



StreetNet News

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StreetNet News is the newsletter of StreetNet International, an international federation formed to promote and protect the rights of street vendors. Address: N228 Diakonia Centre, 20 Diakonia Avenue, Durban 4001 South Africa. e-mail stnet@iafrica.com visit the website: www.streetnet.org.za

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Asian field visit

By Pat Horn, StreetNet International Co-ordinator

StreetNet's first field visit to Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka took place from 15th November to 8th December 2005. On the way I went to Pusan, Korea, at the invitation of our affiliate KOSC (Korean Street Vendors' Confederation) to address a workshop on "APEC and Poverty: Korean government's repression of the poor" that they had organised. There was also a rally to celebrate the 19th birthday of KOSC - attended by busloads of KOSC members. StreetNet Secretary, Elvis Chishala (from Zambia) had also been invited to attend these events, but he was denied a visa by the Korean government.

It was intended that my visit include a trip to Pakistan, but it had not been possible to make contact with organisations there beforehand. Instead, SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) Bharat organised a small programme in Delhi. I met leaders of vendors who had been relocated from behind the Red Fort, a historical area of Delhi. SEWA had negotiated alternative arrangements. I also met book vendors who have been selling books for many years at the Daranganj Book Bazaar, which is periodically stopped - but they always come back to the same spot.

NEPAL

StreetNet's affiliate NEST (Nepal Union of Street Vendors) was formed by GEFONT (General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions) after StreetNet's Asian regional seminar in Patna in 2002. They organise street vendors, market vendors and hawkers, and are now registered with the Labour Department. They have local committees in 25 of the 35 districts of Nepal, and membership has increased - 3 500 are paid up. They have a 25% quota for women's participation in the Central Committee of 15 delegates. I attended one area conference of NEST and visited street vendors in different areas around Kathmandu. At a meeting of 30 members of the NEST local area leadership, participants explained that the repressive political situation in Nepal has had a major impact on the situation of street vendors - many agreements with local authorities about street vendors' rights prior to the Palace coup have been ignored by the military regime. NEST local leadership are clearly playing an active role in addressing their members' problems in each area. GEFONT arranged for me to meet the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) who have a union in the commercial sector, NCSEF (Nepal Commercial and Self-Employed Workers Federation) - affiliated to the global union federation UNI (Union Network International). A sectoral joint meeting has been held, with both NEST and NCSEF, as part of the national trade union unity process.

BANGLADESH

StreetNet's affiliate SEU (Self-Employed Union) was formed in 2003 by the BFTUC (Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress) - one of 36 national trade union centres in Bangladesh. Because the laws of Bangladesh do not allow for unions in the informal economy, they had to register SEU as an association - although they are structured as a union. They have 2 875 paid-up members in 108 branches, consisting of street vendors, street food vendors, home tailors (who sell their products on the streets) and mobile kiosk vendors.

BFTUC are part of a joint programme with other ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) -affiliated trade union centres to organise the unorganised in the informal economy. I observed a course in Azanpur and the Mirpur areas of Dhaka. The trainers, from different BFTUC unions, had attended a basic training course for trainers. Participants included tea vendors, home tailors, workers in small garages, fruit vendors, goods vendors, fast food vendors, chicken vendors, cycle-ricksha drivers and goods-ricksha pullers.

The SEU branch office in Narayanganj took us to meet the Local Council Chairperson and Ward Commissioners - who indicated their willingness to co-operate with SEU. SEU also arranged for me to meet leaders of the Bangladesh Chinnamool Hawkers Association and the Newspaper Vendors' Union. They explained that the present Prime Minister had made good undertakings about the rights of street vendors when her party was in power in 1995 - but that they lost the next elections before these undertakings had been honoured. Now her party was back in power in a 4-party coalition, but those earlier undertakings were apparently no longer on the Prime Minister's agenda.

SRI LANKA

StreetNet's affiliate, the Sri Lanka StreetNet Alliance, is a newly-formed umbrella organisation which associations and also individual street vendors can join - still very small. Members of an association in Galle related how their stalls were destroyed by the tsunami. World Vision donated funds to construct new stalls, but the Urban Development Authority (UDA) demolished them and the vendors to court. UDA lost the case, and the High Court ordered them to build new stalls for the vendors. The General Secretary of the CMU (Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers Union) Bala Tampoe told us they are committed to organising all workers in the formal and informal economy. He offered CMU's assistance to the Sri Lanka StreetNet Alliance - as did the Siyath Foundation, which is a focal point for HomeNet Sri Lanka.

StreetNet's progress since international launch (2003 – 2005)

By Pat Horn, StreetNet International Co-ordinator

An evaluation of StreetNet was done at the end of 2005 in the form of a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, threats and Opportunities) analysis by staff members. The integration of responses to evaluation questionnaires from affiliates with the SWOT analysis told us the following.

STRENGTHS: StreetNet has a functioning democratic structure and a well-defined constituency. There are some strong affiliates with good organisational capacity, and there was some expansion in Latin America in 2005 when SINTEIN affiliated from Brazil. By the end of 2005 there were 20 affiliates in 18 countries.

1. ASSOTSI (Associação dos Operadores e Trabalhadores do Sector Informal) - Mocambique
2. AZIEA (Alliance for Zambian Informal Economy Associations)
3. CNTG (Confederation National de Travailleurs de Guinee) - Guinee
4. CNTS (Confederation National des Travailleurs du Senegal)
5. Eastern Cape Alliance of Street Vendors
Eastern Cape, South Africa
6. FEDEVAL (Federación Departamental de Vendedores Ambulantes de Lima y Callao) Peru
7. Ghana StreetNet Alliance
8. KASVIT (Kisumu Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders) - Kenya
9. Khathang Tema Baitso'okoli - Lesotho
10. KOSC (Korean Street Vendors Confederation) - South Korea
11. Malawi Union for the Informal Sector
12. NASVI (National Alliance of Street Vendors of India)
13. NEST (Nepal Union of Street Traders)
14. SEU (Self-Employed Union) - Bangladesh
15. SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association)
- India
16. SINTEIN (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores na Economia Informal) - Sao Paulo, Brasil
17. StreetNet Association of Sri Lanka
18. SYNAMAVAB-UNSTB - Benin
19. USYNVEDPID-CSPIB - Benin
20. ZCIEA (Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations)

TOTAL membership: 202 864 members

StreetNet enjoys a positive international reputation. There are clear financial and administrative guidelines, strictly and consistently implemented. Most planned activities were implemented - however, in some cases later than originally scheduled. Good leadership training in financial management has shown positive results. There are effective mechanisms in place facilitating the participation of women (eg: a 50% quota in leadership). Networking is good, providing international exposure and education for affiliates.

StreetNet has good access to information, and has helped develop the organisational capacity of some affiliates. As a result of improved responsiveness to battles being waged by our affiliates, international solidarity between affiliates has become a reality. The newsletter distribution system has improved. Further communication with affiliates is done through reports and internet. We have also, to some extent, been able to build the capacity of previously unorganised street vendors in Durban.

WEAKNESSES: StreetNet is dependent on donor funding - a cause of vulnerability. There is excessive dependence on the International Co-ordinator - and StreetNet continues to search for a suitable Assistant Co-ordinator. Affiliates do not always report promptly on their programme activities, implementation is sometimes delayed, and there is poor contact between affiliates in some regions. StreetNet's presence is

uneven in different affiliates' countries - being weaker in those where there is no representative on the International Council.

Other recognised weaknesses are the Anglophone bias against which the organisation constantly struggles, and lack of progress in forming a national alliance of street vendors in South Africa. The administrative systems are still inadequate for significantly expanded organisation. Persistent and unrealisable expectations of financial assistance on the part of some affiliates present an ongoing challenge.

OPPORTUNITIES: StreetNet's work presents possibilities of strengthening the organisation of workers in the informal economy as a whole. Horizontal links between StreetNet's affiliates can be strengthened through exchange visits, and monitoring and support for affiliates can be provided through field visits. StreetNet has the opportunity to establish affiliate-driven regional structures - and developing links in the SADC (South African Development Community) through SATUCC (Southern African Trade Union & Co-ordinating Council).

Through its women-led origins, StreetNet has the opportunity to initiate the development of significant women's leadership in the street vending sector. Good relationships with national trade unions and global union federations present further opportunities. There is an opportunity to establish an Urban Observatory-based system of tracking policy developments in relation to street vending in cities around the world. StreetNet also sees possibilities of making an impact on current notions of "World Class Cities" and of developing innovative Social Contracts regarding street vendor regulation.

THREATS: The greatest threat in the street vending sector is caused by an element of self-interest on the part of leadership, and conflicts within or between organisations. On the financial side, there is an ever-present threat of funding withdrawal (which can be brought on even in reaction to innocent factors such as underspending or delayed spending on country activities due to affiliates' capacity constraints).

Country projects completed in 2005

- Exchange visits took place between KOSC (Korea) and NASVI (National Alliance of Street Vendor Organisations of India) and SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) (India) in April and June 2005, and between AZIEA (Alliance for Zambian Informal Economy Associations) and ZCIEA (Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations) in September and December 2005.
- Launch of ASSOTSI (Mocambique) as a national organisation - with support of OTM national trade union centre - took place in October 2005.
- AZIEA (Zambia) and ZCIEA (Zimbabwe) participated in the Zimbabwe Social Forum in October 2005, including a discussion between Zambian and Zimbabwean Cross Border Traders and government officials from Immigration and Foreign Affairs departments.
- AZIEA and ZANAMA (the largest affiliate of AZIEA), held a workshop on service co-operatives - with prior preparation and technical assistance from

- ILO Cooperative Dept. It took place in Zambia in November 2005, attended by representatives from ZCIEA and the Malawi Union for the Informal Sector.
- Ghana StreetNet Alliance held a national capacity-building workshop in November 2005 after their delegates' conference where a new Executive Committee was elected.
- Malawi Union for the Informal Sector conducted a capacity-building workshop and subsequent local organising campaign with support of War on Want.

Union Network International (UNI) - StreetNet programme: This programme involves the following eight Francophone West African countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo - as well as one activity in Lesotho where both UNI and StreetNet have affiliates. The three-year programme started in April 2005 and goes on until March 2008. The International Co-ordinator and Administrator are involved in the implementation, as well as StreetNet affiliates in the countries concerned.

Public Services International (PSI) - StreetNet programme: In November 2005 a joint workshop was conducted in Sao Paulo, Brazil, involving StreetNet's affiliate SINTEIN and local PSI affiliates. CUT Sao Paulo assisted SINTEIN with the organisation and co-ordination with PSI. This followed a joint workshop in February 2005 in Zambia between StreetNet's affiliate AZIEA (and AZIEA's largest affiliate ZANAMA) and PSI's local government workers' union affiliate ZULAWU, which developed a joint platform of demands in relation to Zambian municipalities.

New areas of work in StreetNet

By Pat Horn, StreetNet International Co-ordinator

StreetNet will continue with the same types of activities which have been working well up to now, ie:

- field visits to familiarise ourselves with the situation of street vendors' organisations in different countries;
- exchange visits between StreetNet affiliates in different countries to learn from each others' experience;
- supporting processes of establishing national alliances of street vendors in countries where street vendors' organisations are not yet speaking with one voice;
- supporting capacity-building and negotiations skills training workshops for street vendors' leaders in StreetNet affiliates.

2006 - 2008 three-year plan

New regions: While we continue our work in Africa, Asia and Latin America, we have decided to start expanding into the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

Website development: The front page of the website has been modified. The following themes will run on the website during 2006:

- Women's Day;
- May Day;

- Latin America regional theme;
- Civil society and world trade - in preparation for World Social Forum 2007.

We will do a special website feature on child labour in the street vending sector on International Children's Day. An Urban Observatory to monitor and evaluate global urban developments and trends in the street vending sector of the informal economy, will also be developed if we can raise funds for this.

Social Security: We will work with WIEGO's Social Security programme. The first activity around the theme of social security will be exchange visits between SEWA and the Women's Department of CNTS (Senegal). Since we worked with the ILO-STEP office on the preparations for the ICC's African regional workshop in Dakar in October 2005, this laid the foundation for a working relationship which we hope to develop further.

Newsletter: Some of our affiliates have recommended that we increase the frequency of the Newsletter from six-monthly to quarterly. We will try to raise the necessary funds for this.

Leadership training: At last year's leadership workshop in Zambia, the main recommendation which emerged from our evaluation was to do less topics in more depth. We propose to do the following in 2006 with the International Council:

- Project management: Technical overview of various aspects including financial management.
- Political issues around world trade: In preparation for more informed participation in the World Social Forum.
- how world trade issues affect street vendors;
- how StreetNet should react;
- how these issues could be used to the advantage of street vendors, or for organising.

SATUCC Workshop: StreetNet and SATUCC (Southern African Trade Union & Co-ordinating Council) have agreed to convene a joint workshop for all the affiliates of SATUCC (14 altogether) and StreetNet in the SADC region in order to:

- promote the organisation of workers in the informal economy in the region;
- jointly explore ways of improving the labour standards of all workers in the region irrespective of sectors they are in;
- jointly explore the challenges for the trade union movement;
- sensitise trade union leadership to prioritise organising of workers in the informal economy, and to make human and financial resources available for implementation of such programmes.

Litigation activism: The following cases have so far presented themselves:

- Case against the Durban Metro Council by the Legal Resources Centre challenging the right to confiscate street vendors' goods and the constitutionality of Durban's Street Trade Bylaws in this regard (lodged in the Durban High Court on 22nd November 2005).

- Possible group action to defend Durban's Informal Economy Policy (this depends on having a sufficiently cohesive group of applicants).
- Appeal case in Bangladesh against an unfavourable ruling against street vendors (lodged in 2001 but still not come up for hearing).

We continue to be on the look-out for good litigation opportunities, and will circulate a memorandum to affiliates to look out for suitable cases for litigation. We will follow up with NASVI to find out about progress in legislating in line with the new National Policy on Street Vending. In 2007 we will conduct an international legal workshop.

Policy work and training: We will remain open to react to demands for this kind of work. This programme will therefore depend on what kinds of requests we get.

World Social Forum 2007: We will attend WSF 2007 (which will be held in Nairobi, Kenya) with a substantial StreetNet delegation, with the aim of organising events designed to raise the awareness of social movements about street vendors and other workers in the informal economy, their organisation and representation, and alliance-building between workers' organisations and social movements. We will need to do this jointly with partner organisations. During 2006 we will approach various organisations about the possibility of working together on this.

International Campaigns

World Class Cities Campaign: to challenge notions of 'world class cities' which exclude the poor and drive street vendors out of work, whenever cities start to prepare to host big international events such as Olympic Games, World Cup match series, NAM or CHOGM conferences, etc. The idea is to launch the campaign and operationalise it in any country where an international event is coming up and the country is preparing to attack the livelihoods of street vendors. During the course of 2006 we will launch the South African component of StreetNet's World Class Cities Campaign at a national street vendors' meeting on what is going to happen to street vendors in preparation for the FIFA World Cup in 2010.

New Street Vendors' Code/Declaration: to update and improve on the Bellagio Declaration which was drafted at the first international meeting on street vendors, a participatory campaign will be undertaken involving all our affiliates and other street vendors' organisations sending in their views as to what should go into an international Street Vendors' Code or Declaration.

Monitoring and evaluation: In their reports to the International Council each year, affiliates will report on the following aspects of their work, which provides information for internal evaluation of our affiliates' progress:

- Membership;
- Leadership;
- Elections (whether these are up to date);
- Payment of subscriptions;
- Activities;
- Results of their relationship to StreetNet.

PSI-StreetNet Workshop in São Paulo

CUT (SP), the São Paulo region of the Brasil trade union centre, StreetNet affiliate SINTEIN, and CONTRACS CUT (union of service and commercial workers) held a seminar on informal economy workers on 9th and 10th November 2005. The seminar was the first of its kind to focus on the informal economy and brought formal and informal trade union structures together to discuss issues of common concern.

The seminar was co-hosted by the global union federation (PSI) Public Services International and StreetNet International and was held at the office of SINTEIN in São Paulo.

At the seminar issues billed for discussion were firstly, the informal economy and the role of the state and the challenges these present to the CUT/SP as a national trade union centre. Secondly, alternative ways of organising that are appropriate to the informal economy workers and the work conditions in the sector were on the agenda for discussion.

Objectives

- To improve the organisational capacity and instill discipline in the informal sector.
- To intensify the demand for legislation and regulation specifically for the informal economy.
- To invest in skills development and capacity building.

CUT/SP president, Edilson De Paula Oliviera noted that unemployment was the main cause of the informal economy. He reiterated that CUT is committed to the organisation of the informal economy. It was noted that 96% of informal economy workers do not receive social security. Legislation that is sensitive to the needs of family and individual micro-enterprises is needed and such legislation needs to have mechanisms that arrive at appropriate taxation for informal economy workers. Micro-lending institutions needs to be more flexible to meet the needs of the workers in the informal sector. The identity of the informal economy worker is repressed and the sector is marginalised. The informal economy is growing and making a contribution to economic growth.

Resolutions

- Unionise workers in the informal economy.
- Create more forums for discussion and interaction among informal economy workers, and improve leadership and the strength of the union leaders.
- Push for economic policies which are transparent.
- Full participation in the challenges facing the informal sector.
- Create home-based networks of organising home-based workers.
- Work together with the public and private sector and civil society to identify ways that informal economy work conditions can be improved.

Documentation on the informal economy is to be presented by CUT/SP to the municipal administration to the São Paulo province and the federal government. The next CUT Brasil annual congress in 2006 will have the theme informal economy. (Source: Report by Elida Cruz - PSI and CUT/SP)

International Co-ordinator deported from Zimbabwe

StreetNet International Co-ordinator Pat Horn was deported from Zimbabwe after being invited by StreetNet affiliate ZCIEA and the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to facilitate a session at the ZCTU Silver School of Labour on Decent Work and the Informal Economy. The School was to launch a colloquium for formal and informal workers in Zimbabwe. ZCTU said police had tried to stop the Silver School from commencing on the first day. Police then insisted on sitting through the activities but ZCTU denied them that chance. They spent the whole day seated outside the Silver School venue. ZCTU said that the deportation of Ms Horn was similar to the action carried out on a delegation from COSATU in February 2005.

Senegal ILO/ICC workshop - Social Protection and the Informal Economy

By Chris Bonner, WIEGO, and Pat Horn, StreetNet International Co-ordinator

The workshop, "Combining our Efforts: Organising for Decent Work in the Informal Economy: The Way out of Poverty", was held from 25-27 October 2005, in Dakar, Senegal. It was funded mainly by the ILO, and planned as a joint ICC (International Co-ordinating Committee on organising workers in the informal economy), and ILO (International Labour Organisation) effort to bring together unions/worker organisations that are organising informal workers to exchange experiences, identify issues and develop organising strategies, with a special focus on social protection for informal workers.

The objectives of this regional workshop were:

- to better understand the lack, gaps and needs for the workers in the informal economy of social protection;
- to develop strategies to intensify organisation of workers in the informal economy;
- to discuss the role of workers' organisations to improve social protection in the informal economy;
- to discuss future co-ordination between organisations of workers in the informal economy, and develop mechanisms for such co-ordination;
- to build links between Anglophone and Francophone countries in order to maximise the sharing of experiences and organising traditions between them in organising the informal economy;
- to identify existing and new partnerships and alliances;
- to collect inputs for the organisers' manual which is being prepared as an ICC project;
- regional preparation for the next international conference to be convened by the ICC in Ghana.

Participants

National union federations affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the WCL (World Congress of Labour) attended. The majority of delegates were from Francophone West African countries - Senegal, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Benin and Burkina Faso. English speaking participants from Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia attended.

The ICC was represented by Pat Horn, Kofi Asemoah (Ghana TUC), Linus Ukamba (Nigeria Labour Congress) and Mirai Chatterjee (SEWA). Chris Bonner and Françoise Carre from WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising) also attended.

The ILO was represented by STEP (Social Protection) and ACTRAV (Workers' Bureau) representatives from the Dakar regional office as well as the ILO's Geneva office. There were representatives from OATUU (Organisation of African Trade Unions), Afro-ICFTU and ODESTA (Africa Regional Office WCL).

The conference was opened by Senegal's Minister of Public Administration, Labour, Employment and Professional Organisations, Adame Sall; Executive Director of Social Protection of the ILO, Assane Diop; and Director of ILO sub-regional office for Sahel in Dakar, Ould Sidi. Abdoulaye Diallo, consultant to the ILO and formerly with ACTRAV for many years, was the overall facilitator.

Programme

ILO Project on organising in the informal economy: ILO and DANIDA (Danish Development Agency) have conducted a project across four countries - Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and Senegal, going on to Phase Two in Niger and Burkina Faso. It was reported that in Niger there are now five trade unions of informal workers and a confederation of informal economy workers in which three federations are represented. In Senegal, three federations have people responsible for informal workers. In Burkina Faso there are 70 000 members in five unions of informal workers. Training modules have been developed for this project.

Survey of organising in the informal economy: Prior to the workshop, a set of questions was sent out to the participating organisations. Twenty six organisations responded - 22 federations/unions, 18 of which were French speaking.

The consolidated report provided an interesting overview of what was happening across the region. For example, 20 unions/federations reported that they had set up bodies/ structures for organising informal workers.

Social Protection: Presentations were given by:

- SEWA (Mirai Chatterjee);
- Rakawin Lee (on Thailand);
- ILO-STEP in the region, focusing on the mutuals as the main tool (500 systems in Francophone Africa with a million beneficiaries) and a new scheme

- for transport workers (formal/informal) in Senegal - ILO/union partnership project;
- A network of credit and savings mutuals in Senegal (PAMECAS);
- National Council for Rural Dialogue, Senegal, working with agricultural/fisheries' workers in Senegal to put in place social protection for the rural population - especially women.

Organising workers in the informal economy: After an overview presentation by Kofi Asemoah, Ghana TUC, participants divided into discussion groups. The session was engaging, brought out a lot of information on what was happening, and the obstacles to organising and the opportunities.

Conclusions and final recommendations

- More than 80% of workers are in the informal economy. Unions have a duty to organise mandates of solidarity;
- The needs of workers in the informal economy provide an opportunity for development of trade unions;
- Civil society organisations have already begun to organise. Unions can amplify what is being done by others;
- Organising is a must - with or without unions;
- Unions have experience in organising but not in the informal economy. They should use their formal economy experience and adapt to the informal economy;
- Unions need new methods, strategies and attitudes;
- Unions/federations need a special committee, department or desk;
- Unions need to define their role in organising informal workers - collective bargaining, social dialogue, knowledge of labour law and, social protection methods;
- They should play an active role in advocacy and as information conduits with governments and parliaments at national, local and provincial levels.

Programme of action

The following programme of action was proposed by participants:

- Produce a brochure based on the workshop;
- Produce a manual on organising in the informal economy for unions and workers;
- Have information available at the ILC (International Labour Conference) 2006;
- Hold a side event at the ILC 2006;
- Work on advocacy and monitoring and keep regional trade unions informed.

Interestingly, this programme is very similar to the one developed by participants at the first international ICC meeting in Ahmedabad in December 2003 and the follow-up meeting in Geneva in June 2004. Organised workers are on the same track when it comes to being serious about combining efforts to extend the organisation of workers in the informal economy.

National launch of ASSOTSI, Mozambique

StreetNet's Mozambique affiliate ASSOTSI (Associação dos Operadores E Trabalhadores do Sector Informal) held its national launch on 13th and 14th October, 2005.

Speakers at the launch were Mozambique's vice-Minister of Finance, vice-Minister of Labour, the Governor of Maputo province, Governor of Matola province and the Councillor for Matola Municipality responsible for economic development.

The Governor of Maputo acknowledged the role of the informal economy in the province and the country as a whole and encouraged the creation of unions that will improve the quality of the lives of workers in the informal economy. The Minister of Finance, in his address, said that the informal sector has an important role to play in the development of the country.

The conference agenda included an analysis of the informal economy and the organisation of workers; the presentation of ASSOTSI's draft constitution for approval; discussion of ASSOTSI's five-year programme and elections.

The Conference resolved to:

- Create space for dialogue with the local authority;
- Obtain solutions to the problems of hygiene, security, environment and the identification of local space suitable for informal sector activities;
- Develop micro-credit funding;
- Develop capacity-building and skills in the management of small business;
- Create mechanisms which will facilitate the inclusion of the informal economy workers in the national social security plan;
- Take steps to create mechanisms for social assistance and social solidarity;
- Develop a progressive way in which people will be encouraged to enter the informal sector.

The OTM was responsible for the formation of ASSOTSI and at the national launch delegates approved the decision that ASSOTSI become an independent affiliate of the trade union centre. (Source: Report by OTM)

NEWS BRIEFS

ZCIEA visit to Zambia

StreetNet affiliates ZCIEA (Zimbabwe) and AZIEA (Zambia) held exchange visits to learn about the organisation of street and market vendors and the problems that they face. The ZCIEA delegation met with many of AZIEA's affiliate structures and a journey was made to Mansa Province. Visits were made to Chisokonye Market, Choboliya Market, COMESA Market, Kowari Market and Soweto Market.

AZIEA visit to Zimbabwe

During the AZIEA field visit to Zimbabwe, meetings were held with ZCIEA member organisations and informal traders at their workplaces in Mutare, Harare, Masvingo,

Bulawayo, Gweru and Sanyati. The Zambians heard about the effects of the recent Government Operation Murambatsvina from informal traders who have been displaced. They met local authorities at Chitungwiza and Gweru, where an attempt is being made by the local authority to rebuild shelters for informal traders. (Source: Reports by ZCIEA and AZIEA)

Southern Africa Social Forum - Zimbabwe

The theme of the Forum was 'Nothing for us without us'. AZIEA and ZCIEA attended the forum. AZIEA presented the Zambian experience of globalisation and the need for informal economy organisation. A Tribunal on Cross Border Trading was held with panellists from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland and Zambia. The Zambian delegation was invited by the Zimbabwean Cross Border Traders (ZCIEA) to attend a meeting with government officials to find ways to remove barriers and discrimination. The discussion focussed on the harassment faced by cross border traders - confiscation of goods, bribery and double payments. Associations resolved to demand transparency from immigration departments and establishment of a system of identification to reduce this harassment (Identity Cards). (Source: ZCIEA Report)

Malawi: Street vendors face forced eviction in April

President Bingu wa Mutharika has given street vendors until 15th April to vacate the streets. Street vendors fought running battles with police, who opened fire on them. Forty were arrested. Street vendors accused the government of failing to listen to their grievances. Government plans to move street vendors to flea markets in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu in the north. Davies Chimombo, General Secretary of MUFIS (Malawi Union for Informal Economy), reports that MUFIS met with local government representatives in Lilongwe to discuss the crisis on 8th February 2006. "At the meeting an agreement was reached that it was paramount for dialogue between parties concerned to be a continuous process", Chimombo said. (Source: E-mail from Davies Chimombo 9/03/2006; IRIN Report, 15/02/2006).

India: Call for May 11th to be respected as National Vendors' Martyr Day

SEWA and NASVI have announced that May 11th is to be marked as National Vendor's Martyr Day in India. The call follows the suicides of street vendors in several cities in protest over eviction and loss of the means to earn a living. Local governments ignored the requests that were made for an alternative place where they could continue to trade as before and in despair they took their own lives. (Source: e-mail from SEWA 14/3/2006)

Retrenched organiser starts cooperative

By Thandiwe Xulu

In 2004 when SEWU (Self-Employed Women's Union) was closing down I had to think which type of work I could do as I no longer had a job. The skill I have is dressmaking but now that most people are selling clothes and pinafores there is a lot of competition in doing that. I had worked as an organiser for SEWU in Durban, south Africa, and this skill as an organiser was what turned out to be useful in bringing my vision - to find a way to overcome poverty - to fruition.

I called a meeting with the women who are working with me in a gardening project in my neighbourhood Engonyameni, near Umlazi, south of Durban, and I told them my vision.

My vision was a poultry project. We discussed my vision and I tried to convince them and show the importance of working together as a co-operative.

They agreed with my idea firstly because in our area there are no butcheries. Secondly, most of the women in my area are not working and this project opens up the opportunity of getting income.

We started to contribute money so that we could buy chickens. We started by contributing R100 per member and we had R1000 for our capital. I donated a house for the chickens. All members agreed to clean the chicken coop.

Solving our first problem

Our first problem we faced in our project was that our chickens were dying every day. We had a meeting and decided to seek

advice from the Department of Agriculture. Then I phoned Phindile from the Dept of Agriculture and she helped us a lot by giving us training on poultry farming. After that our chicken project was successful.

We started to market our business in our community and people came to buy our chickens, but business was very slow. To discuss what could be done, a meeting was called.

Our solution was that we needed to go to the nearest town, Umlazi to market our business. We met with Hadebe, a big businessman in all sections at Umlazi who sells chickens.

We negotiated with Hadebe and he agreed that if he needs chickens then he will come and buy from us. We signed an agreement with him. When our chickens are ready to sell, I phone him and he comes and buys from us.

In the beginning of July 2005, we had a meeting with a social worker from the Department of Social Welfare. Her advice was to write an application to the Government for funding. She helped us to write the application as well.

At the end of November we heard that our request was approved by the Department of Welfare. The co-operative got a grant for R250 000.00 to build a chicken house, to purchase chickens and chicken feed.

Forming the poultry co-operative

We were advised to form one group because there are three different groups in Engonyameni area. Some also do gardening, while our group is doing only poultry.

We agreed that we need to form one group as a Co-operative. We called our project SILWA NOBUPHOFU Co-Operative, which means FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY. We are very happy about the project's progress after the news of the grant.

Next, we approached our iNduna (headman) to request land for our co-operative. He sent us to the Inkosi (Chief) who agreed for the co-operative to be given a piece of land. We are now waiting for the Durban Municipality to survey our site.

I believe that my vision turned out well because now 35 people have an opportunity to earn an income.

Durban street barbers launch Siyagunda Association

By Gaby Bikombo - Chairperson of the Siyagunda Association

On Sunday 18th December 2005, the organisation of street barbers in KwaZulu-Natal called Siyagunda Association was launched. This launch was the realisation of an idea that existed in some of us for more than six years but suffered a lack of interest from most street barbers who did not see the need of an organisation.

Then in 2004 came the Ethekewini Municipality decision to reorganise informal trade through its business support unit. A number of meetings were organised to explain that each one of us street barbers would have to go through a process to obtain a vending permit. One of problems we faced was the exclusion of all those who do not possess a South African identity document. This affected us seriously as most of the street barbers here are refugees mainly from Central Africa.

Then started the crackdown on all those without vending permits, amongst others, street-barbers. With the support of StreetNet and the Durban Legal Resources Centre, two of us decided to launch an urgent High Court action against the Ethekewini Municipality in May 2005 after being evicted from our trading sites and losing most of our trading equipment in the police impounding process.

Even though we lost the court case, which challenged the legality of street trader evictions, it helped to create publicity for our problems as it received media coverage. We learnt that it is not legal to deny refugees who have obtained citizenship rights trade permits. Ironically, while the court case was being heard, the business support unit began to issue permits to some of us who had previously been excluded and evicted.

However, Ethekewini Municipality is still to recognise us street barbers as traders engaged in a legitimate economic activity.

Another important observation from the court case is that if it was brought by an organisation or an organised group of traders, the verdict could be different from the one our two colleagues received.

With these precedents behind us, the threat to our occupation became obvious to the eyes of all Durban street barbers. The idea of creating an association was welcomed by most street barbers in the Central Business District (CBD) and surrounding areas.

Siyagunda Association operates in the whole province of KwaZulu-Natal and has branches in Pietermaritzburg, Empangeni and Escourt and is in the process of opening new branches in Eshowe, Ulundi and other cities in the province, because we believe that we share the same challenges regardless of the city where we are based. Although most of our members in Durban are refugees, Siyagunda Association also has South African members and is open to all street barbers working in this province regardless of their nationality.

A number of resolutions were passed during our launch meeting which include:

- Negotiations with the municipality in order to reach a win-win solution;
- Registration of the association;
- Organisation of branches and opening of new branches in KwaZulu-Natal;
- Understand and educate our members about health issues associated with haircutting.