



Photo by S. Dupuy



Women in Informal Employment  
Globalizing and Organizing

## **SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY AND COOPERATIVISM IN WIEGO: NETWORKING AS A MEANS TO ENGAGE IN SOLIDARITY NETWORKS.**

Sonia Dias, WIEGO Waste Specialist

# About WIEGO

- WIEGO is a global action-research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy through:
  - increased organization and representation
  - improved statistics and research
  - more inclusive policy processes
  - more equitable trade, labor, urban planning, and social protection policies

# Setting the Ground...

- In the current wave of neoliberalization, ever increasing corporatization, and of enclosure of urban commons a critical question has been: how to achieve a transborder political agenda of solidarity across North and South, and South to South that challenge these trends?
- Some responses: emergence of transnational collective action, of counter- hegemonic feminisms (cross-cultural scholarships and popular feminist movements), of transnational social movements and advocacy networks focused on HRs, the environment, social and economic justice.
- SSTC has been one of such responses: initiatives in the social, economic, environmental, technical and political fields that can be a useful tool to engage social partners from developing countries to promote the decent work agenda via development cooperation (ILO)

# Setting the Ground...

- UN world conferences and UN agencies have had a role in providing organizational resources to some counter-hegemonic endeavors (e.g: Beijing 1995 Women's conference with its emphasis on the creation of institutions and public policies – relevant in advancing women's agency)
- Local, Global? Why not go beyond these binarisms? Why not go Glocal? Why not “trans-local links”? Some argue that what matters is the impact not the place where political action is undertaken.
- Transnational and trans-local approaches may enable learnings across contexts.
- There is a renewed interest in the politics of solidarity – BUT whether this will enable transformative changes or serve as vehicle to take the responsibility of the state away (and to worsen working conditions) is still in dispute.

# Recognizing the Informal Economy – Fostering Solidarity – 2 Examples



# 1. Inclusive Cities



- Launched in late 2008 (funded by Gates Foundation)  
Inclusive Cities aimed to strengthen MBOs in the areas of organising, policy analysis, and advocacy, in order to ensure that urban informal workers have the tools necessary to make themselves heard within urban planning processes.
- Inclusive Cities was a collaboration of membership-based organizations (MBOs) of the working poor, international alliances of MBOs and support organisations committed to improving the situation of the working poor.

# The Inclusive Cities Network

- Key MBO partners:
  - SEWA – Self-Employed Womens Association, India
  - Kagad Kach Patra Kashatkari Panchayat, India
  - HomeNet South Asia & HomeNet South East Asia
  - Latin American & Caribbean Network of Waste Pickers and others....
  - StreetNet International, etc, etc...
  
- Support organisations
  - WIEGO
  - AVINA Foundation

# Inclusive Cities: Cross-border Networking

- Exciting agenda supported by cheap internet technology
- Email, skype and 'wiki's all widely used
- Projects included:
  - ▣ Tracking the Global Economic Crisis (2008)
  - ▣ Informal Economy Monitoring Study: 10 cities/3 continents
  - ▣ Learnings exchanges across cities
  - ▣ Law & the Working Poor
  - ▣ Dissemination and knowledge sharing
  - ▣ Participatory research with MBOs
  - ▣ Capacity building
- **Achievements:** greater visibility for informal workers and incidence in public policies: Wastepickers at COP15; Domestic Workers Convention; Global alliance of waste pickers etc

# Exciting Results and Impacts of IC Project...

## Also some Challenges...

- **Assuring “Accountability”:**
  - Global partners in relation to their affiliates
  - Among global partners
  - Global Partners with donors
- **Creation and Maintenance:**
  - System of governance and financial integrity
  - Administrative competence and reliability
  - Efficient advocacy and credibility
  - Monitoring and evaluation system
  - Representation and voice of all partners equally

# Exciting Results and Impacts of IC Project...

## Also some Challenges...

- **Balance in time allocation and other resources for:**
  - Organizing processes vs. Research;
  - Analysis of policies vs. advocacy
  - Promoting initiatives/global projects vs. Influencing the initiatives of other organizations
  - Global processes vs. Local processes
- **Other challenges:**
  - Risk of creating informal globe-trotters (travel the world with no time for local processes);
  - More organized actors can “subordinate” others
  - “forum shopping” (A. Fung) instrumental use of alliances’ deliberative structures

## 2. Waste Pickers Without Borders



# Waste Pickers -Global Networking

Since the 2008 First WP Conference in Bogota, interactions among waste pickers across the world have increased including learning exchanges across cities; it uses a website for interaction, capacity building etc

PUNE NEWSLINE - 19/01/09

## Colombia to Pune: To connect with ragpickers

ROHAN SWAMY  
JANUARY 18



**Nehra Padilla at the office of the Kgsad Kach Patra Kambhakar Panchayat at Pimpri, Oriss Anand**

I HAVE been collecting, rather 'picking my way' through garbage bins searching for recyclable paper, plastic, and other scrap ever since I was seven years old. My parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters were all in this business. We used to scrounge garbage dumps, landfills and streets so that we could eke a living out of it," says Nehra Padilla, a ragpicker who has come all the way from Bogota, Colombia to interact with the ragpickers in the city.

Speaking about her experiences in Bogota she says, "When I was small, the waste collectors, (also called as recycladores) worked in unhygienic conditions. We had to also go to the Bogota City Dump — to collect waste paper, plastic and other things — which was a filthy stretch of land. We had lodged an agitation against the government and eventually got them to incorporate ragpickers in the recycling chain in 1987."

Nehra is also the head of the Recycladores Association of Bogota (ARB) which works towards ensuring that ragpickers also benefit from the recycling of waste and garbage.

The Association ensures that waste is collected in a much hygienic way. The ragpickers are provided with safety equipment while collecting waste, she says.

"Close to 55 per cent of the people in Colombia live below poverty line. Out of these, close to 55,000 are ragpickers who are now officially recognised by the government," she adds. On her trip to Pune she says, "We are basically studying the problems that are faced by rag-

TIMES OF INDIA - 19/01/09

## A ragpicker-activist's battle for dignity

Mansi Tewari | TNN

Pune: "The countries may be different, but the issues remain the same," said Nehra Padilla, a Colombian waste picker who was recently in the city. Ragpickers in her country, too, she said, had to fight a great deal for dignity and respect.

One of the founder-members of Recycladores Association of Bogota (ARB), Nehra, along with other members, fought for the rights of ragpickers in her country. "We fought for 15 years to get the government to recognise our profession and demanded a modification in the law. The organisation in Bogota has fought to get houses, insurance and support from societies," she said, speaking to TOI with an interpreter's help on Saturday.

"I inherited this occupation. I have been a waste picker since the age of seven," said Nehra. "My whole family was into ragpicking and we have struggled a lot to earn the dignity and respect we have today."

Comparing the condition of ragpickers in India with those in Colombia, Nehra said, "There is not a lot of difference. The condition is almost the same. It is just that in Colombia people are proud of what they do and people respect them for their work. In India that is not the case."

While in the city, Nehra wanted to learn as much as she could about the functioning of the Kgsad Kach Patra Kashtakar Panchayat (KKP) to better understand the problems of ragpickers in India. Of the organisation she says, "It is an important organisation, and is showing the government and the ragpickers the way."

Nehra says she will return to India and fight for the cause that has motivated her to travel so far. "People must understand that ragpickers are serving society and are doing a respectable job. They must, therefore, be treated as equals," she says.

Speaking about India, Nehra said, "The infrastructure here is good and the people are peace-loving, which is not the case in Latin America. Poverty drives people towards violence, but this is not the case in India."

"We will fight all problems and stand together to get economic recognition for ragpickers," she promised.



**Nehra Padilla**



# GlobalRec: A Platform for the Interaction of Waste Pickers across the World



- Globalrec.org was developed to support the informal alliance of waste picker in their communication and interaction.
- It started off with blog posts from former websites and content that WIEGO had amassed over the years.
- **How it works:** Almost all content is sent by WP organizations or supporting NGOs. Currently, efforts are being made to create an editorial board with wp representatives, who will be trained on how to post news by themselves so as to create greater ownership.
- It operates in 4 languages: English, Spanish, French and Portuguese.
- Newsletters: Struggles and Victories: Waste Pickers on the Frontline. February-May 2015 [Struggles and Victories: Waste Pickers on the Frontline. February-May 2015](#)

# GlobalRec: A Platform for the Interaction of Waste Pickers across the World

- Provides support to national/local mobilizations and advocacy campaigns
- Organizes signature collection via [change.org](https://www.change.org)
- Publishes articles from newspaper, blogs, or texts written especially for the site
- Has Facebook and Twitter accounts currently operating on a low mode
- Includes a WAW database, which collects information on waste pickers' organizations
- Watch out -new series "Scenes from the Heart of Recycling" (snapshots of wps and Cities SW systems)



# Learnings from Globalrec Interactions – Waste Pickers

Communications Tools are important for sharing experiences among informal workers:

1. Exchange visits - exchange visits and meetings allow workers to share ideas and learn from one another. This is probably the most useful communication tool among waste picker groups, for instance. Costs may impact how many workers can effectively participate.
2. Newsletter - GlobalRec creates and distributes an excellent newsletter for communication among waste picker groups and allies. It is translated into 4 languages which is important for engaging with the grassroots.
3. Online email groups – have been very effective in sharing information about important events, topics, news (needs to be translated in order to be more inclusive).
4. Providing feedback to waste pickers – An example is the photo news reports that are published on the site. [http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Dias\\_Foto-Noticia-Pesquisa-De-Campo-Exploratoria-Moc.pdf](http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Dias_Foto-Noticia-Pesquisa-De-Campo-Exploratoria-Moc.pdf)
5. Dissemination of research on contribution of waste pickers is a tool for wps.

# Conclusion

- ❑ SSTC can create bonds that strengthen the working poor via coordinated cooperation efforts rooted in places but traveling beyond the scale of local, which ultimately may lead to solidarity economy.
- ❑ Social and Solidarity Economy might be a way for the transition from informal to formal in a way respectful of a human development agenda.
- ❑ For that to happen we need a mixture btw critical thinking and engaged activism.



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