

ITF Informal Transport Workers Project



Informal workers

ASIA REGIONAL LEADERSHIP SEMINAR

MANILA, PHILIPPINES, 21-23 MAY 2014

Seminar Report



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Dave Spooner, May 2014.

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For news, updates, resources, links and other information about the ITF Informal Transport Workers Project, please visit the ITF's Informal Workers Blog at: www.itfglobal.org/informal_workers_blog.

If you would like to find out more about the ITF Informal Workers Project, or have any related queries, please email: dave.spooner@global-labour.net.

Introduction

This was the second regional leadership seminar of the ITF Informal Transport Workers Project: bringing together leaders from nine transport unions from India, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. There were 15 men and 2 women participants.

The objective of the seminar was to share and discuss strategies for the successful organisation of informal transport workers, the inclusion of women workers, and the revision and reform of trade union structures and procedures to enable informal workers to play a full and active part.

Mapping the informal workplace

The seminar was launched with a group activity for all the participants among informal transport workers in two jeepney¹ terminals in Mandaluyong, Manila. Each small group was asked to spend an hour interviewing informal workers in and around the terminals to undertake a simple mapping exercise, and then present a report to the plenary group upon return.

The three groups were asked to discover:

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

If time permitted, they could ask a number of further supplementary questions:

- How many workers are there in the workplace? How many men? How many women?
- Where do workers meet when not working (restaurants, bars, churches etc)
- Where do they live?
- How old are they?
- Are there specific ethnic or social groups in the workplace?
- What time do workers start / finish work?



The activity was designed to give the participants a shared practical experience and common reference point which could inform subsequent discussions, as well as provide an introduction to aspects of the underlying organising methodology of the project (see [ITF Organising Manual](#)). The non-Filipino participants had the opportunity to learn some of the underlying issues in the iconic jeepney industry. It also served as a good immediate ice-breaker for the group as a whole.

¹ Jeepneys are the most popular means of public transportation in the Philippines. They were originally made from U.S. military jeeps left over from World War II

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

Star Mall Jeepney Terminal, and Morong Crossing, Mandaluyong, Metro Manila				
	Earnings per day²	Employment Relationships	Key Issues	Bargaining Counterparts
Drivers	P2,000 - P3,000 or more before expenses, which include rental fee to owners (P500 – P800), fuel (P600 - P2,000), fees to the association/union (P30 – P50), meals (P30) and payments to the despatcher (P10). Net daily earnings can be anything between zero and P800 per day. Good earnings depend on having a franchise for a good route.	All own-account self-employed. Some are owner-drivers, others pay a daily rental fee to owners ('operators')	Lack of security against armed thieves; police harassment and fines for petty offences (not wearing a uniform, having the wrong footwear, brake lights etc); fuel price increases not matched by fare increases; poor health and safety – particularly environmental health; fatigue and long working hours; lack of toilet facilities ; traffic congestion	Jeepney owners ³ , terminal management company, police, local government, fuel companies
Despatchers (“Barkers”)	P200 – P300 per day, depending on the number of jeepneys despatched	Paid by drivers – P5 per despatch	Very long working hours , fatigue , very poor environmental health	Drivers, terminal management
Food Vendors	P300 per day after expenses	Own-account self-employed	Extremely precarious income . Harassment by police and terminal management. Not organised.	Terminal management
<p>Organisation. 80% of the Star Mall 200 drivers and all (?) of the Morong Crossing drivers are organised within the National Confederation of Transport Unions (NCTU). The local president is also the national President of NCTU. Drivers pay P30 per day union dues. The benefits provided include insurance, “mitigation assistance” up to P1,000, funeral expenses up to P5,000 (local members also contribute around P100 individually to the cost of members’ funerals). It was not clear whether or not the despatchers were organised. The Food vendors were not organised.</p>				

² 1,000 Philippines Pesos is approximately the equivalent of US\$22

³ The local association, and the union as a whole, has owners, owner-drivers and drivers in membership. Rental fees for jeepneys are individually negotiated between owners and drivers

Organising Strategy

The session was introduced with a presentation⁴ on some of the key questions facing unions organising precarious (including informal) workers, based on the [ITF Organising Manual](#) and the [ITF Organising Precarious Workers](#) booklet, which was distributed to all the participants.

Key Issues & Experience

The participants were divided into country or linguistic groups, and asked **to identify five or six key issues** that confront informal and/or precarious workers in their country, and to make a brief presentation to the group as a whole.

Thailand

The State Enterprise Electrified Train Workers Union and the Wingspan Workers Union both organise out-sourced workers in and around Bangkok International Airport.

Airport Rail Link⁵ – precarious / out-sourced depot maintenance workers.

1. Discriminatory behaviour by supervisors, particularly around the process of annual evaluation and appraisal
2. Lack of spare parts
3. No medical room
4. Lack of safety equipment and uniform
5. Very poor working conditions (heat, lack of ventilation)

WingSpan⁶ – 4,000 sub-contracted workers of Thai Airways (catering, ground staff, check-in staff etc). 3,600 of the workers are organised within the WingSpan Services Union.

1. Delayed or miscalculated wages
2. Instant dismissals, termination of contracts without notice
3. Different pay and conditions between Thai Airways and WingSpan workers, even though doing the same work: medical coverage, annual bonuses, insurance, quality of uniforms etc.
4. Differentiated annual leave / sick leave entitlement
5. Short-term contracts as opposed to permanent status.



⁴ See: *How to we organise Informal Transport Workers? Seven Questions...*

⁵ A subsidiary of the State Railway of Thailand, operating since 2010.

⁶ WingSpan Services Company Limited was formed in 2010 to provide outsourced services in specific areas to Thai Airways, who own 49% of the company. 51% is owned by the airport authority. Wingspan management are all from Thai Airways

Nepal

Members of ITWAN and NETWON include drivers and ancillary workers of auto-rickshaws (“tuk-tuks”), cycle-rickshaws, taxis, trucks, jeeps, and private-hire taxis. There are more than 1,000 women drivers in Kathmandu.

1. No job security
2. No social protection
3. Fuel prices and short supply (dependant on imported fuel from India)
4. Police harassment / bribery
5. Lack of parking space, restrooms, washrooms etc
6. Harassment of women drivers

India⁷

The Tamil Nadu Auto, Taxi and Private Sector Drivers HMS Federation has 5,000 members driving auto-rickshaws (“auto-taxis”) in **Chennai**. Chennai, the capital city of Tamil Nadu operates more than 73,000 auto-rickshaws.

1. Harassment by traffic police, political parties, thieves
2. Very few employment opportunities
3. Fuel price increases not matched by fare increases
4. Lack of proper parking facilities at railway stations
5. Lack of rest-rooms etc



Recently, the Tamil Nadu government introduced a new meter rate for the auto-rickshaws with a minimum fare of Rs.25 (US\$ 0.42) for the first 1.8 km, and Rs.12 per km thereafter. For night trips (11pm – 5am), the rates are increased by 50%. If a driver attempts to charge more than the meter reading, the police will impose a Rs.2,600 fine simply on the basis of a phone call or text from the passenger, with no further evidence or investigation. If the auto-rickshaws do not get a return trip from where they leave the passenger, it can mean an overall loss on the day’s work. The union is

currently in talks with the government in an attempt to resolve these issues.

The workers became organised through a dispute with the railway station, in which they were supported by the railway workers union.

The drivers had been lawfully using a specially allocated area at the railway station for thirty years. The recent introduction of a private taxi contractor to the station put an immediate end to this decades-long tradition, as auto-rickshaw drivers were banned



⁷ Many thanks to Subramonia Pillai, Vice-President of the Federation who provided further information in a written report.

from using the space. This prohibition was enforced by railway police.

The drivers called on ITF affiliates the Southern Railway Mazdoor Union (AIRF) and the Tamil Nadu Road Transport Workers' HMS Federation to intervene, and the unions organised a protest meeting at the station on 19 December 2013. The railway union met with station management and the railway police force to negotiate the return of the allocated space. As a result, union membership soared from 5-600 to more than 5,000.

Auto-rickshaws are being badly affected by the introduction of these new private taxi operators, some of which are large national or state-wide companies, such as Fast Track and NTL Taxi, operating at airports and railway stations.



After protests and negotiations with the government, the federation was able to open new pre-paid auto-rickshaw counters at stations, enabling them to compete with these new private operators⁸. The union has also been able to gain access to bank loans to purchase new vehicles, which helps improve living standards.

Sri Lanka⁹

The All Ceylon Fisher Folk Trade Union (ACFFTU) organises small-scale informal fishers based in villages around the coast of Sri Lanka. The union organises both marine and freshwater fishers, and has 5,000 members.

There are an estimated 30,000 mechanised fishing boats in Sri Lanka, and 23,000 traditional boats. The mechanised boats include around 4,000 boats engaged in deep-sea fishing, which are owned by companies. The remainder are owned by the fishers themselves, working informally. The union estimates that fisheries sector provides direct and indirect employment to approximately 650,000 people.



222,000 people in the fishing industry.

1. Fishing fleets from South India using bottom-trawling techniques (banned in Sri Lanka) entering Sri Lankan waters, destroying livelihoods and the environment
2. Reduction of the fuel subsidy from the government

⁸ The drivers of these new private taxi companies themselves face major problems and issues, particularly extremely long working hours – see <http://www.hindu.com/2007/07/31/stories/2007073159710300.htm> for example

⁹ Many thanks to Dinesh Suranjan, General Secretary of the ACFFTU, who provided further information in a written report.



3. No insurance for boats or their crews, needing government help in providing insurance scheme
4. Eviction of fishing communities by beach resorts for tourists, with many thousands of fishers losing their livelihoods.

Philippines

The National Confederation of Transport Unions (NCTU) and Pagkakaisa ng Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Opereytor Nationwide (PISTON) organise Jeepney drivers, operators and ancillary workers in the Philippines.

Drivers and Operators¹⁰	Vendors	Despatchers (“Barkers”)	Conductors (“Back-Riders”)
High fuel prices, not matched by fare increases, necessitating longer working hours, leading to ill-health, social costs, vehicle maintenance costs, fatigue and accidents	Few permanent stalls, therefore harassment and extortion from police and criminals	Very unhealthy working conditions (heat, rain, dust, fumes etc)	Accidents and injury
Police harassment and extortion from arbitrary fines and penalties (e.g. for driver’s wrong footwear, minor defects on the vehicle).	High rental fees charged for the permanent or secure vending spaces that do exist	Local government ordinances – attempting to ban or regulate despatchers	Very unhealthy working conditions (heat, rain, dust, fumes etc)
Imposition of local bye-laws and regulations that override national laws, designed to generate local income through taxes and fines.	Lack of social protection, social services	Lack of social protection, social services	Very precarious income
National and local “modernisation” ¹¹ plans to phase out old vehicles to be replaced by imported second-hand vehicles from Japan and Korea	Very precarious income	Very precarious income	Lack of social protection, social services
Lack of social protection	High taxation, especially from Barangays ¹²	Competition from non-organised despatchers	Long working hours / fatigue
Health and environment hazards (heat, dust, rain, air pollution)			

¹⁰ NCTU and PISTON include both operators (vehicle and route franchise owners) and drivers, even though the former employs the latter.

¹¹ See below.

¹² A barangay is the smallest administrative division in the Philippines and is the Filipino term for a village, district or ward

“Modernisation”

Discussion of “modernisation” of vehicle fleets revealed an interesting comparison between some of the unions. NCTU and PISTON faced demand from the government for the phase out of vehicles. They used the example of Bataan¹³ where the authorities were attempting to phase out minibuses, then jeepneys. If the phase-out goes ahead, they will be seeking subsidies and/or compensation for their members.

Subramonia Pillai described how the union in Tamil Nadu was able to negotiate government subsidies to help auto-rickshaw drivers upgrade old 2-stroke or diesel engines to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). In Nepal, the unions were able to gain low-interest loans from banks to airport taxi drivers to modernise their vehicles, and the government to waive vehicle taxes for four years.

Collective Bargaining

This session was designed to identify the key issues facing informal transport workers, what are the appropriate potential bargaining counterparts at local, national and international levels, and how unions might seek to negotiate successful outcomes.

The group as a whole was asked to identify issues facing the workers, then to prioritise what they believe to be the five most important. The five issues, determined by a show of hands, included:

1. The lack of social protection
2. High fuel prices
3. Harassment by police and authorities
4. High levels of taxation
5. Poor working conditions

Other issues proposed included lack of shelter, lack of adequate parking areas, vehicle registration and taxation, working time and rest time, lack of jobs, lack of collective bargaining agreements, lack of respect for workers’ rights, low incomes and inadequate health services.

Each of the selected five issues was given a ‘station’ at points around the seminar room. Wall-charts were placed at each station with an grid to be filled in by participants.

The group was divided into five teams, each of which was allocated to one ‘station’. They were then asked to complete the grid, identifying local, national and international target bargaining counterparts relevant to the issue, and potential actions. After ten minutes or so, they were each asked to move to the next station and add to, or comment on, the previous teams’ entries.

The exercise demonstrated the wide range of potential local, national and international bargaining counterparts. Most important of these were local authorities and employers, national government agencies, and a range of inter-governmental organisations, including the ILO. Discussion revealed the need to identify more closely some of the international bargaining counterparts and potential sources of leverage on some of the issues – e.g. fuel prices, social protection and police corruption.

¹³ Bataan is a province in the Central Luzon region of the Philippines

Action plans

The seminar concluded with the development of action plans for each participating union, based on what they had learned in the seminar. Each was asked to develop realistic and achievable plans that would cover target workplaces, target workforce, organising methodology and timescale. After each union was given time to discuss and develop their ideas, they presented the results to the group as a whole:

	Target Workplace	Target Workforce	Organising Strategy	Timescale (Months)
Nepal Yatayaat Mazdoor Sangh – NETWON (Nepal)	Bhaktapur	500 taxi drivers. 125 ¹⁴ to be organised	Trade union education programmes on workers' issues and grievances – particularly on the provision of municipal parking areas	12
	2 Districts in the far western region	Bus and truck drivers and booking clerks. A minimum of 125 workers to be organised in each District		12
	Lalitpur	Women tuk-tuk drivers. Expand organised membership from 200 to 250.		12
Independent Transport Workers Association of Nepal (ITWAN)	Lalitpur District	Water-supply tanker drivers. 300 to be organised.	Trade union education around traffic police harassment issues	6
	Karnali Zone ¹⁵	Jeep, truck and tractor drivers. 150 to be organised into new zonal committee	Trade union education programmes	12
National Confederation of Transport Unions (Philippines)	Mandaluyong, Metro Manila	Jeepney drivers. A minimum of 100 new workers to be organised.	Trade union education programme and seminar	12
	Cogon Market Terminal, Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao	Jeepney drivers and conductors. 500 to be organised	Contact-building, social protection issues, para-legal services	12
	Calabarzon region, south-west Luzon	Drivers and barkers at transport terminals. 700 to be organised.	Trade union education and leadership development training	12
National Union of Seafarers of Sri Lanka	Villages in 6 Districts of Sri Lanka	2,000 young women and men fishers	Trade union education programme on health, safety and workers' rights	12

¹⁴ The NETWON union constitution states that a minimum of 125 members are required to form a District Committee

¹⁵ Karnali Zone is the largest, and one of the poorest and most remote regions of Nepal, not easily accessible by road.

The State Enterprise Electrified Train Workers Union (Thailand)	Bangkok Airport Railway Link	Drivers, office staff and mechanics. 130 to be organised	Development of Arbolitos. Draw on support from mentor union.	12
Wingspan Workers Union (Thailand)	Bangkok Airport	150 Check-in staff (strategic category of workers) to be organised	Take up the key issues faced by the workers	6
Auto, Taxi and Private Sector Drivers HMS Federation (India)	State of Tamil Nadu (32 Districts)	Auto-rickshaw, lorry and bus drivers. 2,000 to be organised.	To be organised through 32 District Leaders by education and awareness-raising on key issues	3
Truck Bus Jeep Auto & Rickshaw Van Workers Union (India)	Naxalbari Block ¹⁶	Jeep and auto-rickshaw drivers (700); taxi drivers (300) to be organised	Supporting drivers against police harassment	12
Pagkakaisa ng Samahan ng mga Tsuper at Opereytor Nationwide - PISTON (Philippines)	Alabang, Metro Manila	Jeepney drivers. 300 to be organised.	Mapping, contact building, development of organising committee, direct action campaign etc	6

¹⁶ Naxalbari (community development block) is an administrative division in Siliguri subdivision of Darjeeling district in the Indian state of West Bengal

Evaluation Report

All participants were asked to complete questionnaires at the conclusion of the seminar. 28 questionnaires were completed. This is a summary of their comments:

What were your positive experiences of the seminar?

- Experience sharing between the unions (7)
- Understood more about informal workers (4)
- Very democratic facilitation (4)
- Learning how unions in other countries solve problems, which we can apply in our own situation (2)
- Global level informal sector transport workers messages, workers' rights awareness-building union activities, increase membership
- Good to learn about Jeepney drivers' situation
- Learning of successful battles in different countries

What were your negative experiences of the seminar?

- Low level of participation of women

Which activities and sessions most grabbed your attention?

- Group activities/ discussion/ exchange of experience (6)
- Organising plans (4)
- Field visit at Jeepney station (3)
- Question and answer activity (3)
- Mapping reports from unions

What activities and sessions were most disappointing?

- Group activity

Which new themes would you wish to see covered in future ITF seminars or meetings? Or which themes would you like to develop further?

- Give more time to the field visits – more in depth interviews (3)
- Collective bargaining and negotiation (2)
- More time to share ideas
- Organising strategy
- More women leaders

Other comments?

- ITF support is expected to help organise the unorganised (2)
- First of its kind in the region
- Good experience of food
- Thanks to NCTU for solidarity evening hospitality (2)



- This is the first time I meet the ITF and I believe ITF stood tall for principled objectives and democratic process
- More power to the ITF!