

ITF Informal Transport Workers Project



LATIN AMERICA REGIONAL WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA, 30 OCTOBER – 1 NOVEMBER 2014

Workshop Report



With special thanks to SNTT, Emiliano Assisi (ITF), Lucia Obregón and Luis Obregón (interpreters) for their support.

Dave Spooner, December 2014.

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Introduction

The workshop in Bogotá was the third of three regional workshops for small teams of women trade union activists, preparing them to gather information about women workers in the informal transport economy, providing some practical training, as well as enabling a general discussion about organising informal women workers in transport. The participants included three women from Costa Rica, three from Venezuela and seven from Colombia.

It was designed to enable them to:

- estimate the numbers of women workers employed in their local informal transport industry;
- identify the major transport-related occupations employing women, and their employment relationships;
- identify potential collective bargaining and negotiating counterparts; and
- identify key priorities as potential issues for collective bargaining.

After the workshop, it was expected that each team would be able to undertake information-gathering over a twelve-month period, prepare reports (including, where possible, video and photographs), keep in contact with one another, and plan local organising, awareness-raising, or campaigning activity.

The workshop was opened with short introductions by participants, followed by a brief presentation and discussion on the ITF Informal Transport Workers Project, the strand of activity on 'visibility of women' and the role of 'mentor' unions.

Organising Experience

The workshop participants were divided into their three national groups, each group with participants from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. They were asked to consider three questions, discuss and compare:

- Who are the informal women transport workers in our country?
- Are we organising them?
- What has been our organising experience?

They were then asked to present a report of their discussion to the plenary group as a whole.

Costa Rica

The Costa Rica group were able to identify four major groups of informal or highly precarious occupations in and immediately around the transport industry where you are likely to find women workers:

1. 'Concesionarias' Taxi operators are highly precarious, and the drivers are very badly paid, often operating with no insurance.
2. Informal ticket sellers
3. Street Vendors

4. 'Chaneadores' Women employed to wash taxis and buses, paid in tips. Many encouraged to wear provocative clothing and vulnerable to sexual exploitation.
5. Mechanics

Costa Rica Taxis – *Red Force v. Chamber of Porteadores?*

To operate taxis within Costa Rica's rules and regulations is very expensive and bound by red tape. This has led to many illegal taxi operators, with very low incomes and bad conditions, frequently without registration plates or lights etc, to which the police generally turn a blind eye. The operators are generally very reluctant to switch into formal (legal) status, as there are so many bureaucratic hurdles to cross.

Drivers of legitimate legally registered red taxis are organised into associations, collectively known as the *Red Force*, and demand that the government implement the law to curb "porteadores" (informal taxis) and "piratas" (pirate cabs) from taking away their business.



Red Force Demonstration

The government ministry responsible for public transport announced a "brigada anti-pirata" – a special police unit to combat the problem. But taxi drivers are sceptical. Many agreements have been reached in the past or simply not implemented, forcing taxi drivers to repeatedly organise protests.

Meanwhile, some of the recently legally-registered porteadores ('orange taxis') are also organised, into the Costa Rican Chamber of Porteadores (Cámara Costarricense de Porteadores), protesting that confusion around special new laws designed to regulate and register them have led to chaos, with a large expansion of informal taxis over the last couple of years. They want to formalize and implement the agreements and to detain drivers who work without permits. The Cámara also wants their drivers to be covered by social security.



Porteadores Demonstration

Organising

Provincial leaders of ANATRAT have received training in organising, with the assistance of the ITF. There are very few women in the union, and only a small group of women activists, with no representation on the executive committee, and not sufficiently empowered – although the men in the union are generally supportive and encouraging. Nevertheless, they are starting the organisation process.



Colombia

There are significant numbers of informal women workers in the Colombian transport system, mostly *around* the vehicle, such as vendors and cleaners. Many of the women are single-parents or carers, working where they can to survive.

There are women members of the SNTT executive committee, and the union takes great effort to encourage women, but they remain a small proportion of the SNTT membership. Women have few opportunities to work as drivers. As the result of widespread discrimination, Bogotá's TransMilenio BRT system, for example, only employs four women out of 370 drivers. In Barranquilla, there is only one woman out of 300 drivers. Women's employment is generally restricted to ticket sales.

Venezuela

The Venezuelan group identified five groups of informal transport workers that include substantial numbers of women:

- 'Las Precomeras' – very precarious outsourced workers who sell tickets on the metro system in Caracas, facing very bad conditions, and with no social benefits.
- Street vendors at rail and bus stations, many of whom are single parents.
- Women taxi drivers ('taxistas')
- Women working as cleaners, hired by out-sourcing companies.
- Petrol station workers (Bomberos)

Despite women occupying 15% of the union's committee chairs, it does not organise these workers, but the group claimed that the Chavez government introduced laws that protect women's rights and ensure adequate social provision.

Legal / Illegal? Formal / Informal?

Throughout the discussions on organising experience (and after the mapping exercise), there was a recurrent debate about what to do about workers operating illegally, such as the pirate taxi drivers in Costa Rica. Do we organise them? If so, into the union or as an association? What should be the union approach?

The Venezuelan participants argued that the role of the union should be to campaign and negotiate with the government to bring illegal operators within the law. But, argued the Costa Ricans, this would undermine the livelihoods of legitimate workers.

In Costa Rica, some of the pirate drivers (Porteadores) were given the option of becoming legal operators, the so-called 'orange taxis', who subsequently formed the Cámara Costarricense de Porteadores. But the majority did not want to opt in to legal registration. Many of these have links with organised crime and/or corrupt politicians, and the registration system itself is riddled with corruption.

Red taxi drivers pay around USD 2.00 per day to their call centre. Orange taxi drivers have to pay USD 47.00 per day to so-called "deputies". They frequently operate without registration plates.

The group very approximately estimated that there are 100,000 taxi drivers in Costa Rica in total, divided between red, orange and pirate:

Costa Rica Estimated Taxi Workforce		
Red Taxis	13,500 vehicles	+/- 30,000 drivers
Orange Taxis	27,000 vehicles	+/- 40,000 drivers
Pirate Taxis	30,000 vehicles	+/- 30,000 drivers
Total		+/- 100,000 drivers

Mapping Women Informal Transport Workers - La Terminal

On the second day, the workshop was divided into three groups to gather information about women workers in one of Bogotá's largest bus terminals.

They were asked to work in different areas within the bus terminal, and by talking with women workers there, attempt to answer a series of questions:

1. What the women workers do for a living (occupations)?
2. How much do they earn?
3. What are the employment relationships?
4. Are they organised? If so, how?
5. What are the key issues faced by the women workers?
6. Who are (or could be) their 'bargaining counterparts'?

Afterwards each group were given time to prepare presentations to the rest of the group.

The combined reports revealed a range of roles and occupations undertaken by women in the bus terminal (see next page).

All the women interviewed live in very poor and dangerous areas of Bogotá on the outskirts of the city, and had to endure long and arduous travel to and from work each day, on top of the long hours.

The exercise was interrupted by the police, evidently called in by terminal security, and the participants were compelled to leave the terminal, despite protest. In discussion after the exercise, it was evident that the women workers were very fearful, and nervous about being seen in conversation with the groups.



LA TERMINAL, BOGOTA

From the combined presentations from the groups, it was possible to build a picture of the terminal's women workforce:

	Earnings	Employment Relationships	Key Issues
Terminal Vendor	COP 30,000	Informally employed, recruited through family contacts. Paid cash on a daily basis.	Harassment by the employer, constantly under video surveillance
Street Vendor	COP 25,000	Informally employed. Paid cash on a daily basis.	
Ice-cream vendor	COP 200 per ice-cream, earning around COP 10,000 per day	Self-employed. Highly precarious	Harassment by police and security guards
Cleaner	COP 700,000 per month	Employed by outsourcing company	Very long working hours. Only 15 minutes rest per day.
Toilet attendant	COP 616,000 per month (minimum wage)	Employed by outsourcing company	
Petrol pump attendant	COP 770,000 per month	Employed by petroleum company	
Security Guard	COP 800,000 per month	Works for outsourcing company	12 hour shifts
Cafeteria server	COP 730,000 per month	Informally employed by concession company	12 hour shifts. Only one day off every three weeks. Fear of instant dismissal. Has to pay for any loss of stock etc.
Ticket seller / information desk	COP 800,000 per month	Employed by bus company	
Office cleaner ('Aseadora')	COP 616,000 per month (minimum wage)	Employed by bus company	Low wages, very long and hard travel to and from work, long hours
Security worker	COP 616,000 per month (minimum wage)	Employed by outsourcing company	Very long hours and low wages
Courier	COP 616,000 per month (minimum wage)	Employed by large (?) courier company	

Overcoming Fear

Given the level of fear among the women encountered in the mapping exercise, the workshop participants were asked to work in groups and consider what practical ideas the SNTT might have in overcoming this when attempting to organise.

After their discussion, the **first group** proposed:

- Start with simple observation, without directly approaching any of the workers.
- Consider asking the terminal management for permission to conduct interviews, perhaps with the help of sympathetic local university researchers to make a formal approach on the basis of an academic study.
- Develop an Arbolito strategy, identifying possible leaders and/or potential activists committed to the idea of developing a union. It was noted that a few of the women interviewed in the mapping exercise, notably the coffee-shop assistant and one of the vendors, showed interest in joining a union. It was important to identify at least one woman per occupation in the terminal (cleaners, vendors, concession staff, toilet attendants etc), and then provide some initial training. This would then be followed with the recruitment of three or four other women by each of the leaders, and perhaps the production of leaflets or booklets aimed at reducing fear / building confidence.



Venezuela Participants

The **second group** thought it best to concentrate on the workers employed by outsourcing companies, and to reach out to the self-employed:

- Start with the workers outside of the terminal (e.g. porters and vendors), observing their work, and building the details on their working lives.
- Socialise with the workers, slowly engaging them in casual conversation, building personal trust.
- Establish a web-site concentrating on workers' rights (including international standards as well as national laws) and invite the workers to visit the site. It may also be an opportunity to offer IT training, where needed.
- Organise them into a small group and identify important winnable issues that could form the basis of an organising campaign.



Colombia Participants

The **third group** suggested that the level of fear was so strong that initial attempts to organise in the workplace itself might prove too difficult, or indeed too risky for the workers themselves. Instead, they should start work in the neighbourhoods where the workers live, leafleting on the role of trade unions, organising a background media campaign etc, so that workers at least become familiar and comfortable with the term 'trade union'. This is likely to be long-term work, building personal relationships



within the community. CNTT gave the example of successful organising among DHL workers at football matches, and the importance of sport, music events etc.

Given that some of the women workers are not in a position to easily socialise (childcare, length of the working/travelling day etc) some of the organising work may have to be undertaken door-to-door, or through discussion to or from work.

In discussion after the presentations, it was again noted how many of the women workers were single parents, and the importance of violence against women as a key organising issue. It was suggested that there was considerable potential for building alliances with local and national women's organisations.



Costa Rica Participants

It was also noted how the process of outsourcing was driving the predominance of precarious work, and the importance of targeting the outsourcing companies.

Action Plans

After a more detailed discussion about the 'Visibility of Women' strand of project activity, and the resources available over the next two years, the participants were asked to work in their respective national groups to prepare plans of action.

Colombia.

Targeting women in major bus terminals in each of four cities, undertaking mapping in each. They will focus on International Women's Day in 2015, leafleting the terminals etc.

The first priority is to provide information that helps to overcome fear. The idea is to go out to the neighbourhoods and do leafleting to explain the role of SNTT. But there has to be some direct contact with the persons. And it's got to be regular, because there is not much point in contacting people only once.

In order to identify the neighbourhoods we would have to go to the bus station and do a quick survey, and also go to the places where the workers meet or spend their leisure time, to socialize with them outside work.

We could also carry out some other social activities like, sport and art events to attract their attention and raise awareness.

There is also the possibility of finding a university to assist in doing some research

Immediate Steps:

To focus on women informal workers in the bus stations, in the cities of Buenaventura, Barranquilla, Bogotá, Ubaté and Medellín. On 25 November 25 2014, (Day of non-violence against women) to



undertake mapping of street vendors in the bus stations of each city, and report on the key findings on 30 November. This would be followed by a leafleting campaign on International Women's Day (8 March 2015). The contact person would be Luz Amparo Rodriguez.

Venezuela.

Undertaking a major mapping exercise in the main bus terminal in Caracas, and reach out to those working independently, informally or the so called pirates, whose livelihood depend on what they themselves generate.

1. Identify the persons. Going out to look at them and observe who they are, where they are, and how they react when the police arrive. Keep on doing this until we identify all the vendors and informal workers there are.
2. Socialize and build trust, Start buying something from them and chatting. Ask questions like: Where do you come from? Who helps you? Etc. Visit them more than once.
3. Learn about the working situation, what they do, what problems they have, and who with, where they come from etc.
4. Invitation, via a web page, to learn their rights.
5. Talk to them about the union.

Magaly Pintos would be the person in charge, in the State of Miranda, Venezuela.

Work would start in January 2015.

Costa Rica.

ANATRAT faces a different context, with a brand new union, and everything is at a very early stage in development. After reporting back to the union leadership, they intend to start from scratch, starting with taxi drivers then move on to other groups (cleaners, vendors, petrol station attendants etc). Each of the three ANATRAT participants is from a different region in Costa Rica, so they will work as a team, each one identifying four or five women in each location, then undertake mapping exercise. It was stressed that they need to learn more about trade unionism themselves, so they will also function as a collective learning group.

1. Direct observation of what is happening at the bus station
2. Ask for permission to conduct the surveys
3. Arbolitos de llamados, identifying leaders to make contact with them, bring them into the union and they in turn will contact other people
 - a. Organizing the coffee bar attendants, street vendors, cleaning staff, etc., who could reach out to other workers we have no access to.
 - b. When we identify the leaders, we train them.
4. Following up the growth of the arbolitos network, identifying the problems.
5. Evaluate how we can start assisting the workers to solve those problems.
 - a. -To do leaflets, brochures, etc. to communicate the achievements and demands



The four of us want to do it and we are going to focus on those women on sub-standard conditions. We are going to start with women taxi drivers and then continue with street vendors, pump attendants, car cleaners, etc.

We are going to work together. We are from San José (metropolitan area), Santos (rural area), Guanacaste (large region close to Nicaragua) and Cartago (the second most important city after San José).

We don't just want cover the street vendors because we are a very small country.

Immediate Steps:

1. Get together to generate the information mechanisms we are going to use
2. Meeting to define the way in which we are going to carry out the mapping
3. Visual spotting and survey to identify and inform, via ANTRATT, those women who derive an income from the transport sector.

It would be important to report every activity to the union, and to get together with the union, once this activity is over, to present the plan of what you want to achieve, in order to get some feedback and support.

Further training is needed, and perhaps should be the first activity.



Evaluation

Summary of feedback from participants.

Which were the positive experiences of this seminar?

- The knowledge we acquired, which makes us eager to continue fighting for a better country and that we can do something for the women workers.
- To learn that this is an international project and that other people in other continents face issues very similar to ours. Without any doubt, the knowledge acquired from the experiences of the brothers and sisters from other countries. The unrelenting struggle with regards to respect and value of human rights. The exchange with other countries. The learning and the cultural exchange with other countries. Sharing the experiences and issues from other countries is highly enriching for us. To acquire knowledge. To strengthen my leadership. To establish new personal relations with different women. The social coexistence
- To learn about trade union issues to be able to understand concepts that, due to us being immersed and isolated in our country I didn't have the perspective of concepts learned here, such as the issue of all those women and men who generate their income from the transport sector, such as: vendors, coffee bar attendants, etc
- To recognize the importance of women as informal workers in the transport sector, and the ideas about how to get them organized. The knowledge acquired on organizational techniques which I didn't know.
- On the whole, the seminar was a very positive experience. Each day was full of positive experiences: there were also some negatives ones but all in all they enhanced our knowledge.

Which were the negative experiences of this seminar?

- Some fellow participants on this seminar were harassed, by some security guards, when trying to do the mapping at the bus station. Police harassment at the bus station with any reason. The negative experiences stemmed from external factors alien to the logistics of this event.
- The short time. The seminar was far too short.
- For me, as a Venezuelan citizen, the widespread fear in this country.
- I couldn't pinpoint any negative experiences. Everything was very enriching. None. Everything was fine. None. Everything was positive. I have no complains whatsoever of those who took part in this seminar. Top marks for this seminar.

Which activities and/or sessions most caught your attention?

- The activity at the bus station. The fieldwork. The organizing tactics. The mapping exercise. The conditions of inequality and precariousness and the figures of informality in the transport sector - the fieldwork activity in the bus station and the activities carried out in Asia and Africa are very motivating.



- The debate sessions. The exchange of experiences from the various countries and to learn about how they live. Learning about the different realities of the various countries. The experiences of each and every women that took part in this seminar. The debates. The exchange of ideas and opinions was excellent. The group activities involving other countries. All the debates. The debates.
- The persecution of trade union leaders in this country was an issue that stroke me very deeply.
- Presentations from the delegations and from Don Emiliano and Mr David were very interesting indeed. The facilitators are very clear and precise. They have much knowledge on the subject.
- Generally speaking every activity was very special and contributed to one's personal growth.

Which activities and /or sessions didn't fulfil your expectations?

- I wish I had been able to visit other bus stations
- I can mention only one. We were prevented from working in the mapping exercise at the bus station, by the guards. I could mention that the less positive experience was what we had go through at the bus station, but on the other hand this helps us to come up with new strategies.
- When the debates are opened, it's always the same people who speak and there were some lengthy speeches that in the end turn out to be dispersing and cause loss of concentration. I think it is necessary to look for some strategies to enable everyone's participation.
- All the activities were fine and getting to know women from other countries is an enriching experience. They all caught my attention. Everything was fine. The objectives were achieved, and thanks to excellent chairing from ITF, all the activities fulfilled my expectations. Everything fulfilled and even surpassed my expectations because the participation of all the delegations was very useful. The participants saw to it that all the activities were successful. I'm completely satisfied.

What topics would you like to be covered in future ITF seminars? And what topics would like to be examined in greater depth?

- The organization of women. To study this topic in greater depth to continue enhancing our knowledge. It would be very enriching to have a mixed seminar (men-women). To be able to hear from the experiences of the male sector and increase our knowledge. The issues for collective bargaining for women are always set forth by men. It could be to learn more from the experience from trade unions led by women. How they have managed to position themselves in their regions. To strengthen the leadership of women. Seminars to which various women leaders could attend and receive training.
- Violence is an issue I'd like very much.
- Being able to visit more work places could help to visualize a greater number of issues, although to some extent they would be similar, that could broaden our perspective and cover a greater number of people.



- Solutions for the issues encountered in this sector
- I'd like to have training topics like some history and compilation (refresh trade union concepts), and develop the creation of work plans in greater depth.
- The transport legislations in the various countries, and how to go about having them respected
- How to overcome the fear of the workers to get organized into a trade union.
- To formulate a strategy to raise awareness with the employers.
- Training for the people who are new to these issues of trade union organizing.

Other comments?

- I'd like to have a project for women by women to cover issues such as violence, discrimination, collective bargaining and socialization campaigns. To have more seminars dealing with these topics.
- I would like to step up the communications and women's networks on the internet, always having a moderator (so that a social network or a means of communicating doesn't turn into gossiping
- Why all the harassment from the authorities? How to exercise our rights?
- Start work sessions at 8:00 am.
- Congratulations because I leave this seminar with newly acquired knowledge which will be useful in my work of organizing and strengthening SNTT. It was a great initiative from ITF. Thanks a lot for taking us into account. You're very well organized. This is my first workshop and it surpassed my expectations. I thank ITF for the opportunity and I remain willing to acquire more knowledge.

Many thanks to Luis Obregon for translation of notes from the evaluation session.



WOMEN'S WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS			
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