UNIT: 11 MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Structure

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1998, the International Labour Conference adopted the ILO Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which spelt out four 'core' labour standards to apply to all workers, regardless of the degree of formality of their work status and levels of development of their countries:

- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining;

- Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
- Effective abolition of child labour; and
- Elimination of discrimination with respect to occupation and remuneration.

However, the declaration came at a time when the capacity of governments to enforce these standards---assuming political will on their part---had been weakened by structural adjustment policies while the burden of debt repayments had reduced the resources at their disposal. Trade unions too face a declining membership and hence a dwindling of their traditional source of power. According to a 1996 ILO survey, trade union membership had declined in 72 out of 92 countries. It had never exceeded 10 per cent of the workers in most developing countries but it went down to 13 per cent in the USA and only reached rates of 25 per cent in some European countries. Women's condition in the informal economy still remains worse and in this context this Unit discusses how mainstreaming can happen in the informal economy.

11.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:
- Define the labour standards in informal economy from gender perspective;
- Explain the need for collective action in informal economy;
- Examine transnational activism; and
- Elucidate principle to mainstream gender in informal economy.

11.3 GENDER AND CORE LABOUR STANDARDS: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Largely northern-led campaigns to promote labour standards have paid little or no attention to workers in the informal economy, particularly to those already at the bottom, often detached from global or even local value chains. Women's concerns are likely to be shaped to a greater extent by the insecurity of their income flows, the more casual nature of their employment and their greater concentration in self-employment and home-based work. They are also likely to reflect women's need to combine responsibility for childcare and domestic chores with their economic activities. As we know, many women will be earning a living and caring for their families without the support of an adult male breadwinner. Based on her extensive research with

women workers in the informal economy in India, Unni (2004) suggests that a charter of rights for such workers would include the right to work together with the right to a minimum level of income, safety at work and basic social security covering health, food, education, shelter, childcare and old age pensions.

Some of these rights have found their way into the constitutions, laws and policies of different countries, but formal recognition does not necessarily translate into practical outcomes. Where public systems of social protection exist, they have been effectively captured by the elites, by public sector workers and by the more organized sections of the working classes. As the ILO puts it, 'People in informal work represent the largest concentration of needs without voice, the silent majority of the world economy' (ILO 2002a: 71). It is in this sense that 'voice' has to be seen as an integral dimension of social protection, particularly for this vulnerable majority. However, vulnerable and marginalized workers face an apparently intractable conundrum. On the one hand, without some minimum level of basic security, any attempt on their part to exercise voice carries the risk of jeopardizing relationships with landlords, employers, middlemen, subcontractors, police or municipal authorities on whose patronage and goodwill they rely in their pursuit of basic needs and some degree of protection. On the other hand, in the absence of such voice, it is difficult to see

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Box 11.1: The crucial importance of an organized voice

Voice refers to the capacity of people to articulate and advance their needs and interests and to influence critical decision-making processes that affect their lives. The exercise of organized, rather than individual, voice is of crucial importance to the collective bargaining capacity of the working poor in relation to other market players. An organized voice is also essential to ensure the representation of their needs and interests in policy discourse and the extension of existing rights and entitlements to excluded groups. The absence of voice from the design and implementation of social protection measures has frequently served to perpetuate these group's exclusion**.**

Source: Author

how they will be able to alter the terms of these relationships or gain access to alternative ones that entail less extreme forms of dependency.

The fact that there is considerable evidence of organization among workers in the informal economy suggests that this conundrum is not insurmountable. While traditional trade

union membership may be on the decline, there has been a proliferation of new forms of labour organization, some precisely in response to the challenge of reaching out to workers in the informal economy.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1:

Note: a) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What are the possible measures improve the status and development of laborers in the informal economy?

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11.4 VOICE, VISIBILITY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Trade unions have historically played a key role in representing and advancing workers' interests.-They evolved in response to the needs and priorities of a workforce that came into existence during an earlier phase of the industrialization of developed countries when mass-based production generated large concentrations of workers on the factory floor. They relied on instruments like the dosed shop, collective bargaining and strike action to fight for the interests of their membership. Trade unions as an organizational form could be transplanted with relative ease to developing countries because of the large public sector enterprises and capital-intensive forms of production associated with the early import-substituting orientation of their industrialization strategies.

However, they failed to reach out to the vast majority of workers in these countries who were largely located in informal activities characterized by the absence of a clear-cut employer-employee relationship. Consequently, trade union membership remained confined to a small, relatively privileged and largely male minority of workers in formal employment.

Trade unions in both developed and developing countries subscribed to the prevailing view that informal work was an anachronism from an earlier phase of industrialization, one that would wither away with its spread and modernization.

In addition, trade unions have frequently perceived informal workers as a threat to their own entrenched privileges. Breman, for instance, describes the attitudes of Indian trade unions towards such workers as one of 'indifference, rising almost to enmity' underpinned by the fear that pressure from below would lead to gradual erosion of the rights gained during a long struggle by the protected labour (Breman 1996: 247). Their reluctance to take on the challenge of organizing workers in the informal economy - and the widening gap between their wages and benefits and those of the unorganized workforce - left them vulnerable in the face of globalization, technological change and labour market deregulation. An increasingly footloose capital has been able to take advantage of the fragmentation of production processes to exploit the large reserves of cheap and unorganized labour in developing countries (as well as the flow of cheap migrant labour into developed countries) and to bypass the organized work force.

It has become increasingly clear to the trade union movement that the informal economy is not just a residual from some premodern mode of production but an integral and growing dimension Of current processes of globalization, and that their traditional modes of organizing are out of sync with the current organization of work. We see evidence of this in the case of the ICFTU. This has been the leading confederation of trade unions at the international level since 1949. Although still located in the North and dominated by northern trade unions, particularly the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), it has been undergoing some important changes in recent years. It has sought to distance itself from its past association with Cold War politics and has responded positively to new forms of unionism in developing countries. It has also begun to make a deliberate effort to include women workers.

In 2002, the AFL-CIO, the Coalition of Labour Union Women and ICFTU launched a three year programme intended to help women worldwide organize and to double the number of women workers who were members. In 2006, the ICFTU was merged with the World Confederation of Labour to form a new International Trade Union Confederation that represents 166 million workers, involving 309 affiliated organizations in 150 countries. It is thus the largest organized mass of workers in the world and has considerable potential to be a force for justice in the face of globalization.

Apart from this, the exclusion of large sectors of the world's poorer workers from trade union membership has raised a question mark over the tendency on the part of many, including the ILO and unions themselves, to continue to conflate the right to organize with the right to join a trade union. As an ICFTU document on informal work put it:

> A common mistake begins by always thinking of trade unions as already established institutions and not as something that workers can bring into existence themselves through a process. Rights are to be guaranteed to workers, not trade unions ... the central issue in organizing is the effective protection of the right of all workers to organize. It is up to workers themselves to decide whether they want to form their own trade unions or other organizations or join existing trade unions ...(ICFTU 2001 in ILO 2002a: 77).

The failure of trade unions to reach out to the informal economy in the past and its slow progress in the present has given birth to a variety of different kinds of organizations within or in association with, as well as outside, formal trade union structures that have sought to adapt to the specific needs and constraints of informal workers. Many have sought to address the gender biases of the past while others have dedicated their efforts to the organization of women workers.

11.4.1 New Unionism and Women Workers in the Export Sector

One genre of these emerging organizational forms is the 'new unionism', which came about as a response to the growing presence of women workers in the export economy. Although the enterprises in which these workers are located may be officially classified as formal, we have seen how the majority of their work force is employed under highly informal conditions, lacking written contracts, social security and legal protection.

11.4.1.1 Examples from Asia

In Bangladesh, the rapid growth of a female factory labour force in the export-oriented garment industry served to challenge traditional ways of organizing workers and. led to the emergence of a number of women-oriented labour organizations, mostly affiliated to a mainstream federation of workers. These include the Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF), founded and supported by the Solidarity Centre, which is affiliated to the AFL-CIO in the US, as well as Kormojibi Nari (Working Women), which is funded by international NGOs and affiliated with one of the progressive political parties in the country. While BIGUF focuses on women workers in the export industry, reflecting the preoccupation of the US trade union

movement, Working Women has extended its organizational activities to women workers in both traded and non-traded sectors as well as in both formal and informal work.

The main difference between these organizations and main-stream trade unions in the country, with whom they increasing co-operate on industry-wide issues, is their focus on neighbourhood based organization and their emphasis on legal literacy and the legal process to obtain workers' rights. They also collaborate with a group of NGOs and human rights organizations on policy-related dialogues and joint training efforts. As a result of their successes in the labour courts, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Employers Association have set up its own arbitration procedures with the co-operation of the unions and employers (Mahmud and Kabeer 2006). The activism generated around the rights of garment workers may also explain the preparation of a new Labour Code that, in keeping with the realities of the economy, extends rights to workers in the informal economy for the first time in the country's history.

In her discussion of the emergence of labour organizations in the free trade zones in Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, Rosa (1994) notes the fact that women workers in these zones were often housed in dormitories and hostels by their employers. This provided them with a sense of unity based on shared economic problems as well as the personal problems of everyday life. It gave rise to an early phase of spontaneous collective actions on the part of workers in reaction to on-the-spot situations at work. Their activism drew the attention of the trade union movement, which used its women's committees to act as an. intermediary between workers and union organizers. The main energies of this movement went into fighting for the legal rights of workers to organize. One exception was the Kilusang Manggagawang Kababaihan (KMK) in the Philippines, which was affiliated to the larger labour federation-the May First Movement-that had emerged in the struggle for democracy in the Philippines in the 1980s. These origins mean that the KMK went beyond traditional trade union movement demands to also assert women's specific needs and demands, including sexual harassment at work, the use of pregnancy tests and other forms of gender specific discrimination.

Rosa also points to the variety of community based organizations that set up centres aimed at women workers in the free trade zones, some associated with religious groups and others with labour movement associations. The Sahabat Wanita (Friends of Women) and Tenaganita (Women's Workforce) action groups in Malaysia were both explicitly dedicated to the rights of women workers. Both combined education and social services to provide practical assistance

and build Workers confidence. They ran courses relating to health and safety as well as kindergartens in the neighbourhoods in which women workers were located. They also offered courses in English, typing, sewing and public speaking for women as well as provided short-term accommodation for workers who had recently migrated. Tenaganita has become increasingly involved with the promotion of the rights of migrant workers.

China recognizes the All China Federation of Trade Unions as the only legal trade union body. Independent unions are illegal and attempts to form them can be treated as treason. Hong Kong-based groups like the Christian Industrial Council have confined their efforts to the provision of support services such as legal and medical advice to workers in export processing zones. They have also worked with transnational footwear companies to provide health and safety training as one means of gaining access to factory workers. Their concern is not only to deal with workers current problems: 'Our challenge is how to sustain changes for women workers when they go back to the same agricultural and patriarchal family, for example through consciousness raising and micro-credit organizations' (Maquila Solidarity Network 2001).

In the Shenzen export processing zone (EPZ), the Chinese Working Women Network also uses a community based organizing model to promote the rights of migrant workers (Ngai 2004). The Centre for Women Workers was established in 1996 to provide education in labour rights, protection against workplace discrimination, reproductive health education and training for migrants' return. An Occupation Health Education Centre has set up a specialized unit of legal support for migrant workers. The mobile Health Express provides health outreach to migrant women, informing them about potential occupational hazards and advocating for better occupational health safety. It has also begun a co-operative to assist women who want to leave factory work to engage in alternative economic activities.

11.4.1.2 Straddling Struggle and Development; SEWA and the Hybrid Model

A second genre of activism around working women is represented by organizations that do not confine themselves to particular sectors or occupations but attempt to organize across the informal economy. They have had to adopt hybrid forms of organizational strategies in order to address the range of needs and constraints reported by women workers in different segments of work. The self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) provides the main prototype for this genre of work. SEWA has provided legal education, that support to members who face

periodic encounters with the police and the law, and it runs a legal advisory centre to deal with co plaints and cases lodged by members. Some of its other support services are provided through its co operative structure SEWA. Bank is its largest co-operative which provides credit and savings services to members as well as, in partnership with nationalized insurance companies, an integrated insurance scheme. There are also childcare co-operatives and midwife/health co-operatives.

11.4.1.3 Self-Employed Women's Union, South Africa

The Self-Employed Women's Union in South Africa was set up in 1993, directly inspired by the experiences of SEWA but also informed by its founder's long history in the trade union movement (Devenish and Skinner 2004). It saw itself as a workers' organisation and sought affiliation with the Congress of South African: Trade Unions (COSATU) from its inception, but failed to obtain this as a result of resistance from sections of the COSATU leadership that accused it of discriminating against men.

SEWU was designed on principles of direct democracy with elected leaders at branch, trade committee, regional executive committee and the National Executive Committee levels. It was open to all adult women involved in an economic activity and earning their living by their own efforts, without regular salaried or waged employment and not employing, more than three people on a basis Its membership was predominantly made up of black women working at the survivalist end of the informal economy. SEWU underwent a shift from a mainly urban to a mainly rural membership and from a predominance of street vendors̄s to home-based workers, with a leadership increasingly of members who had worked their way up from the ranks.

11.4.1.4 Mobilizing Around the Right to Shelter: Urban Experiences

A third set of organizations that have mobilized women Worker take specific needs as their point of entrȳrather than specific, occupational groups. Housing emerges as one of the critical needs for low-income household in urban contexts. It represents a source of shelter, a site of production, a form of capital and a secure place within the community. Some recent studies from India also suggest that, for women in particular, housing that is registered in their names can offer protection against domestic violence as the fear of eviction is one of the factors that leads women to live with abusive partners (Batia et al. forthcoming; Panda and Agarwal 2005).

There are a variety of different ways to address the need far shelter, including housing loans and subsidies, construction of low-cost housing, provision of hostels for working women and so on. This

section, however, focuses on attempts to organize informal workers around their housing needs.

11.4.1.5 Creating an Alliance, India

The Alliance in Mumbai is made up of three rather different organizations that are united by their concerns with obtaining secure tenure of land, adequate and double housing and access to essential utilities for their members and by a strong focus on self organized - savings as a daily activity of its membership. The organization, which have been working together since 1986 are the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF), a national community-based organization that has been fighting for housing rights for slum dwellers since 1974; the Society for the Protection of Area Resource Centre (SPARC), an NGO that began work with the urban poor in Mumbai in 1984; and Mahila Milan. Mahila Milan came into existence when the two other organizations realized that their strongest allies in the fight for better housing for low-income house holds were the women in these households, the majority of whom were engaged in various forms of informal paid work.

A strategic change in organizational direction took place with in the NSDF when the Alliance was formed (Mitlin and Patel 1 2005). It had been a predominantly male organization engaged in agitation politics that frequently brought it into confrontation with the state. The leadership recognized that their movement had not progressed beyond marches and demonstrations and observed that women, passionately concerned with security of tenure and basic amenities, were more comfortable with the mere pragmatic approach favoured by SPARC. One example of the kind of imaginative tactics used by SPARC comes from its early days when it discovered that pavement dwellers were not entitled to ration cards because they were not considered to have a permanent address, despite the fact that they had occupied their pavement dwellings for several years. SPARC decided to mail post-cards to these pavement dwellings and use this as evidence of a fixed address. As a result of this action, the pavement dwellers were issued with temporary ration cards, with the possibility for renewal after a tenure of 18 months (Burra 2000).

The Alliance takes this more pragmatic approach the 'politics- of patience' gives central place to negotiations, self-enumeratitnti and consensus building to achieve its goals (Appadurai 2001). It avoids affiliation to any political parties, working with whoever, is in power, but it has built up long-term relationships with various levels of state bureaucracy that are able to help it in its work. Members daily savings activities not only provide a credit fund for the membership but

also help to develop interactions between Mahila Milan group leaders and their membership. The organization encourages its membership to undertake, self-surveys, useful not only a tool to clarify who they are, what they do and what their problems are but also as evidence to support the slum dwellers claims to a secure place within the community. Thus when the state needed to clear out dwellings that had sprung up along railway tracks in order to increase railway efficiency, it agreed to resettle, rather than evict, the families who had been living there the need for a process to establish individual household entitlements was met through a community based survey that allowed each of the 30,000 families who had lived in the designated area to be surveyed and enumerated. Finally, the Alliance encourages its members to design and exhibit the kind of housing most suited to their needs as a way of influencing the municipality's efforts to provide low-cost housing.

11.4.2 Organizing the 'Doubly Excluded' in the Informal Economy

It is clear that informal work does not constitute a homogenous sector but has its own hierarchies that reflect the nature of the work and the identity of the worker. Gender is only one aspect of this identity. The most exploitative and demeaning forms of work are not only more likely to be carried out by women from low-income households than men but are also more likely to be carried out by workers from marginalized caste, religious or racial groups. These groups of workers are often less visible and harder to reach and do not often feature in the mainstream literature on social protection, although the urgency of their needs is generally in direct proportion to their invisibility in the public discourse. The struggle to organize these workers has been a long and difficult one, but growing interest in the informal economy has allowed their situation to emerge into the public domain.

11.4.3 Waste picking

Waste picking or the informal recovery of materials from waste is another socially devalued occupation. It is an important survival strategy for disadvantaged groups across the developing world, but even in contexts where waste pickers are not the poorest of the poor, they are ascribed a low status in society, marginal to the economy and subject to discriminatory policies (Medina 2005). In Mexico City, dumpsite waste pickers have a life expectancy of 39 years compared to a general average of 67 years. In Colombia, 'social cleansing' campaigns conducted by paramilitary groups treated waste pickers, beggars and prostitutes as 'disposable' and sought to

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free towns and neighbourhoods of them through harassment, kidnapping, expulsion and even murder. However, since the mid1980s, the Social Foundation, an NGO, has been assisting in the formation of co-operatives there. In 1991, it launched the National Recycling Programme, which now includes over 100 waste pickers co-operatives through out the country. The Foundation offers loans for specific projects and provides legal, administrative and business assistance and consultancy services. Waste picker co-operatives have formed larger marketing associations in order to accumulate and sell recyclables in greater volumes, obtaining higher prices than those paid to individual co-operatives.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2:

Note: a) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

       b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) How to organize the doublely excluded in the informal economy?

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11.5 TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

Struggles around the rights of migrants, including their right to association and representation, contain the seeds of transnational activism in them almost by definition. While organizations like TWC2 have sought to restrict their efforts to foreign workers within their national boundaries, others like Tenaganita have deliberately focused from their inception on the connections between the rights of women workers, both national and migrant, and processes of globalization, and forged links with a number of regional and international organizations.

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development is one of these regional organizations and uses the law as an instrument in women's struggles for peace, equality and justice. Another is CARAM Asia (Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility), which has been

particularly influential in promoting the rights of foreign domestic workers. Following up on a regional summit on domestic workers in 2002, it launched a campaign to expose the violations of their rights, to promote their legal and social protection and to lobby for recognition of domestic work as 'proper' work. The Committee for Asian Women began in the late 1970s as a direct response to the problems of women workers in the free trade zones but subsequently expanded to include women workers in the in ferial economy.

Box 11.2: Women in the Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

WIEGO's goals are to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. In effect, it acts as a 'think-tank' for the SEWA-inspired international movement of member base organizations of informal workers. It has generated international interest in the collation of better statistics on informal workers, on their linkages with the formal economy and the wider processes of globalization; promoted the idea of member-based organizations of informal workers to counter the accusations of 'non-representatives' of NGOs; organized conferences, meetings and workshops to share experiences and develop advocacy; mapped who is organizing informal workers and where; and collated examples of best practice on social protection.

WIEGO currently has five programmes that represent: its priority areas for advocacy and action:, global markets Organization and representation; social protection; statistics; and urban policies. It is governed by a 15 person Steering Committee and the Advisory Committees for each of its programmes, drawn frame the constituencies (membership-based organizations of informal research, statistical and academic institutions; and non-government and inter-governmental development agencies). WIEGO is of 150 active members and several hundred associates from countries around the world.

Source : www.wiego.org

11.6 GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND INFORMAL ECONOMY

The changing organization of production and labour markets in an era of intensified globalization dearly throws up new challenges for workers in their struggle for greater voice and

representation in the collective decisions that affect their lives. It has become increasingly evident that old forms of unionism-which prior based work-based activism and collective bargaining within a recognized employer-employee relationship were always irrelevant to the lives of the majority of the world's workforce and that they are becoming increasingly more so with the information of work. The old weapons of the labour movement relied on the power of numbers associated with the mass concentration of workers, on the use of the closed shop to amplify this power and on resort to strikes, pickets and demonstrations if collective bargaining did not work. These are all forms of action that are becoming increasingly ineffective in the face of a globally mobile capital, capable of relocating elsewhere in the face of such threats. Women workers have generally found organizations that revolved primarily around the workplace difficult to reconcile with their domestic responsibilities. The failure of most trade unions to address injustices at home along with injustices at work may further explain why they have not attracted numerous women members in the past. As we have seen, this is changing in many parts of the world as unions realize that without reaching out to workers in the informal economy, they are in danger of becoming obsolete.

This Unit has explored examples of a variety of different attempts to build collective voice and action among workers in the informal economy in order to find out what elements of their organizational strategies have enabled a highly insecure group of workers to engage in collective action. It has also discussed what their actions tell us about a social protection agenda that addresses the needs of women in the informal economy. One point that emerges strongly is the value attached to paid work, however precarious, and hence the unwillingness to jeopardize this through forms of action that might disrupt work-based relationships. This has helped to shape the kinds of strategies employed by organizations seeking to promote collective action as well as the forms of action undertaken. It may also help to explain the other important point that emerges from the analysis, which is that there appears to be far greater importance attached to social security measures than to improving wages and conditions of work. Pressure is often exerted on the state to support and extend protection measures, including labour legislation, rather than on private employers.

Although women workers in global export factories may be classified as formal and come closest to the mass presence that characterized the early era of trade union organization, they lack the dual protections enjoyed by those workers legal protection of their rights and protection from

global competition. Efforts to organize these workers therefore often display some of the same features as efforts to organize women in the informal economy more generally. One of these features is the shift from work-based organization to organization within the neighbourhood and community. In the case of factory workers, this partly reflects the hostility to trade union activity displayed by employers but it is also recognition of the constraints on women's mobility imposed by childcare and domestic responsibilities.

The neighbourhood based location is also facilitated by the fact that informal workers tend to be concentrated in a limited number of low-income areas and, in the case of export factory workers, in dormitories and hostels. Their being located in the neighbor based, may also explain why such organizations tend to address issues that cut across the public-private dichotomy, but it is also likely that most organizations which work with women are aware of how artificial this distinction is in their lives.

The importance women attach to their jobs, and their fear of risking any loss of employment, means that most of these organizations have eschewed confrontational approaches and opted for a range of strategies that involve negotiation, training women workers and mobilizing public opinion. In addition, a number of organizations also seek to strengthen the capacity of their members to stand up for their rights by expanding the resources they have to fall back on. This may be achieved by increasing their livelihood opportunities through training in market-oriented and business skills, by investing in collective assets such storage or marketing outlets, by forming cooperatives that allow members to reap the benefits of economies of scale or by encouraging them to save.

Alliances of various kinds are also critical in enabling informal workers to exercise voice. In some cases, they are formally affiliated to the trade union movement or political parties. In other cases, they have formed strategic coalitions with national machineries for women or with the women's movement more generally. While trade unions continue to operate as institutionalized structures, it would appear that the network-like forms of organization; are better suited to the situation of informal workers, given the absence of a fixed place of work or the difficulties of organizing at work. Networks also allow organizations that share common goals but may have different forms, given differences in local circumstances, to .work together in a semi-structured way. In many cases, they have turned to international organizations for support. International solidarity from labour movements around the world as well as various civil society

organizations has been a source of funds, expertise and supportive action. In some cases, the networks have themselves gone transnational. Many draw on international conventions to argue for women's rights as workers, as women and as human beings. Globalization and new technologies have thus facilitated the local organizations to mobilize resources and support beyond their national boundaries and to appeal to international opinion and international conventions for their cause.

A final set of points relates to the kinds of priorities that emerge out of these efforts to organize. We have noted the value attached to work and hence the importance of the right to work in these workers' lives. We have also noted the priority that they give to various forms of social security to cover ill health, death and contingencies. There appears to be less attention to gender discrimination in wages and greater attention to the level of wages and the need for a basic minimum wage,, if only as an aspirational and regularity of wages. There are concerns about safety at work and on the way to work, including sexual harassment, and demand for reliable transport and, in one context, for lessons in self-defence. There appears to be greater priority attached to support for women's childcare responsibilities and less to bans on child labour. In addition, we note the importance given to issues of respect and recognition in strategies for mobilizing informal workers, particularly those in the more stigmatized forms of work. Given the strength of male breadwinner ideologies, women's work is often devalued, particularly when it is carried on in the informal economy and on a self-employed basis. Belonging to an organization is often the first step for women workers in gaining recognition for what they do and who they are.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3:

Note: a) Use the space given below to answer the questions.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) How alliances of various kinds help women in informal economy?

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11.7 SUMMING UP

To sum up, organizations for women workers in informal forms of work have opted for a more flexible and wide-ranging set of approaches in place of the well-defined strategies associated with traditional trade unionism. They are interested in working towards solutions rather than demonstrating around problems. They have therefore served to challenge accepted definitions of what it means to be a labour organization and brought into existence structures and strategies that are more suited to building collective voice and action among women workers in the informal economy and perhaps also workers more generally in a globalized economy.

11.8 GLOSSARY

Trade Union: Trade Union is an organization whose membership consists of workers and union leaders, united to protect and promote their common interests. The principal purposes of a labor union are to (1) negotiate wages and working condition terms, (2) regulate relations between workers (its members) and the employer, (3) take collective action to enforce the terms of collective bargaining, (4) raise new demands on behalf of its members, and (5) help settle their grievances.

11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1:

1.
   - Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining;
   - Elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;
   - Effective abolition of child labour; and
   - Elimination of discrimination with respect to occupation and remuneration.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2:
1. It is clear that informal work does not constitute a homogenous sector but has its own hierarchies that reflect the nature of the work and the identity of the worker. Gender is

only one aspect of this identity. The most exploitative and demeaning forms of work are not only more likely to be carried out by women from low-income households than men but are also more likely to be carried out by workers from marginalized caste, religious or racial groups. These groups of workers are often less visible and harder to reach and do not often feature in the mainstream literature on social protection, although the urgency of their needs is generally in direct proportion to their invisibility in the public discourse. The struggle to organize these workers has been a long and difficult one, but growing interest in the informal economy has allowed their situation to emerge into the public domain.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3:

1. Alliances of various kinds are also critical in enabling informal workers to exercise voice. In some cases, they are formally affiliated to the trade union movement or political parties. In other cases, they have formed strategic coalitions with national machineries for women or with the women's movement more generally. While trade unions continue to operate as institutionalized structures, it would appear that the network-like forms of organization; are better suited to the situation of informal workers, given the absence of a fixed place of work or the difficulties of organizing at work. Networks also allow organizations that share common goals but may have different forms, given differences in local circumstances, to .work together in a semi-structured way. In many cases, they have turned to international organizations for support. International solidarity from labour movements around the world as well as various civil society organizations has been a source of funds, expertise and supportive action. In some cases, the networks have themselves gone transnational.

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11.11 QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

1. Examine the condition of labour in the informal economy.
2. Analyze the status of women workers in the export sector.
3. Explain the significance of transnational activism in mainstreaming gender in informal economy.