BRIDGING THE GENDER AND FORMAL/INFORMAL DIVIDE IN LABOR MOVEMENTS WITHIN A GLOBALIZING ASEAN*

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Growth of Workers in the Informal Economy

The trend towards informalization of work is worldwide. The informal economy is growing in terms of share in total employment and in new jobs. The global picture shows that even in the developed countries, 25-40 percent of employment is "non-standard" and 12 percent of non-agricultural employment is self-employment. In the developing countries, 50-90 percent of total employment is informal, and the self-employed comprise 31-53 percent of non-agricultural employment. (Chen, 2008).

In the whole of Asia, informal employment provides the majority (65 percent) of non-agricultural employment. (ILO, 20O2), In China, where burgeoning export-oriented industries are now concentrated, ILO figures show a steady decline in formal sector employment by 34.1 million, accompanied by a steep rise in irregular, casual-wage or self-employment by 80 million in 1990-2002. In fast globalizing India, informal employment also increased from 80.5 percent to 83.2 percent from 1994 to 2000. (In Lansberg, 2OO7).

In the whole of ASEAN, informal work comprised 156 million or 63.7 percent of total employment in 2006, according to the ILO (2OO7). In the Philippines, figures based on the 2005 labor force survey show that the informal sector now comprise 76.34 percent or

24.6 million of the country's total employed, an increase of several percentage points from previous estimates.(National Labor Force Survey, 2OO5) This rise in informal sector employment is accompanied by an alarming decrease in the ranks of formal workers. In Indonesia, the share of informal work in non-agricultural employment rose several percentage points to 70.8 percent in the period 1998 to 2003. Similar increases were recorded in Thailand and in Vietnam. (Lansberg, 2OO7).

Informality is often linked to poverty. There are 500 million working poor in the world, and many of them are found in the informal economy. By working poor is meant those who are working but cannot work their way out of poverty because of very low earnings and very high risks. The figures below show that in ASEAN, at least one out of ten workers live in extreme poverty, subsisting at less than one dollar a day. (In the Philippines, one out of five; and in Laos and Cambodia, one out of three). Of the more than 262 million workers in ASEAN, 148 million or 56.5 percent - at least five out of ten -- are living in poverty, subsisting at less than the two dollars a day poverty line. In terms of country breakdown, 80 percent of workers in Cambodia and Laos, 70 percentt in Indonesia, and 60 percent in the Philippines do not have enough income to get themselves out of poverty. ((ILO, 2007:4, 18).

	US$1 a day working poor				US$2 a day working poor			
	Millions		Share in total employment (%)		Millions		Share in total employment (%)	
	1996	2006	1996	2006	1996	2006	1996	2006
ASEAN	36.7	28.5	16.9	10.8	140.1	148.7	64.5	56.5
East Asia	145.0	95.0	20.3	12.1	442.9	347.2	61.9	44.2
South Asia	250.8	196.9	51.9	33.0	427.1	500.2	88.4	83.7

Source: ILO, 2007:18

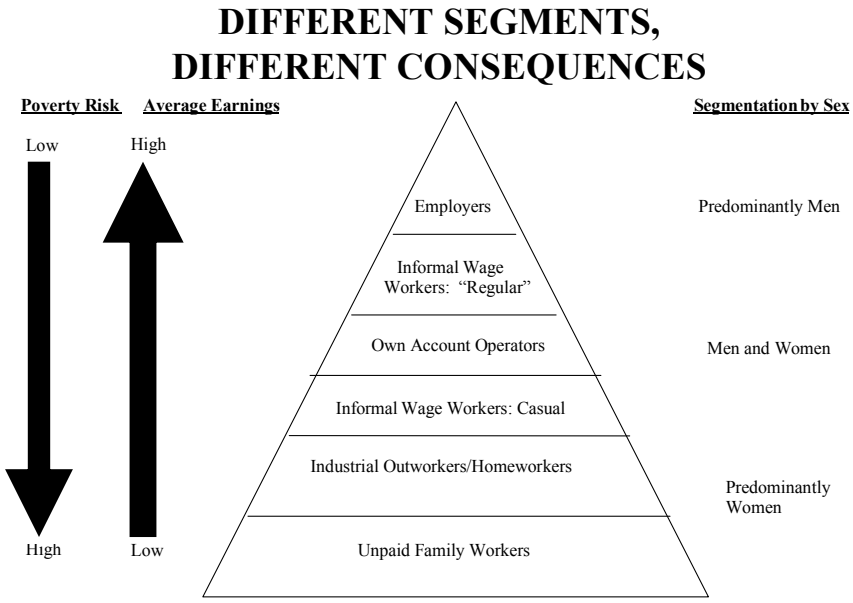
The unprecedented growth of the informal economy worldwide has given birth to a global movement to redefine the concept "worker" away from very narrow notions associated with formality, regularity, and clear employer-employee relations which refer only to a shrinking male minority of working people in the world. A much more inclusive definition of worker is "anyone who lives by selling his or her capacity to work, either for wages or for other forms of income." (Gallin, 2002: 1). Such a definition covers the majority of workers in the world who work in the informal economy, or all those who have unprotected and unregulated work.

The informal economy has been growing in both North and South, due to the combined effects of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization which altogether drove out

millions of workers from the formal economy (24 million, according to the ILO, in East Asia alone in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis, in itself a consequence of the liberalization and deregulation of financial markets culminating in the successive domino-like devaluation of Asian currencies). At the same time, as exemplified by the production or value chains spearheaded by transnational corporations particularly in the garments industry , the informal economy serves as the bottom end of the production ladder, providing cheap and unprotected labor vulnerable to exploitation while management saves on costs by retaining a small core of permanent and regular workers.

Poverty, Gender and the Informal Economy

Women are particularly involved in informal employment (averaging 65 percent of all women in non-agricultural employment in Asia) , and when agriculture is added in, women's share of informal employment goes way up, since women tend to be very much involved in agricultural work. This perhaps helps explain why two-thirds of the working poor in Asia are women. (ILO, 2006:25-26). The informal economy is highly gendered, serving as a catch basin of women who have been among the first to be displaced from formal work, especially in the garments industry, as globalization progressed. But women have also been the mainstay of the informal economy even before the onslaughts of globalization since informal work (e.g., homebased work) is compatible with their reproductive work (child care, domestic chores), and since their status as secondary or supplemental earners often deprive them of opportunities to find formal employment. In their particular case, class, gender, ethnicity, and other issues often intersect.



Source: Martha Chen, WIEGO (2008)

As the pyramid above suggests, women are concentrated in the lower strata of unpaid family workers and industrial homeworkers where earnings are meager and where poverty-inducing risks such as illness and job insecurity are high. On the other hand, men are concentrated in the higher rungs as employers and as fairly "regular" informal workers with bigger remuneration and lower risk.

In the current context of unbridled globalization, women informal workers exhibit strengths as well as weaknesses, and face opportunities as well as threats. Many of them have the capacity, the resilience, and the adaptability to enter many forms of employment during times of crises .because they need to seize every opportunity to earn in order to ensure family survival. However, these very same forms of employment in the informal economy are also subject to the vagaries of the global and local markets, and can be

threatened by competition, instability, and lack of support. Under such circumstances, women's overburdened state becomes a vicious cycle of having to shoulder various means of making a living while tending to domestic as well as community responsibilities. As with other informal workers, women workers have little access to education, credit, healthcare and other resources needed to meet basic needs. Informal workers generally suffer from substandard wages, poor working conditions, exposure to occupational health and safety hazards, and lack of social security.

High unemployment and underemployment due to the decline or stagnation of local industries faced with ruinous competition drive displaced workers abroad in an often uncertain diaspora. Many of these migrants, especially the undocumented ones, wind up in unprotected, informal, 3D (dirty, dangerous, demanding) jobs in construction, service and other industries. Feminization of migration has been a phenomenon since the early nineties, and lately, women comprise almost three-fourths of newly deployed migrants in the Philippines, and the majority in the case of other ASEAN countries like Indonesia.

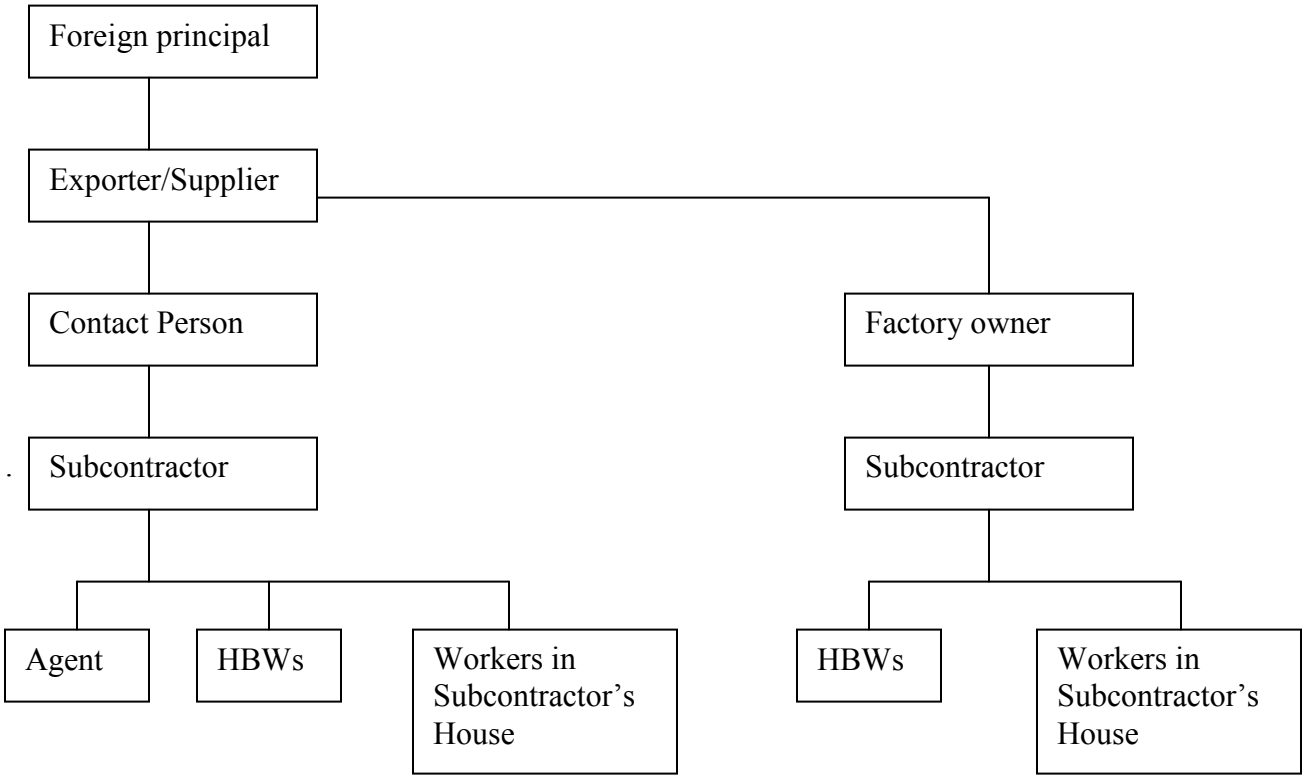
From Informal Sector to Informal Economy

The ranks of unprotected informal workers in the Philippines as well as in the whole of Asia[i] are growing fast, even while those of regular formal workers are being depleted by the onslaughts of trade liberalization and the increasing flexibilization and contractualization of labor. Formal workers may go into self-employment when they lose their jobs. Or they may continue working in the same industry as contractual, casual, agency-hired, or subcontracted home workers under precarious and insecure

conditions .In this sense, they provide cheap and unprotected labor vulnerable to exploitation at the bottom of the production ladder while firms save on costs by maintaining just a few regular, organizable workers.

Forrmal and informal employment are often linked together by the subcontracting chain. And towards the bottom of the chain the distinctions between the two can oftentimes get hazy. This chain is negatively affected by the intricacies of international trade, where larger firms tend to exploit micro-enterprises by ordering at low prices or subcontracting certain stages of the production process to save on labor costs or to weaken the leverage of regular and/or unionized workers. An example from the garments industry may be found below:

Figure 1. The Subcontracting Chain



In this example, a foreign principal based abroad(a large enterprise) could order from a Manila-based exporter (a medium enterprise), which in turn could subcontract to a province-based factory (a small enterprise). This factory could order from outlying barangays, where agents could tap the productive capacity of micro-enterprises and/or homebased workers (HBWs). As the chain goes downward, so do the wages and benefits of the workers who range from formal at the top to informal below.

In the Philippines, figures based on the 2005 labor force survey show that informal workers now comprise 76.34 percent or 24.6 million of the country's total employed, an increase of several percentage points from previous estimates.[ii] This rise in informal employment is accompanied by an alarming decrease in the ranks of formal workers.

Table 4: COMPARATIVE SIZES OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS 1999 AND 2005

	1999		2005		Difference
	No. of Workers	% to total employed	No. of Workers	% to total employed	
Labor Force	**30,758,00**	**90.19%***	**	**	**
Total Employed	**27,742,000**		**32,313,000**		**+4,571,000**
Formal Sector	**6,013,688**	**21.68**	**5,322,320**	**16.4%**	**-691,368**
Informal Sector	**20,492,312**	**65.13**	**24,666,680**	**76.34**	**+4,174,368**
Wage & Salary	4,156,312	14.98	7,068,680	21.88	2,912,368
Own-account	10,792,000	38.90	12,104,000	37.46	1,312,000
Domestic Helpers	1,498,000	5.40	1,473,000	4.55	-25,000
Unpaid workers	4,046,000	14.58	3,893,000	12.05	-153,000

* Per cent unemployed
** Cannot be computed due to the adoption of the revised unemployment definition starting April, 2005
Source : NSO Labor Force Survey of Philippine Business and Industry

The National Statistical and Coordination Board (NSCB), issued the following operational definition of the informal sector in 2002 after consultations with stakeholders:

> *Units engaged in the production of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and incomes to the persons concerned. It consists of household unincorporated enterprises that are market and non-market producers of goods as well as market producers of services.*
>
> *These enterprises are operated by own-account workers, which may employ unpaid family workers as well as occasional, seasonally hired workers.*
>
> *These enterprises may also be owned and operated by employers which may employ less than 10 employees on a continuous basis. (NSCB Resolution No 15, series of 2002)*

The informal sector thus officially recognized and defined includes the following subsectors, among others: the micro-entrepreneurs, homebased workers (including subcontracted, own-account workers and self-employed), vendors, small transport operators (of tricycles, pedicabs and bancas), petty retailers, barter traders, small-scale miners and quarry workers, non-corporate construction workers, entertainers, beauticians, laundry persons, hairdressers, small and landless farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, on-call domestic helpers, volunteer workers, barkers, unorganized cargo handlers, etc.

In recent years, there has been a shift in terminology from "informal sector" to "informal economy," the latter defined by the ILO as "all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice-not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements." [iii] The shift is underpinned by the realization that what used to be considered a transitory, marginal "informal sector" did not disappear with industrial development but has become a permanent, expanding provider of jobs, goods, and services for lower income groups not only in developing but also in industrialized economies. It is responsible for a significant portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and as the Philippine case suggests, accounts for a broad range of occupations from old resilient casual jobs in construction and subcontracted work done at home for the garments and handicraft industries , to new emerging forms such as temporary or part-time work and computer-based "telehomework" such as medical transcription. It also includes a wide variety of economic activity, from survival and livelihood projects to thriving micro-enterprises and stable businesses.

The expanded definition of informal economy includes "the diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, and workers that are not regulated or protected by the state." It is comprised of: 1) "self-employment in informal enterprises," meaning "self-employed persons in small, unregistered, and unincorporated enterprises, including employers, own account workers, and unpaid contributing family workers;" and 2) "wage employment in informal jobs," meaning "wage workers without legal protection for formal and informal firms, for contractors, for households, or with no fixed employer, including non-standard employees of informal enterprises, non-standard employees of formal

enterprises, casual or day laborers, and industrial outworkers (also called homeworkers)." (Chen, 2008).

Decline of Traditional Labor Movements

A trade union is defined as "a continuing, permanent and democratic ORGANISATION created by the workers – or joined by them – to protect themselves at work, to improve their bargaining, to better the conditions of their lives and to provide a means of expressing their views on problems of society."

Unions cover only a tiny fraction of the total employed and not all of them have collective bargaining arrangements. They not only have a rather narrow base from which to operate. They are also at a disadvantage, given the large numbers of unemployed and underemployed in most of the region. Thus, when it comes to hiring and retaining workers, management can afford to be choosy. If it smells trouble brewing from workers who are trying to organize unions, it will not hesitate to find means to obstruct their efforts. Termination for various concocted reasons is a common recourse. "Blacklisting, intimidation and lay-offs are often used by employers to curtail union activism." (CNV and FNV, n.d.: 33). Compounding the problem is the long history of trade union disunity in some countries, punctuated now and then by short-lived efforts towards trade union unity.

A process of de-unionization has accompanied changing employment patterns (flexibilization which is most visible as contractualization, as well as informalization and migration) in a globalizing economy. Workers are affected by labor-cost-cutting measures adopted by micro-businesses just to be able to keep up with increasing competition under globalization. The core of permanent workers is reduced to accommodate temporary and casual employees. The increasing use of cheap labor such as apprentices and migrants is continuing. Somehow this is tantamount to deunionization or controlling unions. Morover, subcontracting production and services outside formal workplaces (outsourcing) is accompanied by increased number of shifts per day, overtime, and use of piece rates. All of these actions have an overwhelming impact on workers, women and men, in both formal and informal employment.

In the Philippines, a mere 9-10 percent of the employed are currently covered by unions, and only one-third of union members and one-fourth of union leaders are women. Worse, according to trade union leaders, only 230,000 of unionized workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements.(CBAs) [iv] The sharp decline in union membership in the Philippines is dramatized by the fact that from 1995-2004, the country's unions lost two million members, down from 3.57 million to 1.57 million. And of this, only one third had CBAs. (Serrano, 2005). The decline has been attributed to "union avoidance by employers combined with weak enforcement of labor laws." (ibid). Part of union avoidance is transfer of operations to economic zones, industrial parks, and other areas where unions are curtailed and/or discouraged.

In the whole of ASEAN, union density, with the exception of Vietnam, has not gone beyond 20 percent of total employed. (Serrano, 2005).

Globalization has placed many unions in crisis. Many unionized firms have closed down due to losses as well as labor unrest, eroding the membership base of labor federations. More sophisticated management techniques at coercion and persuasion have prevented the unionization of large masses of workers, including those in economic zones where women predominate. There are many other hindrances to getting women organized, among them the lack of emphasis on equality issues in trade unions, lack of family support, more vulnerability to employers' retaliation, isolation and marginalization (especially in the case of women in homebased work, for example), and legal restrictions in countries where ILO conventions are not observed. (CNV and FNV, ibid.) Despite persistent and emerging issues and obstacles, however, there are also some gains and advances.

Women and Trade Unions

In the mid-1990s, the proportion of women rank-and-file members ranged from between 10-20 percent in India and Bangladesh , between 20-30 percent in the Republic of Korea, Japan and Fiji, between 40-50 percent in the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and New Zealand, between 50-60 percent in Sri Lanka and Thailand, to between 60-70 percent in Mongolia. (ILO,1999:76). Exclusively male unions are fast disappearing. However, there are many fields of work where the predominantly female

force remains unorganized, particularly export processing zones, agriculture, the informal sector, and other precarious areas of employment such as part-time, casual, or homebased work. Trade union centers and movements are paying more attention to these non-traditional fields for organizing, conscious that women workers comprise a fertile source of membership and revitalization. (CNV and FNV, nd).However, there is a lack of women leaders and organizers to undertake such a task. Conscious of the limitations of traditionally male-dominated trade union structures, some groups have attempted organizing women into separate organizations in order to give them the freedom and the space to develop without having to deal with male-centered hierarchies and practices.

At the leadership level of most trade unions, women have always been under-represented. They usually comprise a small minority of union boards and general councils. For example, in 1996, the proportion of women executive board members ranged from three in Sri Lanka to 25 in Australia; that of women General Council members, from two in Japan to 50 in Sri Lanka. (ILO,1999:76, citing ICFTU APRO surveys and estimates). Despite the increasing number of women unionists, male dominance in union leadership has prevailed. This is true even in service industries where women abound, and in sectors where females outnumber men as union members (such as wholesale and retail trade as well financing, insurance, real estate and business services). It is also the case in individual manufacturing firms where majority of the work force are women (such as electronics and garments). Thus, while male union Presidents lord it over union organizations, women play minor roles as members of the Board of Directors, as second in command or as treasurers or secretaries--traditional spheres of women even in business

and other organizations. This is true not only at the level of the local union but also at the level of the federation

Why are women not more assertive in the trade unions? Why do they not want to get involved in union activities? The following reasons were cited by the South Asians in the joint UNI-APRO Workshop for Women Activists (1999): women have "more responsibility in the family" and therefore lack time for union work; society has a "negative attitude" to such involvement, given the traditional roles and stereotypes which inhibit women from entering what is perceived to be a male domain; unions have a "negative reputation," being associated with aggressive and confrontational activities such as strikes and pickets; and they "do not recruit or represent women..." Aside from these, Filipino women unionists cite women workers' low self esteem, their belief that unionism is a male turf, and their being repelled by exclusively male methods and practices such as drinking alcohol while conducting trade union meetings, dialogues, and negotiations (Angsioco,1994).

International trade union federations have done a lot to put gender equality on the agenda of their affiliates. Although there is increasing recognition among trade unions regarding the need to mainstream gender equality in the work place, in policy-making, in collective bargaining and other forms of union work, this usually just remains on paper and is seldom put into practice. (ILO,1999: 69). Setting up Women's Committees is a step forward for many unions, but more needs to be done in terms of staffing, resource allocation and other support mechanisms to prevent them from being marginalized as

mere tokens of women's participation. In this regard, there is need to recognize and address "negative male attitudes and unwillingness of men to give up power." (ICFTU Trade Unions and Working Women Manual, Appendix, 4) Gender-sensitivity and awareness raising activities tend to involve only women . They should also target the men within trade unions to give gender equality the necessary push towards realization in practice.The good news is that initiatives have been taken toward this end, notably the 1995 campaign conducted in six countries (Fiji, India, Malaysia, Philippines, Western Samoa and Sri Lanka) by the Equality Department of the ICFTU and coordinated by the ICFTU-APRO. Among others, this campaign resulted in the formation of Gender Perspective Teams (GPTs) composed of women and men in each country.

There have also been attempts, notably by the FNV and the CNV, to put more emphasis on organizing women workers in especially difficult circumstances, including those in export processing zones and in informal work. In Asia, the more successful efforts are among the ranks of homebased workers. Some of them, as in the famous SEWA example in India, eventually became recognized as trade unions in their own right.

Organizing Women Informal Workers

THE EXAMPLE OF SEWA. The growing significance of informal work, and the myriad problems of informal workers, have led to the emergence of their organizations in the last few decades. Organizing among homebased workers (HBWs) in Asia for example has had a long herstory/history, beginning with the founding of the Self-

Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India and its multi-pronged approach to women's empowerment which include mass mobilization and negotiation along industry lines (particularly in the case of the bidi workers), formation of production and service cooperatives, establishment of a bank where even illiterate women can borrow, provision of insurance and other social protection schemes, engagement in trade facilitation, international advocacy and networking. SEWA's main strategies therefore, are: a) increasing employment opportunities for women and thus increasing women's bargaining power; b) developing women's assets; c) capacity-building and leadership development of rural women; d) providing food and social security; and e) becoming self-reliant, economically.

SEWA had a rocky relationship with the trade union (Textile Labour Association) of which it was a part. This progressed to a complete break in the early 1980s over issues of caste, class, and gender. SEWA resolved to do things its own way, combining trade unionism and cooperativism. It is now the largest primary union in India (with 700,000 members in 1974 and about a million now), and has been recognized by the largest conglomeration of international confederations of trade unions (ITUC). (Bhatt, 2006:13-16).

Likewise, homebased workers in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand (and later joined by Homenet Laos) were the first to form their own networks, converging in Homenet Southeast Asia for greater visibility in national as well as regional policy advocacy.

Through the strengthening of their own organizations and networks, HBWs and other workers in the informal sector realize their economic, political, and social rights; the

improvement of their working and living conditions; the enjoyment of income and employment security, including social protection; and participation in governance related to homeworkers' and informal workers' concerns.

PHILIPPINES

PATAMABA is a people's organization led by grassroots women who sought to empower themselves by founding and running their own organization. Founded in 1989 as the first organization formed by Filipino homebased workers, **PATAMABA** started out as the *Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagagwa sa Bahay* (National Network of Homeworkers). In its May 2003 National Congress, its expanded name was changed to the *Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal* (National Network of Informal Workers) to reflect fundamental changes in its targeted membership which now includes, in addition to homeworkers, vendors, small transport operators, construction workers, and young workers. From being primarily a women's organization (98 percent of the members are women between the ages 18 to 75), it has started its evolution into an organization that seeks to address the concerns and uplift the plight of both female and male works belonging to the informal sector.

PATAMABA's expanding influence among the informal workers has been manifested in orientation activities for new members and organizing in other subsectors. The latest count (2007) of PATAMABA membership totals to 16,295 in 276 chapters covering 34 provinces nationwide. Of these numbers, 2567 are in subcontracted work, 12,069 are self-employed and 1,524 are combinations of both. The subcontracted workers garments,

handicraft, papier mache, bags, Christmas balls, sawali, fashion accessories, embroidery. The self employed members are into livestock, agri-based products, garments, bags, slippers, fashion accessories, novelty items, food, woodcraft, and weaving.

PATAMABA's networking now spans a wide range different sectors and groups - from informal ones like street and market vendors to official policy-makers and formal academic institutions. PATAMABA, with the support of Homenet Southeast Asia, spearheaded the successful launching of Homenet Philippines in May 2006, a broad coalition of 23 organizations comprised of homebased workers' groups and NGOs of various persuasions with a total membership reach of about 60,000. The formal launching of Homenet Philippines' advocacy agenda of Homenet Philippines helped boost the advocacy campaign on ILO Convention 177 on Home Work and the Magna Carta for Workers in the Informal Economy.

Broad based policy advocacy for a rights-based legislation for informal workers, who now comprise 24.6 million or 76 percent of total employed, took a significant leap with the formation of MAGCAISA (Magna Carta for the Informal Sector Alliance) in October 2OO7. MAGCAISA is a loose coalition of POs, NGOs and academe-based institutions with a long record of involvement in informal worker issues. The driving forces of the coalition include Homenet Philippines,; the Association of Construction and Informal Workers (ACIW) and the National Union of Building and Construction Workers (NUBC); and ASAPHIL, which includes tricycle and other small transport operators.

Through the years, PATAMABA's policy advocacy work has occurred at various levels. It has influenced the national anti-poverty policies and programs through its presence and

leadership in the Workers in the Informal Sector Council (WISC) of the National Anti Poverty Commission (NAPC). After more than a decade of trying, it has aided in persuading the Social Security System (SSS) to allow self-employed homeworkers to avail of social insurance and to facilitate this process through the automatic Debit Account (ADA) arrangement whereby self-employed SSS members can use the facilities

PATAMABA's main strategies are: 1) participation in governance and institution building through organizing, coalition building, representation in national, local and international bodies and institutionalizing programs and projects for the informal sector; 2) human development services such as skills training and skills upgrading (production related), capability-building, training on gender awareness, health and reproductive rights, computer literacy and connectivity, workers' and working children's rights under the law, participatory research, fieldwork data collection, facilitation and linkages; 3) socio-economic assistance as exemplified by its credit facility program and microfinance, enterprise development, and marketing of homebased products through a showroom and participation in trade fairs and bazaars; 4) networking, advocacy and para-legal work for fair trade, Magna Carta for Informal workers, anti-poverty strategies, and other policy changes, through building partnership with GOand academe.s, NGOs. LGUs, POs, international agencies, trade unions, cooperatives.

THAILAND

Homenet Thailand's overall mission is to consolidate, support, protect, and strengthen the identity and role of the homebased workforce in Thailand. Officially established in June 1998, it is presently composed of 9000 members served by NGOs active in four regional networks - the Central (Bangkok) Network , the Northern Network, the North East Network , and the South Network. It is the coordinating centre of homebased producers and homeworkers as well as concerned NGOs in the country. Homenet Thailand through the regional networks has been reaching out to groups of informal workers comprised of own-account workers or home producers who are mainly involved with home products, handicrafts, food processing, herbal products, etc; subcontracted workers involved in the production of garments, artificial flowers, jewelry, leather products, and other products; and agricultural labor, especially contracted farmers.

HomeNet Thailand provides the coordination at the national and international levels on policies and issues related to homeworkers. The national committee is composed of two representatives from each region. Each regional network has its own committee and an office with a regional coordinator who works part-time for HomeNet Thailand.

The strategies employed by Homenet Thailand are: 1) strengthening homeworkers' capacities in production and management through skills training and other development activities for homeworkers; 2) promotion of the homeworkers' organization by coordinating and maintaining a good network and organizational system; 3) promotion of labor standards and social protection among homeworkers and home producers through campaigns for homeworkers' welfare in the areas of occupational health and safety as

well as wages and social security, and 4) exercising influence over government policies in relation to the legal and social protection of homeworkers.

Included in Homenet Thailand's agenda are: 1) visibility of homebased workers for representation in in national statistics and policies; 2) labor and social protection; 3) capacity building through training in promotional, marketing and marketing skills; 4) policy advocacy through dialogues with parliamentarians, academics, government officials, policy makers, international agencies and the general public; and organizing and networking.

Moreover, Homenet Thailand has drawn an action plan to strengthen regional and national HBW networks by giving more attention on the different situations of HBW networks in each region and in Bangkok, that call for specific types of assistance towards an improved network management. Other issues have also been included such as resource mobilization and economic security through cluster approach in the program.

Homenet Thailand has had high visibility in advocating for occupational safety and health, and for the approval of the 30 baht health insurance scheme for all. Among the national Homenets, Homenet Thailand has had the most success in focusing on OSH issues through its OSH project for homebased and other informal workers conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Health. It has also been working closely with formal sector workers' groups in advocating for occupational safety and health, and favors strengthening these ties through more joint activities to forge greater solidarity among all workers.

Concluding Remarks

The previous discussions show that in the context of globalization, informal work is expanding in the ASEAN region, and that it is often linked to poverty. Women are very much into informal employment, and therefore poverty in the region usually has a woman's face. The trade union movement is in decline, and has not yet confronted the challenge of organizing informal workers, and bringing the women in not only as members but also as leaders. What has happened is autonomous organizing by informal women workers' movements, notably among homebased workers, but these efforts are not necessarily antagonistic to existing trade unions and in fact have sought convergence with them especially in terms of policy advocacy. There is hope that both the formal/informal and the gender divide in the labor movement in ASEAN can in the long run be bridged, with the support of enlightened global union federations and more innovative national federations like the FNV which have been supportive of informal women workers' movements in the region. The commonality in both trade union and informal women workers' movements is membership-based organizing rooted in democratic principles whereby leaders are made accountable to the rank-and-file. (Chen et al, 2007).

[i] Informal employment now comprise 71 percent of non-agricultural employment in Asia. (WIEGO website – http://www.wiego.org/stat_picture

[ii] Table IV. Comparative Sizes of Formal and Informal Sectors 1999 and 2OO5, in National Labor Force Survey of Business and Industry, 2OO5.

[iii] Resolution concerning decent work and the informal economy, document of the 9Oth session of the General Conference of the International Labour Organization , 2002, Geneva.

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