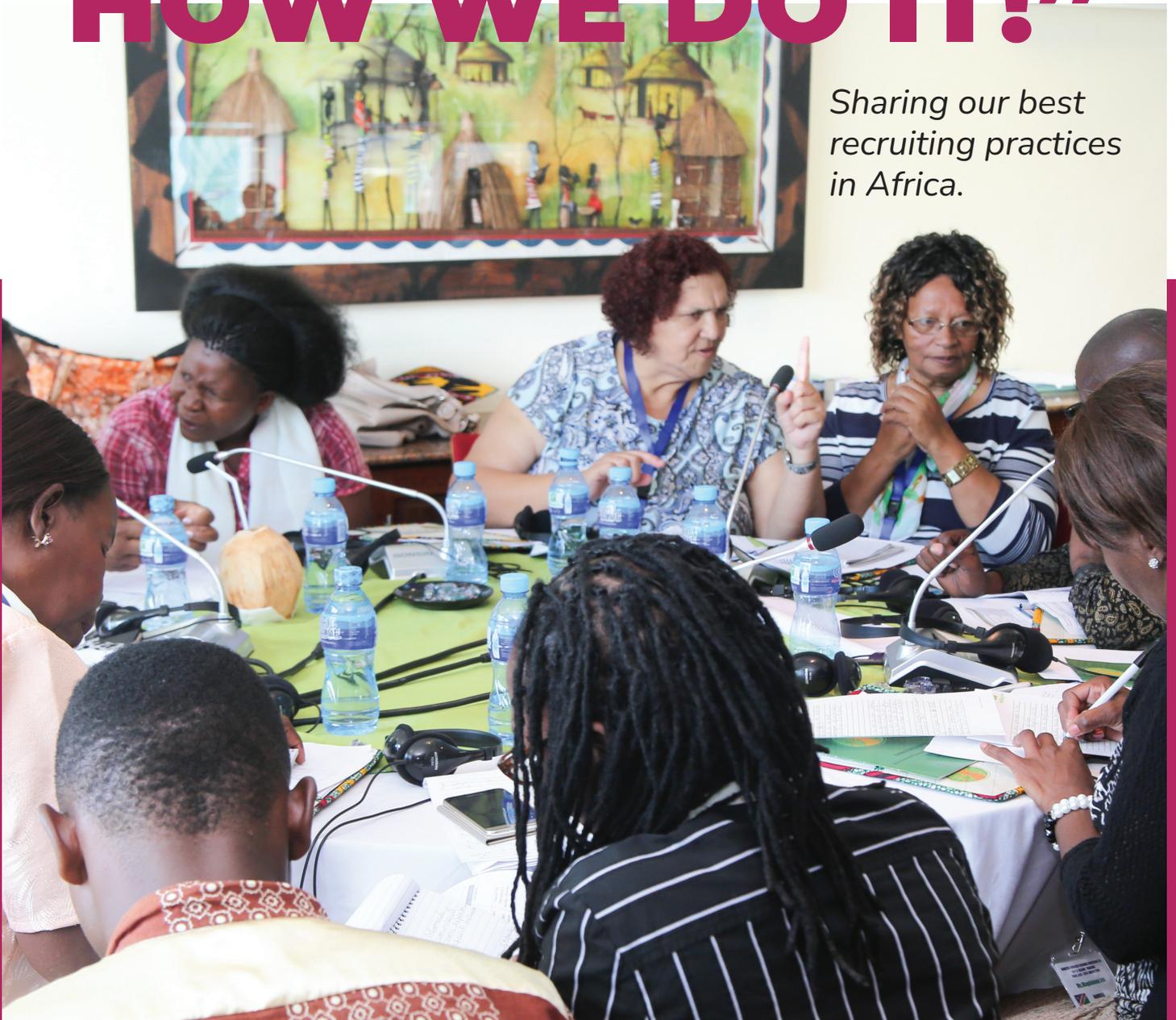


# “ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE. HOW WE DO IT!”

*Sharing our best  
recruiting practices  
in Africa.*



**International Domestic  
Workers Federation**

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“Organize, Organize, Organize. How we do it!”  
Sharing our best recruiting practices in Africa.

**APRIL 19, 2023**



# INTERNATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS FEDERATION

## *About IDWF*

The International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) is a membership-based, global organization of domestic and household workers. We aim to unite domestic and household workers to fight for our rights, overcome exploitation and abuse, and secure dignity, justice and security. IDWF was formed in 2013. Ten years later it had 88 affiliated organizations from 68 countries representing over 670 000 domestic and household worker members.

## *About IDWF Africa Region*

The Africa Region of the IDWF has 28 affiliates from 28 countries-English, French and Portuguese speaking-, representing 105,768 (by Feb 2023) members. We support affiliates by assisting their organizing efforts, building leadership and membership capacity, and uniting domestic workers from local to global level.



**"Organize, Organize, Organize. How we do it!"**  
*Sharing our best recruiting practices in Africa.*

*Written by Chris Bonner*

*Design by 247studios*

*April 2023*

**International Domestic Workers Federation**

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A big thank you to Vicky Kanyoka, IDWF Africa Regional Coordinator, Programme Officers, Deograsia Vuluwa and Essi Kotor, for initiating the project, facilitating the collection of best practices from African affiliates and coordinating the booklet's development.

Thank you too to Chris Bonner, WIEGO, for pulling together the material and writing the booklet, and to all who have helped in its final production.

We give a special appreciation for Myrtle Witbooi, our late President, to whom we dedicate this booklet. We have benefitted so much from her constant support and inspiration. This lives on in many ways: in our memories, on paper and records, on video and social media and especially in our hearts.



....

# MESSAGE FROM OUR LATE IDWF PRESIDENT

Myrtle Witbooi, our beloved President, passed away on the 16 January, 2023. Shortly before she died she sent us the following message to encourage and inspire domestic workers in Africa to organize, organize and organize. We dedicate this booklet to her.

## *Why is Growing an Organization so Important? Organizing is the Power to Success*

When you start any organization, you rely on organizing and mobilizing. This is the key to success in any organization, whether small or big. Members built powerful unions. Yet to maintain this power, you need to organize and organize,

through all conditions. Migrants, urban and rural workers come together to build solidarity for all. Stronger unions can fight the larger forces, and even the unknowns like COVID-19.

Africa is very successful in organization. We built a powerful Africa, across all regions. Yet organization alone does not guarantee the long road to justice. You need to make sure you keep the members. So, with organizing comes education and more education. To grow members, you must empower them. Empowered workers will make sure that they empower other workers. Like the key message throughout our struggle: 'Organize or Starve'.

*-Myrtle Witbooi, December 27, 2022*

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACTRAV</b>	Bureau for Workers' Activities- ILO
<b>CHODAWU</b>	Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union
<b>CIAWU</b>	Commercial Industrial & Allied Workers Union
<b>IDWF</b>	International Domestic Workers Federation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>KUDHEIHA</b>	Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions and Hospital Workers
<b>MTDWA</b>	Mulu Tesfa Domestic Workers Association
<b>NDAWU</b>	Namibian Domestic and Allied Workers Union
<b>SADSAWU</b>	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
<b>SINED</b>	Sindicato Nacional dos Empregados Domésticos
<b>SYNADOT</b>	Syndicat National des Domestiques du Togo
<b>SYNEM-GUINEE</b>	Syndicat National des Employés de Maison de Guinée
<b>SYNEMAG-B</b>	Syndicat National des Employés de Maison et de Gardiennage du Burkina Faso
<b>SYTDTEI.CI</b>	Syndicat Des Travailleurs Domestiques et Travailleurs de l'Economie Informel
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WIEGO</b>	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
<b>ZDAWU</b>	Zimbabwe Domestic and Allied Workers Union

# ABOUT THIS

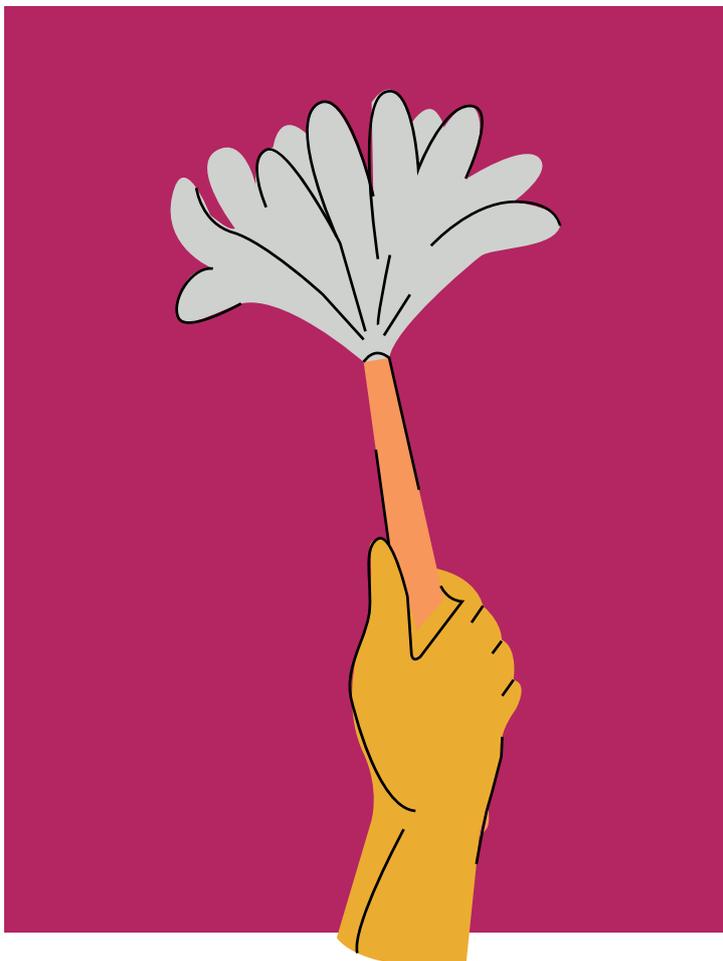
# Book

*In this booklet we share the good practices domestic workers in Africa have developed to grow and build their unions. The booklet focuses on the first stage of organization building- reaching out to domestic workers and bringing them into the union- referred to as recruiting members.*

## *Why did IDWF in Africa produce this booklet?*

During the COVID-19 pandemic members of the IDWF in Africa appreciated more than ever the value of being organized into unions. They decided to work hard to increase existing unions' membership, and to encourage new unions to join the IDWF. IDWF in Africa's goal is to have 40,000 new members by 2025 (10 000 new members a year from 2022), and four new affiliates. At an on-line workshop to share their good recruiting practices, they decided to produce tools, such as this booklet, to spread their experiences widely and help affiliates grow their membership.

Building our grassroots domestic workers unions is the first step to making sure our voices are heard by our governments, our employers, by trade unionists, the public and by the world at large. Without uniting domestic workers into democratic, membership-based organizations, led by domestic workers who are mainly women, we will remain isolated, working in the individual homes of our employers. We





will battle to stand up and voice our demands. We will struggle to realize our rights— or we may not even know what are rights are. To change this we have to organize and grow our unions for collective power. Our booklet aims to help us build that power by sharing our best organizing practices and strategies.

### *Who is the booklet for?*

This booklet is for domestic worker leaders and organizers in unions affiliated to the IDWF. It can also be useful for anyone else who is helping to organize domestic workers in Africa and beyond.

### *How can the booklet be used?*

You can use this booklet to get ideas on recruitment strategies for your own recruiting activities. You can discuss the ideas to plan a recruitment strategy in your union or you can use as an educational tool in workshops and group discussions.

“We will battle to stand up and voice our demands.”

# Organizing and Organizing Challenges



## Why do we organize?

Individually domestic workers have little power to change their situation.

We organize to build our unity, solidarity and collective power so we can improve our economic and social situation through collective representation and action.

Organizing is not only about numbers. It is about members knowing their role and being accountable to the union.

-Vicky Kanyoka, "Report on Zoom Workshop, 3 April, 2022"

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## What does organizing involve?

Organizing involves bringing workers with similar interests, issues and challenges together in a structured and sustainable manner. As domestic workers we unite because our work and challenges are similar in our countries and across the world. Organizing means constantly developing and maintaining democratic organizational structures, building accountable leadership and empowering members. It means collectively implementing activities and representing the members in negotiations with employers, government and others with power over domestic workers' lives. Organizing never stops!

## What is recruiting?

This is the first important step in organizing. It is the processes of drawing in workers to become members of the union: persuading workers to join the union.

## Why do we need to recruit new members?

“Without union members, there is no union.

-Nana Rasmané SYNAMAG/B, Burkina Faso

A union is nothing without its members- the union is the members! Growing our membership means we have more visibility and a bigger voice. Employers and governments are more likely to listen/hear us if they know we have a solid and active membership base.

## Key challenges in growing our membership?

“To achieve a certain goal challenges are unavoidable, but overcoming them is what brings us to success.

-Abebu Molla Hunegnaw, MTDWA, Ethiopia

We face many challenges in growing our unions. We come across obstacles when we try to recruit new members. We struggle to keep or retain those already in the union.

## Challenges: New members

- **Hard to reach.** Domestic workers are isolated in their employers' homes. “We don't have access to their workplaces.”(-Marcelline Douai, SYDTEL.CI, Côte D'Ivoire). “Some bosses

do not allow us to approach the domestic worker.” (Sitope Koto, SYNADOT, Togo)

- **Fear.** Workers are afraid of losing their jobs if they join the union. They fear victimization by the employer. Employers say, “you are trouble causers.” (Toindepi Dhure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe)
- **No money.** Low wages and “the high cost of living means that domestic workers do not have extra money. They must meet their basic needs before they can contribute to the union.” (Joan Gloria, KUDHEIHA, Kenya)
- **No need.** Domestic workers say that they don't need a union. They say, “My employer is good. I don't see why I should join the union” (Tondeipi Dhure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe), or “I can speak for myself with my boss. I can negotiate. Why must I join the union?” (Gloria Kente, SADSAWU, South Africa)
- **Poor understanding/interest.** Many domestic workers “have a low capacity to understand the union” (Debora Mwageni, CHODAWU, Tanzania). “Many have not gone to school and they are more afraid” (Asmaou Bah, SYNEM-GUINEE), and “some are not interested.” (Josephine Zongo, SYNEMAG-B, Burkina Faso)
- **Language barriers.** There are many local languages in our countries. “In some regions of Namibia there is a language barrier. They do not speak English so it is difficult to explain about the union.” (Frieda Naris, NDAWU, Namibia)

- **Low Status.** “Many are ashamed to let people know they are domestic workers.” (Sandrine Akaffou, SYTDTEI-CI, Côte D'Ivoire)
- **Migrant workers.** “Migrant workers are scared we will report them and they will be deported”(Gloria Kente, SADSAWU, South Africa). “They fear to join because they don't have documents.” (Nellie Kahua, NDAWU, Namibia)
- **Time constraints.** “Domestic workers do not have enough time to listen to us and we don't have time enough to explain to them.” (Aimee De Souza, SYNADOT, Togo)
- **Limited union resources.** “There is a lack of means to travel to the provinces from where the workers still need union support.” (Nana Rasmané, SYNAMAG/B, Burkina Faso)
- **Cases lost.** We cannot always succeed in winning cases, but “ they expect you to win the case. They don't assess the case. They just say ‘I paid my subs so now I must win’.” (Gloria Kente, SADSAWU, South Africa)
- **Already dismissed.** Membership is temporary as “they come to the union when they are getting dismissed.” (Toindepi Dhure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe)
- **Digital resources & literacy:** Although things are improving, many domestic workers do not have access, or have limited access, to smart phones and are not always able to connect. For organizers there is a “lack of enough digital gadgets like laptops and desktops.” (Ruth Khakame, KUDHEIHA, Kenya)

### Challenges: Retaining members

- **High job turnover.** Domestic workers often do not stay long in their jobs, for example, “A large number of domestic workers in the cities go back to the rural areas to vote. Then they do not return.” (Joan Gloria, KUDHEIHA, Kenya)
- **Dismissals.** The rate of dismissals is high. “Some workers are unfairly dismissed by their employers if they find out that they join a union.” (Nellie Kahua, NDAWU, Namibia). During COVID many domestic workers lost their jobs.
- **Cases slow.** “Slow progress with cases. This discourages them. Domestic workers look for quick case outcomes.” (Ruth Khakame, KUDHEIHA, Kenya)

Despite these challenges domestic workers' unions have developed organizing strategies and good practices, and have grown in Africa and all over the world. Through collective struggles they have gained national and international recognition and laws. They have fought for, and won, rights at workplaces.

In the next two sections we look at the strategies and good practices we have adopted to deal with our recruitment challenges, with many successes.



A large number of domestic workers in the cities go back to the rural areas to vote. Then they do not return.

# GROWING OUR UNIONS-PLANNING TO RECRUIT



We are united as domestic workers in Africa through the IDWF. However, we come from many different countries. At work, our conditions and challenges are similar, but our languages, political, economic, social and organizational traditions and systems are different. We develop our recruitment strategies according to what works for us. Sometimes we try a new strategy and it works. Sometimes we try and it is not so successful. We often feel we need new ideas. Sharing what has worked for us can give ideas to others. We can adapt ideas to fit our own situations.

## *Recruitment Campaigns/ Drives*

Recruiting new members should be an ongoing activity, but often we plan to make a big push and set ourselves targets. In other words we have a recruitment campaign or drive. So, before sharing our strategies, let's look at the basic steps to follow when planning and implementing a recruitment drive, or even for regular recruitment activities. These apply wherever you are.

Steps to follow	Examples
Step One: <b>Do Research</b>	Where do many domestic workers work and/or live? What type of domestic worker (e.g. live-in, migrant)? Where and how can you contact them?
Step Two: <b>Plan your overall strategy</b>	What has the information collected told you? What is possible? Opportunities? Challenges? What do we aim to achieve? What resources are needed-leaders, money, materials?
Step Three: <b>Plan and prepare the practical details</b>	Who will do what, when and for how long? What resources are available? Have arrangements been made- transport, joining forms, media? How will we report and check on progress?
Step Four: <b>Implement and monitor</b>	What are the challenges? What are you learning? What do you need to change? Are you reporting regularly?
Step Five: <b>Evaluate</b>	Did you achieve your aims and targets? What worked and what did not work? Do you need to change your overall strategy?



Many of us follow good planning processes.

## A STORY FROM KENYA

### *Mapping and approaching potential new members*

We are Ruth Khakame, National Chairperson, Domestic Workers Council and Joan Gloria, Assistant Secretary General of the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions and Hospital Workers Union (KUDHEIHA). We were both elected to our positions. The Union had 12 967 paid up domestic worker members in December 2022.

Before we go out to recruit we do mapping to identify where our potential members are located. We do this every year. This guides our recruitment plans for the year.

We have a list of domestic worker leaders in every ward. They help us identify where domestic workers are working. We look for big estates where many domestic workers will be working. We ask “do they allow us to come in and out”, as in some estates security is very tight. We list every ward and look at the distribution of domestic workers. This guides us as to the type of domestic workers working in the different areas.

Domestic workers are employed in different forms like; fulltime live-in, fulltime live-out, piecework and on-call jobs, among others. They are found in different places. Piecework workers have places where they sit outside the residential homes waiting for any potential employer to come and offer them a job for some hours. The live-outs come from their places in the morning and go back in the evening. The live-ins stay in their employers' homes. After identifying the places where they are found, the union organizers go there with flyers and other documents that can help them convince the domestic workers to join the union.

We use domestic worker members and leaders to influence sister domestic workers to join the union. We call it a referral method. It has worked for us because they know themselves. This is a good practice as we give them targets and they feel acknowledged by the union for who they are, and what they do as being very important.

Nellie Kahua, General Secretary of NDAWU, Namibia, reminds us to prepare our recruitment materials. “Before starting to recruit, ensure that the materials and resources you'll need for the

campaign are available, for example, recruiter forms, pamphlets and a vetted list of telephone numbers for cold calling potential members.”

# 04

# FROM THE GRAND STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES



# GRASSROOTS: STRATEGIES AND BEST PRACTICES

## SECTION

The above diagram gives a quick summary of key strategies and best practices we use for growing and strengthening our unions. Some are most useful during a recruitment campaign; others can be used in the everyday work of recruiting new members. Some are most useful in helping us to retain our members. Many we use together, e.g. communication tools in support of other activities.

These practices have all been tried out by one or more of our African affiliates. Remember that unions may use more than one strategy and tool at any one time; or they may alternate strategies. Choose the ones that you think are most suitable to your context and give them a try!

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Strategies and Practices in Brief diagram

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### *Recruiting domestic workers: our stories*

In the streets and open spaces; in homes and communities; in meeting places and even virtually domestic worker members, leaders and organizers meet and communicate with potential union members. They work alone, in pairs or in groups. They have many old and new communication tools to assist them. They gain support from community members, trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGO), United Nations (UN) institutions, supportive government officials and even employment agencies. Working with employment agencies is one strategy used by SYDTEI-CI, Côte D'Ivoire.

“We have worked for long with employment agencies. We educated them to let them know the conditions under which domestic workers were working. We informed them that the law can be against domestic workers. We give them flyers for their offices. They give these to domestic workers, letting them know they should join the union. Today they are our partners. They are very important to us, as every day they receive domestic workers who are looking for a job”. (Sandrine Akaffou)

In other words, they use many different strategies, practices and tools to persuade domestic workers to join the union and to retain their members.



# Older ways are still very

## 1. Places, Spaces And Faces

Traditional methods of recruiting new members, generally face-to-face, are still very relevant. During the COVID pandemic we learnt to use new technology much better, and we have incorporated what we have learnt into our practices. But it has not replaced our tried and tested methods. What we have realized is that meeting with domestic workers face-to-face is still the most valuable way of bringing them into the union. As Gloria Kente (SADSAWU, South Africa) said, “Face to face is good. When they see us they feel that all their problems will be solved.” Vicky Kanyoka, IDWF Regional Coordinator noted the psychological benefits, “Face-to-face is very important to help the healing processes. Domestic workers are wounded and meeting with them is like counselling when they can tell their problems.”

### *Door- to-Door: at the workplace*

“When we plan we look for areas where there are a lot of domestic workers. We go door to door. We ring the bell and ask if there are domestic workers here. We talk to them about the union... We go two by two so we can address them either in French or in their local language. Speaking to them in their language is very important.” (Aimee de Souza, SYNADOT, Togo)

Unions are using two door-to-door methods: approaching domestic workers in their employers’ homes, especially for live-in workers, and in their own homes after work or weekends for live-out domestic workers. Although it is challenging to approach domestic workers in employers’ homes, domestic worker leaders in areas know each other, and where there are potential new members in the area. They will go during the daytime when the employer is at work. They will knock at the door and the domestic worker will come out. They will show her a poster or flyer and talk to her about the union. They then leave their mobile number so that later the domestic worker can call to get further information and to join. In some cases security guards have been helpful in connecting leaders to domestic workers working in the house. There is an interesting but perhaps controversial strategy used by CHODAWU, Tanzania where,

“We take one domestic worker leader and one government official, as they know where domestic workers are. We go door to door with the officials to recruit. We have a good relationship with government officials and we have trained them about the situation of domestic workers and their value.” (Debora Mwangeni, CHODAWU, Tanzania)

# important.

- Joan Gloria, KUDHEIHA, Kenya

## *Door-to-Door: in the community*

Door to door recruiting also takes place within communities for live-out domestic workers. Nellie Kahua, NDAWU, Namibia explains the benefits of this approach.

“Door to door in the community is more flexible for domestic workers. You find them in the comfort of their own homes. While she looks after the household chores such as cooking, we introduce ourselves and give the union background. Also, she may fear to go to the office. Being at home she doesn’t have to use her scarce resources to attend a meeting or visit the office. She then recruits her friends and neighbours.”

## **CIAWU in Malawi adopts a similar approach:**

“We go into homes to meet domestic workers and introduce ourselves

We explain to them about union and how it works, how they can join and know their rights at the work place. When they register by filling a form which costs MK 200 they become a member and are advised to pay union dues of 1% every month.” (Peter Chaunga, CIAWU, Malawi)

This story also raises the issue of union dues and how to best explain it to domestic workers who earn little. It is important to explain the purpose of union dues, and how it is a commitment to the union. It is also important to explain clearly the amount to be paid. “We tell them the membership fees are low- otherwise they don’t want to join,” notes Asmaou Bah (SINEM-GUINEE).

## *Places and spaces: around the workplace*

There are many places and spaces where domestic workers travel for work, gather or

frequent near their workplaces, providing opportunities for leaders/organizers to talk to them about the union.

Most leaders of domestic workers are or were themselves domestic workers. They know the streets and paths that domestic workers use to go to work and return home. They know the bus and taxi stops where domestic workers board or drop off. Leaders wake up early in the morning and go to these areas to meet domestic workers. They bring along posters, flyers and stickers, the union constitution, the registration forms whilst wearing union T-shirts and caps so the domestic workers can identify them. Domestic workers themselves on their way to and from work also help by talking to their colleagues about the union.

There are places near where domestic workers are working that provide good opportunities for leaders/organizers to meet with them. In the streets and parks where they may be pushing prams; street corners where live-in workers congregate to chat with others after work; places where piece rate or casual workers wait for work and so on, leaders/organizers meet with domestic workers with their tools and T-shirts encouraging them to join the union. They give the domestic workers flyers that contain contact details so they can phone, send text or What-

sapp messages, or visit the offices for further information and for joining. Laura Tembe Manhiça (SINED, Mozambique) explains her early morning routine:

“I carry out this activity (recruiting) three days a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. On the aforementioned days, I get up at 4:00 am, wash the dishes, sweep the yard, take a shower and prepare my work clothes (apron), the campaign material (t-shirts, stickers, leaflets). When it’s 05:25 I catch the first bus at the Socimol Terminal that takes me downtown.

I usually arrive in town at 6:10 and around 6:20 I go to meet other union leaders. After we meet at the workers’ square (meeting point), we share the campaign material and divide into neighborhoods, and from there I start with the work of organizing and recruiting.”

#### Places and spaces: in the community

Live-out domestic workers are part of their communities and belong to different networks. They use these networks to organize themselves and to inform leaders/organizers where domestic workers live or can be frequently found. Some of the good recruiting spots are at religious gatherings, market places and supermarkets where domestic workers shop, and at community meetings.

“Markets, churches wherever we see them we talk to them about the union. We don’t like to stay in the office. We go out to talk to them.”

(Aimee de Souza, SYNADOT, Togo)

An important point made by many leaders is that domestic workers themselves make the best organizers:

“Domestic workers organize themselves best. They know where other domestic workers are and can communicate best.

- Ruth Khakame, KUDHEIHA, Kenya

## DOMESTIC WORKERS' QUESTIONS

### *Answering Domestic Workers' Questions*

Ruth Khakame and Joan Gloria (KUD-HEIHA, Kenya) and Abebu Molla Hunegnaw (MDWA, Ethiopia) identified some of the tricky questions you are likely to hear from domestic workers when recruiting. They share some of their answers.

#### Kenya

- What is the union? Is it a savings organization?
- Will I get my money back when I no longer want to be a member?
- What will I benefit from when I join the union?
- Where are you located?

We explain to them that the union is not a savings organization and the money they pay is meant for a membership fee. It is nonrefundable, just like when they are subscribing to the National Hospital Insurance Fund. If they do not get sick and do not use the cover then they are not refunded. Another way of clearing their doubts is by asking them to attend monthly domestic workers/members meetings so they can learn more about the union and its advantages.

#### Ethiopia

- What are the benefits of being a member of the Association?
- Does the Association pay us or does it give us money?
- How can the Association enforce our rights?
- Does the Association facilitate domestic work/other work?
- What kind of training and support does the Association provide?

We explain that the Association is an organization where:

- We are supported to enforce our social and economic rights
- We exchange good experiences with friends
- We develop our communication skills
- We discuss solutions to the problems we face with other domestic workers
- We get training about work and employer laws, policies and guidelines
- We get vocational training on income generation activities

#### *At public events*

On May Day (1 May), International Domestic Workers' Day (16 June), International Women's Day (8 March), among others, you will see domestic workers on the streets wearing union T-Shirts, holding up banners, singing songs about the union, and distributing flyers inviting other domestic workers to join the union. In many instances they will be

marching or gathering at rallies with other workers and/or community members. They also take part in community activities, such as in Kenya where domestic workers participated in a tree-planting event. All these activities create awareness amongst domestic workers that they are workers like all other workers and the union is for them. Hence, it encourages them to join the union.

Information and pictures of these events are shared with members and more widely using social media and even press and radio, raising awareness of the situation of domestic workers amongst other workers, communities and the public at large.

### The case of migrant workers

We have identified recruiting migrant domestic workers as a major challenge. In South Africa, SADSAWU has taken up the challenge and has developed a successful strategy to recruit migrant domestic workers. Gloria Kente tells the story.

## BOX

### A STORY FROM SOUTH AFRICA

# 03

#### *“They Understand Each Other” My Strategy for Recruiting Migrant Domestic Workers*

My name is Nomasomi Gloria Kente. I am a South African. I am an organizer of a trade union called South African Domestic, Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), which has ±9000 members.

My strategy is to invite migrant workers who are already members of SADSAWU to join me in my recruitment activities.

I went out to recruit with them because migrant workers are the ones who are the most exploited in South Africa. Taking SADSAWU migrant worker members with me means that they can influence and recruit other migrant workers because they can understand each other.

This has resulted in more migrant workers joining SADSAWU because they got to understand what SADSAWU is about and why they should be members of the Union.

I definitely encountered difficulties because some workers didn't see the need to join because they believed that their employers would never wrong them. Some of them were scared that SADSAWU would report them to the Home Affairs officials, and that they would get deported to their home countries.

I overcame these difficulties by educating the domestic workers about SADSAWU, and also by having massive recruitment drives during weekends.

I followed up by contacting the members via social media, phone calls, and also SMSs (text messages).

It is not easy dealing with people you don't know, but what I learnt is that you have to understand where people come from and put yourself in their shoes in order for you to work properly with them.

## 2. Collective Empowerment Activities

### Awareness raising meetings

After the initial contact with potential or actual new domestic worker members most unions invite them to participate in an awareness-raising meeting. This could be a special meeting called for new/potential members or they could be included in a regular monthly meeting.

“We meet with our members every month to hear their problems and help them. We invite new workers to come. They listen and then they are ready to get their membership cards.” (Josephine Zongo, SYNAMED/B, Burkina Faso)

These meetings are very important in building trust and confidence in the union. During the meetings leaders explain what the union is, what it aims to do and how it does this. They explain the importance of joining the union, and the

benefits of being unionized. They talk about domestic workers’ rights under the law, and how the union helps them with their struggle to gain their rights. They give examples of cases they have won. But they are careful to explain that this is a collective struggle and not all problems can be solved overnight. In some meetings leaders introduce the IDWF. This helps to build the legitimacy of the union. Learning about the IDWF is an eye opener for domestic workers new to the movement.

“We tell them about IDWF and we send them to the IDWF web site to see all the activities. They ask, ‘can we really have an international union?’ This builds trust.” (Marecelline Douai, SYTD-TEI-CI, Côte d’Ivoire)

### Singing motivates

Songs and dances, slogans and testimonies play a big part in most of these mee-

tings.. SADSAWU even has its own domestic workers’ choir that performs at meetings and events.

“Songs are used to express our feelings of sadness, joy, inspiration! We sing where we gather. We send messages through our songs. Songs are passed down from generation to generation and send historical messages about the struggles of the past. Songs are influenced by African traditions of workers and the working class as a special force. It is a means of communication and a way of building solidarity.” (Toindepi Dhure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe)

After the meetings, stimulated with songs, with good messages and accompanied by dancing, those who have not already joined the union fill in the forms and join.

## BOX

### DOMESTIC WORKERS’ QUESTIONS

#### *A Favourite Domestic Workers’ Song*

My mother is a kitchen girl

My father is a garden boy

That’s why I’m a unionist, I’m a unionist,  
I’m a unionist

That’s why I’m a unionist

That’s why I’m a unionist

That’s why I’m a unionist, I’m a unionist,  
I’m a unionist

# 04

## Providing Training

Our unions provide trainings and capacity building on many issues for new recruits and for established members in order to empower them as members and as workers. Ongoing training activities, workshops and events are very important for keeping members interested and active and so make sure they remain in the union. If unions do not deal with issues, run mobilizing activities and workshops, or provide training opportunities then members will see no point in being a union member. In Ethiopia the MTDWA provides training in labour laws and policies as well as vocational training on income generation activities. In South Africa, SADSAWU holds trainings on leadership skills, digital skills and handwork amongst others.

## 3. Organizing Around Domestic Workers' Issues

### Solving problems & providing good service

“It is important to deal with domestic workers' issues and demands. Do not be rhetorical. Listen to their issues and discuss possible ways to resolve the problem. It encourages them to join.” (Toindepi Dhoure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe)

One of the expectations of domestic workers is that leaders and organizers solve their grievances and attend to their demands. If the union leaders are well organized and are visible to the members, then the members will always visit the offices to bring their cases. When the leaders provide good service by taking up cases, especially resolving them, and giving good advice, the members share this with other domestic workers facing work challenges.

“First strategy is based on the resolution of labour disputes in the courts; workers who are satisfied with the conciliations and verdicts pass on the information to their non-union colleagues, who in turn become union members.” (Nana Rasmané, SYNEMAG/B, Burkina Faso)

Our experiences during the COVID pandemic illustrate the central importance of dealing with the pressing concerns of domestic workers, and how this helps to build the union. Many unions reported that they grew their membership during this time because the union directly helped domestic workers with their physical and mental distress. Sitopi Koto from SYNADOT, Togo, recalls how this happened:

“We acquired 600 new members during COVID. We gave food to people from the IDWF. People asked, “Who is this giving us food. Is it government?’ We took time to explain about the union and the IDWF.”

Asmaou Bah, SYNEM-GUINEE tells of a similar experience:

“We used COVID-19 to gain members. Before COVID we were 2000 members. We now are 3000 members because of what we gave to domestic workers.”

### Advocacy campaigns on key demands

Running campaigns on big and important concerns and demands of domestic workers in their country such as social protection, or the big global issues such as ratification and implementation of C189, raises awareness of the situation of domestic workers. It raises awareness with advocacy targets-usually government and/or employers- but it also reaches domestic workers and attracts them to the union using good communication strategies. Support from allies, such as trade union federations, NGOs and international bodies such as the ILO can help strengthen our campaigns.

Asmaou Bah, SYNEM-GUINEE, tells how demanding the rights of domestic workers through campaigning for ratification of C189, enabled the formation of the union in 2011 and its growth into a strong organization.

## A STORY FROM GUINEA

### *Mobilizing around C189*

I am Asmaou Bah, General Secretary of the National Union of Domestic Workers of Guinea (SYNEM-GUINEE). Our union was created in March 2011 after the preparatory meeting in Johannesburg for the adoption of ILO Convention 189 at the 100th International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2011.

After the election of the officers, we started contacting domestic workers door to door, by word of mouth, going to their homes, waiting for domestic workers when they arrive and leave work, telling them about ILO Convention 189 which protects them, sensitizing them to join the union, registering them, giving them membership cards.

We popularized ILO Convention 189 through press conferences, caravans, posters and advertising (billboards). We used radio, television, written press, newspapers, social networks. We also used Facebook and other social media. We held workshops, trainings and made sure we had messages in local languages, especially for domestic workers in rural areas.

All these activities allowed us to recruit several domestic workers, organize them, unionize them, and make them join the union massively. The result is that SYNEM - GUINEE is one of the best organized unions in the IDWF. And, because of our Union mobilization, Guinea has ratified ILO Convention C189, which protects domestic workers.

Sandrine Akaffou (SYTDTEI.CI, Côte D'Ivoire) shares information on the union's social protection campaign run jointly with UN agencies in Côte D'Ivoire, led by ILO-ACTRAV. This shows the importance of working with union and high profile supportive in-

ternational bodies that can promote the campaign, provide access to the government and agencies and give the union legitimacy in the eyes of the domestic workers and the public.



One of the expectations of domestic workers is that leaders and organizers solve their grievances and attend to their demands.

## A STORY FROM CÔTE D'IVOIRE

### *Support from United Nations Organizations A campaign for Social Protection for Domestic Workers*

I am Sandrine Akaffou, Deputy Secretary General of the Union of Domestic Workers and Workers in the Informal Economy of Côte D'Ivoire (SYTDTEI.CI).

Since 2019 we have had a project on Decent Work for Domestic Workers with organizations in the UN system, especially with ACTRAV, the Bureau for Workers' Activities of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Social protection, including universal health coverage is very important for domestic workers. We have launched a campaign with the ILO to get employers to register their domestic workers with the social security system in Côte D'Ivoire.

ILO Specialist for Workers' Activities at the International Labor Office (ILO) in Abidjan, Kattia Paredes Moreno believes that it is important for domestic workers to benefit from their rights. During a presentation on the 77th anniversary of the United Nations (3 November 2022) she said,

"Today in Côte d'Ivoire, it is important that domestic workers can benefit from their rights, within the legislative framework, and in this case, it is a question of seeing how to be able to integrate these domestic workers into the protection process, which exists through the CNAM (Social Security Institute) and the national social security fund (CNPS)."

As our Secretary General, Marceline Douai noted, "social protection which includes social security and occupational health and safety was capitalized to motivate domestic workers to join the union and have strong demands to the government. These issues attracted domestic workers to join the union."

#### 4. Our Tools: "Traditional" Media

##### *Educational materials*

In all our recruitment stories we see the vital role played by the distribution of, and discussion on, various types of educational and advocacy materials. Unions have developed multiple forms: flyers, leaflets, posters, stickers, banners, T-shirts, amongst others. These

materials include information on the union and union issues, on demands for decent work, domestic workers' rights, C189 ratification and implementation, for social protection or wage increases, mobilizing slogans and so on. We also make and use videos about the union to show in our meetings.

## Radio and Television

This is a powerful organizing tool. Domestic worker leaders approach media houses for slots on radio and TV to talk about the importance of joining the union and on important issues for domestic workers. SYNEHM, Guinee and CHO-DAWU, Tanzania used radio and TV extensively in their C189 campaign. Being well known, SADSAWU is called by radio stations to come and explain about trade unionism or about new laws affecting domestic workers.

This often takes place early in the morning whilst employers are at work and the domestic workers are working in the house. They get an opportunity to listen and to view the television. This attracts them to the union. Others listen before work.

“We have a free slot on national TV. We just make a call. We do it before 5h45 as domestic workers wake up early. It is on the programme ‘Good Morning Namibia’. We talk about the union on this programme.” (Nellie Kahua, NDAWU, Namibia)

## 5. Our Tools: New Technology

“It is the time of technology”, says Asmaou Bah (SY-NEM-GUINEE)

### Using smart phones

Mobile phones have been used for many years during recruitment drives. Leaders provide

their mobile phone number so domestic workers can contact them and vice versa. Now with smart phones new ways of recruiting and retaining members have grown. This was boosted during COVID when unions developed innovative ways of organizing, holding meetings, assisting domestic workers with the many problems they faced during this period, as well as continuing to recruit new members. As Gloria Kente, SADSAWU, South Africa notes:

“It was not easy to organize domestic workers during COVID. However, the use of smart phones was very helpful to reach members. Organizers made leaflets explaining about SADSAWU and why they should join the union. They took pictures of the leaflet and shared it with the committee members who live with domestic workers in the community.”

Whatsapp is a particularly powerful tool for sending out information about the union and its activities. It is also useful for recruiting. Members receive the Whatsapp messages and send them on to other domestic workers encouraging them to join.

“We use Whatsapp. Most domestic workers have access to this and it is user friendly. We use it to recruit. We post information about the union, issues of importance to domestic workers, raise awareness of their rights and our campaigns. We also post local, regional and international information about the IDWF. This is important as they know they are not

isolated in their struggles and that they have a global voice.” (Toindepu Dhure, ZDAWU, Zimbabwe)

During COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, unions also learnt to use smart phones as a tool for holding meetings. SADSAWU, for example, uses Google Meet to hold meetings with leaders across South Africa.

### Using Social media

Linked to the use of smart phones unions have stepped up their presence on social media. Debora Mwageni from CHO-DAWU, Tanzania, notes:

“We have Facebook and Instagram. To recruit new members we post all our activities for those who are part of the union. They pass on the information or show others. Domestic workers also post their problems and ask, “What can we do?” We message them back and give information”.

SADSAWU also uses Tick Tock to share videos made by organizers and leaders.

Interestingly many leaders report that employers get information about the union from Facebook.

“We post on social media on events days such as May Day. We talk about the benefits of joining the union. Employers can also see and learn from this.” (Joan Gloria, KUDHEI-HA, Kenya)

Employers also find the union’s contact details on Facebook and some approach the union for advice.

## 6. Engaging Decision Makers

Domestic workers want to see that the union is effective and can make change happen. Engaging with government and employers through dialogue and especially through negotiations, is a powerful strategy. When workers see their governments or employers listening to the union they feel the union is really working for them. They are proud that government is listening and tell other domestic workers, encouraging them to join.

Many of our unions have developed a positive relationship with relevant government officials/departments:

“They help with us with awareness campaigns, for example on-line, on TV, with regional meetings. They involve us in discussions on minimum wages. They help us with cases. They do not negotiate with employers without union reps.” (Nellie Kahua, NDAWU, Namibia)

In some cases the trade unions assist them to get access to governments or provide support. “The trade union we are affiliated to help us,” notes Asmaou Bah.

Most of you use multiple strategies to grow your unions. Here is an example from Mozambique.

### BOX

## A STORY FROM MOZAMBIQUE

# 07

### *Using Multiple Strategies: A Proud Domestic Worker*

My name is Gisela Cossa, I am a mother and I have a son. I have worked as a domestic worker since 2012. I became a member of SINED in 2017 when a group of domestic workers passed close to my work place. I decided to join the group.

SINED is a trade union of domestic workers in Mozambique. It has 14667 members (1732 male and 12935 female). It has ten branches established in the provinces of Maputo, Gaza, Inhambane, Sofala, Manica, Zambézia, Tete, Nampula, Niassa and Cabo Delgado. In 2021, we recruited 800 new members from across the whole country. It had a great impact in Maputo where approximately 312 domestic workers were fired due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SINED was able to give legal assistance to nineteen of these domestic workers.

After I joined the union, I participated in meetings organized by SINED, on Sundays at the Trade Union Center, OTM. There I was elected as a leader of the union core as well as an organizer of domestic workers at Casas Brancas in the neighbourhood of Polana Caniço - an area on the outskirts of Maputo City.

I want to take advantage of this opportunity to tell you a little about my experience of our union recruitment drive. Every day, except for Saturdays and Sundays, I wake up at 4 a.m. I leave home to go to work at 5:20 a.m, and I arrive at my work place at 7 a.m. On my way from home to work or vice versa, I campaign in an individual way, talking to any and every domestic worker about the union in the street.

On Saturdays and Sundays, I join with other domestic worker leaders. We walk around Maputo City, campaigning door to door, in the buildings or houses, in the markets, squares, stores or supermarkets. We give out campaign materials such as flyers. We also use this way of campaigning for new members in the provincial capitals where SINED is established.

When we want to establish a new branch, the first thing we do is contact the local neighbourhood leaders. Then we try to identify domestic workers that work or live in those residential areas.

After the mobilization of at least 30 domestic workers, we organize a meeting to explain the importance of joining the union. We talk about the law, domestic workers' rights and the benefits of being unionized. Usually, in these meetings domestic workers elect, through a vote, a leader for the union committee who will represent them.

I also participate in television and radio programmes, where I speak about the regulation of domestic work, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, ILO Conventions 189 and 190, social security and other issues of importance to domestic workers. This raises awareness and attracts domestic workers to the union. The use of Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram has also been helpful to inform members about the union and the importance of joining the union.

To finish, I would like to say that I am proud to be a domestic worker because I like the work I do, and that contributes a lot to the success of our campaigns and work. Another secret of our successful recruiting campaigns is our good communication when addressing the members. The message you want to give to them must be clear, simple and easy to be understood.



Many of our unions have developed a positive relationship with relevant government officials/departments.

# RECORDS FOR RECRUITMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

It is very important for the union to make sure new members fill in the application or registration form and for the union to issue membership cards (or similar). We must know who our members are and how to reach them. We must be able to keep up to date information on their paid-up membership status. Most unions report that they do keep records. “Record keeping is a union tradition,” asserts Toindepi Dhure (ZDAWU, Zimbabwe). Some keep records manually in books; others now record on computers using Excel, whilst others have more sophisticated computerized systems. It is also important for members to know they are registered with the union, and that they have a proof of membership that they can show and be proud of. This helps develop an identity as a domestic worker, and a bond with other domestic workers. Having records is really important for retaining our members: we can keep in touch, invite them to participate in activities, report on activities and our successes and so on. It is also important for the sustainability of the union.

Nellie Kahua from NDAWU shares the following story of how the union, with assistance from the trade union federation, has introduced an innovative membership card, which also addresses a pressing need of domestic workers and is linked to accurate record keeping. This helps to attract new members whilst helping to retain existing members. It also helps with the collection of dues.



## BOX

## 08

### A STORY FROM NAMIBIA

#### *A Special Membership Card*

My name is Nellie Dina Kahua. I am the General Secretary of the Namibian Domestic and Allied Workers' Union (NDAWU). Our union was inaugurated in 2015. We have between 3000 and 3700 members.

When a domestic worker joins our union she fills in a membership form and pays the registration fee. Members get a membership card. We used to use paper cards. But things have changed, and we now issue a plastic membership card that is also a Visa card. The union name and logo is on the card as well as her union membership number.

With this Visa card a member can save money, receive her salary, buy electricity or air time, withdraw cash from the ATM, pay her subscriptions. The card does not expire so a domestic worker can continue to use the card after retirement, although she is taken off our data-base and does not pay subscriptions any more.

#### **Why and how did this happen?**

We identified a problem that our domestic workers were facing. We asked ourselves what we can do to assist

domestic workers to manage money. They don't have bank accounts because to open an account you need to earn a minimum amount and domestic workers do not earn enough. This card solves that problem.

This initiative was negotiated by our federation, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW). The federation started a union business arm where the bigger unions invest their funds for future plans. With help from our research institute they came up with this brilliant idea of how they can assist NDAWU members to overcome their banking problem. They negotiated with the bank to link the membership /Visa card to the banking system. This system is working well and helps us to keep our members as it meets one of their real needs.

#### **Record Keeping**

This also helps the union to keep good records. We have a data base where we capture all new members recruited. It shows on the system who has contributed union dues and who hasn't. This makes it easier to remind members by sending them message or making a call. Two organizers monitor the system.

06

## LESSONS FROM OUR



*What are the lessons we can learn from all these experiences of growing our unions? Here are some “Do’s” and “Don’ts” to remember when you are recruiting new members and keeping existing ones. You may want to add some others.*

## A STORY FROM GUINEA

### *The DOs and DON'Ts of Recruiting*



#### DO THIS:

- Plan well
- Understand and adapt your strategies to the local situation
- Listen to the domestic workers' concerns and problems
- Make the worker feel that her concerns are important
- Do your best to answer workers' questions and doubts
- Try to solve problems and give advice
- Communicate in a short, simple and easily understood way
- Use the language they are comfortable with
- Make sure you have enough time and don't appear rushed
- Encourage domestic workers themselves to help with recruiting and acknowledge their good work
- Use appropriate tools/media to interest and excite workers
- Arrange for follow up
- Work with trade unions and other allies
- Use multiple strategies, including face-to-face and new technology
- Make domestic workers feel part of a global movement by introducing the IDWF



#### DO NOT DO THIS:

- Promise what you can't achieve
- Arrange a date and not turn up.
- Ignore workers' concerns.
- Avoid answering difficult questions e.g. about union dues
- Talk too much or lecture the workers
- Be impatient



# WHAT NEXT?

*As we have seen, recruiting new members is not enough to grow and maintain a strong union. We have to make it a powerful voice for domestic workers in our countries, in Africa and worldwide through the IDWF. How do we do this? Here are some guidelines.*



## BOX

# 10

## A STRONG UNION

### *Keeping our Union Strong: Guidelines*

Be active, creative and responsive

- Continuously recruit members from new and old areas
- Ensure existing members are interested and active
- Mobilize and campaign around domestic workers' issues and demands
- Always deal with individual problems and cases
- Show your power by engaging/negotiating with governments and employers
- Empower members: provide education and training on union issues, rights and relevant skills
- Ensure good and regular communication with leaders and members

Have well-functioning, democratic structures

- Follow the union constitution
- Hold regular, well-attended meetings
- Take and follow clear mandates from workers
- Give prompt and clear report backs
- Hold regular elections according to the constitution
- Have accountable and committed leaders
- Ensure strong financial management and accountability
- Keep good records



The final words in our booklet come from  
the IDWF Africa Regional Coordinator,  
Vicky Kanyoka.

08

■ ■ ■

# CONCLU- SION

“The first strategic goal of IDWF is federation development, which includes organizing and recruitment drives. That means the strength of any trade union is membership. Members are the backbone of any union and hence the domestic workers’ unions too. It is from the membership that unions gain power, unity and solidarity. Our affiliates in Africa have been working hard to mobi-

lize, sensitize, organize and recruit members since 2009. Their membership has been increasing from between 50% and 100% yearly. They have acquired different experiences in doing so.

However, from this booklet we learn that there is no one way of organizing and recruiting domestic workers. Leaders and members have been very creative and innovative in

recruiting members into their unions, resulting in the growth of union membership, and being able to pay membership dues to IDWF.

It is the expectation of IDWF leaders that this booklet will be one of the resources to enable the members, leaders and partners to learn more about our organizing and recruitment drive and how we do it in Africa.



We thank all leaders, members of domestic workers unions/associations in Africa for their good contributions in making the booklet possible.”

**Organize for Power! Organize for Unity!**

**Organize for Strength!**

“  
It is from the membership that unions gain power, unity and solidarity.”

# IDWF AFRICA TEAM



**ASMAOU BAH**  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER



**ESSI KOTOR**  
PROGRAM OFFICER



**VICKY KANYOKA**  
REGIONAL COORDINATOR



**DEOGRASIA VULUWA**  
PROGRAM OFFICER



# SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

## ON ORGANIZING

StreetNet and WIEGO, “Organizing in the Informal Economy. Resource books for Organisers”, series of 6 booklets (available in English, French, Portuguese)

1. Recruiting Informal Workers into Democratic Workers’ Organisations
2. Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers
3. Handling the Day-To-Day Problems of Informal Workers
4. Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers
5. Handling Disputes between Informal Workers and those in Power
6. Collective Action for Informal Workers

<https://www.wiego.org/worker-education-advocacy-materials>

ITUC-CSI, “Decent work, decent life for domestic workers”

[https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ITUC\\_dwd\\_AnglaisWEB.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ITUC_dwd_AnglaisWEB.pdf)

IDWF and NDWA, International Domestic Workers Day, Outreach and Visibility Campaign. A Toolkit

[https://idwfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/international\\_domestic\\_workers\\_day\\_outreach\\_and\\_visibility\\_campaign\\_en.pdf](https://idwfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/international_domestic_workers_day_outreach_and_visibility_campaign_en.pdf)

Burke, Geronima, Martina, Thomas, Wall, “Education for Changing Unions.”

## ON C189

IDWF and WIEGO. “Your Toolkit on ILO Convention 189. The Domestic Workers’ Convention (Africa Region)”

[https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic\\_Worker\\_Toolkit\\_WIEGO\\_IDWF\\_Web.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/Domestic_Worker_Toolkit_WIEGO_IDWF_Web.pdf)

## ON BEST PRACTICES

IDWF and ILO. Decent work for domestic workers. Eight good practices from Asia

[https://idwfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/eight\\_good\\_practices\\_from\\_asia\\_en.pdf](https://idwfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/eight_good_practices_from_asia_en.pdf)

*Sharing our best recruiting practices in Africa.*

# “ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE. HOW WE DO IT!”



**International Domestic  
Workers Federation**

[www.idwfed.org](http://www.idwfed.org)