

Union Organizing of Informal Workers

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Global Workers' Rights: Patterns of
Exclusion, Possibilities for Change
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Research Teams

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Outline

1. Definitions and Extent of Informal Employment
2. Year 1 Research – Examples, Conclusions
3. Year 2 Research – Case Studies and Conclusions

Definitional issues

- Debate on the use of the term informal
- Informal economy (or sector) vs. informal employment
 - Informal economy = economic activities “outside the formal reach of law”
 - Informal employment = work for informal business enterprises + work for formal business but that is not covered by law or other social protections
- “Informalization from below”: truly self-employed, micro-business, subsistence/survival
- “Informalization from above”: subcontracted, casualized, privatized by a particular employer
 - AKA: “dependent contractors”
- precarious, non-standard, atypical, irregular

Extent of Informal/Non-standard Work

- W. Europe (self-emp): 5.8% (France) – 17.3 (Italy)
- N. America: (“own account”, self-emp)
 - 6% (U.S, 2003)- 10% (CA 2000)
 - U.S.: 22% of pvt sector excluded from labor law
- Africa: 80% of non-ag employment (2000), 60% of urban employment, 90% of new jobs
- Asia: Hong-Kong: 10.7% of employment, Phillipines – 44.6%, Cambodia –95%, India – 93%
- Latin America: 42.1% of labor force (Brazil) – 70.3% (Peru)

- Disproportionately women
- Disproportionately immigrants or internal migrants

Year 1 research

- Review the existing literature on the role of traditional trade unions globally (including Global Union Federations and ITUC, National “peak” federations and Sectoral Unions in selected countries) in organizing, representing or otherwise assisting informal workers.
- Summarize what can be learned from existing knowledge and identify areas for future research
- Regional blocs as the unit of analysis: North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe
- Regional studies trade depth for breadth
- Searching for larger patterns

What kinds of work?

- Street vendors
- Artisans
- Waste pickers
- Porters
- Taxi drivers
- Truck drivers
- Sub-contracted factory/service workers
- Construction
- Day laborers
- Agriculture workers
- Domestic workers

Examples from each region

- **U.S.** - LIUNA (Laborers' Union) alliances/affiliations with Day laborer worker centers
- Federation of Trade Unions of **Ukraine** – political pressure to regulate non-std employment and ban outsourcing
- **Ghana**: Maritime and Dock Workers Union (MDU) formed a company to absorb unemployed members who work as casual laborers
- Building and Woodworkers Trade Union Federation of **Cambodia** – trying community based organizing, firm-based organizing, craft-based organizing, legal assistance, capacity building education, policy reform (safety and health standards, for example)
- La Confederacion de Union Sindical de **Guatemala** formed the Federación de Unidad Sindical de la Economía Informal de Guatemala, which includes 7 sectoral trade unions (cycle taxis, taxi drivers, traders, market vendors, etc.)

Conclusions

- Legal frameworks governing employment & labor relations and social benefits are still geared to formal employment and standard jobs in most countries
- Relatedly, organized labor movements throughout the world have had common difficulties in expanding the **scope** of their membership or constituencies and in altering their **structures**.
 - First reaction to informalization is to oppose it and exclude the workers involved (tied to “wage culture”)
 - However, there are many, many examples of unions who have moved to inclusion
 - For ideological or strategic (growth/maintenance) reasons
 - A central question: how best to relate to the NGOs or MBOs that have often taken the lead in organizing informal workers.

Conclusions

- Organized labor movements throughout the world have had common difficulties in altering their **representational strategies**.
 - Traditional strategies - collective bargaining and political advocacy - remain important.
 - Another important strategy for almost all types of informal workers is gaining access to various types of social protections including employment law and social insurance.
 - But many informal workers need approaches (cooperatives, insurance, access to capital, and business skills) that address their needs as very small scale entrepreneurs. *This moves most traditional unions beyond their comfort zone.*
 - *Some argue unions are not the right form of organization for this group*
 - Education and skill building of various kinds play a critically important role in union strategies.

Conclusions

- Despite a growing literature on this topic, too little is known about what works for organizing informal economy workers
 - Research often does not get deeply into the dynamics of decision-making within the union that leads to the commitment to organize these workers.
 - There are clearly some success stories that we need to better understand.

Year 2 – Focus on informalization from above

- Lit Review
- New research - 4 cases
- All “successes” in (re)formalization or improvement in (degraded) conditions
- Cambodian Beer Promoters
- Colombian Port Workers (Buenaventura)
- S. African Retail and Hospitality Workers
- Tunisian Public Sector Workers (low skilled)

Conclusions

- Informalized from above present special opportunities and challenges
- Campaigns often long term
- Political opportunity structure
 - Regime change; industry code of conduct
- Based in part on a moral claim, a raised “normative threshold”
 - For workers themselves
 - For the general public
 - Often achieved through specific education and PR programs

Conclusions

- Other leverage
 - All involved strikes by workers
 - Strategic-placement in production or labor process
 - Including customer relationship in service context
- Key: alliance between formal/regular workers and informal
 - Developed through side by side work
 - Developed consciously by union through social events/business meetings/education process
- Importance of global labor solidarity in most cases
- Realistic goals
- Small wins may lead to larger gains in the long term

<http://www.solidaritycenter.org/content.asp?pl=1329&contentid=1329>

<http://smlr.rutgers.edu/news-events/review-of-trade-union-organizing-in-informal-economy>

THE END

Yun; *Labour, Capital and Society*; 2011

	Non-organizing	Organizing
Non-representation	Exclusion	Inclusion
Representation	Proxy	Integration

The Globalization Process: Today's "standard" is tomorrow's informal etc. etc.

Labor Market Categories

Primary Sector	Secondary Sector	Informal Sector	Illegal Sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High wage • High security • Well regulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low wage • Low security • Poorly regulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self Employment • Casual Labor • Unregulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal • Unregulated

