



April – December 2020

# Mobilizing during the Covid-19 pandemic: Nothing for Us, without Us!

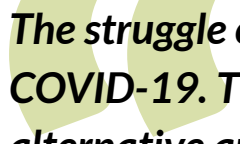
**Streetnet International**

<http://streetnet.org.za/>

Photo credit to: Uthman Kaisi,  
StreetNet Youth Reporter on the Ground

# Content

Greetings to all our members	3
Why are we sharing this report?	5
What challenges were we experiencing before the Covid-19 crisis?	6
What happened when Covid-19 hit all of us?	6
What did we do to take on the challenges of Covid-19?	9
What did SNI affiliates do?	9
What did StreetNet International do?	16
Where to from here?	20
What do we need to do to get the future we want?	21



***The struggle continues! We cannot give up, sit back, and blame COVID-19. There must be a way around it. We have to find alternative approaches to regain all the advances that we made.***

Lorraine Sibanda, StreetNet International President

## **Greetings to all our members**

We are sharing this report with all our members who are street traders, market vendors, hawkers and cross-border traders. Our workplace is wherever we sell – it could be in a market place, at a taxi rank, or just on the side of the road. If we lose one single day of work, that represents the loss of a very basic income to make ends meet. It's not an easy life – often the police harass us or they confiscate or destroy our goods because they say we're trading in the wrong place.

We thought life couldn't become more difficult. But then in early 2020 Covid-19 hit us all. Borders couldn't stop the virus, armies couldn't stop it. The virus crept in like an unwelcome guest and soon many of our loved ones and friends fell ill and some even passed away.

Governments closed our markets, stopped all workers from going to work, forced everyone to stay at home. They hoped that would stop the virus from spreading. But it didn't. Even if we worked during the lockdown and tried to sell on the streets, there was no-one to buy. We had no income, we were forced to fall back on our savings, many of us had to sell our belongings to survive. Across the world people started saying, 'We will die of hunger, not the virus'.

# Who is StreetNet International (SNI) and its affiliates?

StreetNet International, with an office located in Durban, South Africa, represents over 690 000 street vendors, informal market vendors and hawkers, including informal cross-border traders in over 50 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Eastern Europe.

Our 56 [affiliates](#) are usually not recognized by governments so mostly members are not covered by labour laws and scarcely receive social and health protection coverage in various countries.

***Every single day for an informal trader without work makes a big difference. Every single day for a street vendor is a loss of a very basic income to make ends meet. Therefore, in order to simply survive, the vendors still go to the streets and sell as they can't afford to close their activity and at the same time, they are exposed to a big danger which can cost their life.***

StreetNet statement 24 March 2020 - <http://streetnet.org.za/2020/03/24/streetnet-international-statement-in-response-to-covid-19/>

# Why are we sharing this report?

Covid-19 has made life more difficult for us all. But our members have not given up. In this report we are sharing:

- Stories of how street traders in different parts of the world have coped with the pandemic
- The lessons learnt from surviving the pandemic
- How our affiliates worked with governments and other organizations to try and help street traders mobilize and move forward during the pandemic.

We hope this document can be used to strengthen our organizations and others like ours. Share this information with other informal economy workers like domestic workers or waste pickers, or those who work from home to sell in informal markets. They suffer the same hardships as us.

Let's join our voices with them, only if we become more visible and loud, will the authorities hear us and respond to our concerns.

If we haven't included your victory here, please tell us about it so we can share with our Brothers and Sisters across the world.

E-mail to [media@streetnet.org.za](mailto:media@streetnet.org.za)

# What challenges were we experiencing before the Covid-19 crisis?

**Before Covid-19 hit us:**

- Authorities and others continued to harass, intimidate, and threaten us at our workplaces
- We were still struggling to get access to public space and infrastructure to run our businesses
- There was still no social protection like unemployment pay, maternity pay, sick pay, health protection or a legal framework to protect informal economy workers like us
- We were battling to be recognised and there were few regulations that protected us as informal economy workers.

## What happened when Covid-19 hit all of us?

As infection rates soared across the world, governments took measures like shutdowns and lockdowns to slow the spread of the virus. These measures were usually abrupt and caused huge harm to all informal traders. The well-being of many families was put at risk.

**Lockdowns and shutdowns meant No work – No income – No food.**

No trade made it very hard for our members to put food on the table. Moreover, when trade was allowed again, in some towns where infection rates were high, street vendors were blamed for the infections.



### **Inadequate skills to adapt to the sudden crisis.**

We lacked crucial skills like knowing how to protect ourselves and our customers from the virus, how to move our businesses online and we didn't have the gadgets and knowledge to communicate with each other virtually.

### **No recognition of informal economy workers, no data on informal economy workers and an absence/lack of inclusive social protection systems.**

In most countries, governments don't 'see' informal economy workers. They never sit down at the table with us. They only recognize workers who are formally employed and those that pay taxes. Despite the fact that particularly informal traders contribute a lot to their national and local economies through different indirect taxes and fees payments. So, when governments promised measures to mitigate the effects of Covid-19, such as handouts, food parcels and other social protection measures, they often never included our members.

### **Persistent harassment and violence in some countries because of enforcing Covid-19 regulations.**

Often the perpetrators were municipal authorities and police. Stress on businesses strained relationships with those of us who work for others.

### **Closure of borders stopped cross-border trade.**

These closures threatened the livelihoods of many of us who rely on crossing borders to earn an income.

### **Forced to borrow or sell possessions.**

With no work, we couldn't settle loans or pay rent, school fees, or other bills. Many had to borrow more; our loans and interest repayments increased.

## **Businesses suffered.**

Many of us are now earning less than before as the economy has slowed down. Some of us have lost our small businesses and have not been able to restart them.

## **Depression, anxiety, more violence at home.**

To see our families suffering, going hungry made many of us depressed. It put a strain on our relationships at home and many women experienced more violence at the hands of their partners.



***[Each vendor had] to make a horrible choice... To go to work and to be exposed to the risk or to see how the family members are starving.***

Oksana Abboud, International Coordinator, StreetNet International

## **More pressure on women.**

Our businesses were shut down, schools were closed, many of our women found that we were spending more and more time looking after the home and our family doing domestic care work.

And when we got back to work, schools were still closed. We had to find somewhere for our kids to go, take them with us to work, or stay at home and look after our kids and not work.



# What did we do to take on the challenges of Covid-19?

Although the situation was very tough, we didn't sit back and give up. Below we detail what SNI affiliates across the world did and share many inspiring stories. You can find more stories on the StreetNet website [www.streetnet.org.za](http://www.streetnet.org.za)

## What did SNI affiliates do?

In all four continents, we immediately started taking actions.

### 1) Secured the survival of our members

#### **Delivered food packages, hygiene supplies and PPEs**

The priority was to ensure that all vendors were able to survive, especially those who could not trade. So, we mobilized across the world to deliver food packages, hygiene supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE). Whether relying on the solidarity of partner trade unions or crowdfunding, we made sure our members knew that no one would be left behind! From New York City to Burkina Faso to India, our members were always in the frontlines.

## Made the plight of street vendors visible

We regularly engaged with the media and decision-makers so that the plight of street vendors could not be ignored. We routinely released press statements about new policies and denounced situations of harassment and violence. We made the plight of street vendors visible by, for example, speaking about the situation in news media in South Africa, engaging in social media in Nigeria or releasing press statements in Zimbabwe.

## Became agents of public health

Once markets were slowly allowed to reopen, we became agents of public health. From Sierra Leone to El Salvador, street vendors were active to ensure public markets were safe for all. We delivered training about proper hygiene and sanitation, and even disinfected markets ourselves in many countries.



## Myanmar

Street vendors across the world were creative and found ways to make trading safe for consumers and traders in public markets

[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



## 2) Made sure we had a seat at the table

After securing the survival of our members, **advocacy became a priority**. We needed new social protection policies and new schemes that could support street vendors. From supporting universal basic income policies to promoting access to health care, we were adamant to get a seat at the table. There we set about securing support for street vendors from authorities and others. Many of us secured food parcels, medical care for our members and some even won financial support for informal economy workers, like in South Africa, Brazil and the USA.



### Guatemala

Our members from FENTRAVIG in Guatemala secured a seat at the table to negotiate with their authorities to support street vendors

[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)



## Supported self-sufficiency

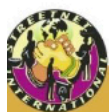
Not knowing how long the pandemic would last, we also started to consider alternative activities to generate income. From investing in cooperatives to even rice-farming projects, we were concerned with self-sufficiency and resilience. Whenever possible, we also financed our members to restart their small businesses.



Informal economy workers (mostly women) from CNTS in Senegal who had lost their jobs because of Covid-19 acquired land and started a pilot project to farm rice

***We all worked so hard during the pandemic! Learning from the examples of our affiliates, we devised Best Practices briefs highlighting major accomplishments.***

Here are a few examples:



## StreetNet International

### COVID-19 BEST PRACTICES

### TACKLING COVID-19 EFFECTS ON INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKERS

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF CNTS (SENEGAL)

The National Confederation of Senegalese Workers (CNTS) has been able to claim their rightful role as interlocutors of informal economy workers, and is therefore directly involved in designing and implementing policies which affect informal traders:

## NEGOTIATION



- CNTS engages with **national media** to speak on matters related to informal economy workers, thus placing the rights of informal traders and others firmly in the agenda;
- CNTS takes into consideration the **concerns of cross-border traders** in their discussions with the State about **transforming the informal economy**;
- CNTS regularly participates at the **High Council of Social Dialogue**, directly engaging with decision-makers;
- CNTS advocates for the rights informal economy workers to the Ministry of Commerce and their work on the economic **national recovery planning**.
- CNTS works in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce and with SMEs, Ministry of Local Authorities and Planning to find **decent work for street and market vendors and artisans**. CNTS also negotiates with the Delegation for Fast Entrepreneurship (DER) to finance structural projects of traders at the national level.



- Seeing that many women had lost their source of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CNTS proposed an initiative to generate employment.

As an alternative to COVID-19, informal workers acquired 6 hectares of land in the Fatick region, where many women were impacted, to develop **a pilot project of rice farming to create jobs and ensure food security**.

Because they needed funds to hire experts, buy resources, equipment and seeds and prepare the land, **25 members (mostly women) contributed 50000 CFA each one to finance the project**.

## SUPPORTING WOMEN

This experience illustrates the importance of proactive measures taken by affiliates at national and local levels to tackle an emergency and socio-economic threat such as Covid-19 and its effects, safeguarding the health and survival of members/masses whilst pursuing their livelihoods.

#### CNTS

Maison des Travailleurs Keur Madia Quartier  
Cerf Volant Dakar, Senegal  
cnts@orange.sn

#### StreetNet International

Durban, South Africa  
coordinator@streetnet.org.za  
accounts@streetnet.org.za

[www.streetnet.org.za](http://www.streetnet.org.za)

@StreetNetInternational  
 @Streetnet1





**COVID-19  
BEST PRACTICES**

**StreetNet International**

**MARKET MANAGEMENT**



## **FESTIVES (El Salvador)**



**JOINT MANAGEMENT  
OF MARKETS BY TRADERS  
WITH MUNICIPAL AND  
GOVERNMENT  
AUTHORITIES IS  
ESSENTIAL TO  
SAFEGUARD LIVELIHOODS  
OF STREET VENDORS**



### **HOW DID THEY DO IT?**

- During the lockdown, **StreetNet affiliate FESTIVES** washed and disinfected markets
- They installed **personal disinfection stations** in markets
- In partnership with governmental and municipal authorities, they developed **capacity-building sessions about how to wash hands correctly**
- In partnership with municipal authorities, they implemented **medical care**
- In partnership with governmental and municipal authorities, they **delivered food packages to vendors**
- FESTIVES also provided **financial support to members and non-members during lockdown**
- They implemented **Mobile Markets** with municipal authorities
- They delivered **COVID-19 Prevention Kits to own account workers**

#### **FOLLOW FESTIVES**

Federacion sindical festives  
 @prensafestives

#### **FOLLOW STREETNET INTERNATIONAL**

@StreetNetInternational [www.streetnet.org.za](http://www.streetnet.org.za)  
 @Streetnet1

Share with us what you did so we can share with others.

Reach out to us via e-mail [media@streetnet.org.za](mailto:media@streetnet.org.za)



# StreetNet International

## COVID-19 TACKLING COVID-19 BEST PRACTICES EFFECTS ON INFORMAL ECONOMY WORKERS

When the COVID-19 crisis hit, Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations [ZCIEA] developed series of initiatives;



### AWARENESS

- ZCIEA Developed **disaster preparedness strategy** on COVID-19 which was shared to all members;
- Conducted awareness campaigns on the reality of COVID-19 via social media platforms and also on radios.
- Developed **5 000 information posters and flyers on COVID-19 sensitisation** which were distributed across 42 territories
- ZCIEA provided **cash transfer support to 3 500 members (1987 women and 1513 men) across 42 territories during lockdown.**

### PROTECTION

- ZCIEA provided and distributed PPEs (Sanitizers, face masks, latex gloves, Infra-red thermometers and Awareness Information posters to a total of 5050 members from 42 Territories. 2750 women and 2300 men received sanitizers, masks and gloves to self protect from COVID-19. gave 16 territories infrared thermometers to use at market places.
- 27 ZCIEA members (20 women, 7 men) from 20 territories received virtual training on how to design and offer online training to others using whatsapp, webinars. Out of that virtual training ZCIEA is conducting 2 pilot online trainings on violence and harassment and a Convention 190 online study circle.



### ADVOCACY

- Successfully lobbied the Government of Zimbabwe to give a rental reprieve on informal traders during the lockdown.
- ZCIEA took government to High court to stop demolitions of informal workers structures and allow them go back to work with preservation to safety conditions. The 2 court applications were dismissed but on the ground demolitions were stopped and a few days later President Emmerson Mnangagwa announced re-opening of the informal sector with condition of registration.



- Published **5 Press Statements on the effects of Lockdown and COVID-19** to the informal economy workers.
- ZCIEA in partnership with other informal economy associations (Bulawayo Vendors and Traders Association (BVTA), Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET), Women Alliance in Business Association of Zimbabwe (WABAZ), Zimbabwe Cross Border Traders Association of Zimbabwe (ZCBTA) hosted **Informal Economy Advocacy Forum on Registration Post COVID-19 on the 21ST OF September 2020** where ZCIEA and its partners officially handed over National POLICY Framework for the Informal Economy

- 19 Memorandums of Understanding were signed with local authorities after distribution of PPEs to our members in the communities.

### PARTNERSHIP

- 20 market places were disinfected and community sensitisation was done in partnership with local authorities for safe working environment for the informal traders and their market places.
- ZCIEA conducted engagement meetings in Chivhu, Gweru, Gwanda and Masvingo on partnership in the fight against COVID-19 and the has the following results: (1) Masvingo Council has offered a place for us to partner in building a new market place; (2) Gwanda Council has prioritised 289 ZCIEA members in the allocation of market places; (3) Kariba Town Council made ZCIEA kariba leadership team a contact point for all informal economy developmental issues in Kariba including members registration on the new market under construction; (4) Chikomba District Council (Chivhu) offered ZCIEA a commercial stand to build a working structure for members.



#### ZCIEA

7 Beal Road, Belvedere Harare,  
Zimbabwe  
info@zciea.org.zw

#### StreetNet International

Durban, South Africa  
coordinator@streetnet.org.za  
accounts@streetnet.org.za

www.streetnet.org.za

@StreetNetInternational  
 @Streetnet1



## What did StreetNet International do?

**We urged governments across the world to support informal economy workers at all levels. We wanted them to:**

- introduce measures and resources to keep all workers and their incomes safe
- provide universal health care and a basic emergency living cash grant to all informal economy workers regardless of nationality and residency status
- exempt all informal economy workers and the most vulnerable from having to pay water, electricity bills etc. during the Covid-19 crisis.

**We brainstormed with allies/partners like [WIEGO](#), [HomeNet International](#) (HNI) (an international organization of home-based workers), the [Global Alliance of Waste Pickers](#) (Global Rec) and the [International Domestic Workers Federation](#) (IDWF) to find solutions that could be useful to all informal economy workers.**

We launched the **'Two Billion Strong Campaign'** together with our allies/ partners in May 2020. 'The economy cannot recover without us' was our message.

Other key messages were:

- **Nothing for us without us** – Covid-19 is an opportunity to change things. Authorities should ensure that informal economy workers are included in decision-making processes that directly affect them
- **Do no harm** – no more harassment, bribery, forced evictions and demolition of workers' assets
- **See the transformation** – together let's find a new model of work that is equitable, redistributive and recognizes and values the contributions of all forms of work.

**We provided practical advice** to affiliates on how affiliates' members could resume work safely through the Covid-19 pandemic.

**We provided communication equipment** (computers, smartphones, airtime, internet bundles) and access to internet and online platforms so that meetings could be held virtually to make them safer from Covid-19. All this helped to improve the tracking of affiliates' activities.

**We built the internal operational capacity of StreetNet staff on:**

- how to run crowdfunding campaigns, so the StreetNet team members could develop online crowdfunding training for all StreetNet affiliates
- social protection, law and informality, new urban policies, informal economy work
- key issues affecting members during Covid-19 crisis.

We shared Best Practice Briefs and Summarized Guidelines for street vendor organizations related to advocacy, health, solidarity and social protection



The infographic features a purple and yellow color scheme. At the top left is the StreetNet International logo. The main title 'StreetNet International' is in yellow, followed by 'COVID-19 BEST PRACTICES' in white on a yellow background, and 'CROWDFUNDING' in white on a purple background. Below this is 'STREET VENDOR PROJECT (NEW YORK, USA)' in white. A yellow vertical line separates the left and right sections. On the left, text in yellow and purple states: 'SINCE MARCH 2020, THEY HAVE RAISED \$152,486 TO SUPPORT STREET VENDORS!'. Below this is 'HOW DID THEY DO IT?' in purple, with a small icon of a hand holding a heart. On the right, a list of five bullet points in purple describes their strategy. At the bottom, two purple boxes provide social media and website information for both the Street Vendor Project and StreetNet International.

**StreetNet International**  
**COVID-19 BEST PRACTICES** **CROWDFUNDING**  
**STREET VENDOR PROJECT**  
**(NEW YORK, USA)**

**SINCE MARCH 2020, THEY HAVE RAISED \$152,486 TO SUPPORT STREET VENDORS!**

**HOW DID THEY DO IT?**

- Started with a **realistic goal**: help 100 people. But soon the donations exceeded that goal and it was raised;
- Shared **personal stories about individuals** and explained how street vendors were impacted by the pandemic in a personal and engaging way;
- **Rallied their networks** and encouraged donors to be active in sharing and contributing to the campaign;
- Explained **what the money was used for**, tried to gather data and provide information;
- Kept **talking about the campaign at every chance they got**, especially with the media.

**FOLLOW STREET VENDOR PROJECT**  
f @StreetVendorProject www.streetvendor.org  
t @VendorPower

**FOLLOW STREETNET INTERNATIONAL**  
f @StreetNetInternational www.streetnet.org.za  
t @Streetnet1

For more details see:

<http://streetnet.org.za/covid-19/best-practices-and-guidelines/>

**We provided capacity building training online** for affiliates using experts from WIEGO and other international expert agencies as trainers, from issues related to sustainability and important advocacy instruments, such as the New Urban Agenda, SDGs and ILO Conventions and Recommendations.

**We provided regular information updates on Covid-19 effects** that included responses from affiliates, national governments and other institutions like the ILO, WHO, ITUC and its structures. It shared strategies of experiences of SNI members. Official statements [can be found here](#). [Developed and shared Podcasts can be tracked here](#). We also shared motivational messages and stayed in a permanent communication to support each other on a regular basis at all operational levels.

**We provided regular online updates of the situation of affiliates across the globe** so that information could be shared easily, which included:

- Affiliate membership and gender breakdown data
- Details about when members started to resume work and difficulties they faced
- Effects and impact of lockdown restrictions on our members.

# Where to from here?

## StreetNet's Guiding Document on Economic Recovery Plans post-Covid

StreetNet has drawn up a guiding document<sup>2</sup> on what should be included in governments' Economic Recovery Plans in post-COVID-19 pandemic times.

We say we need a new model of work and production. This new model must treat everyone equally and redistribute the wealth so that inequality is reduced. It must recognize and value all forms of work.

**The transformation to achieve this model must begin now!!**

Governments' Covid-19 recovery plans must also focus on supporting informal economy workers to gradually transition to the formal economy, respecting their rights, in line with ILO Recommendation 204 which covers the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy.

***COVID-19 has impoverished the workers, they do not have the means to work. The issue of social protection is also crucial because there are health costs that are not covered by any institution. These workers are suffering. We must also work on women empowerment, so that these women can be independent.***

Angélique Kipulu Katani

Member-Auditor of StreetNet Executive Committee

2. StreetNet International guiding document on building Economic Recovery Plans in post-COVID-19 pandemic times.

We need long-term investments to rebuild economies. The understanding must be that informal economy workers, especially women, sustain households and communities. These informal economies are central to the rebuilding of local value chains and require a guarantee that decent work standards will be enforced in all sectors.

## What do we need to do to get the future we want?

Each of us has a task to grow our organizations because only united we are stronger. And unity gives us the voice and the power to negotiate and push for what we want.

**Remember – informal economy workers are many, we need our seat at the negotiating table**

Research on informal economy workers shows that:

**\* 61% of all workers globally** are informally employed (2 billion workers). (ILO 2018)

**\* 90% of all workers in developing countries, 67% in emerging economies and 18% in developed economies** are informal economy workers.

(Figures quoted in a Wiego/IDRC webinar on 13 July 2021 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g1EXHeAfjU>)

## At local level we must:

- **mobilize and organize** informal economy workers to build our collective power; promote unity among informal economy workers, and among traders in particular.
- **be visible** – We must show the public and the media who we are and what we do, such as:
  - running public awareness campaigns e.g. a campaign to show how street vendors are being agents of public health (disinfecting markets, packaging goods, awareness sessions on proper hygiene, providing sanitising stations etc.).
- **being visible** will help us participate in public discussions where we can demand recognition and discuss and review all policies that affect us like:
  - access to public spaces
  - regulations that promote vulnerable workers
  - social protection schemes
  - the right to the city
  - the implementation of the NUA
- **forge economic ties** by creating and supporting cooperatives, self-help groups or any other types of social solidarity economy
- **help members acquire the necessary technological know-how** to sell online and do contactless money transactions and keep members updated as and when updates happen.



## At regional level we must:

- mobilize and organize and engage within regions and across regions to share best practices and to learn from one other.

## At national level we must:

- advocate for recognition and a voice, for a seat at the table where we can discuss and review all policies that affect us, such as:
  - access to public spaces as working place
  - regulations that promote vulnerable workers
  - extended/universal social protection schemes and health care
  - the right to the city
  - the implementation of the NUA
  - the ratification and implementation of ILO's Recommendation 202, 204, and Convention 190 by our Governments (if not already ratified)

## What is the New Urban Agenda (NUA)

The NUA was adopted by national governments at the United Nations in 2016. It sets out guidelines that governments should follow so they can achieve sustainable urban development until 2036.

### Three principles guide governments:

1. Leave no one behind, ensure urban equity and eradicate poverty
2. Achieve sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all
3. Foster ecological and resilient cities and human settlements

## What are these ILO Recommendations and Conventions?

### Recommendation 202

It provides guidance to countries that are members of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on how to build a comprehensive social security system, which has a life-cycle approach.

### Recommendation 204

It includes 12 guiding principles to support the formalization of the informal economy, promote the economic inclusion of workers, recognize the fundamental rights of all workers, foster an entrepreneurial spirit and contribute to Decent Work, social dialogue and civic participation.

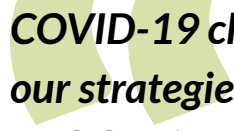
### Convention 190

Recognises the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

prioritise gender-sensitive assessments. We must plan, implement, monitor and evaluate all our organizations' interventions to make sure they are effective

liaise with international donors and like-minded organizations so that they support interventions that get results for our members and informal economy workers generally.

This is a long list of Things to do and it's not going to be easy but together we can do it. In the words of our Vice-President Alberto Santana:



***COVID-19 changed the world. And we must also change and adapt our strategies. The pandemic changed how we live and the priorities for labor issues. So, the next step must be to re-think our plans to effectively support informal economy workers.***

Alberto Santana, StreetNet Vice-President