



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

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About WIEGO

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. It does so by highlighting the size, composition, characteristics, and contribution of the informal economy through improved statistics and research; by helping to strengthen membership-based organizations of informal workers; and by promoting policy dialogues and processes that include representatives of informal worker organizations.

WIEGO's Contribution to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

Employment – more precisely, “decent work” – is a key pathway to poverty reduction. Most of the world’s poor, especially in developing countries, are working. There are 630 million working poor, of whom the majority are women (ILO 2009). They cannot work their way out of poverty because the vast majority earn their living in the informal economy, where average earnings are low and costs and risks are high.

Workers who are informally employed are an integral component of cities around the world. They work as construction workers, domestic workers, waste pickers, home-based workers and street vendors. Informal employment is particularly significant in *developing* countries, where it comprises one half to three quarters of non-agricultural employment: specifically, 48 per cent in North Africa; 51 per cent in Latin America; 65 per cent in Asia; and 72 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. If South Africa is excluded, the share of informal employment in non-agricultural employment rises to 78 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. If comparable data were available for other countries in South Asia in addition to India, the regional average for Asia would likely be much higher. If informal employment in agriculture is included, as is done in some countries, the proportion of informal employment greatly increases: from 83 per cent of *non-agricultural* employment to 93 per cent of *total* employment in India; from 55 to 62 per cent in Mexico; and from 28 to 34 per cent in South Africa.

Principle 5 from the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states: “eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development”.

Rio+20 Conference in 2012 provides an opportunity to advance global efforts towards securing economic rights for informal workers, particularly women, and to address the root causes of low incomes and high risks in the informal economy, such as:

- lack of productive resources and economic opportunities
- lack of economic rights – as workers and producers
- lack of social protection
- lack of organization and representation

Today, after 19 years since the Earth Summit, the informally employed face *new* or *intensified* threats such as the far-reaching impacts of the global economic recession on the livelihoods of the working poor, the rapid pace of urbanization and the regulatory policies that exclude the working poor and undermine their livelihood. This troubling context requires renewed creativity, energy and information sharing.

We therefore propose that outcomes focus on

- Address poverty and gender inequality
- Promote social economic inclusion of informal workers
- Include informal workers and their organizations in policy dialogue discussions.
- Strengthen the voice and organized leadership of informal workers
- Sensitize policy makers to the fact that the vast majority of those living in poverty/extreme poverty in their countries are actually working poor, and, as such, have special needs to reduce exposure to risks, while at the same time creating potential to overcome poverty by advocating for policy and practice change that can improve their lives.
- Create spaces for dialogue, exchange and mutual learning among policy makers and informal economy actors to foster more responsive policies for the working poor.

WIEGO believes that all policy and process discussions regarding eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development must include worker representatives themselves, specifically informal workers who make up the majority of workers in developing countries. Informal workers and their organizations must be included in solutions for eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods if the implementation of those solutions are meant to be successful.

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