

# STREETNET ASSOCIATION

NO. 1 NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2000

## What is the StreetNet Association? *by Pat Horn - Co-ordinator*

StreetNet was conceived by a network of individual vendors, activists, researchers and other people and institutions, who came together to look at how to increase the visibility, voice and bargaining power of street vendors throughout the world.

StreetNet aims to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors and on practical organizing and advocacy strategies. Through StreetNet, members should gain an understanding of the common problems of street vendors, develop new ideas for strengthening their organizing and advocacy efforts and join in international campaigns to promote policies and actions that can contribute to improving the lives of millions of street vendors.

In order to realise these aims, the StreetNet Association was established in Durban, South Africa, in December 1999 as the legal entity which will build and consolidate StreetNet.

Representatives from four organizations have played a key role in the development of StreetNet: the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Ahmedabad, India, the Self Employed Women Union (SEWU) in Durban, South Africa, Women's World Banking in New York and the International Coalition of Women and Credit in New York. The Alliance is supported through action research promoted by WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising), primarily through its Urban Policies Program.

### Objectives

StreetNet's objectives are:

- \* to expand and strengthen street vendor networks at the international, regional and national levels;
- \* to build an information base on street vendors in different parts of the world;
- \* to document and disseminate information on effective organizing strategies;
- \* to work towards building a solid institutional base from which to carry forward its work in the future.

## Benefits

The proposed benefits of joining StreetNet include:

- \* international solidarity;
- \* access to regional/international networks;
- \* participation in international campaigns (such as an ILO Convention);
- \* access to regional and national studies (such as the WIEGO Urban Policies Programme);
- \* access to information.

It is not proposed that StreetNet raise funds for member organisations. It will also not offer solutions for capacity or organisational problems they may have.

A data-base has been set up. Please send us information about all the street vendors' organisations you know about. This information will be put on the data-base.

We also have a website at [www.streetnet.org.za](http://www.streetnet.org.za). You will soon be able to access the information on our data-base through the website.

A leaflet about StreetNet is available in English and in Spanish and will come out in French next year. For copies, please contact us the address given in the box at the end of this article. This is the first issue of our newsletter. After this, it will be coming out twice a year, in English, Spanish and French.

## Workshops

We are organising three regional workshops to prepare for the international launch of StreetNet, in Latin America (February 2001), in Asia (November 2001) and in Africa (2002). Issues to be discussed at the regional workshops and decided at the launch:

- \* StreetNet's policy on political orientation or connections.
- \* How to deal with class differentiation between street vendors.
- \* What should be the scope of StreetNet's membership.
- \* Membership affiliation fees and the financial self-sufficiency of StreetNet.

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**Pat Horn - StreetNet Co-ordinator**

## Priorities

Until StreetNet's international launch, our priorities will be:

- \* Building and expanding the network under women's leadership. This will mean identifying organizations working with and/or on behalf of street vendors, vendor leaders, researchers and activists and encouraging them to join StreetNet.
- \* Identifying partners to work with to carry out proposed research and documentation activities.
- \* Developing a proposal for a 5-year plan of action and raising funds to support it.

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## The Bellagio International Declaration of Street Vendors

Having regard to the fact;  
 that in the fast growing urban sector there  
 is a proliferation of poor hawkers and vendors  
 including those who are children;

- \* that because of poverty, unemployment and forced migration and immigration, despite the useful service they render to society, they are looked upon as a hindrance to the planned development of cities both by the elite urbanites and the town planners alike;
- \* that hawkers and vendors are subjected to constant mental and physical torture by the local officials and are harassed in many other ways which at times leads to riotous situations, loss of property rights, or monetary loss;
- \* that there is hardly any publicity consistent with the needs of street vendors throughout the world.

## We urge governments

- \* to form a National Policy for hawkers and vendors by making them a part of the broader structural policies aimed at improving their standards of living, by having regard to the following:

Give vendors legal status by issuing licences, enacting laws and providing appropriate hawking zones in urban plans,

provide legal access to the use of appropriate and available space in urban areas,

protect and expand vendors' existing livelihood, make street vendors a special component of the plans for urban development by treating them as an integral part of the urban distribution system,

issue guidelines for supportive services at local levels,

enforce regulations and promote self-governance,

set up appropriate, participatory, non-formal mechanisms with representation by street vendors and hawkers, NGOs, local authorities, the police and others,

provide street vendors with relief measures in situations of disasters and natural calamities.



## TRADING ON THE STREETS OF PATNA

### Interview with Prabhawati Devi by Arbind Singh - NASVI Co-ordinator

At the busy road crossing near the Secretariat of Bihar Government building in Patna, Prabhawati Devi sells vegetables. She was the first to sell vegetables here. Now at least a hundred other vendors sit alongside with her. This is how she describes her daily routine :

"I get up at 5.00 a.m., clean my house and utensils by 7.00 a.m and then set up my vegetable shop on the roadside. I sell vegetables till 10.00 a.m. Thereafter, I return home with the unsold vegetables. After brushing my teeth and taking a bath, I prepare and have my first meal for the day lunch. At 2.00 p.m. I go to the wholesale market to replenish my stocks for the day and try to return by 4.00 p.m. I set up my shop once again and continue selling till about 9.30 to 10.00 p.m. I then return home and prepare dinner. It is about midnight when I go to bed."

Prabhawati's earnings are modest, hard-earned and support people other than herself. She says :

"If I work hard, I am able to earn between Rs 70-80 (rupees) a day. However, there are many problems. For example, since November, the police have been causing so much trouble that my earnings have been cut down to only Rs 800-900 a month. I spend about ten rupees on myself, another Rs 5 on my grandchildren, and a further Rs 5-10 if I have guests. Some expenses are also incurred when I visit my daughters."

Prabhawati has three daughters and a son. She came to Patna in 1962 "the year of Nehru's death". Her husband never supported her and later died. On her own, she has managed to marry all her children off. Her son has settled in Orissa, and one or other of her daughters is always visiting her. She continues to support them even in her old age.

Despite this, she "manages to save Rs 300 a month." She says, "I am not indebted to anyone except Nidan. I have a working capital of Rs 1000 on which my business runs."

Her complaints are few. What does bother her is the bargaining and haggling that her customers insist on. Further, setting up shop twice a day and carrying her commodities to and fro for this, is time consuming and problematic, particularly when it rains.

How did she become a member of Nidan, an organization which has been established to organize vendors and hawkers? Prabhawati says:

"One day, when you were taking photographs of vendors, I asked you what you were up to. After you explained about Nidan, I invited you to my place. Thereafter, a small group was organized. Today most of us have obtained a loan from Nidan!"

When asked what more she wants in life, she ponders seriously. Her eyes light up as she says :

"A place where I can sell my vegetables without any disturbance by the police or anybody else."



Participants at the street vendors workshop



## STREET VENDING IN KENYA

by Dr. Winnie Mitullah and Anne Kamau

Institute for Development Studies (IDS) - University of Nairobi

Street trading provides employment and income to a large number of vendors in Kenya, many of whom are women.

Both central and local government have recognized this fact. Programs to support small and micro enterprises have been implemented. A recent IDS study found, however, that street vending is the most regulated of all informal sector activities.

For a long time, urban authorities have viewed street vendors as illegal traders and as a 'nuisance' which is bound to disappear. However, most local authorities have now recognized the need to integrate street vending into urban planning. The Machakos Municipal Council has reviewed its street-trading by-laws and the Migori Council is in the process of doing so.

### Conditions

Most authorities do not allocate vending sites. Many vendors operate on open ground, with no shelter or basic services. The authorities are reluctant to allocate sites within the Central Business District (CBD). They argue that the CBD is not planned to accommodate street trading and that it would cause congestion and insecurity. Street vendors are also seen as a threat to formal business, who pay license fees and other charges to the local authorities.

These perceptions are also changing. The Machakos Council has set aside vending sites and the Nairobi City Council has identified possible sites. Street vendors prefer operating in the CBD, where they have easy access to customers. They have their own methods of identifying and allocating sites.



*Street vendors selling clothing at City Stadium, Kenya*



*Chicken project at OpenAir Market - Nairobi*

This exposes them, however, to harassment by the authorities. They are arrested by enforcement officers. Their goods are confiscated and their structures are demolished without notice. They are also evicted to allow planned development to take place.

### Communication

The vendors are not aware of all the policies and regulations that apply to their businesses. This is partly because there is so little communication between them and the authorities. There is no appropriate forum where they can be informed about the by-laws. Lack of information makes compliance virtually impossible.

### Organization

The street vendor organizations which do exist are weak. Many are business-cum-welfare groupings. The IDS study found only five bodies which are pure street vendors organizations: the Kenya Street Traders' Society (KSTS) and the Kenya National Hawkers' Union (KENAHU) - which operate nationwide - and the General Street Traders (Kisumu), the Kisumu Hawkers' Association and the Migori Small Traders Society, which are local organizations. These associations focus on advocacy and occasionally negotiate with the urban authorities. They have not yet achieved much. Some of the business-cum-welfare groupings also address street trading issues, particularly when traders are faced with severe harassment or threatened with eviction.

For street vending to thrive in Kenya, urban policy change is needed which integrates street vending in planning and decision-making. Existing street vendor associations must be given recognition and support so that they can voice the needs of their members.



## INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE

by Arbind Singh and Pat Horn

A global conference with the theme "Urban 21" was held in Berlin, Germany in July this year. The conference was organized to intensify the international dialogue on sustainable urban development which was initiated by the United Nations with their Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and their Habitat II Conference on Human Settlements held in Istanbul in 1996.

The conference was attended by participants from all continents, among them the mayors of large mega-cities, high level representatives of government and non-government organisations, politicians from the local level and experts. It concluded a panel discussion on "Urban Policies and Street Vendors: a Dialogue between Municipal Authorities and Street Vendors from South Africa".

Dr. Sharit Bhowmik, moderator of the panel and Professor of Sociology at Mumbai University, introduced **Patric Mncube**, who started his career in the Municipal police and was then transferred to the Department of Informal Trade & Small Business Opportunities in the municipality. His main job is to regulate street vendors.

**Pat Horn** is a trade unionist from the organized sector who read about SEWA in 1991 and formed SEWU in 1993. She is presently co-ordinating StreetNet.

**Zodwa Kumalo** is a herb trader in Durban. She has been with SEWU right from the beginning and has been the main negotiator for SEWU in her area.

**Paluben** is a vegetable seller from the crowded Danapith Manek Chowk area of Ahmedabad. She has been a member of SEWA since 1992 and is also one of the leaders of SEWA. She is active in organizing other women.

**Manali Shah** is a trade union organizer of women in 12 trades in SEWA. Manaliben has led many struggles, including that for a minimum wage.

**Arbind Singh** is a lawyer who is also active in organizing street vendors. He is co-ordinating the activities of National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI).

## Experiences

Zodwa is a widow. Her husband passed away in 1978. She has to feed 7 children. She has 4 grandchildren. After continuous harassment, she joined SEWU. One day Patric came with police to move them to another place. She rung up SEWU and there was a big stand-off, but they were not moved. They eventually moved to the present market in 1998. They got water, toilets and shelters. SEWU has organised them, so now the vendors represent themselves with one voice.

Paluben has sold vegetable at the crowded Danapith Manek Chowk area for the past 40 years. She talked about the harassment by municipal authorities which often included the confiscation of goods. She then joined SEWA. When the harassment reached unbearable limits, they went to the Supreme Court and won the case for 324 vendors. They also opened the SEWA Bank to solve credit problems. She concluded by saying that SEWA has helped them to solve many of their problems.

Pat concluded by acknowledging the complexity of the situation. In many municipalities, contracting out of the public functions of space management has been attempted but has not solved the problem. Municipalities have to take responsibility for developing their public space.



A group sharing some experiences on street vending



## **LATIN AMERICAN WORKSHOP**

### **by Carmen Vildo**

Latin America is a subcontinent of contrasts with a high concentration of urbanisation. Modern cities surrounded by poor suburbs whose residents are the most vulnerable victims to natural disasters.

There are the educated elites made up of high officials from both the private and public sectors, teachers and Northern American University Masters and Doctorate graduates. In contrast, the illiteracy of women in the poorest regions borders on 50%.

Latin American countries have opened their goods and capital markets, but their populations who migrate to foreign countries encounter closed borders. The wounds of repression caused by authoritarian governments and the trauma of civil war are fresh; the poor - especially indigenous population - are second or third class citizens.

The Eighties turned into "the lost Decade" for Latin America. One of the principle proofs of this is increase in unemployment and under-employment, with one of its most widely effects being the street trade. Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, Lima, and Mexico and many other cities exhibit large areas where street vendors have assembled.

In some cases, they are persecuted by mayors. In other cases, they have asserted their presence by forced means. Some assemble precarious stands during the day, which they disassemble at night. Others offer limited merchandise displayed on plastic sheets that can be collected quickly if the police come. Some peddle their merchandise while walking the streets or with tricycles and **carts**.

In certain cities, like Lima or Santiago de Chile, the municipal governments have promoted the relocation of groups of street vendors to other zones where they can continue to practise their activities in more favourable conditions. They have been given assistance for this relocation. These policies have functioned properly under certain favourable conditions, in particular when the street vendors have been capable of investing in the purchase and marketing in an appropriate place that is not in reach of the larger, developed sectors. In the majority of cities, the authorities define their policies for the street vendor market without discussion with the workers who make a living from this activity.

The majority of street vendors are women. For them it is easier to occupy themselves in this activity than as a salesperson in a shop where generally, experience and accredited levels of education are required

In addition, independent work permits them to combine the raising of their children and housekeeping with their commercial activities.

Normally the street vendors rely on having an organised plan, above all to give order to their occupation of the streets and to guarantee that the same people will occupy the same locations. This system works especially where the authorities have resigned themselves to their presence or at least will tolerate them for a certain period of time. Their organised plan addresses an area that is limited in range to that area which is visible. It is much more difficult to find such an organised plan covering larger areas, such as districts and provinces. This must be even less likely on a national level.

This sector has been object of some case studies but their results have not been widely publicised. There are insufficient statistics and the figures relating to the number of street vendors who exist in a given city varies considerably amongst the different sources.

The existence of StreetNet is an excellent source of information for Latin American Street vendors and will definitely provide stimulus for their organisation. StreetNet is preparing for a Latin American workshop between 5 - 17 February 2001, comprising representatives of street vendors and organisations supporting them.

The workshop has the following objectives;

- a) Identify the existence of organisations and their nature in the region.

- b) Contribute to strengthen and expand networks of street vendors at the regional and national levels.

- c) Define what type of organisational framework is most appropriate to maximise co-operation between the different types of active organisations in this field.

- d) Produce joint recommendations for the Latin American regions in dialogue with StreetNet as a focal point about key matters such as guiding policies relating to the sector, the feminine presence and leadership and especially how to address the needs of the poorest street vendors.

- e) Come to an agreement on a plan of action among the participating organisations.

**Additional information can be requested from COPEME that promotes the organisation of the workshop in Lima, Peru, at: [postmaster@copeme.org.pe](mailto:postmaster@copeme.org.pe)**



## STREET WISDOM EMPOWER

by Richard Dobson and Patrick Mncube

"You keep talking about development, but when will we see it?"

This was the challenge a street trader threw out to the project team of the Warwick Junction Urban Renewal Project during a community meeting. For the team, this was a sobering question. The project was already 18 months into the implementation phase and millions had been spent. We realized that only meaningful engagement between all the development participants can align expectations and produce solutions that are 'ours' instead of 'theirs'.

### Urban renewal

Warwick Junction sits on the edge of what was once an apartheid divided city. It is a major transport interchange for trains, buses and mini-bus taxis. It is also the historic location for fresh produce markets and a vibrant environment for the informal economy. Approximately 5 000-7 000 kerb-side traders operate in the district.

Warwick Junction is the site of a Durban City Council Urban Renewal Project which aims at infrastructural, economic and urban management revitalization. The project team has three district-based leaders who are concentrating on:

- \* planning (long-term strategy and urban design);
- \* implementation (execution of projects identified by the planning team); and
- \* operations (enforcement and service delivery).

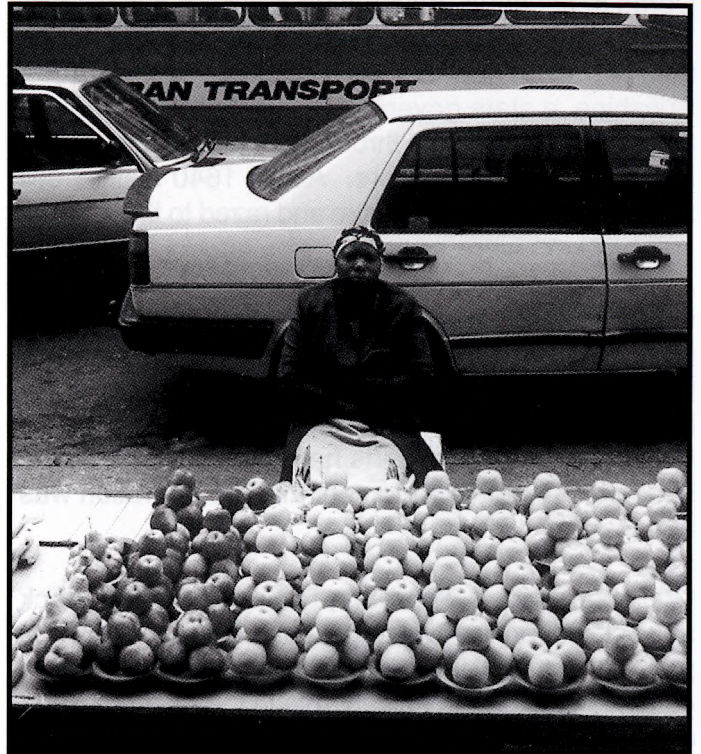
A variety of informal trading facilities have been provided in the past three years, including kerb-side tables and shelters, a herb-traders' market, a mielie (corn-on-the-cob) cookers' facility, overnight storage, overnight accommodation, a market-barrow operators' facility, toilets, a waste recycling depot and a roofed market precinct.

### Working together

The project team works closely with the local stakeholders and street committees. The team leaders depend on this interaction to ensure that interventions which are made are appropriate and sustainable.

Where resources are limited, it is essential that spending achieves maximum benefits. Local authorities' involvement is often driven by management concerns.

Many informal traders are survivalists. Their knowledge can help prioritize spending and help shape the design of new facilities. Traders should be able to say what they want in the way of facilities. As long as these fall within local authority guidelines, limited enforcement will be required.



Street vending at Durban, South Africa

### Communicating

Building jargon is very technical. The project team has used a variety of methods to communicate with the traders, including role-playing with small scale objects or full size make-ups of proposed structures.

Consultation is not an end in itself. Both parties are empowered. The project team has increased its knowledge and gained insights. The kerb-side committee's self-esteem has grown because it is respected as a worthy development partner. Costly mistakes have been avoided. For example, the project team put forward suggestions to the traders about realigning the tables under the new roofed market. The traders pointed out that the one row of tables shown on the plan were positioned along a continuous depression in the paving. This would have meant that all these traders would have been flooded when it rained!

Meaningful stakeholder participation and district-based technical expertise are the best way to support the informal economy. This expertise must, however, be accessible and operate in an integrated team structure that can tap the knowledge of every available source.



## **OPERATION SUNSHINE : A BLOT ON THE LIVES OF CALCUTTA HAWKERS**

**By Arbind Singh**

In the dead of night on the 24 November 1996, hundreds of members of the Left Front and Police Corps descended on innocent hawkers in Calcutta. The Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) badges they wore, signified their collusion in Operation Sunshine a state government initiative to "clean up" the streets of Calcutta through the forced and violent removal of street vendors. About 1640 stalls were ransacked, looted, set on fire and razed to the ground. 102 hawkers were arrested.

Members of the press had been invited by the state government to report on the operation. They were guided to select spots where they witnessed the indiscriminate assaults on hawkers and their wailing dependants. Their reports however, focused on the state government's statement that the operation was a "success."

Critics described Operation Sunshine as an attack against economic development and anti-people. They pointed out that the 191 000 hawkers in Calcutta continue to play a significant role in the economic and overall development of society. Estimates of the total annual contribution hawkers in Calcutta make to the economy is fixed at about 3000 crores.

It was further stated that the government had not given any thought to the plight and future of evicted hawkers. There is no comprehensive government rehabilitation policy for them. Ironically, it appeared that persons responsible for the violent programme of attacks on hawkers over three years, were once active campaigners for peoples rights to work and a livelihood.



**Thai woman selling her vegetables**



**Street vendors also need to raise their children**

The attacks have also been described as a "counter insurgency" offensive on the achievements of the hawkers. Such achievements include the construction of the Maiden Market through the efforts of Dr BC Roy and the staying of the eviction of hawkers when the Sealdah Flyover was being constructed. In 1983, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly established a committee under the chairmanship of Mr Anil Mukherjee to conduct a study into all the districts of West Bengal. While this committee made hawking in certain areas a legal non-bailable offence, it concurrently recommended developing new avenues of employment in rural areas for hawkers, demarcation of hawking zones, alternative accommodation for those who had been evicted, and the creation of new markets in keeping with an increasing population. Sadly, the pattern that has emerged is that negative recommendations are being implemented while the positive ones have not seen the light of the day.

As the state government continues to dilly dally over their fate, the menace of eviction looms large over the lives of the vast numbers of hawkers in Greater Calcutta. More so since November 1997 when the West Bengal Legislative Assembly passed the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (Second Amendment) Act which makes vending a cognizable and non-bailable offence.