

# Engendering Waste Pickers' Cooperatives in Brazil



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# Overall Reflections in the Paper

- Based on exploratory research action carried out in Minas Gerais, Brazil, we seek to: (1) highlight how women waste pickers experience multiples forms of oppression within the sector and in the national movement (MNCR)



- (2) critically address how expressions of gender inequalities within the cooperatives and national movement present a contradiction to the ideals that established the cooperative movement in Brazil

# Contributions

- Better understanding of:
  - ▣ Gender relations in the context of waste picking
  - ▣ Impediments to women's empowerment and what tools they need (practical and strategic)
  - ▣ How forms of agency emerge in contexts of gender oppression
  - ▣ How to promote gender-sensitive research-action projects with waste pickers
  - ▣ Connection between the genesis of the cooperative movement in Brazil and ideals of gender equality

# Contributions

- Engendering the waste sector and the national movement



*strengthen collective action*



*revitalize the movement*

- Important questions:

- *What are the consequences of reproducing multiple dimensions of gender inequality within cooperatives and movement in light of cooperative model?*
- *Can gender awareness contribute to renew these cooperative ideals?*
- *How can we introduce gender awareness in a movement where sexism is deeply entrenched and reproduced on various levels?*

# Gender & Waste Project in a Nutshell

## Objectives:

- Increase women's leadership roles within organizations
- Raise Gender-Awareness within organizations and national movement
- Foster Individual and Collective Empowerment (economic, political and symbolic)



## How:

- Involving women in all phases
- Engaging multiple partners and expertise
- Collaborative coordination involving all partners especially waste pickers
- Regional Workshops sessions
- Production of key resources – gender toolkits
- Ongoing communication
- Individual coaching sessions

# General Findings

- **Relations at work:** sexual division of labor; yet safe environment for many women
- **Relations in the movement:** more women should participate in workshops related to gender discussions; men and women should participate in meetings held in all government levels; women shouldn't only be given more opportunities to participate at the community/local level

# General Findings

## □ **Gender Vulnerabilities:**

- gender violence is a pressing concern, but stories and experiences of oppression established solidarity and demystified notions of victimization

## □ **Practical and Strategic Needs:**

- capacity building courses are essential for improving self-esteem and giving women more resources to actively participate in the cooperative and movement;
- better management and communication skills help women become more assertive within cooperatives impacting overall productivity
- Women are challenging traditional male leadership and discussing the creation of a Women's wing of the MNCR at state chapter



# Lessons Learned – Research-Action Level

- Participatory practices involve respecting women waste pickers' pace and time
- Gender is a relational concept; need to begin with women to create safe space for their voices to be heard
- However, it is important to engage male supporters in key moments in order to avoid undermining potential of project





# Lessons Learned – Theoretical/Analytical Level

- Building gender awareness is not disconnected from MNCR's general ideals: mutual help, democratic practices such as direct democracy, and self-management as specific forms of targeting oppression and exclusion
- Need to bridge praxis and action in leftist movements - articulating how gender injustices must be rejected even in traditionally male dominated spaces
- Gender equality does not base itself on establishing divisions, but rather on building alliances that are capable of challenging hierarchies on multiple levels
- Gender equality does not diminish class struggles, but is connected to broader struggles for social justice.

# Women's Voices



***“If women empower themselves, this could lead to more women mobilizing for other causes.”***

***“This project gave us hope to take it to the base. We need to make changes. As women to continue to produce this sexist thought, we won’t change. We know it is a slow process. Women have to change”.***





# Thank You!

**For comments or questions, please contact:**

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**To learn more about the project, please see:**

<http://wiego.org/informal-economy/waste-gender-rethinking-relations-empowerment>