

WIEGO

WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organising) is a worldwide coalition of people, organisations and institutions who want to improve statistics, research, programmes and policies in support of women in the informal economy.

WIEGO is an action-research programme with two major concerns:

- Globalizing - women all over the world are part of the global economy, and globalization is having a big impact on women
- Organising - the most effective way for women to cope with the negative effects of global trade and investment, and to seize opportunities arising from it, is to organise at local, regional, national and international levels.

WIEGO aims to improve women's economic and social prospects by highlighting how important women's informal employment is in national and global economies. It aims to integrate their informal work into mainstream economic theory, policies and markets, as well as into urban planning and policies.

Specifically, WIEGO aims to:

- do research which will promote a better understanding of women in informal employment;
- use this research to feed into better policies and programmes for women in informal employment - both economic

by Caroline Skinner

- policies and urban planning policies of local governments;
- promote and strengthen alliances of women in informal employment, in particular the alliances of home-based workers (HomeNet), and of street vendors;
- improve statistics on women's informal employment, nationally and internationally.

The founder organisations of WIEGO are the Harvard Institute for International Development (HID), a research, teaching and policy advising centre at Harvard University in the United States, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a trade union for self-employed women in India and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, an agency of the United Nations that focuses on women.

An international steering committee formulates policies and objectives. Pat Horn, the general secretary of the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU) in South Africa, sits on this committee. There are three working groups to plan and monitor activities. The three groups are research, statistics and programme/policy.

Research project

South Africa is one of four countries in

Africa where research will be done on women street traders. The pilot phase commenced in this country early in 1998, and will continue for 18 months. At the end of this period, there will be a regional exchange workshop. The South African research will be presented to researchers and street vendors from the other countries, who will continue with the research. These countries are most likely to be Kenya, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire.



Informal trading on the streets of Yeoville.

SEWU has contracted the Centre for Social and Development Studies (CSDS) at the University of Natal to manage the South African pilot study. It has contracted the Durban Workers' College to run the policy dialogues and workshops which will be held to share research results with various stakeholders.

Products

The research will give rise to the following products:

- a report which synthesises existing South African research on women in informal employment, especially street traders;
- a report which compares the regulatory and institutional framework for street traders in five South African cities, voicing both street traders' and local government's views. The 'best' existing programmes and policies will be identified. SEWU's experience of

negotiating with local authorities will be drawn on;

- a report which describes how street traders, and especially women, are organised in South Africa, and what barriers there are to further organisation.

The reports and papers will appear as soon as they are completed as working papers and later in academic publications. The main findings will be published in a lively, attractive and accessible publication for wider dissemination in South Africa and other countries in Africa participating in the project. ★

Contact details

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