

IDWN/IUF-AP Meeting on “Strategic Planning on Organizing and Campaigns of Domestic Workers in India”, Chennai, India, March 17-18, 2012.

Introduction:

Over 35 domestic workers leaders and organizers participated at the first-ever IDWN and IUF national meeting of domestic workers in India in March this year. At the conclusion, among other things, developing a domestic workers model contract has been cited as a concrete step to raise awareness of labour rights and organizing of domestic workers.

1. Participants: 35 from 13 domestic workers trade unions and other organizations:

1. Self Employed Women Association
2. National Domestic Workers Movement
3. Sarv Shramik Sangh-Mumbai
4. Sarv Shramil Sangh-Pune
5. Manuel Workers Union
6. Nirmala Niketan (DWs coop)
7. Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Union
8. Karnataka Domestic Workers Union
9. Karnataka Domestic Workers Rights Union
10. Annai Illam (migrant workers centre)
11. Unorganized Workers Federation
12. Centre for Women and Development
13. Manushi Trade Union for Domestic Workers

- 1) **The meeting was opened** with songs and slogans by domestic workers. Hidayat Greenfield, Assistant Regional Secretary of the IUF AP and Ip Pui Yu (or Fish), Regional Coordinator of the IDWN, both welcomed the participants. Greenfield said that the IUF considered the victory of domestic workers in winning the C189 the most important one since workers achieved the right to organize. Now that domestic workers have gained an important tool, it was important to plan how to use it in order to achieve work with dignity. Fish Ip explained that the objectives of the meeting were: first, to plan for ratification of C189 with domestic workers playing a central role and secondly, to ensure that domestic workers be organized.

2. On-going Main Issues of Campaigns, Advocacies and Activities of the Domestic Workers Organizations

- the rights of domestic workers as workers and to social protections by advocating for them to be included in Welfare Board, registered in the Labour Department and own ID cards.
- Claiming their basic labour rights such as the rights to pensions, health insurance, minimum wage, weekly offs and holiday bonus, through enactment of local laws e.g. workplace bill,
- campaign for the ratification of C189; (refer to no. 4)
- supporting domestic workers' livelihood by provisions of savings/loans scheme, skill-training, pre-departure training for migrant workers and job-placement.
- Provisions of grievance-handling, by taking up individual cases of sexual harassment, unemployment , etc.
- Trying to build common platform with other domestic workers organizations, trade unions and other supportive groups.
- Participation in the National Task Force to develop the National Policy for Domestic Workers.

3. Activities to campaign for the Ratification of C189 in India.

- Fish Ip explained on the need of ratification and implementation of C189 and the current process of the ITUC "12 by 12" campaign.
- Major actions and activities have been taken up by the Unorganized Workers Federation in Tamil Nadu, National Domestic Workers Movement, Self Employed Women Association and Karnataka Domestic Workers Rights Union. Many have actively campaigned for the adoption of the C189 before June, 2011.
- In most cases, the demand for the ratification has been coupled with demands for local laws and policies to improve domestic workers rights such as inclusion to the Welfare Board.
- The main activities were:
 - Public demonstrations in the state;
 - Translation of the C189 into local languages;
 - Information sessions on the C189 for leaders and members of the organizations;
 - Lobbied local MPs;
 - Signature campaign; and
 - Held press conference to launch the ITUC "12 by 12" campaign

4. Organizing of Domestic Workers

a) Greenfield conducted a session on the need to link the strategies of implementation of the gains of the Convention to the organizing of domestic workers. He said that as unions, the job was to assist workers to access their rights that were guaranteed in the C189, under which household has become a regulated workplace. At the same time, domestic workers have to be empowered to access their rights, by awareness-raising as the first step. He further informed the participants that the IUF Hotel Workers at their AP Conference in Goa has passed a resolution to support domestic workers to struggle for the ratification and implementation of C189.

b) Result of SWOT (Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat analysis) Group Work on Organizing:

Strengths

- the members know that “ I am a worker.”
- “I have strength as a union member”;
- “I know my rights, as my union has outlined these for me”.

Weakness

- Some workers do not feel that DW is respectful work;
- They tend to develop a dependency relationship on the employer so that they want to get favours instead of rights;
- There is competition between workers and therefore workers accept bad deals; and
- Domestic workers are very scattered and difficult to come to meetings because of triple burdens (work, family and organization)

Opportunities

- there are regular meetings by domestic workers organizations, awareness can be built on rights and how to access them;
- there are on going struggles for social security and training programmes for local leaders;
- public is more aware of the fact that DW now have rights like all other workers due to media programmes and demonstrations.

Threats

- Arrogance of the employers, feudal relationship with the workers still prevails strongly;
- Allegations of theft by domestic workers by employers ;
- Sexual harassments ;
- Lack of acceptance of domestic workers organizations by some trade unions.

5. Planning for the Future:

The Participants in their group work and general discussion identified their priorities and goals, and at the end came up with a concrete plan.

- a) The main objectives and goals are:
 - To achieve Ratification of C189 in India;
 - To build up strong base among the domestic workers and empowering them to defend their rights at the workplace. Only this would lead to the building up of the workers organizations and help them access their rights.
 - To achieve state-level domestic workers Acts in some states in which local mobilisation has already taken place.
 - To work towards a Central Act (or national law). It was highlighted that there were already two good drafts of Bills in the preparation of which a large number of groups of domestic workers had collaborated. They have been lying dormant and these have to be reintroduced/reactivated.

6. Concrete Planning at State level /per Organization

Objectives and Goals	Activities/The States to Implement
1. National Policy on Domestic Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize street programme and demonstration; To include employers in the Policy and collect levy from them towards social security for domestic workers. To translate into local language;
2. Central Minimum Wage	to develop a strategy
3. Central Act (or National Law)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop and join a common platform to lobby, in Maharashtra (which has stronger legislations) by the SSS; SEWA to get approval from its National Council to take up the issue.
4. Ratification of C189	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop a common platform involving trade unions and a joint programme to pursue; To organize a tripartite meeting in the state; To conduct signature campaign and send them to MPs and other political leaders; To celebrate June 16, Int' DWs Day; To distribute leaflets on May Day; To hold 5 workshops with trade unions between May Day and June 16, to sensitize trade unions on the need of the ratification.
5. Domestic Workers Model Contract	To initiate at the DWs trade committees in every state
6. to activate the Welfare Board and to have domestic workers representatives in the Board.	NDWM and UWF to take the lead.
7. to unite all small domestic workers organizations in one common platform	In Maharashtra, by the SSS

7. Implementation Plan

It was decided that a small committee would take responsibility for the implementation of the plan. The committee would be made up of Medha from SSS of Pune, Geetha R from the Unorganised Workers Federation, Chennai, Fr. Chetan (proposed by Sr. Clara) for the NDWM, one from SEWA after the SEWA National Council makes a decision and one from Karnataka after a decision is made on their state platform. It was decided that the Delhi Domestic Workers Union ,assisted by Subash, would initially be responsible for coordinating this group until it takes wider shape and a momentum of its own. To set the ball rolling. Subash would , in the coming week, prepare a two page note – a status paper to launch a National Platform for a Domestic Workers Act.