

National Conference

The role of the informal sector in the Bangladesh economy, and the social and legal protection of informal sector workers

2nd and 3rd October, 2009



Organized by

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Introduction

The informal sector is economic activity that is unregulated and is not taxed, supported or monitored by the government. It is outside the structured formal sector and usually involves small scale production processes with no contracts and very small amounts of capital. Property, ownership, investment, and equipment are usually under personal initiatives.

The informal sector is labor intensive and incredibly diverse - it includes farming, vending, rag picking, domestic service, and home working and shrimp cultivation. The sector has enormous scope, power and creativity. It makes a vast contribution to the national economy; however it has no national recognition and is often ignored or excluded from economic and wider labour debates. Therefore, there is no proper implementation of existing labour laws in this sector particularly in terms of wages, compensation, benefits or recruitment. More women work in the informal sector than the formal sector.

Bangladesh Government statistics claimed there around 10 million women participating in the informal sector. However in reality this figure is likely to be much higher and is also rapidly increasing. The majority of women in this sector are from poor, excluded and destitute families. These women face



many obstacles such social insecurity, a lack of regular work, low wages, long working hours, dangerous working conditions, inadequate, shelter, mental and physical torture, and negligence from their husbands, families and communities. They have little scope to organise and no social recognition. The time has now come to ensure they are integrated, valued and recognised as an integral part of the national economy. Proper planning, time sensitive steps and providing social security will bring quicker and more equitable economic progress and harness these workers creativity and productivity.

Informal sector workers challenges, particularly for women.

Workers in the informal sector are deprived of their rights in various ways. They are not given priority in political, social, human right's or labour movements and there is no comprehensive law and to protect their rights.

Women workers are extremely poor and poverty, river erosion and Monga (seasonal poverty prevailing in the North of Bangladesh) are all factors which force women to migrate to Dhaka and other cities in search of work and shelter. Once they arrive they find work in construction, breaking bricks and stones, working in garments, as domestic helpers, as sex workers, as street vendors or in small retailing. They live in slums or in very poor areas with inadequate housing, health, sanitation or education for their children. They face a wretched existence and frequently face extremely dangerous and risky situations. In the workplace they have to struggle against torture, discrimination and violations of their basic human rights., From home to their workplace nothing is safe and no steps are taken to ensure their safety.



Why is this conference?

Despite these limitations and their lack of capital, skill, education and technology informal sector workers make a critical contribution to their family, society and nation. 90% of Bangladesh's labour force work in the informal sector and the contribution of the sector to Bangladesh's GDP is around 40%. Yet they are excluded and ignored by the mainstream economy. Their lives are over shadowed by various problems and obstacles.

This groundbreaking and timely conference will provide a unique opportunity to discuss these issues and develop solutions and recommendations to the problems workers face.

Through this two days conference the problems of the informal sector will be clarified and their profile will be raised capturing the attention of government and policy makers and practitioners so that informal workers can become visible, valued and protected.

Specific Topics

- ♦ Analyzing types of work in the informal sector
- ♦ Identifying and highlighting the occupational risks
- ♦ Understanding the contribution of the informal sector to the economy
- ♦ Engaging the informal sector workers with organisations and cooperatives: experiences of Bangladesh and India
- ♦ Urban planning and the informal sector
- ♦ How to provide financial services for the informal sector workers
- ♦ Occupational health, safety and security for workers, discussion on social security, insurance and social protection
- ♦ Role of the media in improving the situation informal sector workers
- ♦ How to reduce the pressure on informal sector workers from climate change and natural disaster
- ♦ Identifying models and best practices for effectively organising informal workers
- ♦ Decent work: experiences of sweepers and construction workers
- ♦ Globalisation and the informal sector: opportunities and problems
- ♦ Developing recommendations and future action plans for government, policy makers, donors, NGOs, trade unions and practitioners



Invitation for papers

We would welcome papers from you and your organisation in relation to these topics - your thoughts and analysis are incredibly valuable and essential to the success of this national conference. Please send your articles and input via email, post or personally by hand. Please mention your name, designation, organisation and full contact details. The presenter will get the opportunity to present the paper personally and afterwards a book will be published compiling the articles. Only selected articles will be presented in the conference. Deadline for articles is 10th September 2009

Date and Venue of the conference

Opening Robindra Sorobor opens stage, Dhanmondi
Sessions WVA Auditorium, Road-27, Dhanmondi, Dhaka
Date Friday 2nd and Saturday 3rd October 2009

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