

ITF Informal Transport Workers Project



Informal workers

ASIA REGIONAL WOMEN'S WORKSHOP KATHMANDU, 25-27 JUNE 2014

Workshop Report



Special thanks to all the participants, and to NETWON and ITWAN for their support and hospitality.



Dave Spooner, July 2014.

Supported by FNV Mondiaal



Introduction

The workshop in Kathmandu was the second 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.¹ The participants included ten women from Nepal (ITWAN and NETWON²), four from Indonesia and three from India.



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.

Several of the women work in informal transport, and brought their direct experience to the workshop, particularly of driving Safa (“clean”) Tempos: electric-powered three-wheeled minibuses which employ many women drivers in Kathmandu.

Mapping Women Informal Transport Workers

After introductions and welcoming statements from ITWAN and NETWON, and then a brief introduction to the ITF Informal Transport Workers Project, the workshop was divided into four teams to gather information about women workers in some of Kathmandu’s bus and Tempo stops: Lagankhel, NAC Sundhara (two groups), and Lalitpur Tempo stand.

By talking with women workers, they attempted to answer a series of questions:

¹ The first was held in Kampala, Uganda in April 2014. The third, the Latin America regional workshop, will be held in Colombia in October 2014.

² Nepal Yatayat Mazdoor Sangh (NETWON) is the transport union affiliated to the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC), historically linked to the Nepali Congress Party. The Independent Transport Workers Association of Nepal (ITWAN) is affiliated to the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), historically linked to the United Communist Party of Nepal (UCPN). NTUC and GEFONT are both affiliated to the ITUC. ITWAN and NETWON are jointly the ‘mentor unions’ for South Asia in the ITF Informal Transport Workers Project.

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 team were given time to prepare presentations to the rest of the group.

Occupations

The combined reports described a range of roles and occupations undertaken by women workers in Kathmandu's informal urban transport system, particularly the Tempo drivers.

The teams found Tempo drivers, taxi drivers, micro-bus drivers, conductors, *Khalasi*³, street vendors, cobblers, loaders, booking clerks, push-cart operators, 'time-keepers'⁴ and others.

At Lagankhel the team estimated that there were some 2,000 workers, including 500 Tempo drivers, 50% of whom were women. At NAC Sunhara, there were around 300-350 workers, of whom they estimated that 40% are women. Many of the women drivers are from the Tamang community, from the mountainous parts of north and east Nepal. The Tamangs have suffered many years of marginalisation and discrimination

The Tempos are owned by *Sahus*, nearly all men, who may own anything between 1 and 20 vehicles. The Sahus are organised into associations with a national representative structure. These form one of the key counterparts to the unions for collective bargaining.

Earnings

The Sahus charge a fixed-fee rental from the drivers, typically R2,400 - R3,000 (USD 24-30) per day, and give them a basic 'salary' of perhaps R1,200 per month. The drivers' net income depends on the fares they are able to collect from the passengers, and the fares are fixed and regulated by the authorities (with some union negotiation) at R15-20 for short journeys and R40 for longer trips. Drivers earn around R360 per round trip, for up to 10 trips per day, depending on battery life. When the battery has aged, it may



³ "Helper". Despatchers paid to attract and load passengers as quickly as possible, many of whom are children. Also known as Call-Boys/Girls (in many African countries), Keneks (Indonesia), Barkers (Philippines) etc.

⁴ Timekeepers keep records of the micro-buses waiting to load passengers to ensure that none of the drivers jump the queue.

only be capable of 6-7 trips, although the rental charge from the owners remains the same.

If the drivers are unable to collect fares of more than R3,000 in a day, they will make a loss, as they still have to pay the Sahu. In addition, the drivers have to pay the conductor and the Khalasi, plus fines to the police and their union fees. The system forces the drivers to work very long hours, typically from 6:00am to 8:00pm, to ensure that they can pay the Sahu and make some money for themselves.

It proved difficult in the time available to get many details from the other occupational groups, but it was estimated that the Khalasi typically earn R1,500 per month, and the loaders R300-400 per day.

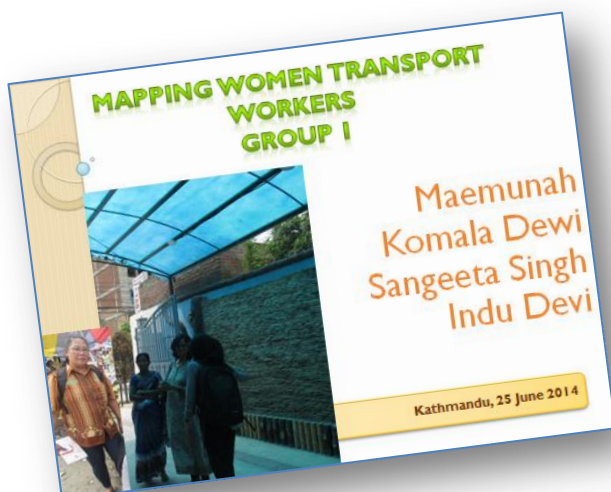
Employment Relationships

The Tempo drivers are in effect informally employed by the Sahus, although the drivers have no contracts or letters of appointment, take all the financial risk, and can be sacked at any time.

Key Issues

The long hours make it very difficult for the women to cope with both work and family responsibilities, with little time available for child-care. Child-care is available, but too expensive, so the women have to rely on family members or friends to take care of the children while working.

The long hours and bad working conditions cause large numbers of women to undergo hysterectomies, and suffer from back-pain, jaundice and lung disease. The vehicles themselves are precarious and can be very dangerous, with the drivers having little protection in road traffic accidents. If anyone is killed in an accident involving a Tempo, the driver is automatically banned for life.



The lack of maternity rights is a particular problem. The women drivers have to take at least a month off work, and there is no guarantee that the Sahus will re-hire them on their return.

The women face various forms of discrimination. It is very difficult for the Tempo drivers to progress on to larger (and more lucrative) vehicles such as micro-buses, as Sahus refuse to believe that women are capable of driving four-wheel vehicles. The women also face a lack of experience, so have little

opportunity to drive the larger vehicles, and without the opportunity they gain no experience.

Those interviewed explained that when taking driving tests, the women are given tougher main routes to navigate than the men. All the driving instructors are men, from whom the women complain that they suffer sexual harassment. There is a clear demand for women driving instructors.

To get a licence to drive a Tempo requires 10th grade education, even if they have passed their driving tests. The unions are fighting to change the legislation.

The women drivers complain that the men drive more aggressively than the women, and race to pick up passengers, therefore the women's vehicles are not as full, requiring them to work even longer hours.

The women also face a higher level of police harassment – verbal abuse, confiscation of licences, imposition of fines (particularly for picking up passengers at the roadside away from designated stops, which is necessarily common, due to the shortage of stops), from which the traffic police arresting officers gain a commission.

Organisation

Most of the women drivers are organised, whether by NETWON or ITWAN. The team in Lalitpur estimated that 90% of women Tempo drivers are union members. Each Tempo route has its own committee of union representatives. Issues or disputes that cannot be settled by the route committees are referred to the union structures at district or central level.

The teams reported a high level of cooperation between NETWON and ITWAN. Members pay R130 (NETWON) or R150 (ITWAN) per year. In addition, at NAC Sunhara, ITWAN charges drivers R12-15 per day for discounted use of the parking lot and for insurance towards social protection and against police fines.

A lot of union organisation is undertaken when the drivers meet at the battery-charging stations, where they change the batteries.



Organising Experience

The workshop was divided into national groups, with each asked to prepare a presentation on their experience in organising informal women transport workers, and their unions' priorities for organising.

Indonesia

The Indonesian group described the bus terminal where two of the participants worked as a tour leader and ticketing agent. The terminal has around 500 workers, including 100 women, including despatchers (*Keneks*), ticket agents, tour guides and leaders, musicians and entertainers, vendors and hawkers, bicycle-rickshaw (*becak*) operators and parking attendants.

Both the ticketing agent and tour leader are self-employed. The ticketing agent earns 7% of the ticket price on commission from the bus companies, plus the equivalent cash value of one litre of gasoline for every three miles of bus travel. The tour leader looks after groups of passengers, books tickets, and acts as guide. The tour leaders are under pressure to be young and attractive.

India

The India group suggested that considerable numbers of informal women transport workers are to be found in airports, ports, freight companies, and travel agencies. There are also some auto (motorised rickshaw) and taxi drivers. They estimated that there were 50 women taxi drivers in Delhi, for example. There are also women in a wide range of administrative functions, receptionists, data operators etc. They also described the substantial numbers of women working in the ports collecting, sorting, processing and re-packing bulk goods that are spilled or damaged in transit.

Very few of these women are organised, although a few are supported by NGOs. *Jagori* ("Awaken Women!"), a Delhi-based feminist NGO, for example, was reported to support survivors of violence against women by providing training to drive taxis and autos for women passengers. More generally however, informal women transport workers in India are invisible, and need identifying and mapping.



Organising Experience and Priorities

- Where are the women in informal transport in your country?
- What do they do? (occupations)
- Are they organised?
- By who?
- Which women are not organised, or weak?
- Which would be your priority (or priorities)

Nepal (ITWAN)

Women informal transport workers are to be found at booking counters, public bus stations, tempo stops, taxi stations, markets and driving instruction centres. Apart from the tempo drivers, the ITWAN group identified ticket booking agents, loaders/ unloaders, time-keepers, ticket inspectors, conductors and Khalasi.

Many of the women are organised in the transport unions, and some in the Nepal Street Vendors' Union (NEST)⁵. There is very little or no organisation among women working as loaders/ unloaders

⁵ An affiliate of StreetNet International

however, which is now ITWAN's first priority. The group recognised that this will be very difficult as these workers are mostly outside Kathmandu, tend to move frequently, sometimes long distances, and have no fixed workplace.

Nepal (NETWON)

The NETWON group identified the main workplaces of informal women workers to be the tempo stands, ticket counters, the streets (vendors, money changers and waste collectors) and the driving instruction centres. There are also women engaged in policing the transport system and directing traffic ('traffic jam clearers').

Most of the women are organised, recruited through friendship networks but also, more importantly, through the family political party connections which can determine, for example, whether the women are members of ITWAN (GEFONT) or NETWON (NTUC)⁶.

The NETWON group identified their priority target for organising to be the 'pulling-rickshaw' workers - home-based workers using cycle-rickshaws to sell food and hot snacks on the streets in the evenings. An estimated 1,000 of these women work in the Kathmandu Valley.

2014-15 Action Plans

The final session was concerned with the development of 12 month action plans by each of the teams, preceded by a discussion of what should be the key elements of an action plan, that makes them specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and achievable. See the following pages.

The actions plans were then presented and discussed with the plenary group as a whole, during which there were many suggestions for improvement and clarification. *The plans shown here should therefore be treated as draft, pending discussion and finalisation by the teams after their return.*



⁶ There is also the All Nepal Trade Union Federation (Revolutionary), linked to the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

Activity	Objective	Where?	When?	Who?
National Union of Informal Workers, India				
Sharing the Kathmandu experience with the union executive body	To brief the leadership on what was learned from the workshop	Delhi office	Second week of July	Sangeeta Singh
Amending and making additional points to this action plan	To have more ideas from the ground To develop the practical planning	Delhi office	Second week of July	Union leadership
Disseminate notes and minutes to other units of the union	Enhance outreach	Delhi office by phone and email	End of July	Delhi office staff
Organise cluster meetings in the community	To identify informal women transport workers	Delhi, Patna, Lucknow, Bhopal, Dehradun	July - December	Local union leaders with union staff support
Meeting with women vendors using push-carts	Organise women in this trade Strengthen them	Patna	July - August	Indu Dewi
Identify unions and organisations of transport workers	To build awareness and understanding Form a network of informal workers	Delhi and Bhopal	September - November	Sangeeta Singh with union executive members
Visits to unions and organisations working with women transport workers	To understand organising tools To determine locations of these workers	Delhi, Bihar, Bhopal	September - December	Union members and staff
Community meetings to identify various trades/ occupations in the informal sector	Identify and organise invisible trades	Local units of union in Delhi, Patna, Bhopal, Dehradun	October - December	Union members assisted by staff
Trades/ occupations-based meetings	Understand specific needs and issues faced by informal women workers			

Activity	Objective	Where?	When?	Who?
Brain-storming workshop with unions and organisations working with informal workers, with specific focus on women transport workers union organisation	To develop an understanding of the needs of informal women workers Make an organising plan of action To build a strong network	Delhi	January – March 2015	Sangeeta Singh with union activists and staff members
Truck, Bus, Jeep, Auto and Rickshaw Van Workers Union, West Bengal, India				
Meetings with women working in office administration, receptionists and data operators in the transport and tourism agency	Analyse their issues and problems Educate them on the need to be organised in the union	Darjeeling, Siliguri	Second week in July and first week of October	Union leadership
Meetings with qualified but unemployed women	Encourage and explore potential for unemployed women to be trained as drivers	Pokhriabong, Darjeeling	December – January 2015	Union leadership
ITWAN, Nepal				
Mapping	To identify situations of women loaders/unloaders	Jhapa, Koshi, Hetauda, Butwal, Pokhara, Dhangadi, Kathmandu	July	ITWAN Zonal Women's Committee
Mass Meeting, 13 Zonal Committee	To build awareness among non-members		August	ITWAN Central Women's Committee and Zonal Women's Committee
Committee Formation 15	Organise women loaders/unloaders		November onwards	

Activity	Objective	Where?	When?	Who?
Education & Training on basic trade unionism, gender issues and occupational health and safety for women	Building awareness among women transport workers	Jhapa, Koshi, Hetauda, Butwal, Pokhara, Dhangadi, Kathmandu	September onwards	Education Department and Central Women's Committee
Lobby	To increase the number of women workers in the workplace	Central office	July onwards	
Training for self-defence	Elimination of sexual harassment of women transport workers	Local level	February 2015 onwards	Education Department Central Women's Committee GEFONT Women's Committee
NETWON, Nepal				
Interview 50 'pulling rickshaw' ⁷ women workers	Determine workplaces, identify issues, introduce the union, identify potential local leaders	Laliput, Kathmandu Valley: bus stop, tempo stop, market, hall, mall, school	July onwards	Sita, Geeta, Sabina, Lila, China
Organise a small groups of workers into unit committees		Kathmandu valley	October – July 2015	Sita, Geeta, Sabina, Lila, China, coordinated with central committee and women's department
Indonesia				
(Awaiting documentation)				

⁷ See above

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.

Evaluation Report

<p>What were your positive experiences of the workshop?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of experiences and problems (5) • I came here and became happy as all the sisters are very good • Proper planning of the seminar with field visit • Well knitted agenda • Participatory approach • Got many ideas to organise informal workers • Can see the real women transport workers • All participants so inspiring • This workshop gave me a variety of new knowledge • Very good – we are motivated • Increasing my empowerment • We went into the field: practically all of us had the opportunity to see the actual situation • Motivated to build power of our local level workers • I got new knowledge about organising strategies
<p>What were your negative experiences of the workshop?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None (12) • Nepali language is too difficult to understand • Food in the hotel was not suitable • Extra participatory activities needed, e.g. small drama • I understand if they talk English, but I cannot speak English very well
<p>Which activities and sessions most grabbed your attention?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field visit (8) • Mapping and list-building (2) • Sharing experience • Organising plan (3) • How we can help women defend themselves against harassment (3)
<p>What activities and sessions were most disappointing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None (14) • The participants not focused because some of them coming and going during the activity
<p>Which new themes would you wish to see covered in future ITF workshops or meetings? Or which themes would you like to develop further?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to assist and organise against violence to women / sexual harassment (4) • How to organise informal workers (2) • Leadership development / empowerment for women (2) • Could be 2-3 global problems (occupational problems) of transport workers • Education on the environment and health issues
<p>Other comments?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a similar workshop in Indonesia (2) • Help to eliminate harassment and organise informal sector women (2) • A short film or documentary (8-10 minutes) would have been highly appreciated • Hoping for some help • Nepal needs such workshops from time to time, otherwise – due to the triple load – even women leaders become lazy