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#InformalTalks Webinar 4

Organizing & mobilizing informal workers

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Why organising is central to the holistic approach for policies targeting the informal economy?

- Organising is key for financing
- Organising is key for extending social protection
- Organising is key for being taken into account as a player in the value chains
- Organising is key for gaining visibility and voice and having their rights recognised
- Organising is key for gaining self-esteem and confidence when facing public authorities

Organising does not start from scratch

- Many self-help groups exist since a long time among the vulnerable populations through which they exchange workforce (for instance for cropping in peasant societies) or they save their meagre daily receipts for further access to credit (tontines, merry-go-round)
- In other places, some kinds of cooperatives continue to exist that have been implemented for instance in rural areas in order to facilitate the delivery of fertilisers or other agricultural inputs and the outflow of crops
- Except in some situations where the creation of grassroots organisations is a fundamental starting point for domestic workers (for instance), in many other situations the action regarding organisation will therefore be a support to pre-existing forms of organisations in order to strengthen them, to dis-embed them from their possible blockages or from their lack of resources



Organising is key for financing

- Many community-based organisations are created and implemented in order to initiate saving and lending groups
- Pooling resources helps increasing access to financing
- They are the background upon which public actors and/or Civil Society Organisations can build broader policies towards delineating more ambitious strategies for supporting micro-businesses or cooperatives, or achieving universal health or social protection coverage, or more generally transitioning from the informal to the formal economy

Organising is key for extending social protection

- In the informal economy where most workers are self-employed community-based organisations gather into larger saving and lending groups
- A first step towards regular and adapted contribution to mutual funds ensuring health coverage and other risks that fit with the needs of populations



Organising is key for being taken into account as a player in the value chains

- Seizing opportunities in value chains requires from producers at the bottom of the chains they become organised
- Community-based organisations eventually supported by government actions or NGOs are generally the starting point towards increasing quantities collected and quality
- These are the required conditions to be in a better position to negotiate with intermediaries or multinationals firms in order to receive better prices and gain more room in the value chains

Organising is key for gaining visibility and voice and having their rights recognised

- Collective action is the origin and purpose of trade unions and employers' associations in the formal economy
- The informal economy operators and workers need to follow the footprints of their predecessors in the formal sector, who can selves help in this regard

Organising is key for gaining self-esteem and confidence when facing public authorities

- Not only numbers, but also self-confidence is necessary to gain voice and visibility
- One among recurrent difficulties encountered by populations dependent on the informal economy, especially women (but not only) is their shame when posing their problems or requests to the administration
- Organising is a means towards acquiring self-esteem and confidence, with life skills attached to behavioural experiences in public when organising collectively around the main issues faced by the community of belonging



Two levels of action

- A typical type of action toward organising informal workers refers to local or sectoral development projects – donor- or government-funded – that try to rely on or revitalise pre-existing self-help groups in order to help communities in self-financing or contributing to social protection schemes or more generally giving visibility and voice, confidence and self-esteem
- a major important one, which is illustrated by organisations such as SEWA or WIEGO, is the attempt to intervene at global (regional, national and international) and political levels in support of the recognition of informal workers rights. Examples of such actions refer to workers such as waste-pickers, domestic workers, street vendors and transport workers, in other words informal workers who are not geographically located in places where they can meet together and who are especially vulnerable.



Different forms of collective action

- Informal workers “are increasingly self-organizing or getting organized” through organisations such as unions, cooperatives, or associations engaged in:
 - bargaining
 - negotiating and advocacy
 - mobilization and campaigns
 - production and marketing
 - and mutual aid and self-help
- The objective is to increase voice collectively through organising and representation in policy-making, rule-setting, collective-bargaining or negotiating processes



Two major actors in organising the informal workers: SEWA and WIEGO (1/2)

- The Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) funded in 1970 as a set of cooperatives, was recognised as a trade union in 1983
- With today more than 2 million members SEWA is the largest trade union of informal workers in the world and pursues a joint strategy of
 - struggle (collective bargaining, negotiations, campaigns and advocacy)
 - and development in financial services (it is a major microfinance institution), social services, housing and basic infrastructure services,
 - and training and capacity building
- As a trade union SEWA struggled towards the adoption of the Convention on Home-based workers in 2008 and the Convention on domestic workers in 2011, and as a cooperative it is organised around 4 sources of security/insecurity: work, income, food and social security

Two major actors in organising the informal workers: SEWA and WIEGO (2/2)

- WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) was founded in 1997 with SEWA as one of its founding members
- It is an international network of membership-based organisations, activists, practitioners from development agencies, researchers, statisticians that focus on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy
- It aims at creating change by building capacity among informal worker organizations, expanding the knowledge base, and influencing local, national and international policies
- One of its main objectives has been to support the development of membership-based organizations (MBOs) – trade unions, cooperatives, and worker associations – that are democratic and representative, as well as national and international alliances and networks among which the main are the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF), HomeNet (for the home-based workers), StreetNet International (for the street vendors).



Good practice and lessons learned from the struggle of waste pickers of Bogota

- Recent privatization of public waste collection threatened the livelihoods of some 15,000 waste pickers in Bogota by granting exclusive contracts to private companies
- In response, the Association of Waste Pickers of Bogota (ARB), an umbrella association of cooperatives representing over 2,500 waste pickers, launched a legal campaign to allow waste pickers to continue to collect and recycle waste. A landmark victory was achieved in 2003 when the Constitutional Court ruled that the municipal government's tendering process had violated the basic rights of the waste-picking community. The court mandated that the cooperatives of waste pickers had a right to compete for the city tenders
- With the help of WIEGO and others, the ARB prepared a proposal, elements of which were adopted in the official proposal made by the district agency in charge of the city's public service
- The struggle continued because of vested interests in the private sector that have mounted a political campaign to remove the current Mayor of Bogotá. They argue that the public management of waste collection and the involvement of the recicladores undermine 'free competition' and are, therefore, illegal

Issues, Challenges and Counterparts in Collective Bargaining Campaigns (WIEGO)

Sector/group	Priority issues	Organizing challenges	Bargaining counterparts
Street, market vendors and hawkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right and space to vend • Facilities: storage, shelter, toilet, water • Protection against police harassment • Safety and security • Competition: protection against bad effects • Access to credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not regarded as workers by selves and others • Controlled by politicians, “mafia” • Fear of harassment by authorities, police • Competition amongst selves & formal sector • Time spent on organizing means loss of income • No forums for bargaining 	<p>Municipality: local economic development, health and safety, zoning</p> <p>National and municipal police</p> <p>Suppliers and buyers</p>
Home-based workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal income, benefits as factory workers • Identifying employer • End to exploitation by intermediaries • Access to regular work • Access to markets (own account) • Access to credit (own account) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolated in homes, invisible • Time-double burden of work and home care • Fear of losing work • Restrictions imposed by religion, culture • Children working • Unprotected by labour law or disguised status 	<p>Contractors</p> <p>Tripartite boards</p> <p>Suppliers & buyers</p>

The integrated project to support the empowerment of artisans in Côte d'Ivoire, a EU-funded project conducted by AVSI Foundation



- The project has put in place Savings and Community Solidarity Groups (GESCO) and, through these groups, collected initial amounts then weekly amounts arousing emulation between villages
- Despite the success of the approach, it would have been difficult however to reach the minimum amount necessary to create a mutual Fund for the handicrafts (weavers, potters, seamstresses, furniture makers, etc.)
- Too long delays would have disappointed the strong expectations and would have weakened the trust of the population in a context where previous failures have left traces
- Therefore AVSI suggested to contribute to various existing successful and efficient regional mutual funds of agricultural planters or other trades, and modulate the services according to the financial capacities of craftsmen and craftswomen: it is a flexible model that can be adapted according to the regional opportunities and is a preliminary step towards an independent mutual insurance for crafts.
- In this approach, AVSI is supported by the Support Programme for the mutual health insurance strategies (PASS) at the regional level of the WAEMU countries.



The experience of the Delegation for the Organisation of the Informal Sector (DOSI) in Togo

- Organisation of farmers-breeders-fishermen, motorcycle taxis, handicrafts and traders in mutual associations (often leaning on pre-existing cooperatives) that are vectors for capacity strengthening, acquisition of equipment and above all ensuring social protection
- The principle is that the acquisition of means of production (with credit) is submitted to the membership and to the payment of an insurance premium (or social contribution) to a mutual association ensuring health coverage and old age pension
- Once the credit is reimbursed, the social contribution continues to be reclaimed together with the membership fees. However as the sense of belonging to a mutual association takes time, it is necessary to attach the social contribution to another regular expenditure for a service or a good that the association provides to its members, for instance the seeds or the fertilisers for the farmers.

Production with training, an alternative for decent work and social inclusion, EU-funded project implemented by FAUTAPO, Bolivia



- To contribute to the socioeconomic empowerment of women and men, both young and adults, in situation of vulnerable employment in the municipalities of Cercado, Oruro department, and Potosi, Potosi department.
- To improve the productive, working and personal capacities of women and men self-employed or employed in small enterprises in the construction, food, engineering and textile sectors, by strengthening their capacities, consolidating the representative associations/organisation.



Methodology

The methodology was developed in the municipalities of Oruro and Potosì -Bolivia with people who already have their production units, that is, an area where the raw material is transformed, in the sectors of food, textiles, metalworking, construction.



Organizing informal workers

- Facilitating the registration process
- Access to social protection
- Networking among micro-enterprises
- Bargaining power



Conclusions (1/2)

- In this matter no one model fits all in terms of organizing informal workers
- It must be recognising that what is needed is:
 - 1) a change in mindsets of policy-makers to recognise and validate informal workers as real workers through or despite the various forms of employment relationships or arrangements, and
 - 2) change in laws, regulations and policies to protect and promote informal works and their livelihoods,
- Activists in support of these vulnerable populations have to rely on pre-existing forms of organisations at best, or to build a consciousness of shared interests and concerns among these various categories of informal workers through campaigns oriented toward the gain of denied rights: for instance the right to have access and make use of the public space for street vendors or the right to be recognised as workers according to the labour law for domestic workers



Conclusions (2/2)

- In many countries, there are such unregistered associations that function like cooperatives or trade unions but they find it difficult to register as such: organisational form follows organisational function
- Recent emphasis put on the Social and Solidarity Economy and social enterprises can provide the ways and means by which the transition from the informal to the formal economy can be achieved



Thank you

Questions & Answers

The views expressed in this webinar do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.





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