



# StreetNet International

## ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

Influencing Decision Makers to Defend and Promote Street and Market Vendors' Rights







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# Introduction

Welcome to StreetNet International's Advocacy Toolkit.

**This material aims to support street and market vendor leaders who want to improve their strategies for fighting for their rights.**

It can be used by local leaders seeking to influence communities and cities; by national leaders aiming to change national legislation and policies; by leaders representing street and market vendors at the regional level, for example, towards political blocs like the African Union, CELAC, ASEAN, European Union, etc.; and it can be used by international leadership in multilateral spaces such as the International Labor Organization - ILO, the United Nations - UN and so on, to promote and defend street and market vendors' rights.

This material is intended for StreetNet members, and is a user-friendly resource that can be used whenever necessary to guide, support, and inspire our leaders.

Throughout this toolkit, we will talk about why we do advocacy, how to represent and lead our constituency, and how to advocate for street vendors' rights in a participatory, grassroots-oriented, effective, and strategic manner, offering tools to improve your advocacy work.

**We hope you make good use of this material, and that you always remember StreetNet's main motto:**

**Nothing for us without us!**



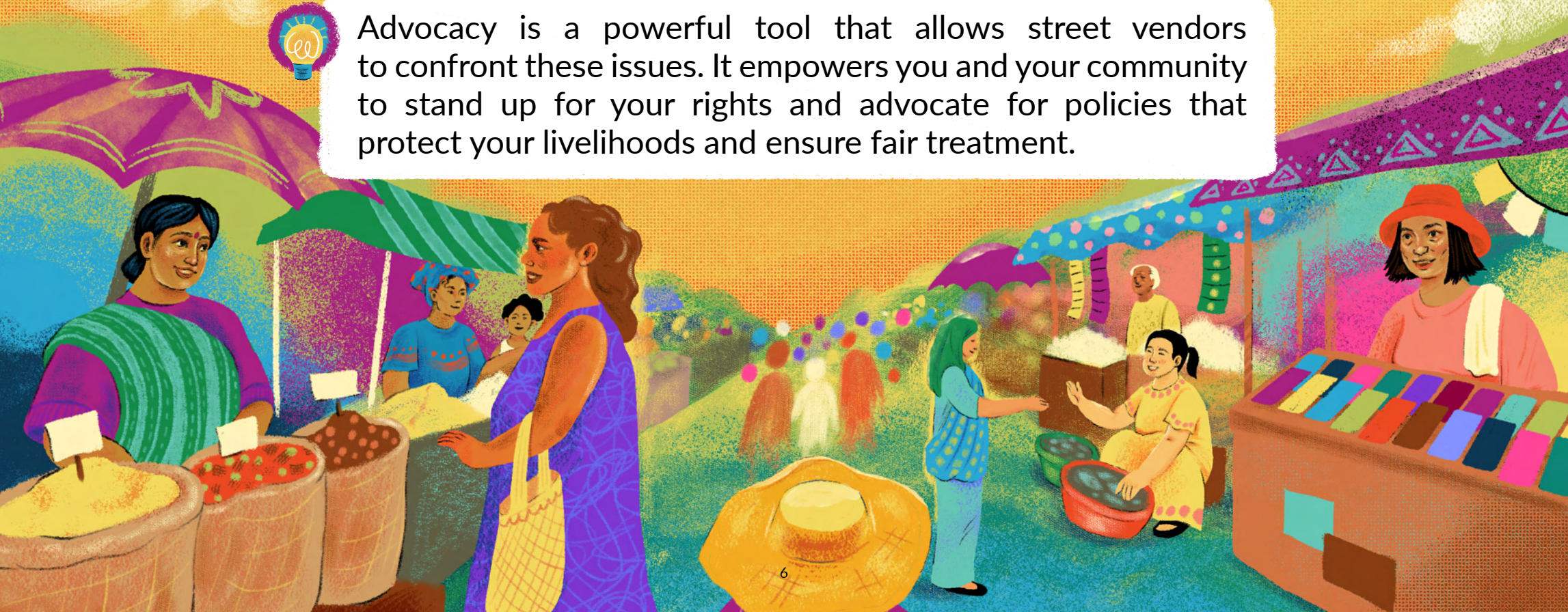
# Why Advocacy?

**Street and market vendors and hawkers are essential to the fabric of our communities,** providing vital goods and services to local populations while supporting their families and livelihoods.

However, street vendors often face significant challenges that threaten their ability to work freely and safely. From violence and harassment by authorities or the public to the confiscation of goods and the lack of secure, safe workplaces and conditions, the barriers are many. These challenges make it difficult for vendors to sustain their businesses and maintain their well-being.



Advocacy is a powerful tool that allows street vendors to confront these issues. It empowers you and your community to stand up for your rights and advocate for policies that protect your livelihoods and ensure fair treatment.



Engaging in advocacy work is about actively participating in the political processes that shape the policies, laws, and decisions that directly impact your livelihood and your community. It is about raising your voice to ensure that street vendors are heard, recognized, and respected in the decision-making processes that matter most. **It is to embody the representation entrusted to you and act effectively.** Through advocacy, street vendors can influence government policies, practices and laws for safer working environments, and demand their rights be respected.

Advocacy work involves raising awareness, building support, and pursuing collective action and strategic communication to ensure your demand reaches policymakers, and thus creating change— in the hope of influencing their decisions. **Advocacy can take many forms: organizing protests, public campaigns, participating in meetings with decision-makers, lobbying, writing petitions, or using the media to highlight issues. Whatever the method, the goal is always the same—creating positive change that benefits the community.**

The importance of advocacy lies in its ability to **challenge unjust systems and bring about lasting change.** Without people understanding themselves as citizens, subjects of rights, and working to ensure that public policies reflect their interests and needs, there is no democracy.

**Advocating for rights is an integral part of the functioning of democratic systems.** People are expected by rulers to organize and petition for what they need and demand. Governments are elected representatives whose role is to listen to the clamor of society, and advocacy is the means by which this happens. Unfortunately, people often do not know the ways to go about advocacy. But they do exist.

This toolkit is designed to **guide you through the process of advocacy and provide practical tools, strategies, and resources for making your voice heard.** Whether you are just beginning your advocacy journey or looking to strengthen your efforts, this material will help you navigate the political landscape, build strong alliances, and implement different tactics to advocate for the changes you wish to see.

It is time to take action and shape the policies that affect your life and work. Through advocacy, we can ensure that street and market vendors' rights are respected and protected.



**We do advocacy so that issues faced by street vendors—such as unsafe working conditions, harassment/unfair treatment and lack of work rights—can be addressed.**



**By engaging in advocacy, communities gain the power to influence decisions that directly affect their livelihood and future.**



**You can help create a more just environment for yourself and others, standing up for street and market vendors to be recognized, respected, and protected.**

# What is Advocacy?



Advocacy can take many forms, but it is usually an activity that consists of<sup>1</sup>:

### **INFLUENCE THOSE IN POWER**

and make decision-makers aware of their responsibility to defend the rights of the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed. Encourages accountability and is capable of adjusting power relations.

### **SPEAK OUT AND COMMUNICATE,**

presenting a clear message based on sound evidence, aimed at those who have the capacity to bring about change.

### **EMPOWER THOSE WHO HAVE NO POWER,**

so that they become their own agents of change. It helps those who feel powerless to see the power that is already in their hands. It is capable of strengthening civil society.

### **SEEK JUSTICE**

for people in need, who are vulnerable, oppressed, or wronged.

### **AN ORGANIZED,**

planned, and strategic process, rather than a one-off action. It seeks a defined result, although it is also flexible and often unpredictable.

### **ASK “WHY?”**

until you get to the root causes of poverty and injustice.

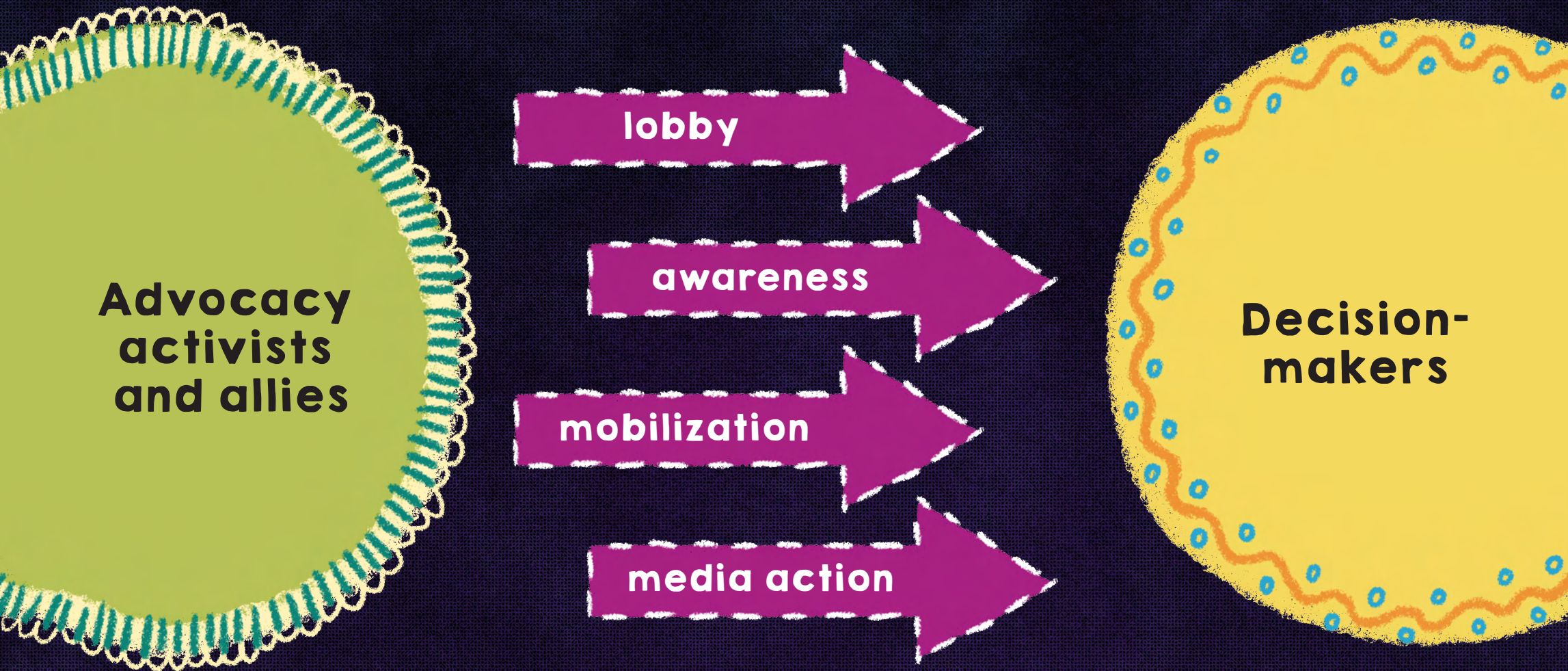
### **BE INTENTIONAL,**

identifying the desired changes and the people capable of promoting them.

### **A CLEAR PURPOSE**

that seeks to combat poverty and injustice by promoting changes in the systems, structures, policies, decisions, practices, and attitudes that lead to poverty and injustice.

<sup>1</sup>Comprehensive introductory guide to advocacy theory and practice Tearfund (2002)



For StreetNet, the main objective of doing advocacy is to **change policies or practices of decision-makers** in favor of street and market vendors.



## Advocacy vs. Collective Negotiation: Understanding the Difference

While advocacy and negotiation are both essential strategies for advancing the rights of street vendors, they have substantial differences that we must be clear about, in order to properly plan and execute our work as Membership-Based Organizations - MBOs.

**Advocacy** is about shaping public perception and influencing policymakers to recognize and support the group we defend, street and market vendors. Any action that spreads a message and/or contributes to the defense of our sector, which affirms its contributions to the economy and makes a case for fair treatment, recognising and rights, is advocacy. It involves a fairly large scope of actions such as raising awareness, building alliances, mobilizing, media actions, gathering public support, lobbying, and negotiating to push for changes in laws, policies, and societal attitudes towards street and market vendors.





## Advocacy vs. Collective Negotiation: Understanding the Difference

Advocacy can be done by Civil Society Organizations - CSOs, community leaders (elected or unelected), supporters and social actors who are sympathetic to our group's cause. And it can be done, of course, by leaders of MBOs/representative organizations. Any social actor who has a basic understanding of issues related to street vendors and wants to contribute to their defense can do advocacy for or with street and market vendors. And of course we street and market vendors do advocacy for ourselves as well.

What's tricky about advocacy, and what we need to be aware of, is that it can also be done individually by influential people, without inherent accountability to those on behalf of whom the advocacy is being done. When we do advocacy, we do so with the legitimacy of representing street vendors.





## Advocacy vs. Collective Negotiation: Understanding the Difference



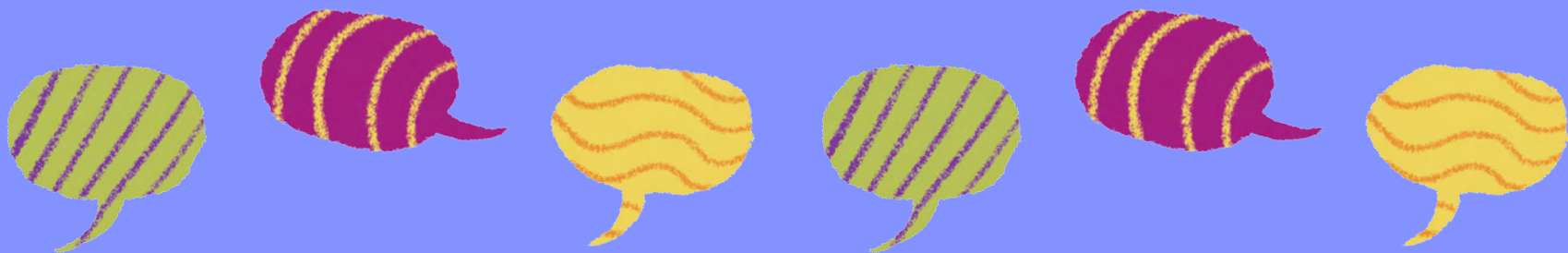
**Collective Negotiation or Bargaining**, on the other hand, is a structured process of dialogue with the purpose of reaching an agreement, with clear counterparts, between the key players in the world of work. Historically, it has been recognized as the official dialogue between employer and employee, mediated and legitimized by governments to ensure democracy in labor relations, as it allows the parties involved—capital and labor—to build collective agreements that reflect mutual interests, avoiding unilateral impositions.

However, since work also exists in non-salaried forms, it also involves collective negotiations between workers and those counterparts that have the power to make decisions that influence working conditions, which may be governments (at different levels) and private entities (e.g., Public-Private Partnerships market managers).



## Advocacy vs. Collective Negotiation: Understanding the Difference

Collective bargaining is the natural extension of strong workers' organisation and hence the more powerful route for workers since it is enabled by their own collective agency. It is the process where legitimate workers representatives collectively bargain for specific demands of their constituency to whom they are accountable and by whom they have been mandated to negotiate, that in the street and market vendors case can include securing designated vending spaces, fair licensing policies, protection from harassment, or access to social protection, among others.





## Advocacy vs. Collective Negotiation: Understanding the Difference



Both collective negotiations and advocacy can target broader public and policy engagement. Unlike advocacy, which targets broader public and policy engagement, and can be done by various social actors and in various ways, including by individuals using personal influence, collective negotiation is a specific way of securing rights, carried out only by representatives legitimized by a grassroots movement and aimed at concrete agreements and improvements.



Both advocacy and negotiation are complementary and critical to our struggle for Decent Work and rights. By understanding their differences and using them strategically, accountably and effectively, we can strengthen our collective power and achieve lasting positive change for street vendors.



# The Power of Collective Action

As street vendors' leaders and representatives, we have the mandate, the power and the responsibility to influence the laws and public policies that impact our livelihoods.

In order to act to have a solid impact on the rights of street and market vendors, we must first and foremost be certain in our hearts that we are rightful representatives and stakeholders in the public arena, that is, in the spaces where decisions and policies are formulated. As citizens, but also as workers, through the principle of Social Dialogue.

## The Right to Social Dialogue: We are Workers

There is an understanding among signatory countries of the ILO that workers have the right to organize themselves into associations and to participate in decisions that affect their work conditions.

The ILO understands that Social Dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between or among representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.

Social dialogue is both a means to achieve social and economic progress and an end in itself, as it gives people a voice and a stake in their societies and workplaces.<sup>2</sup>

This is why we need to push for laws that recognize us as workers, in order to no longer be seen as business people or illegal traders. Recognition is the first step towards ensuring that street vendors are included at the table and thus in labor rights protections, which will enable us to work with dignity and access what we are entitled to.

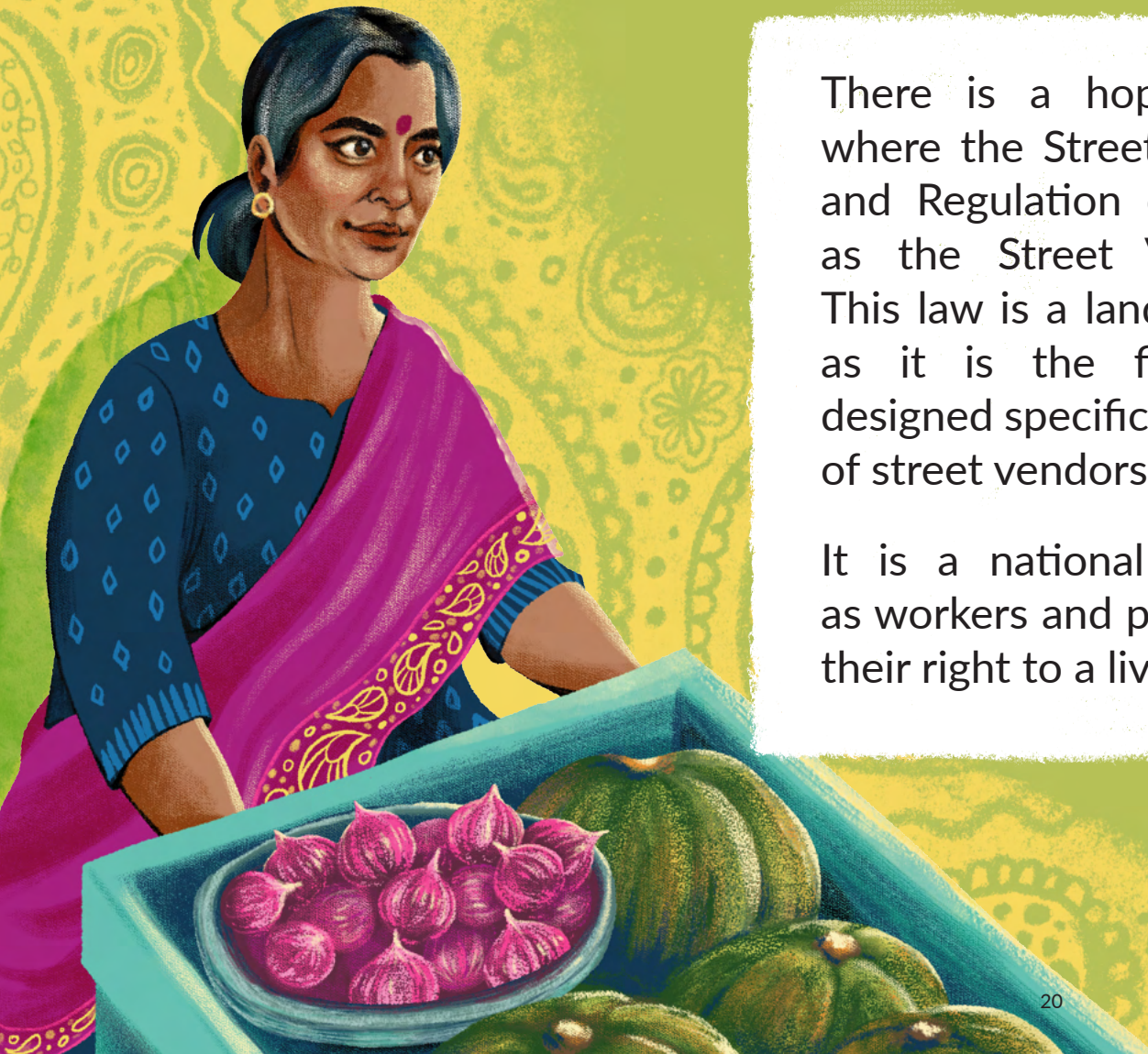
<sup>2</sup><https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/social-dialogue-and-tripartism>

CASE STUDY

## The Street Vendor Law in India

There is a hopeful example of progress in India, where the Street Vendor Act (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending), commonly known as the Street Vendor Law, was passed in 2014. This law is a landmark achievement for street vendors, as it is the first legal framework in the world designed specifically to protect the rights and livelihoods of street vendors.

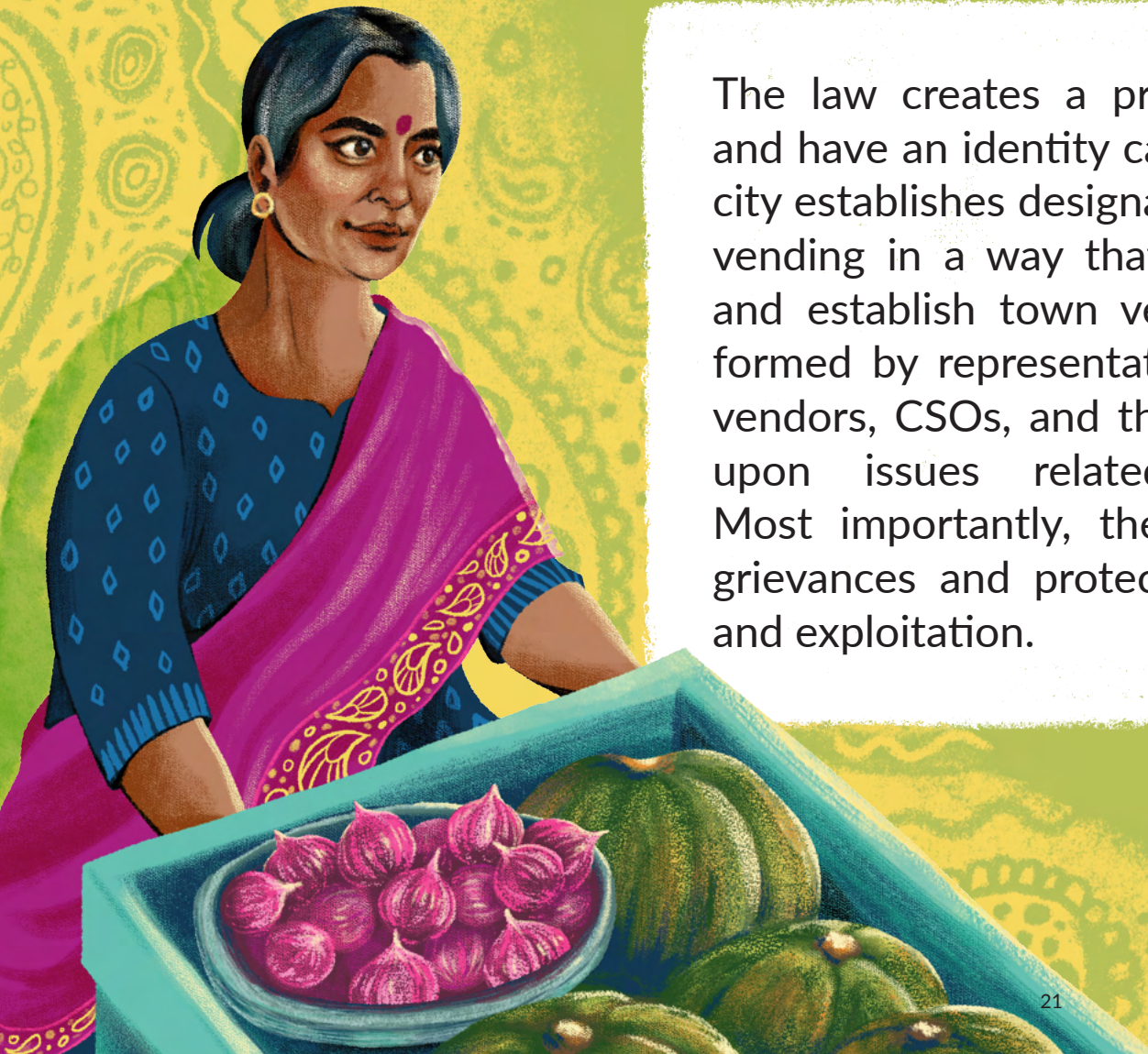
It is a national law that recognizes street vendors as workers and provides a legal framework to safeguard their right to a livelihood.



CASE STUDY

## The Street Vendor Law in India

The law creates a process for vendors to apply for licenses and have an identity card as street vendors. It dictates that each city establishes designated vending zones to help organize street vending in a way that minimizes conflict with urban planning and establish town vending committees, that is, local forums formed by representatives of organizations representing street vendors, CSOs, and the city government to discuss and decide upon issues related to street vending in the city. Most importantly, the law outlines a system for addressing grievances and protecting vendors from harassment, eviction, and exploitation.



CASE STUDY

## The Street Vendor Law in India



This law is crucial because it acknowledges the reality of street vending as an essential part of the urban economy, providing a structured way for vendors to work legally and safely. It also reflects the power of collective action—street vendors, along with unions and other stakeholders, worked together for many years to advocate for this legislation.

This law was passed after many years of campaigning by the Self-Employed Women's Association - SEWA, an organization representing self-employed women, including street vendors, which has around 2 million members and is affiliated to StreetNet.

The existence of the Street Vendor Law in India is an inspiration and an example for street vendors in other countries. It shows that with collective effort and sustained advocacy, street vendors can influence public policy and secure legal recognition as workers. The law helps vendors access better working conditions, reduce harassment, and promote safer, more organized vending environments. It also sets a precedent for the rest of the world, proving that street vendors' rights can and should be included in national legal frameworks.

As grassroots leaders, grounded in the principles of good leadership, we know that by building collective strength we can achieve more. Great achievements such as India's Street Vending Act were not the result of the work of one leader, or a small group of leaders, but of the building of collective power. This is the most effective ammunition that any initiative to influence public policy can have.

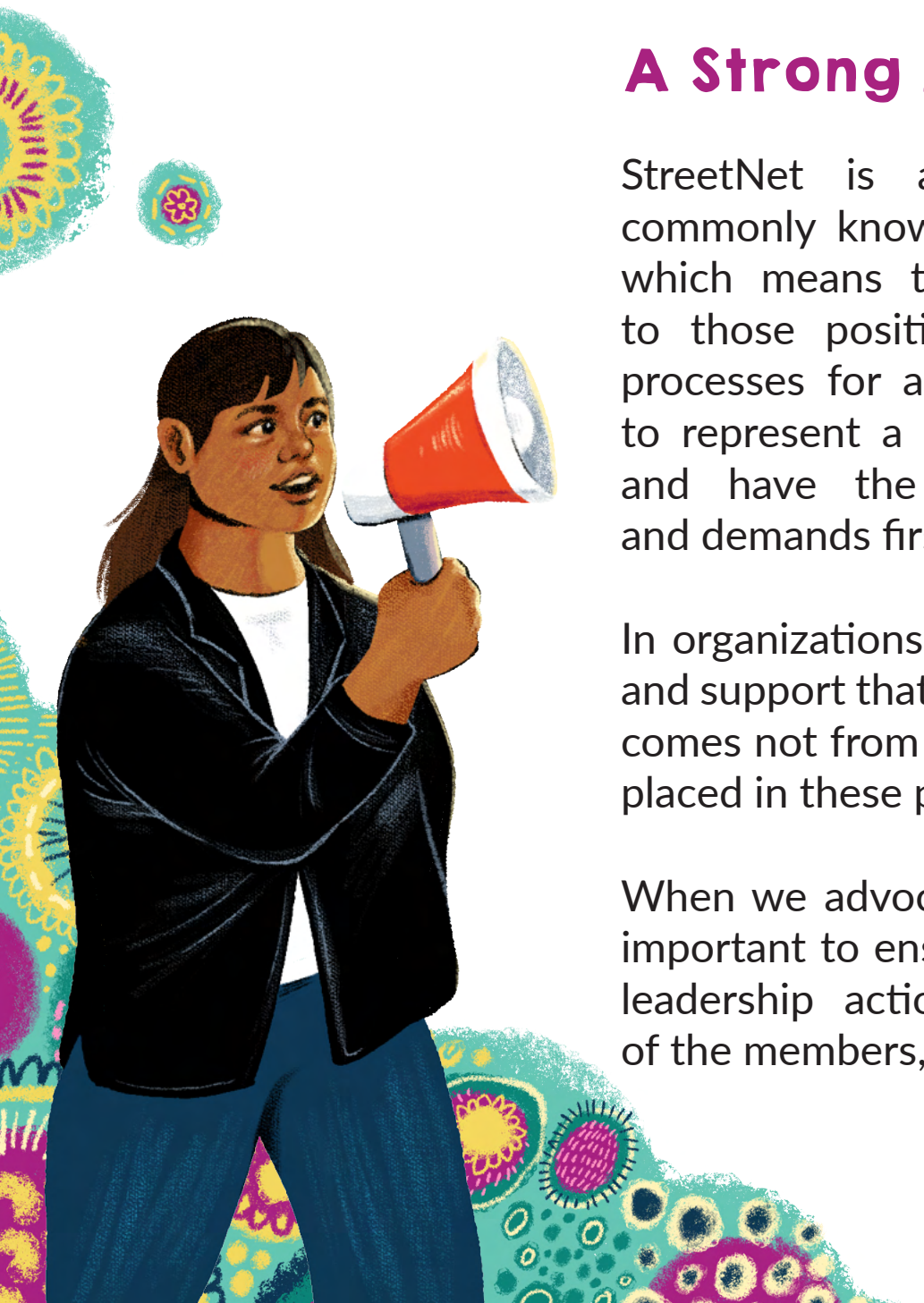
But in order to legitimately act on behalf of street vendors, we also need to make sure we have a strong mandate.

## A Strong Mandate: Why it Matters

StreetNet is a representative organization with members, commonly known as a Membership-Based Organization (MBO), which means that people in leadership positions are elected to those positions by members through periodic democratic processes for a specific term. The leaders, therefore, are there to represent a membership base of street and market vendors, and have the responsibility to put their interests, needs, and demands first wherever they are acting on behalf of StreetNet.

In organizations like ours, a mandate refers to the clear authority and support that leaders have to represent members. This authority comes not from personal power, but from the trust and consensus placed in these people by the collective.

When we advocate on behalf of our membership base, it is very important to ensure that we have a mandate to act, ensuring that leadership actions are rooted in the needs and experiences of the members, rather than the interests of any individual leader.



## A Strong Mandate: Why it Matters

To honor a mandate it is necessary to engage in continuous consultation, dialogue, and participation. This process is grounded in democratic decision-making – which in addition to ensuring that every member has a voice and a say in the direction we take, also mobilizes and organizes our constituency, generating collective strength to pressure decision-makers and strengthen the bonds of solidarity within our union.

As MBO leaders, you have the legitimacy of a membership base that gives strength to your actions and qualifies you in the public arena as stakeholder. For this reason, we can (and have a duty to) do advocacy on behalf of street vendors. A strong leadership should not be top-down, but a collaborative effort, where decisions should be made with the consensus of the collective, reflecting the diversity of experiences and needs within the group.



**To be a representative is a power that must be used ethically and responsibly.**

## A Strong and Democratic Leadership

As a workers organization, we believe that a good representation of street and market vendors is built on the foundation of strong grassroots leadership. This kind of leadership arises from the members, grounded in the shared experiences, struggles, and realities of being a street vendor. Legitimate leaders are not just figures of authority, but individuals who know and feel the daily challenges faced by street vendors.



Furthermore, good leadership occurs when guided by principles and values of commitment and alignment with social justice and ethics. In addition to having **leadership skills and strategic vision.**

## StreetNet Values and Principles

**Democracy  
and Collective  
Decision-making**



**Solidarity**



**Integrity,  
Accountability,  
and  
Transparency**



**Gender Justice**



**Unity**



**Diversity  
and Inclusion**



These are the cornerstones that guide the way we interact, make decisions, and engage in our collective struggle for dignity and justice.

However, there are also characteristics that make a good leader and a good representative. It is important that you know yourself, assess your abilities and what you need to improve, or recognise in comrades. And pursue those skills to better represent your base.

## Skills and Qualities of a Good Leader



### **ASSERTIVE**

I know what we want (mandate) and can express it firmly.



### **CALM**

I remain calm even when I am angry.



### **CLARITY AND OBJECTIVITY**

I am able to present clear arguments, presenting the issue objectively, without deviating.



### **THOROUGH**

I am thorough and prepare well.



### **COURAGEOUS**

I am courageous and can stand up to my interlocutor.



### **KNOWLEDGEABLE**

I make sure I am familiar with the issues and arguments.



### **WRITING SKILLS**

I am able to take notes during important meetings.



### **CONFLICT MEDIATION AND COMPROMISE**

I am good at resolving conflicts.

## Skills and Qualities of a Good Leader



### REPORTING AND SHARING

I report to members clearly and honestly.



### GENDER SENSITIVE

I make sure that women are part of all activities and play a prominent role.



### CONFIDENCE

I am confident in myself.



### LISTENING

I know how to listen.



### THINKING

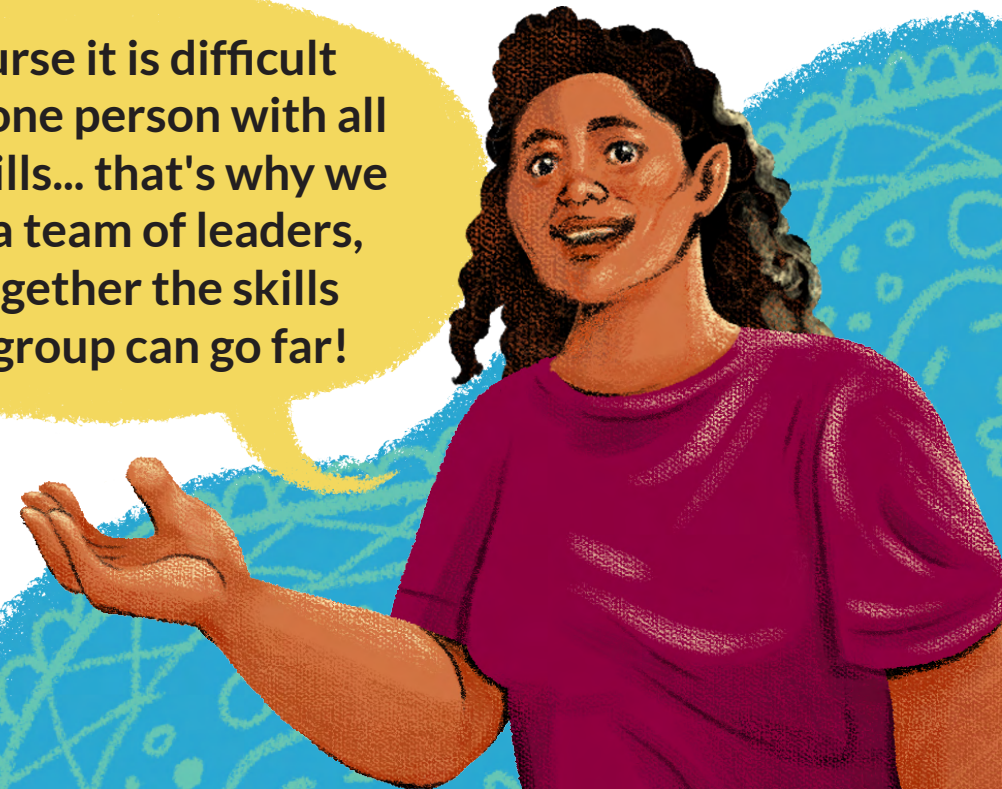
I think before I speak.



### SPEAKING

I communicate clearly.

Of course it is difficult to have one person with all these skills... that's why we create a team of leaders, and together the skills of the group can go far!



## VISION

In conclusion, we can say that strong leadership has a strong vision, a long term goal able to guide our movement forward. We need a horizon that we want to reach and that drives us, ensuring that our struggles translate into tangible wins that support our rights, livelihoods, and dignity.



In conclusion, **the power of a representative, strong leadership** lies in being underpinned by a clear **mandate** from the membership. It should be anchored in **commitment, principles** and **values**, with **skills, self-awareness**, and a desire to always improve, combined with a **strategic vision**.

Being a leader is no easy task. Representing your constituency and a sector requires responsibility and involves many demands. By grounding ourselves in these fundamental issues, we strengthen our capacity to advocate effectively and thus influence policy change in defense of street and market vendors rights. The case of India is an inspiration and a source of hope, pointing the way forward.

## Reflections for Action

### Social Dialogue

- ❁ Are we currently involved in social dialogue with governments, or other stakeholders?
- ❁ Do authorities consider us a representative organization and a key stakeholder that should be heard for decisions that affect street and market vendors?
- ❁ How can we strengthen our participation to ensure our voices are heard and our rights are protected?
- ❁ How can we get ourselves registered and recognized as workers?

### Learning from India's Example

- ❁ How can we draw inspiration from the Street Vendor Law in India and apply to our own advocacy efforts?



## Reflections for Action

### Representing your members and having a strong mandate

- ❁ Have I taken the time to listen to the experiences and concerns of the members, including those most marginalized (e.g., women street vendors) and seek out feedback and input from them?
- ❁ How can I regularly engage with members to understand issues that matter most to them?
- ❁ Do I regularly check that my leadership actions are inclusive and aligned with the mandate given to me by the entire membership by regularly sharing my deeds, consulting members before making important decisions and building consensus and support?
- ❁ What can I do to increase transparency, member participation, representativeness and build collective support in my organization?

## Reflections for Action

### Strong, ethical and committed leadership

- ❁ Do I act within StreetNet values and principles – democracy, solidarity, gender justice, inclusion, and accountability—in all my decisions and actions?
- ❁ Am I leading by example, maintaining high ethical standards, and actively promoting the core values of the organization?
- ❁ Do I demonstrate respect for diversity within the union, making sure that we foster an inclusive environment for all members?
- ❁ Am I advocating for gender-sensitive approaches and prioritizing the inclusion of women street vendors in decision-making processes?
- ❁ Have I established clear lines of accountability to ensure that I am answerable to the membership for my decisions and actions?
- ❁ Are members able to voice concerns or disagreements with leadership without fear of retaliation or marginalization?
- ❁ Am I fostering a spirit of solidarity among members, ensuring we work together toward common goals?

## Reflections for Action

### Strong, ethical and committed leadership

- ❁ Do I actively encourage cooperation and collaboration, both within the leadership and among the broader membership?
- ❁ Have I made sure that all members, regardless of their status or position, feel valued and included in our collective efforts?
- ❁ Do I know my strengths and weaknesses as a leader? I use my potential to further the cause I defend and seek alternatives to deal with what I am not good at.

### Vision and Long-term Goals

- ❁ Do we have a **Vision and Long-term Goals in my organization?**
- ❁ Have I shared the organization's vision with the membership, ensuring we are all working toward the same long-term objectives?
- ❁ What long-term goals should we set in our advocacy for street vendors to secure better legal protections and formal recognition for street vendors in our countries?



# What Do We Do Advocacy For?

Seeking to influence decision-makers regarding the rights of street and market vendors can be done from various perspectives.

In most cases, representative organizations take action in response to the most egregious violations of rights, using collective action and strength at these moments to press for dignity to be respected. However, advocacy can and should also be a planned action, with short, medium and long-term goals.

There are strategic areas that StreetNet recognizes as key to the recognition of street vendors and respect for their rights. Let's call them **Key Focus Areas**.



**The Decent Work Agenda** of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is a global framework aimed at promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity.

The Decent Work Agenda is not just about having a job, rather, it is about ensuring that workers have access to fair wages, safe and healthy working conditions (free of harassment and violence), the ability to form and join unions and have them recognized and consulted when decisions affecting their work are made, to be included in Social Protection schemes that ensure pension, maternity, sick and annual leave, health insurance, unemployment protection, that is: the protection of basic human rights.

For street vendors and their unions, the Decent Work Agenda provides a roadmap for achieving the labor rights that have long been denied to those working in the informal economy.



The Decent Work Agenda brings together the rights that a worker recognized and protected by the state would have. That is why we recognize it as our Agenda. Our vision is that all street and market vendors should have Decent Work, with a capital D and W, because we are referring to this agenda that lists everything we should have as rights and that is denied to us.

And it is no wonder that this agenda is strongly promoted by the ILO. They understand that ensuring productive employment and decent living standards for all workers is crucial because when people have access to fair jobs and quality living conditions, it drives both social and economic development, contributing to broader human development.



# Key Focus Areas

SNI leadership and members are prioritizing four areas for country level and global advocacy:



These form the four pillars of a rights-based formalization, a fair transition to formalization.



## 1 Social Protection

SNI is calling for the inclusion of street vendors, market traders and hawkers in social insurance and social assistance schemes. This includes ensuring that workers have access to protection against sickness, unemployment, old age, maternity, disability, pensions, and more, as well as access to healthcare and other essential services. It's about including street and market vendors in the coverage of social protection systems available for recognized workers.

By advocating for policies that extend social protection to informal economy workers, we fight to be recognized by governments as workers with full rights and ensure that street vendors have their rights and livelihood protected.

## 2 Right to the Public Space

StreetNet members are challenging municipal and national authorities for secured access to public space and infrastructure for working. This is related to the **right to work**, which is constantly denied to street and market vendors.

Municipal cities around the world often fail to recognize the role of these workers in providing essential goods and services. By not offering licensing processes, not including street vending and markets in their master plans, and therefore excluding them from urban planning and regulatory processes, they violate our right to work with dignity.



## 2 Right to the Public Space (continuation)

As a result, we often face criminalization and illegality, facing state violence in the form of evictions, harassment, and the confiscation of goods; and we are subject to intimidation, extortion, and physical abuse, making our work environment unsafe and precarious. Women vendors, in particular, are more vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination. Enforcing policies that safeguard vendors from such threats is essential to ensure a **workplace free from harassment and violence**.

Similarly, authorities refrain from taking responsibility for providing urban infrastructure (bathrooms, working stalls, storage spaces, etc.) that would, in practice, mean street vendors having **decent working conditions** that would **protect workers from occupational hazards**.

Advocating for policies that recognize street vending as a legitimate form of work and provide designated vending zones and urban infrastructure can protect our livelihoods and work conditions, and to healthier, more organized urban spaces. In this struggle, we join forces with all urban social movements fighting for the Right to the City.





### 3 Social Dialogue

StreetNet members must be recognized as social dialogue partners and included and heard in local, national, and global social dialogue platforms, including through the implementation of the ILO Recommendation 204 on the transition from the informal to the formal economy.

We need to insist that Trade Unions make room for our representatives and that governments guarantee us a seat at the participatory and tripartite tables of the world of work.

### 4 Social and Solidarity Economy

StreetNet can members benefit from an enabling environment at the global and national levels that supports the growth and development of the Social and Solidarity Economy - SSE experiences. This can lead to improved access to markets, greater income security, better work conditions and access to services and better living conditions through worker cooperatives and mutual support. Furthermore, SSE experiences build solidarity and collective strength necessary to demand rights. We need to advocate for enabling legal frameworks and government support so that street vendors can develop these initiatives and self-organize ways of accessing rights, that can later become public policies.

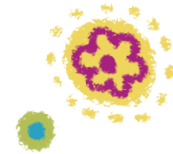


These key focus areas for street and market vendors advocacy comprise the **Rights-based Formalization of Workers in the Informal Economy** that StreetNet promotes and defends. A formalization that:

- ✓ Is inclusive, human-centered, workers-rights based
- ✓ Empowers workers (including self-employed)
- ✓ Improves working conditions
- ✓ Expands social protection
- ✓ Secures economic rights & livelihood



This is the Decent Work agenda applied specifically to the informal trade sector, and these are causes that we, as organizations representing workers, must defend and fight for.



Scan here to read our position paper on formalization:





CASE STUDY

## Argentina's Social Emergency Law, National Registry of the Popular Economy, and Complementary Social Wage

In 2016, Argentina faced an economic crisis which drove many Argentinians into hunger. In this context, the General Union of Workers of the Popular Economy (UTEPA), a union which represents and defends the rights of all those excluded from the labor market (including street vendors), and a member of StreetNet, pressured the country's right-wing government through widespread social mobilization to adopt public policies to support these workers.



TRABAJAR EN LA CALLE  
NO ES DELITO

Translation: Working on streets is not a crime

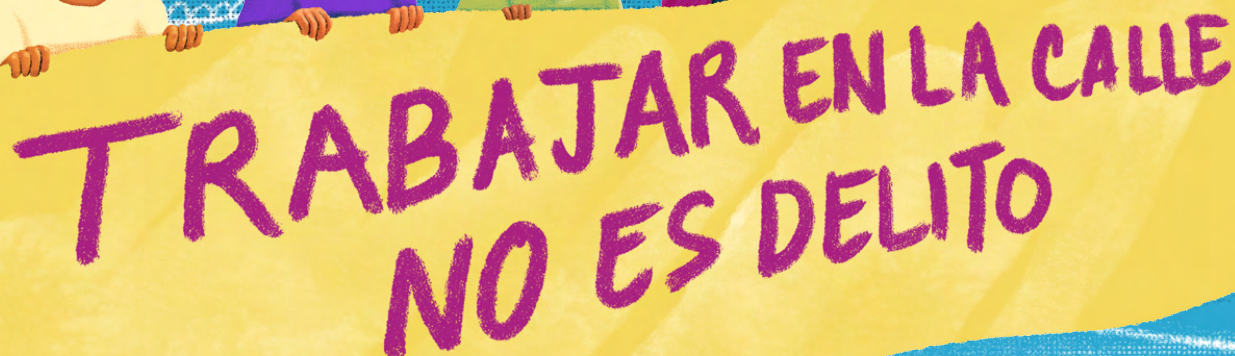


CASE STUDY

## Argentina's Social Emergency Law, National Registry of the Popular Economy, and Complementary Social Wage

UTEP successfully fought for the passing of a Social Emergency Law, including a National Registry of the Popular Economy Workers, and a Complementary Social Salary which meant that all workers in the registry would receive a monthly payment of half the minimum wage.

The policy was grounded in the understanding that since the government cannot offer full employment, it is responsible for addressing the vulnerability of own account workers.



TRABAJAR EN LA CALLE  
NO ES DELITO

Translation: Working on streets is not a crime



CASE STUDY

## Argentina's Social Emergency Law, National Registry of the Popular Economy, and Complementary Social Wage

Furthermore, they achieved a 'Monotax', known as the Monotributo Social, which guarantees all informal workers 100% subsidized access to social protection, with simplified digital access at a very affordable price.

It is the world's leading example of recognition of workers in the informal economy within collective labor law, with a social benefit linked to inclusion in the current social protection scheme. And, of course, it is the result of the mobilization and coordinated action of various social movements to influence those in power.





## International Legal Instruments That Strengthen Our Advocacy

Street vendors' rights are supported by several international legal instruments that we can use to strengthen our advocacy efforts. Many of these come from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN agency responsible for setting global labor standards. The ILO brings together governments, employers, and worker representatives to develop international standards relating to the world of work.

Each year, the ILO organizes the **International Labour Conference (ILC)** in Geneva, where representatives from its 187 member states discuss labor issues, set priorities, and adopt new agreements. These standards take the form of either **Conventions** or **Recommendations**:

- **Conventions** are legally binding treaties that countries can choose to ratify, committing them to implement the agreed-upon standards in their national laws.
- **Recommendations** are non-binding guidelines that provide policy advice and best practices but do not require formal ratification.



**Both Conventions and Recommendations are powerful tools that street vendors and informal workers can use to push for policy changes at the national level. By referencing these instruments, we can hold governments accountable and advocate for policies that support our rights and livelihoods.**



## Key Instruments That Protect Street Vendors

- **ILO Recommendation 204 on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (2015):** This landmark recommendation acknowledges the contributions of informal economy workers and calls on governments to adopt policies that facilitate formalization while ensuring rights and protections for those in informal employment. ILO R204 is a roadmap to gradual, inclusive formalization that protects livelihoods. Governments should invest in capacity-building, infrastructure, legal frameworks to facilitate formalization and awareness raising & training on R204 should be promoted especially with local authorities.
- **ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (2019):** This legally binding convention recognizes the right of all workers, including informal economy workers, to be free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence. It obliges governments to put in place laws and measures to prevent and address these issues.
- **ILO Conventions on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining (Conventions 87 & 98):** These conventions affirm the right of all workers, including those in the informal economy, to organize, form associations, and engage in collective bargaining to improve their working conditions.



## Key Instruments That Protect Street Vendors

- 🌟 **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The UN's SDGs, particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), support the recognition and protection of informal economy workers, including street vendors. These goals push for inclusive policies that improve working conditions, social protection, and urban planning for informal economy workers.
- 🌟 **New Urban Agenda (2016):** Adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), this framework recognizes the importance of informal economy workers in urban economies and calls for inclusive cities where street vendors have access to secure workplaces and fair economic opportunities.
- 🌟 **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23):** This article establishes that everyone has the right to work, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment—principles that apply to all workers, including street vendors.



By using these international instruments in our advocacy, we can demand policies that protect and promote our rights as workers. These tools provide legitimacy to our claims and help us connect our struggles with global efforts to ensure decent work for all.



## Reflections for Action

- ❁ How can we use international legal instruments to support or advocacy efforts in defense of street vendors rights?
- ❁ Which of these key instruments has my country ratified?



# How to Do Advocacy?

Now that we have explored the key issues affecting street vendors and the international legal instruments that support our rights, it is time to shift from what and why to how we take action.

In the next sections, we will focus on practical steps that street vendor leaders can take to organize and advocate for better working conditions, legal recognition, and social protection. We will break down key strategies for engaging with policymakers, mobilizing public support, and influencing changes.

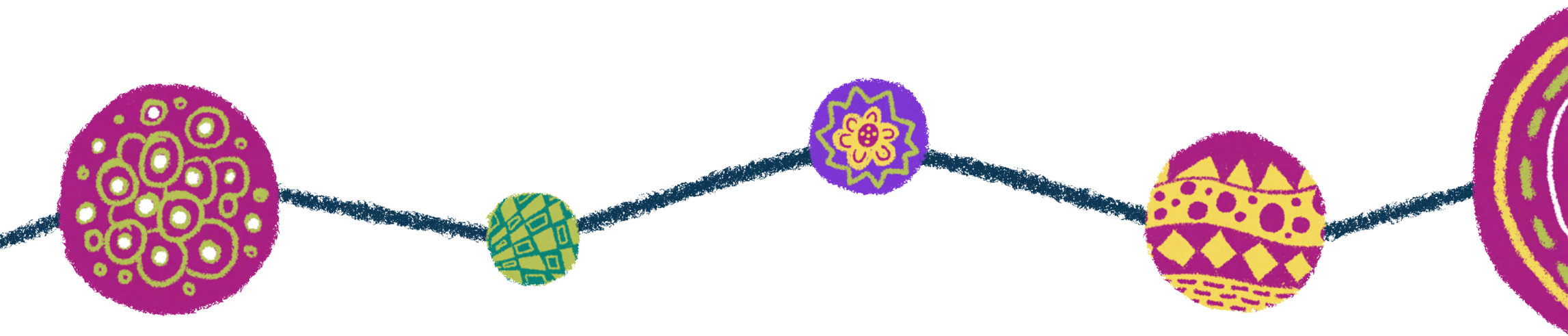
This section of the toolkit is designed to equip you with hands-on guidance to strengthen our movement. These next steps will help you turn knowledge into action.

Together, we can build worker power and shape a future where street vendors are recognized, protected, and empowered.

# Practical Strategies:

## Step-by-Step Guide to Doing Advocacy in the Street Vending Sector

Effective advocacy requires, besides participation and alliances, careful planning and strategy—we need to define what we want to change, who has the power to make those changes, and how we will influence them. The response to these questions will form our advocacy plan that you will implement.

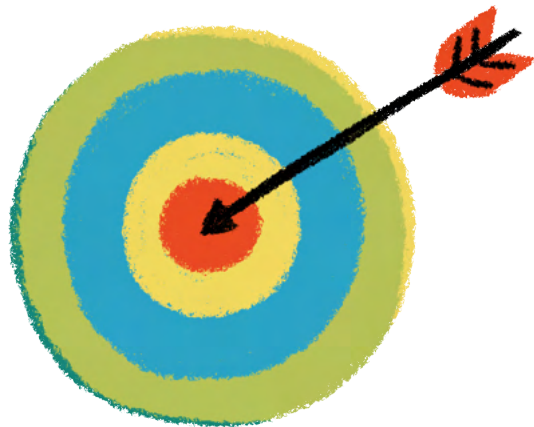




**STEP 1**

## Identify the Main Challenges, Collect Data and Prioritize

- Consult with members through meetings, surveys, or informal discussions to understand their key struggles (e.g., police harassment, lack of legal recognition, restricted access to vending spaces).
- Gather evidence, such as personal testimonies, data, and case studies, to back up these challenges.
- Prioritize together with your members the most urgent and widely shared concerns that require advocacy.



**STEP 2**

## Define and Decide on What is your Goal

- Determine what specific changes you want to see—new policies, new attitudes from the authorities, recognition, a better image of street vendors in society, a narrative that respect street vendors' rights etc.
- Ensure that advocacy goals align with the needs of our members and are decided democratically through consultation.
- The specific change you want to see is your objective. Make sure it is clear and realistic.



**STEP 3**

## Map Key Actors in Our Sphere of Influence



- Identify the key actors who have the power to make the changes we seek – policymakers, government bodies, municipal authorities, other decision-makers, media, CSOs etc.
- Analyze their roles, interests, and openness to engaging with our organization. Do we have existing relationships with these actors?
- Develop strategies for engaging with them, whether through direct meetings, petitions, or policy proposals. Make sure you get their contacts to officially approach them and that you write an official letter requesting a meeting.



**STEP 4**

## Identify Potential Allies and Build Networks

- Look for organizations and movements that share our concerns, such as labor unions, human rights groups, legal aid organizations, rights defense CSOs and urban planning advocates. Look for these identified organizations and contact them and/or participate in public activities where these organizations will be present, introduce yourself, talk to key people, and build relationships (networking).
- Engage with national and international networks to strengthen our collective voice.
- Form or join coalitions to amplify our demands and increase pressure on decision-makers.

**STEP 5**

## Develop Key Messages and Advocacy Tools

- Create clear, compelling messages that communicate our demands in a way that resonates with policymakers, the public, and the media.
- Use evidence, testimonies, and legal frameworks (such as ILO standards and human rights agreements) to support our arguments.
- Choose the best advocacy tools, such as letters to authorities, petitions, media campaigns.





**STEP 6**

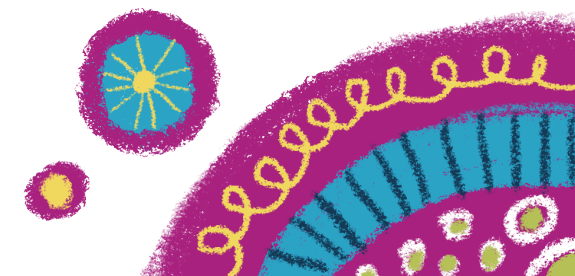
## **Mobilize and Take Action**

- Organize advocacy actions such as public demonstrations, media campaigns, and press conferences, meetings with government officials, including allied parliamentarians, government officials at different levels.

Lobbying often involves taking an official letter explaining the point you are defending and going to Congress, to the City Council, the City Hall, the Judiciary, to national ministries in person to approach decision-makers or key figures who can carry the message forward, present your issue, exchange contacts, and seek their commitment and interest.

Acting through allied elected representatives can also be promising. The important thing is to understand that you can do this, that citizens have the right to approach decision-makers and bring their demands, and that as a leader, you have a duty to attempt to do so.

- Ensure members are actively involved in actions, keeping them informed and engaged.
- Use diverse tactics—both formal (policy meetings, legal advocacy) and informal (protests, market exchanges, WhatsApp broadcast, Facebook posts).





**STEP 7**

## Monitor Progress and Adapt Strategies

- Track responses from policymakers and authorities to assess the impact of our advocacy.
- Gather feedback from members to evaluate whether advocacy efforts are meeting their needs.
- Be flexible—adjust strategies and tactics as needed to overcome obstacles and seize new opportunities.



**STEP 8**

## Ensure Accountability and Transparency



- Maintain regular communication with members about advocacy developments.
- Make decisions democratically, ensuring that leadership remains accountable to the broader membership.
- Reflect on lessons learned together with members and document successful advocacy experiences to strengthen future efforts. Share the documentation with members.



**By following these steps and staying true to our values of democratic participation and consultation, street vendor organizations can build strong, member-driven advocacy campaigns that create lasting change.**

## Reflections for Action

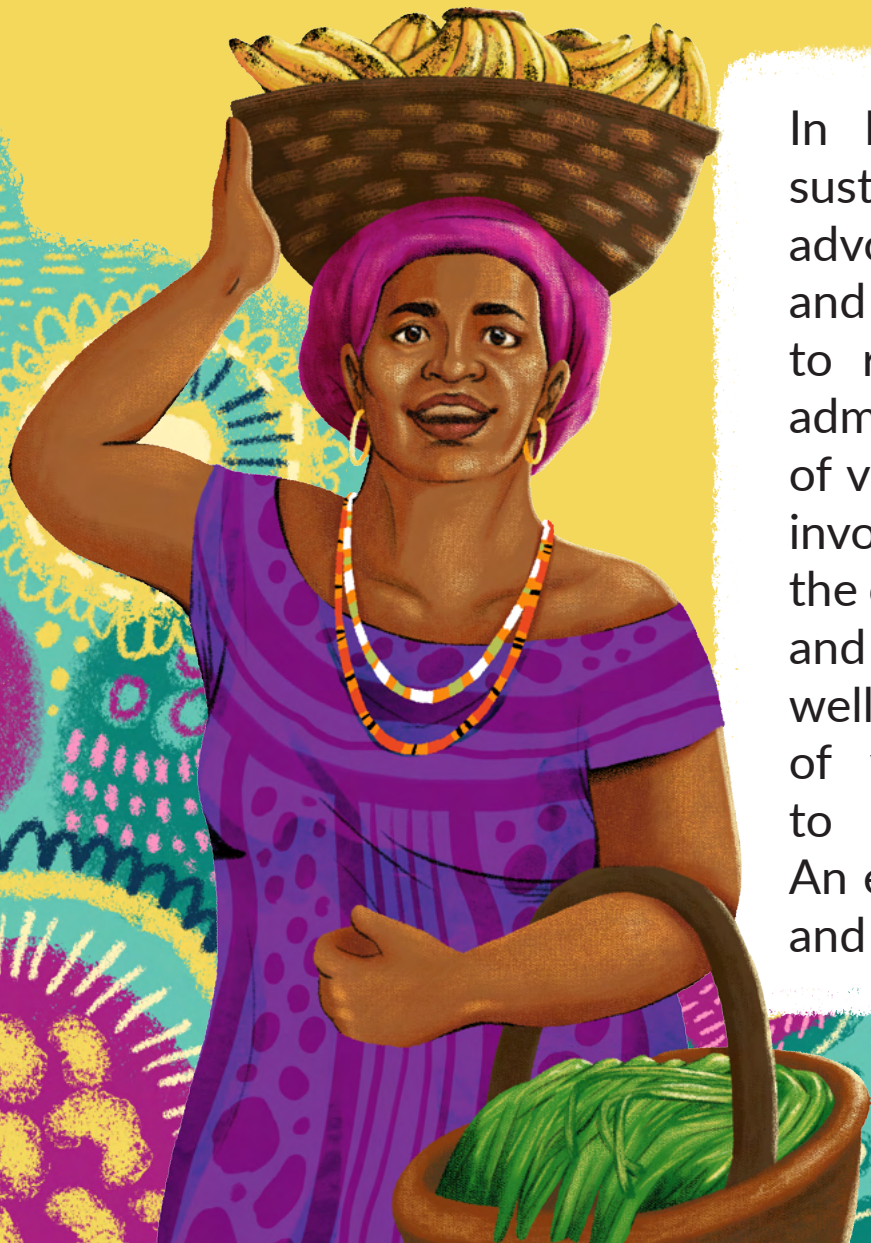
- ❁ **Previous advocacy work:** Have we mobilized the public opinion and/or influenced policymaking in favour of street and market vendors in the past? How did it happen?
- ❁ **Understanding the Legal Landscape:** What is the current legal framework for street vendors in our context? Are there any laws or policies that specifically address our rights and protect us from vulnerability? What is missing in our legal system that we need to advocate for?
- ❁ **Shaping Policy for Change:** What key challenges do street vendors in our community and country face? What are their most pressing needs (e.g., safety from violence, harassment, eviction, lack of safe working conditions)? What specific policy changes can we propose?

## Reflections for Action

- ❁ **Strategic advocacy planning:** Can we strategically define our advocacy goals and identify decision-makers to influence? What strengths do we already have as an organized group that we can use to make our advocacy more effective?
- ❁ **Allies and networking:** Who are our allies and who are the other stakeholders we need to bring to the table?
- ❁ **Building unity and mobilization:** How can we strengthen our unity and work together with other vendors, unions, and stakeholders to push for legal recognition and better protections for street vendors in our own countries?

CASE STUDY

## Asiye eTafuleni - AeT (Durban/South Africa)



In Durban, street vendors claimed a major victory after sustained advocacy efforts. It is an experience of local level advocacy led by the organization AeT, in which street and market vendors managed, for a long period of time, to resist the urban redevelopment plans of the municipal administration in a busy train station where a great number of vendors used to work. And through a participatory process involving street and market vendors, they managed to change the city's plans leading to the construction of a market designed and planned with the participation of workers, including a very well-organized and planned sales complex, with a large number of vendors working in healthy conditions, with access to urban infrastructure and good economic movement. An example of urban planning carried out with social dialogue and participation.

# Amplifying Our Voice: Strategies for Communications and Campaigns

When we are advocating for change, media and communication are key. The simple act of spreading a message can be a form of advocacy, when it is an action to challenge the prevailing narrative by defending a perspective that affirms our rights, and denounce rights violations that can no longer be accepted by society. Communication and media are strategies for **credibility, awareness raising, influencing, and mobilization.**

To develop a strategic communication plan to support an advocacy campaign we must be aware of our specific target audiences (who you want to reach); our key messages (what you want them to know/act upon); and adapt our communication channels (e.g. radio, rallies, social media etc.) and materials (e.g. videos, songs, flyers etc.) according to your audience and messages.

## Credibility and Interaction



If you are requesting a meeting with a decision maker to advocate for policy change, the first thing the office of the decision maker will do is research about who you are and the organization you claim to represent. Because of that, **it is extremely important that you curate your public image.** You have to make sure that your online presence (e.g. your website, social media platforms) present a clear picture of who you are, what you represent and why you should be regarded as a credible stakeholder.

Furthermore, a **good advocacy campaign is transparent and constantly interacts with supporters** - and you cannot be transparent if you do not document and share with the public how the campaign is going.

If you are meeting with decision makers, it is important to share that with your members and others supporting your campaign; if you are receiving support (financial or otherwise) from other partners, that is also something that you should disclose.

You do not need expert technical skills for this: a well managed and regularly updated social media page can already help you build credibility in the long run.

## Awareness Raising

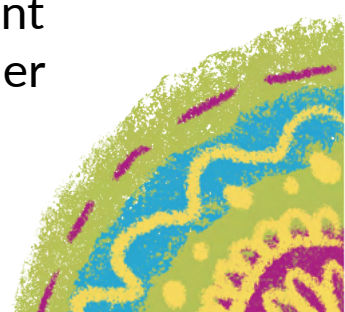
We also use **media and communication to raise awareness among our target audiences about our key demands**. We can do this through different mediums - we can use the radio, flyers, town criers, videos, community theater... the important thing is to know which communication channel your audience prefers and adapt your communication strategy accordingly.

Media and communication can also be **tools to put pressure on decision makers to comply with your demands**. For example, you can use communication materials such as videos and articles to denounce labour rights violations (e.g. a video of a market being destroyed by local authorities). You can also use **press releases and press conferences** to engage news media and make the public aware of the issues affecting your members.



## Mobilization

You cannot advocate for change by yourself. That is why media and communication also become very important to mobilize your members, partners, allies and other stakeholders around your key demands.





## The Importance of Building a Narrative

A good advocacy campaign **tells a story**. Sometimes, we become too focused on advocating for policy changes in a way that can be too technical and abstract for the general public - and sometimes even for our members and decision makers. That is why it is important that you are able to create a **compelling narrative about why the change you advocate for is necessary, whose lives it will impact and what you are hoping to achieve in the future**.

For example, at StreetNet, we often use our **impact stories** as advocacy materials, because they are first-person accounts of the power of organizing street and market vendors and how that has led to change in the lives of specific workers and also communities.

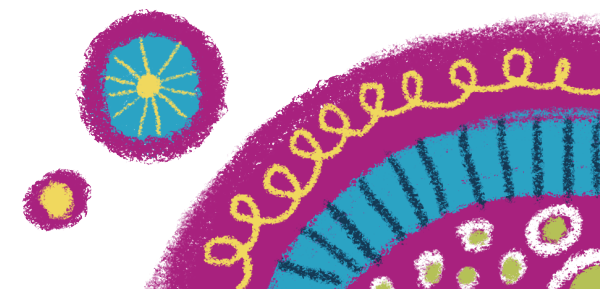
Remember that every good story involves **hope** — you cannot mobilize people and advocate for change if you cannot convince them that what you are trying to do will bring about a better world. That is why it is important that our key messages are not only negative about everything that is wrong. They also need to include our vision and inspire others to join us in advocating for change.

## Participatory Campaign Design

StreetNet International, through its global network of grassroots activists and youth leaders engaged in media work, develops campaigns using a strongly participatory, bottom-up approach.

Building on the experiences and insights of members from all regions, the organisation ensures messaging reflects their realities and priorities. This means that strategies are not imposed from the top or from the central office but emerge from collaborative discussions, storytelling exchanges, and shared analysis, especially with activists who work with media tools.

By grounding campaigns in the perspectives of those directly affected, StreetNet not only amplifies their own narratives but also strengthens the capacity of its members to shape public discourse.



# Workers Education Principles & Facilitation Practices





When we are building collective decision-making and action processes, it is interesting to set up dialogue practices with our members in alignment with democratic education principles. StreetNet develops its learning practices based on the principles of Popular Education, a methodology committed to transforming social injustices and that historically has been promoted by social and workers movements worldwide.



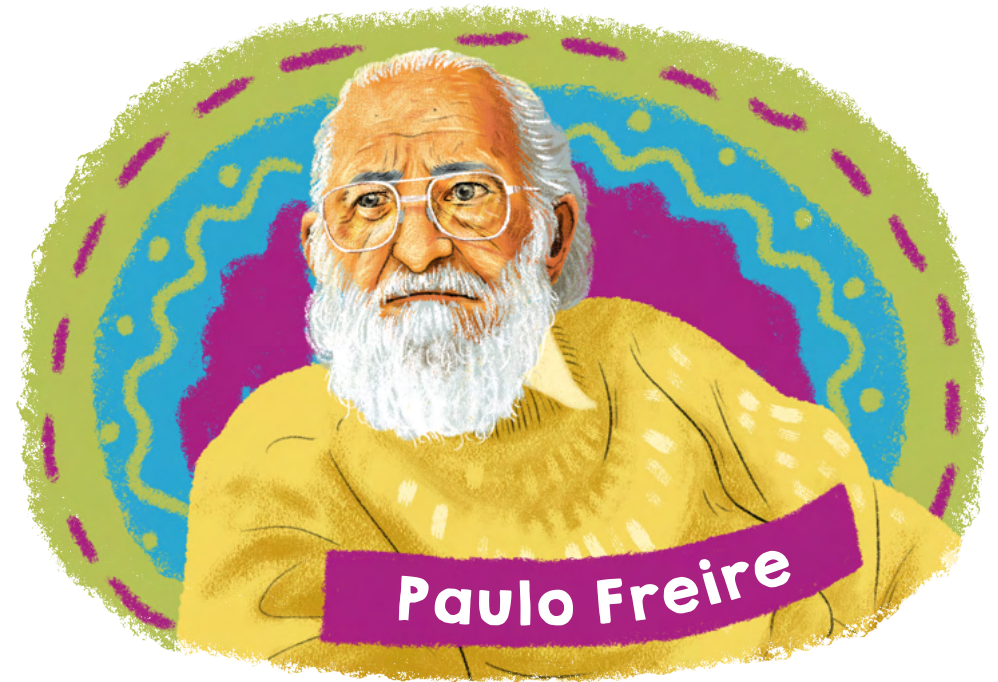
Popular education is an educational approach that seeks to promote learning in a participatory, democratic, and contextualized manner, involving the community and valuing people's everyday knowledge. It aims to democratize access to knowledge, strengthen local culture, and promote social transformation, recognizing and respecting individuals' life experiences as a fundamental part of the educational process.

In this approach, learners and their realities are protagonists in the educational process, rather than mere recipients of information, and the interaction encourages critical thinking about reality and values the experience and prior knowledge of learners.



Popular education has its roots in 20th-century Latin American social movements, particularly those that emerged in response to colonization and authoritarian governments, inspiring social movements and academic thinking about transformative education around the world.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is a central figure in this movement and became known worldwide for innovating by promoting a pedagogy of dialogue, autonomy, and awareness.



**To bring everyone together in a collective process, the principles and methodology of Popular Education are valuable and can contribute greatly.**



## Principles of Popular Education



### **Dialogical, inclusive and participatory methodology**

Learning takes place collaboratively, through dialogue, valuing popular knowledge, with the active involvement of the group, recognition of their prior knowledge and the exchange of experiences.

It questions the logic of traditional teaching in which the teacher is the sole holder of knowledge and students are mere recipients, proposing an environment of exchange in which everyone is welcome to contribute.

A more horizontal way of learning: the training environment should be in a circle, where everyone can look each other in the eye, rather than at each other's backs, building a space where knowledge can flow and the appreciation of each person as a holder of knowledge (and rights) can be perceived and encouraged.



### **Critical and emancipatory consciousness**

Development of a critical consciousness that leads people to reflect, question, and transform their social reality. Always seek to provide an analysis of the context in which the issue is situated for a deeper understanding of the interests at stake.

## Facilitation Practices

If we are going to develop a participatory advocacy process, we will follow the principles of popular education.



Make a broad call through communication channels to ensure everyone's participation. Find a time and day that works for everyone.



Prepare the environment: we will arrange the chairs in a circle. We can place some elements that symbolize street and market vending, our flags, flowers, etc. Objects that honor the day, work, and life of people.



You can use some of the activities provided at the end of this material in the resources section at various times: icebreakers, energizers, group work, brainstorming at various times to get people actively participating in the activity.



**Remember: everyone's perspective is important. Listening is an action. Align and converge to build collective strength.**



# Conclusion

Thank you for coming this far.

It has been a great journey.

We hope that you and your organization will use this material often and that it will serve as a resource to be reviewed and used whenever necessary, as a basis for developing advocacy strategies that make sense in your context, in your organization, and in your community.

StreetNet stands with you. Our regional organizers will be very happy to learn about and follow any advocacy processes you may implement. Please keep in touch with us.

May street and market vendors be increasingly present on the public agenda, making themselves heard, setting the agenda for debates on the world of work and just cities. May this be a contribution to igniting the spark that moves us forward, without retreating, in the struggle for the rights and dignity of street vendors.

# Resources



You can find all the resources using this link:

<https://bit.ly/SNIadvocacyresources>



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**StreetNet** is a membership based global alliance of street, market vendors and hawkers present in more than 50 countries and representing over 700,000 members worldwide.

Our mission is strengthening and empowering members' organizations to protect and promote street and market vendors' rights and livelihood, especially of women, through advocacy actions, capacity building, education, democratic governance, representation and solidarity among all workers.

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

