahead. She posed an important question: should we be thinking again of building an international network, focus on building regional networks, or let things slowly develop? This question was further discussed in February 2015 at the first Global Conference on Home-based Workers in New Delhi. [More information is available on the WIEGO website.](#)

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research as a means to improve visibility, and the need to engage policymakers at the right time for validity.

Goma Devi Acharya Paudel was involved with farming and agricultural networks before joining the trade union, GEFONT (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions). Because of issues including non-payment or under-payment by employers to agricultural workers, Goma and her colleagues decided to connect with GEFONT. In addition to being the National Women's Committee Vice-President of GEFONT Nepal, Goma is also Vice President of an agricultural association, a farmers' union. Goma shared one of GEFONT's accomplishments. She explained that, when GEFONT was established, leadership included zero per cent women. Later they succeeded in ensuring that 33 per cent of all leadership are women. She also explained that all programs include at least 33 per cent female workers and that, in women's programs, at least 33 per cent of male workers should also participate. This helps everyone to share each other's expectations and problems.

Ip Pui Yu (Fish) started her career as an organizer for the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) in 1999. That year was very difficult as workers faced high levels of unemployment due to the economic recession. But this was also an opportunity for the union to build worker's skills because they had more time to participate in activities. Fish was involved in training domestic workers on issues of occupational health and services. In 2001 the Domestic Workers General Union was established with 600 founding members. By 2010 the Federation of Domestic Workers Union was formed uniting local and migrant domestic workers. "In the beginning I didn't plan to work for so long in the Union. I was young and I wanted new things. This work is very hard, and during economic recessions women workers are very tense. Domestic workers have immediate economic needs and a

reality of weak bargaining power, unstable work and very little pay is always in front of you." In the middle of all this, Fish found her inspiration in what she calls the generation of hope "when sisters get together you find strength and a louder voice in numbers". Today the domestic worker union has over 800 members and Fish remains active in its work.

Lourdes Gula is the National President and one of the founders of PATAMABA (Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal sa Pilipinas, Inc. or the National Network of Informal Workers in the Philippines). The organization was formed in 1991 as a grassroots organization run by rural women home-based workers. PATAMABA now has over 18,000 members nationwide, including women, men and youth. PATAMABA now also organizes other informal workers, including street vendors, construction workers and transport workers. PATAMABA helped to establish HomeNet Philippines and works to develop leaders and strengthen the capacity of members. It conducts research on good practices and brings home-based workers together for knowledge exchanges, especially around diversifying their livelihoods and improving incomes. One of PATAMABA's successes has been helping workers understand that they are workers and what their role is in society. This, Lourdes notes, is key to organizing.

Madalena Duarte and 27 other waste pickers formed a cooperative in the small city of Itaúna, Brazil, in 1999. After a year of meeting, they left the dump where hundreds of waste pickers had worked for years to try to improve their lives. One of their biggest challenges was convincing the mayor that waste pickers could handle the city's waste. "He thought it was impossible that waste pickers could become organized workers," she said. For two years, they worked with all kinds of trash until the mayor saw that they were capable workers. In 2002, they were contracted to collect separated recyclables in the downtown area. Madalena explained that the new system required outreach and environmental

education which has been successful because of the waste pickers' role. Since 2011, Madalena has been involved in the Gender and Waste project, a collaboration between WIEGO, the national movement of Brazilian waste pickers (MNCR), the federal university and other support organizations. She said working with WIEGO on the project brought the importance of this work to the international level. The project has made a difference within the national movement. "Now there are more women leaders in the movement," said Madalena. The women also formed a gender secretariat. Madalena said that "to be in solidarity with other women is what makes us strong."

Neeramol Sutipannapong is a home-based tailor who lives in a government housing project in Bangkok, Thailand. She has been doing home-based work for over 30 years. Faced with very low piece rates, she decided to start organizing some of the women in her community, training them in more advanced sewing skills. With her small organization, she began negotiating for higher piece rates with contractors but it was difficult. In the 1990s, her organization became a member of what is now HomeNet Thailand. She says that, since joining, she has more knowledge about informal workers, laws, legal issues and social protection and has gained advocacy skills. Neeramol also commented on HomeNet Thailand's successful work in advocating for the Universal Health Coverage scheme in 2001 and the Homeworkers Protection Act in 2010 and their work for social security for informal workers. Neeramol is currently a Committee member for HomeNet Thailand and a Board member of HomeNet South-East Asia.

Nuchnapha Bamrungra is a homemaker who lives in a small community in Khon Kaen, Thailand. She is the leader of a group of home-based workers producing fishing nets. Nuchnapha began producing fishing nets in 1994 after finishing primary school (there was not enough money to continue her studies). Although there were

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Zehra Khan at the WIEGO General Assembly in Indonesia, November 2014

Photo by Patricia Carney

WIEGO workshop and field visits in Nairobi, Kenya

Home-based workers met in Africa for the first time in August 2014.

Twenty-nine participants from home-based worker MBOs and support organizations attended a WIEGO workshop (organized and facilitated by WIEGO members Elaine Jones and Chris Bonner) and field visits in Nairobi, Kenya. The event was hosted by the World Fair Trade Organization-Africa (WFTO-AFRICA) and KEFAT (Kenya Federation for Alternative Trade). Home-based workers shared information, challenges, experiences and recommendations about organizing and organizations working with HBWs in Asia and Africa. For some African participants, this was the first time they recognized themselves as home-based workers. Participants also shared challenges and recommendations with each other. In addition to the workshop, participants attended field visits to Malembwa Women's Group, Machakos Cooperative Union and Bega Kwa Bega Self Help Group, all of whom impressed the workshop attendees. Participants also collaborated to plan for future work with home-based workers in Africa and for continued connections between the Asian and African groups.

Seminar on the Struggles and Gains of Home-Based Workers held in Pakistan

By Zehra Khan, General Secretary, HBWWF, Pakistan

On 8 December 2014, the Home Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF), Pakistan, organized a seminar on the "Struggle for the Rights of Home-Based Workers" in Gadap Town, Karachi, marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The seminar commemorated the struggle of its late members, Najma Khanam, Rehana Kausar, Abdus Salam Salam and Wahid Baloch. Homage was also paid to women all over the world, but especially to home-based women workers struggling against gender discrimination in all its various forms, including violence. In total, 468 home-based women workers from different sectors and parts of

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almost 200 families working to produce fishing nets, they worked mostly as individuals. Everyone had many expenses, including healthcare and children's education. Workers got low piece rates and faced health and safety risks because of lead in the nets. In 1994, Nuchnapa and other homeworkers formed a savings group to help members with expenses. In 1997, they joined HomeNet Thailand because of opportunities to learn from other workers and HomeNet's bargaining and negotiating power. Since then, working conditions have improved. About 10 years ago she wrote successful proposals to get support from Local Organization Administration for purchasing personal protection equipment (aprons, masks) and carts to transport lead materials from the factory. Five years ago she negotiated directly with the factory, convincing them to give work directly to workers (instead of to intermediaries), thereby raising rates from 8 to 13 baht per piece. Nuchnapa received an award recognizing her work as a woman informal worker at the provincial level. She also is an elected representative to the national Homeworker Committee.

Rosa Cumbe Carlos has been a vendor since she was a child, selling homemade sweets and popcorn

Karachi and Hyderabad attended the seminar. The program was presided over by Zehra Khan, General Secretary of the Home Based Women Workers Federation. Other speakers included Rafiq Baloch, Vice President of the Pakistan Workers Confederation; Nasir Mansoor, Deputy General Secretary of the National Trade Union Federation; Mr. Syed Abid of ILO, Karachi; Jameela A. Latif, General Secretary of the Home Based Women Bangle Workers Union; Shakeela Khan, Information Secretary for the HBWWF; and home-based worker members Zahida Mukhtiar, Jameela M. Hafeez, Shahbnam, Shamim Bano and Samina. During the seminar, the

near her house before going to school. Later, even while working at a textile factory by day and going to school at night, she continued to sew clothing that she would sell to her friends and colleagues. After getting married, she continued to work informally. She said "There was never anything missing at home because of this work." In 2003, Rosa was one of the five founding members of ASSOTSI (Associação dos Operadores Trabalhadores do Sector Informal), the street vendors' association of Mozambique. ASSOTSI is under the umbrella of a larger workers' union of Mozambique. When ASSOTSI started, there was only one province with a woman leader. But then the women started to join the leadership and now there are six women leaders in the country. She also noted that "We women are fighting for leadership. We want the same rights as men. We want to end discrimination. We speak a lot about gender." Currently, Rosa is president of ASSOTSI in her province, leading 3,000 members.

Zehra Khan is General Secretary of the Home-Based Women Workers Federation in Pakistan. It is the first-ever federation of Home-Based Workers in Pakistan. Zehra has been organizing home-based workers since 2004, beginning when she wrote her thesis on informal sector workers. She chose to work with the home-based workers because of the issues they faced: not receiving full

HBWWF made the following demands:

1. All home-based workers should be considered workers,
2. ILO convention 177 should be ratified
3. The Sindh Government should sign a policy for home based workers
4. All HBWs should be registered with social security
5. End all forms of violence against women
6. Women should have citizen rights equal to that of men

At the end of the program a token of appreciation was also presented to the active members of the federation. This seminar was written up in [One Pakistan](#) and [The International News](#).

payment, not getting paid on time, and earning low wages. These were issues that resonated with Zehra and connected her to the women, so she started meeting with them. Zehra works with home-based workers in garments (stitching, embroidery, zardosi – a form of metal embroidery often added to bridal wear). They work hard to improve wages, but even more importantly, to improve recognition of the workers: "We need recognition, as an equal, our identity," explains Zehra. One initial challenge Zehra and her organization faced was building trust between themselves and the workers. At first the workers were suspicious of their motives. But once they had many meetings with the women, discussing issues about exploitation, the women realized that the organization was dedicated to the workers' issues. So they began to listen and started coming to the organization for help. From this began the formation of home-based worker cooperatives in many locations.

All of the women interviewed reflected on what they had learned from the GA. They were grateful for the opportunity to meet leaders and workers from other sectors. Many expressed a deepened understanding of the importance of working together and using statistics, research and advocacy skills to continue to improve the situation for all informal workers.