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Unionizing Domestic Workers: **Case Study of the INTUC- Karnataka** **Domestic Workers Congress**

Suneetha Eluri
Alok Singh





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Message

In 2009, ILO-ACTRAV and INTUC initiated a Workers' Education Pilot Project - "Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Organising, Skills Up gradation and Advocacy". The one year project helped organise more than 2,500 domestic workers to form a union, which was registered as Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress. Given the success of the project, the ILO further supported the efforts through a follow up project that aimed at sustaining the successes achieved during the initial pilot project, strengthening the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress (KDWC), and improving the capacity of the Domestic Workers' Brigade – a pool of organizers, educators.

The present case study, "Unionizing Domestic Workers: Case Study of the INTUC-Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress" documents the processes and steps that have successfully helped the INTUC Karnataka and KDWC to organise these highly vulnerable group of workers in to union, which has been working towards ensuring better working conditions for the domestic workers in Bangalore city. We in the ILO, feel that it will be great opportunity to document this work as a case study, which will help other trade Unions and organizations, working towards organising domestic workers, to learn and reflect from the experiences of the Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress and the Domestic Workers Brigade in organising domestic workers.

In the process of completing this case study, all relevant stakeholders were made part, including the employers that were involved and had a huge stake in the accomplishment of the project. A series of structured personal interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) were carried out with the ILO specialist, leaders of INTUC Karnataka, INTUC Bangalore City leaders, Government officials, leaders and office bearers of KDWC, employers, domestic workers brigade's organisers and educators and the domestic workers. The input by all these stakeholders has helped strengthen this case study.

The worker voices presented in this case study will help readers understand issues from the domestic workers perspective. Certain workplace issues recounted by these workers are quite revealing and highlight the plight of these workers. Similarly, the interactions with the organisers and educators have helped capture the issues and bottlenecks in organising this vulnerable group of workers. We acknowledge the critical role played by these organisers and educators in the achievements of this project. There were also various documents which served as excellent secondary source to capture the historical timelines and the validated some of the points shared by the stakeholders.

The ILO is thankful to all the stakeholders, especially the domestic workers, INTUC Karnataka and Bangalore city leaders, local government officials, leaders and office bearers

of KDWC, brigade's organisers and educators and the employers for their input and support. I am thankful to Ms. Suneetha Eluri, Mr. Alok Singh, the authors of the case study. I also express thanks to Mr Anandan Menon, and Mr Karthikeyan from the ILO Country Office in India for their support in coordination and other colleagues in headquarters (TRAVAIL, ACTRAV) for providing their inputs for this case study. I express appreciation to Ariel B. Castro, Senior Specialist on Workers Activities, ILO for providing guidance at all the stages of this documentation. His gesture to accompany the research during the field visits and help organise various meetings at Bangalore is very much appreciated and his support has been very valuable at all stages of this documentation.

I congratulate and thank Brother N.M. Adyanthaya (INTUC Vice President and President-INTUC, Karnataka), Brother Shanthakumar (General Secretary, INTUC Karnataka) and all the men and women who make up the KDWC, for their excellent work which is featured in this case study.

Tine Staermose
Director
ILO Decent Work Technical
Support Team for South Asia and
Country Office-India

Foreword

This document titled “Unionizing Domestic Workers: Case Study of the INTUC- Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress” narrates the experiences of domestic workers of a southern state of India, Karnataka. It is a specific case study of domestic workers from one of the fastest grown urban centers of India and the experiences, agony, issues, problems, and concerns of domestic workers of this region are not entirely unique to them. Similar experiences of domestic workers exist in other parts of the world and there might be variations owing to certain cultural specificities.

Globalization has brought enormous changes to the livelihood options for many groups and communities. The IT revolution, along with its associated consequences in India, led to massive changes in social, cultural, and economic spheres. One of the more visible changes is the increasing informalization and casualization of workforce that has squeezed the work options of women from poor and marginalized backgrounds, and resort to domestic work as the only means of livelihood. This trend has further amplified the arguments and discussions on the so-called “feminization of labour” and the need to increase the knowledge base.

And while there exists a dominant stereotype that domestic work is unskilled and requires no training as it merely extends the domestic workers’ private sphere activities, some activists have pointed out the skills and emotional labor that are required of a feminized workforce. The case study attempts to contribute to these discussions and reveal some interesting, sometimes shocking, findings about the nature and conditions of domestic employment. The issues of justice and rights related to domestic workers are given paramount importance and the mutual necessity of employers and domestic workers to secure this kind of arrangement for day-to-day running of households is also tackled.

Securing social protection and decent working conditions for the millions of domestic workers continue to be of primordial concern for the ILO, in partnership with the trade unions. There is great belief that the very first weapon to combat unfair working conditions and wages is through unionization and that was the main reason why Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) initiatives to organize domestic workers in Bangalore city enjoys support of the ILO, particularly the Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV).

This case study attempts to capture the minute details of the entire process of organizing the domestic workers into a trade union under Karnataka Domestic Workers’ Congress. This document gives an account of the efforts made by one of India’s major national trade union centers that is, INTUC. With INTUC’s help, the KDWC successfully put forward the issues involved in organizing domestic workers, especially women informal workers. The case study also poses valid questions about the institution of caste in the lives of women who are

compelled to enter labour market as paid domestic workers. It also offers a critical analysis of the functioning of domestic workers' unions and examines the role of various agencies in securing the benefits entitled to domestic workers. It documents the successes and failures of such attempts and captures the experiences of organizing the informal women workforce. Above all, this document narrates the sorrows, joys, experiences, women bonding, spirit of collectiveness, societal odds against women's involvement in public domain, and capabilities of women as organizers/ group leaders/union leaders. I am sure this document will serve the purpose of a key reference for further attempts at unionization of domestic workers in a way forward to secure decent working conditions for domestic workers in India.

It is my pleasure to express appreciation to the ILO Senior Specialist on Workers' Activities for South Asia, Ariel Castro, for his efforts in coordinating the preparation and finalization of this case study. I also thank Ms. Suneetha Eluri and Mr. Alok Singh for the help putting together information, analyzing data and bringing out this case study. I am also grateful for colleagues at TRAVAIL, the Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office in India for their contributions in shaping this case study. My sincere thanks also go to colleagues in INTUC-Karnataka: Brother N.M. Adyanthaya (INTUC Vice President and President-INTUC, Karnataka), Brother Shanthakumar (General Secretary, INTUC Karnataka) and all the members of the KDWC, for their support and cooperation for this case study.

I am most certain that this publication will be of extreme use to trade unions, policy makers and others concerned with ensuring decent work for domestic workers.

Dan Cunniah
Director
ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities
Geneva

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There are several people who contributed to shape the document titled, “Unionizing Domestic Workers: Case Study of the INTUC- Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress”. The first and prior most people to be thanked in this endeavour are the domestic workers of Bangalore city. If not for their open discussions, their willingness to share their problems and concerns and expressing their aspirations towards decent working conditions, this study could not have been a reality. We would also like to thank INTUC leadership of Karnataka state. We express our sincere thanks to Mr.N M Adyanthaya, President, INTUC in particular for facilitating this research in Bangalore city.

We would like to express sincere thanks to Mr Shantha Kumar, General Secretary INTUC Karnataka State, for his valuable support throughout the study. We would also like to express our gratitude to Miss Muthaki Uthaiah, Chairperson of INTUC Women’s Wing Karnataka, for patiently accompanying us to the field sites and introducing to as many domestic workers as possible in different parts of the Bangalore city. We would also like to thank the office staff, Mr Dakshina Murthy, Mr Tyaga Raj, INTUC Bangalore city, for their cooperation while we were on field. We extend our sincere thanks to Ms Girija, Ms Malathi S Balaji, Ms Vijaya laxmi, Ms Laxmi, Ms Franchina Thavamani, organizers of Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress (KDWC).

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We would like to thank Mr Karthikeyan Vaitheeswaran and Mr Anandan Menon, ILO staff for their cooperation at various stages of the research. Last but not least, we would like to express our sincere and special thanks to Mr Ariel Castro, Senior Specialist, Workers Activities, for providing constant guidance, support and encouragement throughout the study and having corrected the drafts again and again, in spite of his busy schedule.

At last we thank one and all for their valuable inputs as well allocating their precious time to provide these inputs.

**Suneetha Eluri
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Unionizing Domestic Workers: Case Study of the INTUC- Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress

Introduction

While there is a controversy over the concept of feminization of the labour force, statistics register the fact that there has been a significant increase in the number of women workers in recent times. The newly imposed roles for women workers in the informal economy of India throws up several questions, such as whether this women labour force is contributing to positive structural transformation or is it being used to reinforce certain hierarchical and undemocratic institutions (such as caste) of the past? Is it a positive voluntary participation by these women in the production process or is it situational compulsions which are forcing them to work as mere wage labour? Are these newly assigned roles leading women towards a creative engagement with their work while exercising livelihood options or are they resulting in routine, mechanical, burdensome and often inhuman work relations? Is it women's emancipation or is it a double burden which is further restricting their mental and physical development? There are several unanswered questions and dilemmas. Keeping these dilemmas and unanswered questions aside, the newly assigned roles on women, as informal workers in general and domestic workers in particular, calls for immediate attention.

The agrarian crisis in rural India has resulted in a reserved army of unemployed men and women. This unemployed work force has largely been accommodated by urban centers in underpaid and hazardous occupations. A large section of this unemployed rural and urban work force has been deployed in urban centers in domestic work, which was brought under the category of 'hazardous occupation' in 2006. In terms of the urban scenario, changes in the urban middle class lifestyle, accommodation of an increasing number of middle class men and women into jobs in the service sector, irregular work hours which are often unsuitable for their own domestic work, the withering away of the concept of community life, and a strong preference for nuclear families has resulted in a demand for domestic workers in cities. NSSO data shows that 3.05 million workers are engaged in domestic work in urban areas in India. As majority of the unemployed women resort to domestic work and swell the ranks of the informal workforce, there emerges a need to evolve a mechanism to provide decent, safe, secure and just working conditions for these workers. Formulating a protective mechanism which allows them to work free of any kind of exploitation is an emergency call.

In this context, ILO communicates with trade unions regarding organizing workers in the informal economy and equips them in building innovative strategies to organize themselves. In the changed context of work and increasing number of domestic workers, realizing the necessity to respond to the situation, INTUC took an initiative to organize domestic workers in Bangalore city through a pilot project in 2009. This pilot project was supported by ILO-ACTRAV. INTUC recruited 2000 domestic workers as union members in



2009. Implementation of the pilot project, Decent work for domestic workers: organizing, skills upgrading and advocacy, (Phase I), by INTUC is a significant effort from a central union in India. Under this project (Phase I), INTUC identified 30 women as 'Organizers' to carry out the organizing campaigns. The campaign led to registration of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress, a domestic workers union. Subsequently, INTUC formulated the 'Domestic Workers' Brigade' with its cadre to further continue the efforts of organizing and educating domestic workers. In 2010, as follow-up action to sustain the efforts made through pilot project, INTUC, with the ILO's support, launched another follow-up project, Decent work for domestic workers: organizing, skills upgrading and advocacy (Phase II). The entire process of formulating the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress and the Domestic Workers Brigade is an exciting and learning process. The proposed study is an attempt to capture and analyze the entire process in the backdrop of ILO's 'decent work' agenda.

Significance of the case study

The documentation and analysis of the process of formation of the Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress and the Domestic Workers Brigade acquires significance in a context where there have been very few attempts to unionize domestic workers. This case study provides an opportunity to reflect and learn from this experience of organizing domestic workers. Further, it helps as a guidance and reference for organizing domestic workers for trade unions in India. This particular case study is also important as it breaks the stereotype of an average trade union member being a male factory worker. The Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress is a domestic workers' trade union which comprises only women. This case study focuses on women domestic workers who are increasingly enrolling themselves as union members. It provides insights into the challenges encountered in unionizing informal women workers. It also stands as a document of evidence and facilitates the sharing of experiences among workers and unions. Over a period of time one can hope that it inspires and results in setting a benchmark for practices of unionization in India and other regions.

Scope of the study

The proposed study limits its scope to the project implemented area, which is Bangalore city, headquarter of a Southern state of India. It is limited to documenting the process of unionization of domestic workers and critically examines the project indicators to determine the changes and improvements in the capacity of Domestic Workers' Congress. Further, it critically examines the role of its leaders, organizers, and educators in Bangalore city.

Objectives of the Study

The proposed case study aims to document and report the experience of organizing domestic workers in Karnataka and will include the following aspects:

1. Documentation of the socio-political and economic scenario that led to the initiative of organizing domestic workers



- Historical account of the emergence of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress and the Domestic Workers' Brigade.
2. Documentation of various strategies used to recruit domestic workers into the Domestic Workers' Congress and training them as Organizers and Educators.
 - The support extended by ILO and INTUC in the process of unionization and campaigning.
 - Identifying the significant changes in their capacity as workers, organizers, and educators.
 3. Documentation of various aspects of organizing and mobilizing domestic workers.
 - Challenges encountered while organizing domestic workers and the methods adopted to overcome these challenges. Lessons learned out of the precious experiences.
 - Assessment of the methods (if any in specific) used to mobilize and organize the domestic workers.
 - Analyzing the changes in terms of visibility, economic gains, access to public services offered by the government, and emergence of sense of collectiveness among workers of the Domestic Workers' Congress.
 - The role of key players such as INTUC.
 - Responses labour department officials.

Methodology

This study intends to capture the process of unionization of domestic workers of Bangalore city. It intends to document the historical, social, political and economic context in which the Domestic Workers' Congress of Karnataka was established. It also intends to bring the experiences, lessons learnt, strategies adopted, methods followed, and the success and failures of one of the very few domestic workers unions in India. In a way, rather than documenting the successes and failure of the Domestic Workers' Congress, it is an attempt to capture the very exciting process of unionization itself. At this juncture, where domestic workers are hardly organized and have never before considered as real workers, the fact that domestic workers came together, realizing the importance of formation of a trade union, and registered themselves as the Domestic Workers' Congress and explored various strategies to expand and equip themselves with knowledge of various governmental schemes, is worth specific attention. This is also important in a context where there are attempts to weaken the trade unions and trade unionism. The trade union movement across the world is passing through a critical phase where there are several instances of violation of workers' rights, right to association and right to unionization. There are attempts to deprive workers from exercising their collective bargaining power.



In this context, attempts were made to capture the entire process and to put forward a case study for further reference, retrospection, and reflection. The attempt is to capture the entire evolution of the Domestic workers' Congress of Karnataka. The records and registers of the Union, the literature produced in the form of pamphlets and posters, and newspaper coverage were examined. The study attempts to narrate the formation, structure, functioning, educational sessions, strategies adopted, the level of expansion rate, and, importantly, the experiences of domestic workers prior to and after union formation.

In an attempt to understand the above, a series of interviews were conducted with domestic workers, members and non-members of Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress, group leaders of various localities, Organizers and Educators of the Domestic Workers Brigade, INTUC leadership of Bangalore city, employers, and State Labour Welfare Department officials of Bangalore city. The INTUC leadership, Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress leadership, Workers Brigade members, some KDWC members, and the State Labour Department officials were interviewed through structured and formal questionnaires and the informal, unstructured interview method was adopted during group interviews. In case of domestic workers, both individual interviews and focused group interviews were conducted. In the case of group interviews, each group from a particular locality comprised 15 to 20 members. Individual domestic workers, who are members of KDWC, were chosen to be interviewed from the union register through a random sampling method. Time was the main constraint as domestic workers are not available during day time. Their work timings are such that it was a difficult to reach them during day time. Most of the interviews were conducted in workers' residential localities, while some were conducted at the INTUC office in Bangalore. Two focus group interviews were conducted, at Shanthi Nagar and Dayanand Nagar of Shrirampuram. Individual interviews were conducted with workers from Konana Kuntae, Alsur, Swatra Nagar, Srirampuram, Vijaya Nagar, Dayanand nagar of Srirampuram, and Shanthi Nagar.

Chapterisation

This study comprises five chapters. The first chapter, Socio- political context of Domestic Work, explains the context in which a huge number of women in India have been forced towards domestic work as a livelihood option. It also talks about the detailed situational necessity which resulted in majority of the middle and upper class households in urban centers of India to opt for a domestic help. The second chapter, 'Domestic workers in Bangalore, Issues and concerns', presents a detailed account of the conditions of domestic workers in Bangalore city. It attempts to capture the working and living conditions of domestic workers. The third Chapter, 'Historical and socio-political context of the ILO convention on domestic workers, No 189', explains the situational emergency which demands the organization of domestic workers across countries. Chapter four, 'Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress', explains the origin, evolution, and activities of the KDWC in detail. Chapter five, 'Organizing and mobilizing domestic workers: Challenges and



strategies', gives a detailed account of the various aspects of organizing and mobilizing domestic workers. It also presents the challenges faced by trade union leadership, INTUC and KDWC, from various quarters while the recruitment drive was taking place in Bangalore city. This chapter also discusses the various strategies and counterstrategies adopted by the trade union leadership to resolve challenges on the ground for promoting memberships. It also contains notes on the experiences of INTUC and the lessons learnt by INTUC in the process. The conclusion, which comprises the researchers' observations and inferences drawn from the field, will be followed by the appendix, which consists of narratives of domestic workers, summaries of interviews with INTUC and Labour Department officials of Karnataka, and the notification brought by Karnataka regarding the minimum wages schedule for domestic workers in Karnataka.



Socio- political context of Domestic work

The socio political context in which domestic workers are employed by employers in India

The process of globalization has brought many changes in the social, economic, political and cultural facets of nation-states. In a country like India, the service sector, which was given much emphasis, and the revolutionary growth of Information Technology (IT) accommodated a work force which was, to a great extent, gender neutral. The post-1990s structural changes, both national and international, facilitated a greater entry of women into paid services. The increasing number of women labour in the service sector resulted in many changes in family structures and function in India.

Earlier, male members of the family were involved in paid labour and earned the income to run the family, which was considered as men taking part in social production, whereas women members of the family took care of domestic responsibilities and played their reproductive role. The domestic work done by women in their houses was never recognized as a contribution to social production. Even though it was women who liberated men from the clutches of domestic responsibilities through relentless labour in their homes and provided them conditions conducive for taking part in larger societal production, women's domestic labour was never valued, unlike men's labour. Despite carrying the domestic burden and playing the reproductive role, women's labour was kept invisible, undermined, unrecognized, and unpaid across societies.

The gradual cultural changes that took place in India drastically changed the structure and functioning of the Indian family, resulting in the evolution of nuclear families from large, rural joint families and an accompanied shift to urban centers. With changes in the economic scenario, educated women from both middle and lower-middle class families found opportunities to enter paid labour (white collar jobs in BPO's, software companies, etc.) in significant numbers. The increasing number of women in paid labour even led to the use of the term 'feminization'. There are several arguments which question the concept of 'feminization' and whether it is emancipatory for women to join social production or whether it actually becomes a double burden on women due to the multiple roles assigned to them. While acknowledging the controversy over on the concept and issue of 'feminization of the labour force', the fact remains that there has been a significant change in the number of women in paid labour since the 1990s. The increasing number of nuclear families, absence of community life, thrust towards private, secluded and luxurious life styles, irregular work hours and shifts systems, liberalization in the cultural sphere (where women are allowed to work even in late-night hours, which was a cultural obstacle for women prior to 1990s), and the newly-created service sector jobs, all resulted in the employment of domestic labour by many families in urban centers.



In the words of Manuela Tomei, Director of ILO's Conditions of Work and Employment Programme:

"...changes in the organization and intensification of work and the marked rise in female labour participation rates, which has reduced women's availability for unpaid care work, are responsible for this increase. Besides, ageing of societies, intensified national and international migration of women, and the decline in state provisions of care and social services have made it increasingly difficult for families to reconcile paid work with family responsibilities. As a result, reliance on domestic work has increased everywhere across the world as a private strategy to counter mounting work family tensions"¹.

At the same time, the new Indian middle class insisted on a somewhat luxurious lifestyle and home came to be considered as a place for exhibiting wealth. Opting for increasingly spacious, comfortable, and decorated homes became a status symbol and managing such houses, with stress the concept of utmost cleanliness, resulted in many families opting to employ domestic labour. Some families in urban centers employ more than one domestic worker as a status symbol. According to Mini Srinivasan, "the newly affluent classes have adopted a lifestyle which requires the support of a whole army of servants"². In this context, many households in urban centers were left with no other option other than appointing a domestic help to cater their family needs.

The socio-political context which turned huge number of women to domestic labour in India

On the other hand, rapid economic changes also majorly altered the lives of lower income groups, with making ends meet often becoming difficult for families if both the spouses were not engaged in paid work. Skyrocketing prices, increasing cost of living, increasing prices of educational and health facilities, withdrawal of the state welfare mechanism from primary government services, and increasing takeover of market forces, resulted in an increasing number of women from such families entering paid labour. Being less educated, or illiterate, and unskilled, these women were often left with no option other than engaging in domestic work.

Consecutive crop failures, failure of agriculture, government's emphasis on the service sector, and the neglect of manufacturing and agricultural sectors by successive governments, resulted in the deprivation of livelihood options for several agriculture-dependent families in rural areas. After migrating to urban centers, women from these families were compelled to work as domestic workers in order to run their household. Even in cases where the male members of such migrant families were employed, women's income

¹ Manuela Tomei, 31 May 2010, www.ilo.org

² Mini Srinivasan, January –June 2010, 'Domestic Child Labour: The Dirty Secret of the Rising Middle Class, Labour File' in *Defense of the Rights of Domestic Workers*, Vol. 8, No. 1-3, pp. 44-45



played a significant role in coping with the relatively expensive living costs of urban centers. The mismatch between their life in the village as dignified and self-sufficient small farmers and their current situation as daily wage earners in an urban reality pushed these families into miserable conditions. With the head of the family often being unable to cope up with the condition as a wage labour and under depression, distress, and the continuous psychological trauma of settling down, it fell upon the women to take charge of the situation and they attempted to resolve the crisis in their families by working as domestic labourers. The withdrawal of welfare measures intended for marginalized sections of the society, along with the poor and non-effective performance of certain sectors such as health and education, also increased the burden of these families.

A combination of all these factors led to a situation with the newly emerged Indian middle class was in need of domestic help on one hand and the poor and marginalized work force looking for new livelihood options on the other. In such a situation, where both the parties equally needed the other, there should ideally have been a mutually beneficial agreement between the two. However, the reality is quite contrary.

It is undeniable that domestic workers play a great role when they cater to the needs of urban families. Their labour allows many men and women in service and related sectors to work peacefully, even in late night shifts and irregular work hours. In a way, their labour contributes in the social production not just of their own spouses, but also of other families (their employers) by providing them with leisure time. But what do they get in return? Not even a minimum, decent wage to lead a dignified life! Their families, their children, their sick and elderly were left to no care while they were engaged in taking care of the children, elderly and sick of their employer's family. Further, they carry the double burden of working as wage labourers and performing the tasks in their own domestic sphere.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that some urban families where both the partners are employed simply cannot function even a single day in case of absence of their domestic help. There are cases where women had to withdraw from their high salaried jobs when they failed to locate domestic help who could cater to their family needs. In a way the visibility of the women of these families in the public sphere depends upon the women who render service to them for meager wages. Of course there are no instances of male members of the family withdrawing from their jobs because of domestic responsibilities. This explains the way domestic work was assigned only to women and the very unfair division of work. In a nutshell, domestic workers contribute towards social production by providing leisure to their employers, by liberating male members of their own families from the clutches of domestic responsibilities, and by contributing towards the visibility of the newly emerged middle class women in the public and production spheres. How should they be compensated for making possible such impossible things? That is a million dollar question that remains to be answered!



This social, political, and economic context resulted in a situation of mutual necessity which could have been expected to be fair and mutually beneficial. But this logic is violated in case of domestic workers and they constitute the most vulnerable, pathetic, and miserable work force of the present day.

Domestic workers, employers and Bangalore city

Bangalore, the sprawling capital city of the southern state of Karnataka, is among the few states which witnessed the IT revolution. Considering the amount of IT exports from the city, Bangalore is also called the Silicon Valley of India. The combination of several factors, such as the state's proactive role in inviting capital to the service sector and building infrastructural facilities to meet the needs of investors, abundant, cheap, well educated, and trained human resources, and conducive weather, resulted in the growth of the IT sector in Bangalore city. The IT revolution, growth in the service sector, and the establishment of several BPOs in Bangalore resulted in other economic activity and subsequently led to the mass flow to the city. People from various states of India reached Bangalore in search of livelihood, both white collar employees and the rural, unemployed men and women. This resulted in the city acquiring a cosmopolitan nature. As per the statistics for 2011, the population of the city is 84,99,399. As it was explained earlier, increase in the number of domestic workers of the city is also a result of the recent developments in the service sector and the growth of the city as a hub of IT companies. Domestic workers were seen as an option to facilitate the involvement of both men and women from middle class families in pursuing their careers. The city accommodated thousands of domestic workers along with the increasing numbers of white collar employees, who are the new employers in Bangalore. The untold story of the domestic workers and the employers in the glittering Bangalore city is the same as that of millions of domestic workers and employers in all other big cities in the world, apart from a few differences owing to regional cultural specificities.

Summary

- The agrarian crisis and lack of livelihood options drives number of women and men to the urban centers in search of livelihood options
- The unemployed and mostly uneducated women are recruited as domestic workers in Bangalore city
- The growth of service sector is directly proportionate to the increase in number of domestic workers in Bangalore
- The mutual necessity between the employer and the domestic worker, does not result in a mutually beneficial situation as the domestic workers are subjected to undemocratic and inhuman working conditions
- Millions of Domestic workers create the environment for millions of middle class women to engage in their careers



Domestic Workers in Bangalore - Issues and Concerns

There are certain striking similarities between domestic workers of India and elsewhere in the world, though the conditions differ owing to cultural specificities of each country. The visibility for domestic workers in the public domain as real, waged labour is the main problem everywhere. Low wages, no regulation over wage structure, fear of termination, no guaranteed livelihood options, no paid holidays, and no sick or casual leaves, all these are common problems faced by domestic workers in India and elsewhere. But there are certain humiliating practices drawn from the centuries old and inhuman caste system which can still be seen in the case of India. Some workers, during their individual and group interviews, expressed sorrow about the humiliating practices, remnants of the caste system, in their employer's homes. Some workers explained the way their employees practice untouchability even today. Even though the Constitution of India prohibits untouchability vide Article 17, a large chunk of the Indian work force continues to be subjected to it. They are forbidden from touching certain objects in the households, such as idols of gods and goddesses, certain utensils, and rooms in the house where prayers are offered. In some instances domestic workers are not allowed to enter the house through the kitchen. Domestic workers have to go around the house in order to avoid getting into the kitchen. In words of one of the domestic workers, Radhika, from Vijayanagaram locality:

"They restrict me by saying, don't come this way, don't come that way and all. Mostly Brahmin families and Lingayat families say so. They even arrange a water tap outside the home, within the compound premises and ask us to wash clothes and vessels outside. Once we are done, they sprinkle some water and take them inside. I work in two houses; I am allowed to enter in one house and not allowed in the other. I like the house which allows me in and don't like the other one".

Radhika's experience reflects the experience of many other workers. It is hard to imagine working in a situation such as this. Radhika is supposed to work as if she is ignorant of the fact she is being ill-treated. She needs to pretend that it does not affect her self-respect and continue to work suppressing her anger and humiliation. In a group interview conducted in a tailoring class in Shrirampuram, a mention of Radhika's experience got mixed responses. While some related to Radhika's experience to their own, some, particularly two elderly women who had been working in the same house for more than 25 and 13 years, said that they are aware that this kind of humiliation occurs in many work places but they had never faced it themselves as their employers are very good and never did such things. Some of the young women were very firm and said that they would not like to undergo such humiliation and if faced with such a situation, they would stop working in that house. This kind of spirit was seen particularly in the young and somewhat educated workers than among elderly



workers. It was noticeable that the younger women were more confident and uncompromising in terms of fighting against discrimination, whereas the older women tried to console themselves by taking it as their fate and saying that they had no option other than undergoing this humiliation. Reinforcement of the caste system through certain humiliating practices is a day to day reality for many domestic workers in India since a large number of Dalit women, deprived of other livelihood options, are pushed towards domestic work as the only source of income. There are a significant number of families where these women are the sole bread winners. In a way, the technological and scientific advancements in Indian society have reinforced certain identities of caste and have provided new platforms to intensify certain inhuman practices, rather than dismantling the caste system and liberating the most deprived.

While at work, domestic workers face severe problems even in attending to nature's call as most employers won't let them use their washrooms. This is a major problem particularly for workers suffering from urinary bladder problems who have to use restrooms often. This is a serious problem, but remains un-spoken and un-discussed even among the workers themselves. Workers generally feel shy about talking about it or mentioning it in public.

In a group discussion conducted at Shanthi Nagar, domestic workers mentioned that in case any valuable item belonging to the employer is lost or misplaced, eyebrows were often raised against them. Some even mentioned, with pain, that in many families their work was supervised every day by at least one member of the family, who would keep roaming behind them the whole time they worked. Most of the times, the person supervising is an elderly male or female member of the household who stays back at home. One of the workers mentioned that sometimes employers encourage even small children to keep a check over them. One of the workers responds to this by saying,

"They are the people with money. We are their servants. They don't trust us even if we have worked for them for years together. But even though we know that they do not trust us, we still continue working in their homes, accepting the suspicion on us as if it were a common thing to occur in such situations".

Another worker says that her employers ask her if she has seen the thing which went missing and when she says no, they leave at that. "They never make me feel bad", she adds. However, this is a rare instance. There are some cases where the police was called, employers gave statements regarding their suspicion on the domestic worker, and then formal complaints were launched even though there was no evidence. One of the workers says, "Since we are poor, they (the employers) think that we may resort to such things". The understanding that poor people are prone to commit such crimes is deep-rooted in the Indian society and only a major social, political, and economic alteration of relations of work can change these biased perceptions. These perceptions of employers can only be changed through workers unity,



resistance, and struggle. These biases will vanish when all kinds of work is respected on an equal basis and no work is regarded as superior or inferior to another.

Most domestic workers were uncomfortable and hesitant in answering questions regarding sexual harassment at the workplace. After long conversations on different other aspects of work and after developing some kind of comfort, one domestic worker mentioned during a group discussion that she had heard about the sexual harassment that a fellow domestic worker had faced. She also said that men in some houses do make suggestive gestures in the absence of women family members and that she ignored such occurrences most of the time. When one or two women slowly opened up and responded to questions on sexual harassment cases, other women also responded and said,

“It is not that there are no cases as such. But we never underwent such a situation. In some work places, women do complain that the male members of the family, in the absence of female members, try to take advantage, but that they resist and get out of that house and they leave that particular house forever”.

When one young woman of the group said, “if any employer misbehaves with me, I will give them a tight slap”, other women applauded and endorsed it by saying, “yes, yes, that should be the case”.

Apart from the abovementioned specific problems, domestic workers were in general paid wages lower than the minimum and living wages. Centuries old, deep-rooted perceptions about domestic work as “no work”³, leads employers to undervalue domestic work. Even the educated lot does not recognize that domestic workers relieve them from domestic tensions and burden and that this is a crucial factor which enables them to successfully pursue their careers. Most domestic workers in India usually work in more than one house. Their work generally constitutes, cleaning vessels, washing clothes, and sweeping and mopping the floor. In some cases the extension of these services includes cooking, taking care of the children and elderly. Domestic workers who live in the employer's home have to do everything, from washing, cleaning, ironing clothes, going to market and buying groceries, vegetables and fruits, to feeding and taking care of children and taking care of the elderly. Their duties include serving the needs of all the members of the family, big or small, and they are expected to be on their toes the whole day. They are the first to wake up and the last to go to bed. Some domestic workers who live with the employers have to look after the children even during the night, as per the child's schedule. They are not paid any overtime money for the services rendered during odd hours.

³ Domestic work is majorly seen as the work naturally assigned to the women. It was not considered as real work and it was never repaid in terms of wages. Women were only taught that they will be paid by family in terms of love and care. The perceptions that women are soft, docile, and delivers utmost care to the family without any return expectations, were used to extract the women labour on day to day basis without any compensation.



Some domestic workers said that the wages they get is not enough for them to lead a decent life in urban centers like Bangalore and that they are unable to meet the needs of their families. Karnataka is among the few states in India which has brought domestic workers under Minimum Wages Act, first in 2004 and then in 2011 when the wages were revised. But the Act is hardly implemented. Most domestic workers are not aware that the Act was applicable to them. In fact there are no standards for payment of domestic workers. They are often paid varied amounts for the same work. In the case of live-out domestic workers, household work usually includes washing vessels, sweeping and mopping the floor, and washing clothes. In some houses they are asked to cut vegetables, clean bath rooms, and some other daily chores. Some households appoint domestic workers for washing and cleaning whereas some houses also appoint cooks. In some cases, domestic workers were asked to cook along with housekeeping and washing vessels and clothes. Some houses in Bangalore also appoint domestic workers to attend to their kids till they return from offices in the evening. In general, for a family of four members, domestic workers are paid from Rs 700 to Rs 1000 for washing vessels, keeping the house, and washing clothes. In some households domestic workers are paid Rs 1200 to 1500 for the same. Neither has the government evolved a mechanism for strict implementation of the Minimum Wages Act, nor do the employers follow any standards in paying domestic workers. Payments also depend on factors like the availability of workers, the residential locality, etc. If there are abundant domestic workers present in one locality, automatically the amounts paid to them is lesser than the locality where there are not many. In case of availability of workers, employers take it for granted that they will get easy replacements. The basic economic principle is applicable here as well like elsewhere, in case of high demand for domestic workers, there might be a chance for somewhat better wages and if the demand is less, they will be forced to work for as much as the employer pays them. In some households in Bangalore, domestic workers start work at 7 a.m in the morning and leave the employers house at 5 or 6 p.m. They get paid Rs 1500 to Rs 2000 per month. But such cases are rare. Usually, domestic workers are asked to come for work twice a day and they work in more than one house. They attend one house after the other and finish the morning session and go back home. At home, they attend to their kids and the elderly and then again come back to the employer's house in the evening and work in one house after the other. Some of the domestic workers are asked to come to the work only once, because of the unavailability of the employers in the evenings. Domestic workers coming from far-off places finish the houses one after the other and then start again with the evening work session. Most of the time, workers from far-off places opt to work in a continuous shift from morning to mid-afternoon, hoping to reach home by evening.

Workers often continue accepting whatever the employers pay them and are under constant fear that asking for a raise may lead to termination from work as there would be many more workers who are available to do the same work by accepting whatever the employer pays them. Most of the time the wages they get paid are much lower than the minimum wages



prescribed by the Government and they are forced to live in a day-to-day financial crisis in this era of sky rocketing commodity prices.

This financial crisis is much greater in cases where the husbands are alcoholic. Some domestic workers narrated their bitter experiences with drunken husbands and their everyday difficulties in meeting family needs. Even though the heads of these families earned fairly well, they spent most of their incomes, sometimes all of it, on alcohol, resulting in a financial crisis. Ultimately the responsibility of taking care of the family's needs falls upon the women members. In some families, where more than one male member of the family is into this habit, the situation is all the more painful. Some domestic workers said that they cannot afford good/nutritious food and it is often difficult to even have two square meals a day. On most days they have to make do with just one meal a day. Most of the workers also said that their employers gave them leftover food and for some families this served as one meal of the day. Some workers also said that some of the employers give them stale and spoiled food. One of the workers mentioned that the employers expected them to work continuously for many hours but did not even offer them a cup of coffee or tea, even while having it in front of them. "They expect us to work continuously without any refreshments". Other women in the group however said that even though it was not compulsory for employers to offer such refreshments during work hours, it is a matter of courtesy to offer whatever you are having to the person with you; all the more reason to offer it to someone working hard for you as your domestic worker. Some workers in the group mentioned that in some houses employers do offer them coffee, tea and food. The elderly workers said that they get such refreshments but younger workers stated that they were not offered anything of that sort. In some instances, the worker and the employer reached an agreement, prior to taking up work, regarding food and refreshments. Some workers said that they talked to the employers and whether or not the employer should offer refreshments was decided on the basis of the nature of the work, number of working hours, and as per the agreement.

During our conversations, almost all the workers talked about the absence of paid leave. Many employers deduct wages for the leave taken from their monthly salaries. In the words of Laxmi, a domestic worker from Shrirampuram,

"We always live under the fear of termination. We are sacked if we are absent for more than one or two days. Employers deduct our wages if we are absent for one or two days. With the fear of termination, we will not think of taking leave even when we are sick".

Workers stated that they are not entitled to any paid leave. Even on public and national holidays and festivals, domestic workers are not allowed to take leave. Some employers give them a one-day weekly off, but not all employer's do so. Workers stated that it is painful that they in fact have to work for more hours during these days of celebration. Their condition is



pathetic when they get sick and are unable to carry out the work. Kavitha, a domestic worker and a group leader for Dayanand Nagar, Shrirampuram locality said, “when I tell my employer that I am not well and unable to work, my employer gives me a tablet and asks me to have it then and there and then asks me to continue working”. Another worker, Susheela, says, “my employer never gives me any paid leave. I take leave only when I am not well, at the expense of my day’s salary”. Laxmi from Shrirampuram said,

“Employers will not give us any paid leave. Rather, if we are absent one day, when we come for the work the next day, more work will be piled up. We have to do yesterday's and today's vessels, clothes, etc. Employers will not do any work and keep it for us to come the next day and finish. In such a situation, even if we are not well, isn't it better to go and finish the work rather than letting it pile up for next day?”

Some workers said that if they take some amount as an advance from their employers due to a financial emergency, this amount is deducted from their salaries at the end of the month. In case they are unable to repay the amount, they settle as domestic workers in the house and work for meager wages and sometimes no wages at all, till they clear the debt. Susheela, a domestic worker from Shrirampuram, Dayanand Nagar told us that three years ago, her husband met an accident and underwent two surgeries. In order to meet the surgical expenses the family borrowed money and were paying interest till dates. Difficult times such as this pushed many women towards domestic work, which is the only option available for workers who are unskilled and not well-educated. Susheela also said that she takes an advance every month as there is always some financial emergency or the other at home and as a result, after all the deductions she just gets only about Rs. 200-300 in her hands at the end of the month.

The modern era has facilitated much technological advancement in every sphere. Most of the domestic work in western countries is done with the help of machinery. Though technological advancements have reduced the burden to some extent, human power is still needed, at least to operate them. In a country like India, domestic work is more physically taxing than elsewhere. While vacuum cleaners, dish washers, washing machines, etc., play a major role in house work in the West, such technology is not used as much in India. Here domestic workers have to do all the work without the assistance of any machine. Domestic workers are allowed to use machinery in very few houses. It is not about the ability of a household to afford the machinery, but about the perception that the no machine can replace or be as good as human labour. Certain households even calculate and compare the expenses incurred in using such machinery, in terms of electricity consumption, and the money charged by domestic workers and in such a comparative analysis the cost of employing a domestic worker is inevitable less than using machines. Moreover, they need some person to supervise the functioning of the machinery. Considering all these factors, households prefer hiring a domestic worker rather than using machines.



Many workers complained about the highly taxing nature of domestic work. They constantly suffer from severe body pains, back pain, and the soaps and detergents used in washing clothes and vessels were further adding to the damage. In general, cheaply available detergent cakes and powders shows side effects on human skin. Cheaper the soap or detergent, the more harm it causes. Domestic workers are prone to skin allergies because of the high use of these detergents. Some young women who breast feed their children complained that the nature of work they engage in also results in adverse effects to their children's health. In the group discussion in Shrirampura tailoring class, one of the domestic workers said,

“I breast feed my children. I spend so much time in water on an everyday basis, for washing clothes and other related house work, that I get wet and catch cold. Since I get a cold and I breast feed, my baby is also catches cold frequently. This is a major problem for me, but I cannot avoid water. My work involves that.”

Many women, including Susheela, and Kavitha of Shrirampuram, complained of skin allergies, which were clearly visible when they showed their hands. Dhanalaxmi, a domestic worker from Shanthinagar, developed a problem in her abdomen. “I underwent cesarean operation for child birth. But after that I could not afford to take sufficient rest. At my employer’s home I have to mop the floor sitting on my toes and I have to keep moving in the entire house. It might be because of my operation, but I have developed severe abdominal pain and now after this group meeting, I am going to consult a doctor along with my friend”, she said, pointing towards her neighbor and fellow domestic worker in the group.

Most of the domestic workers also said many employers giving them stale and spoiled food.

“We take the food that our employers gave us even though we knew it was stale, leftover food. We take it happily; at least we are getting some food when the price of groceries is so high. Sometimes we eat it then and there and sometimes we save it for our children. But some of the employers really give us spoiled food. We know we cannot complain about this anywhere since there is no written rule that they should give us food. But what we feel bad about is that they think we can consume food which is not suitable for their consumption. When it is not good for them, it is not good for us either! Why can they not understand this and avoid offering such food. Anyway, we take it with us and the moment we step out of their house we dump it in the drain.”

Dhanalaxmi of Shanthi Nagar says firmly, “I never accept such food and tell them to their face that I don’t need it and please throw it away”. Some employers even give them old and worn-out clothes which are not in a condition to be worn. Many workers said that they feel bad and they refuse to take such food and clothes and occasions such as these hurt their self-respect and dignity.



Domestic workers are under the constant fear of termination from work. Employers let them work as long as they wish. Their services are terminated, often without any notice, if the employer is not satisfied. When workers were asked whether they had ever been terminated from the work, most of the workers stated that they had had this experience at least once or twice and that most of the times employers terminated them on grounds of coming late for work or taking one or two sick leaves. Often employers also terminate workers on the pretext of not offering good services. Workers also lose their jobs when employers change their place of residence. If workers are given prior notice of termination at least they can look for work another house, otherwise they lose their income and face great difficulty in running their own households.

During the interviews, domestic workers narrated their day-to-day experiences and the amount of labour they had to render to fulfill their family needs. All of them felt that they were unable to fulfill their family's need despite working hard and for long hours. They feel that the burden is increasing by the day. Deprived of basic facilities such as safe drinking water, health, education, decent living conditions, and decent housing, they felt increasingly marginalized. Further, all of them feel that they were getting physically weaker and aged earlier than other women of their age who are not domestic workers.

Not many domestic workers are aware that domestic work has been included under the list of 'hazardous occupations' by the Government of India. The very private location (employers' home) that it takes place in, the absence of public scrutiny, and the lack of a supervision mechanism are the reasons for the insecure and unsafe working conditions. There is no supervision over the violation of labour rights or minimum work standards. Since there are no registered entries, it is also not possible to have supervision over payments. According to Peggie Smith, JD, employment law expert and Professor of law at Washington University in St. Louis,

“Domestic employees face a variety of workplace hazards when working in clients' homes, including exposure to harmful cleaning chemicals, verbal and physical abuse and injuries caused by lifting and moving clients with limited mobility,”

This explains the existing anarchic situation, where domestic workers constitute an unorganized, unheard, and invisible work force. There is discrimination on grounds of caste, no standards of work, no regulation of wage structures, no safety and security at work place, no paid leave, no decent, secure, and safe working conditions, and, above all, no authentic and comprehensive statistical data about the number of domestic workers. This complete lawlessness can be termed nothing less than anarchy/anarchic situation.



Summary

- Hierarchical and undemocratic institutions of the past, such as Caste, are reinforced through practice of untouchability against the domestic workers
- Sexual Harassment is still an unspeakable issue for domestic workers as it is with women from the different stratum of the Indian society
- There is a huge mismatch between the wages of domestic workers and the increasing cost of living in metro polis
- Domestic work is not regularized and there is no mechanism to ensure minimum wages and paid leaves
- Insecurity and constant fear of termination makes domestic workers silent victims of the certain undemocratic work practices
- There is a need for technological replacement of burdensome and humiliating domestic work, and domestic workers should be provided skills to operate such machinery
- There is no authentic statistical count of domestic workers till date



Historical and socio, political context of the C-189 - ILO Domestic Workers Convention

As per the ILO estimates, there are 50 to 100 million domestic workers all over the world, rendering their labour for the smooth functioning of their societies. In India, there is no authentic statistical base to establish the number of domestic workers, but various studies indicate that there are about 4.75 million domestic workers. This number constitutes a significant proportion of the total work force of India. When a significant part of the work force of any society is not covered under labour protection laws, it is a cause for immediate attention. When this labour force is subjected to exploitation, unsafe, and unprotected working conditions and there are no minimum standards followed to ensure fair and mutually beneficial employer-employee relationships, it is important for an international body such as the ILO to intervene and direct the States to take appropriate measures for implementation of labour standards. Once the standards are set and ratified by the States, the onus lies on respective governments to ensure proper implementation of the same. It is also important for trade unions, civil society organizations, labour resource organizations, and social activists to keep a check on the implementation of the standards set by the ILO.

The context, of the increasing number of domestic workers across the world and the exploitation these workers face every day, demanded an international law/enactment to ensure a safety mechanism for these workers. Every State has its own mechanism to ensure better living and working conditions for its workforce. But prior to the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (No. 189), domestic workers had not been brought under these mechanisms in most countries.

In case of domestic workers, the culmination of several factors, such as the centuries-old and inhuman caste system, demeaning perceptions about physical labour and labourers, conceptions about domestic work as solely being women's responsibility, the existing gender inequalities, and the very nature and location of the work (in private space which are away from public scrutiny), have resulted in the miserable condition of domestic workers.

There is a lack of effort from trade unions across the world in responding to the situation and on working for the cause of domestic workers. Not many efforts have been made by trade unions to organize and voice the rights and demands of domestic workers. Though it may be unfair to say that there have been no attempts to raise the cause of these workers, such attempts were not proportional to the rapid expansion in the number of workers and the exploitation these workers face across the world. In this context, international intervention is the need of the hour in order to break the existing silence about the exploitation that domestic workers face. The ILO adopted a Resolution in 1948 on the conditions of



employment and work of domestic workers. But, there had been no follow-up on promoting decent standards for these workers for 60 long years.

Now the onus is on an international body to dismantle the hard shell and put forward the cause of domestic workers. Responding to the situational emergency, and in an act of self-retrospection, the ILO constituted a committee, the Committee on Domestic Workers, in the 99th session of its International Labour Conference. As per the recommendations of the Committee, and wider consultations with member states, the ILO adopted a Convention (No. 189) concerning decent work for domestic workers in the 100th annual session of the International Labour Conference, which is widely known as Domestic Workers Convention, 2011. This Convention comprises twenty-seven Articles aimed at standardizing and regularizing the work and life conditions of domestic workers. By adopting certain regulations and standards for improving the life standard of domestic workers, the ILO is attempting to regularize and standardize the working conditions of workers in informal sectors.

The Labour Conference also adopted the Domestic Workers Recommendation (No. 201), which supplements the Domestic Workers Convention (No.189). This particular set of recommendations was not meant for ratification by the member states, but to act as a supporting document for the Convention, by providing guidance over legal matters and effective implementation of the rights of domestic workers enshrined in the Convention. The Convention can be implemented by “extending or adopting existing laws and regulations or other measures, or by developing new and specific measures for domestic workers”⁴.

The Convention guarantees domestic workers the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and protection against abuse, harassment, and violence. It stipulates legal hours of work and entitles domestic workers to paid annual leave, paid sick leave, maternity benefits, weekly rest periods (consequently 24 hours of rest), overtime benefits, and minimum wages (which are applicable to all other workers). The Convention also calls for the elimination of all forms of forced labour, abolition of child labour, and elimination of discrimination. It also demands safe and healthy working conditions for domestic workers. It specifically mentions that the major portion of the workers payment should be made in cash. This Convention largely intends to provide domestic workers with fair and favorable conditions and social security measures at par with workers of other sectors. It sets certain standards for domestic work in the process of creating decent and dignified living conditions for the workers. According to Manuela Tomei, Director, ILO, “the new standards make clear that domestic workers are neither servants nor members of the family”⁵.

⁴ ILO Convention No.189, Decent work for domestic workers

⁵ Domestic workers get labour Rights, The Indian Worker, Vol. LV, No. 13, July 01-15, 2011



The ILO Convention for domestic workers has given new strength and guidance to trade unions across the globe. The need of the hour now is that the Convention be publicized widely. Domestic workers must be well informed about their rights and the various Constitutional provisions which provide legal validity to their rights. Even in the countries which did not ratify the Convention, domestic workers can organize themselves into trade unions and pressurize their respective governments to ratify the Convention.

Summary

- There are 4.75 millions of Domestic workers in India and they constitute the significant proportion of the total work force of the country
- ILO adopted Domestic workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) in the 100th annual session of the International Labour Conference
- ILO convention on domestic workers ensures domestic workers of the world, the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and protection against abuse, harassment, and violence
- ILO domestic workers convention gave new strength to the trade unions to address the issues of the domestic workers further



Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress

ILO works among the trade unions, involved in organizing workers in the informal economy and equips these unions to build innovative strategies to organize this large work force further. Organizing domestic workers is not a new phenomenon in India. Various central and regional trade unions and NGOs have organized domestic workers in the past and continue to do so. In Delhi, Maharashtra, Assam, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, etc., central trade unions like AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS, and SEWA, regional trade unions, civil society organizations, religious institutions, and NGOs, are working on the issues of domestic workers. It is interesting to note that the NGOs and religious organizations also took initiative to register unions for addressing the cause of domestic workers and in some states did so much before the trade unions. Though organizing and articulating the cause of domestic workers is not a new phenomenon, it is a very recent development in the Indian context. Now all the trade unions acknowledge the necessity of organizing domestic workers, considering the fact that urban centers accommodate large numbers of rural unemployed reserved labour as domestic workers. Statistics show that there is a rapid increase in the number of domestic workers. There are 4.75 million to 6.4 million domestic workers in India, out of whom approximately 3.5 million work in urban centers of India. Considering the large number of domestic workers and their unfair working and living conditions, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, appointed a Task Force⁶, to ensure decent working conditions for them. The Task Force submitted its report on various aspects of domestic work and pointed out certain crucial things, such as the absence of regulatory mechanism for domestic work, non-inclusion of domestic workers in any welfare policies of the government, the lack of opportunities for domestic workers to improve their skills, and so on. The Task Force recommended the extension of all the rights guaranteed to the workers by the Indian Constitution. A crucial dimension specific to domestic workers of India is that most of the domestic work force belongs to vulnerable and socially marginalized backgrounds. Most of the domestic workers are from socially deprived and marginalized households of Dalit families. For several workers this occupation is the only available livelihood option.

It is in this context that the ILO called upon the nations to adopt the decent work agenda for domestic workers and, in specific, extended both financial and advisory support to the INTUC project, aimed at organizing domestic workers. As a response to the situation, INTUC, in partnership with ILO-ACTRAV, took an initiative to organize domestic workers in Bangalore city through a pilot project. INTUC added organizing domestic workers as one

⁶ www.labour.nic.in



of its agenda in its Working Committee meetings⁷ and decided to launch the organizing mission through a pilot project, Decent work for domestic workers: Organizing, skills upgrading and advocacy (Phase 1). This project by a central trade union is an appreciable effort, particularly in a situation where domestic workers have not given much attention by any of the major trade unions in India. The pilot project was intended as an experimental project to organize domestic workers. This particular project was carried out by the INTUC Bangalore leadership from May 2009 to April 2010 and aimed to achieve certain goals such as organizing domestic workers, upgrading their work related skills, and educating them about labour laws, trade union functioning, and the provisions they are entitled to under various agencies such as the state and central governments. At a larger level the goals of this project include improving the working and living conditions of domestic workers, as per the ILO Convention on domestic workers, and strengthening the capacity of the trade union, which is the project implementation partner.

I. Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress: Origins and evolution

Constitution of the KDWC: INTUC formulated a constitution for the proposed union, Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress, after wider consultation within. The constitution of the proposed union contains aims and objectives, regulations regarding domestic work, and various other aspects of union functioning and structure. The aims of the proposed union includes creation of awareness about the rights and duties of domestic workers, providing a platform for grievance redressal, promotion of fellowship and cooperation among the domestic workers, and promotion of education and self-employment. The constitution also talks about the regularization of domestic work, which includes fixing and regulating hours of work, periodic revision of wages, fixation of week day leave, provision of legal assistance, formulation of the Domestic Workers' Welfare Board, etc. (A copy of the constitution is presented as an Annexure).

Mapping of localities: At the first instance, INTUC took up the task of mapping localities and identified 198 wards where predominant numbers of the domestic workers resided. Some of the wards identified include Babasaheb colony, Lakshmpiura, Byappana Halli, Sudamma Nagar, Sanjay Gandhi Nagar, Bimangala, Someshwara, Ullari, Amarjothi, Kaveri Nagar, Jakkarayarakere, and Lavanya. At present, the KDWC has members from different parts of the Bangalore city, some of the localities include Konan Kuntae, Kothanur, Jigani, Basvanthpur, JP Nagar, Hari Nagar, KP Agraharam, Bhuvanewari nagr, Ulsoor, Gouthampuri, Shrirampuram, Swatantra Nagar, Bandradi Circle, Vijayanagar, Dayanand Nagar Colony, Malleswaram, Ramchandrapuram, and Shanthinagar.

Identification of trainees: As a second step, INTUC provided training to 30 women who were identified as trainees. Most of the women who were identified as trainees had had prior

⁷ Minutes of the working committee meetings

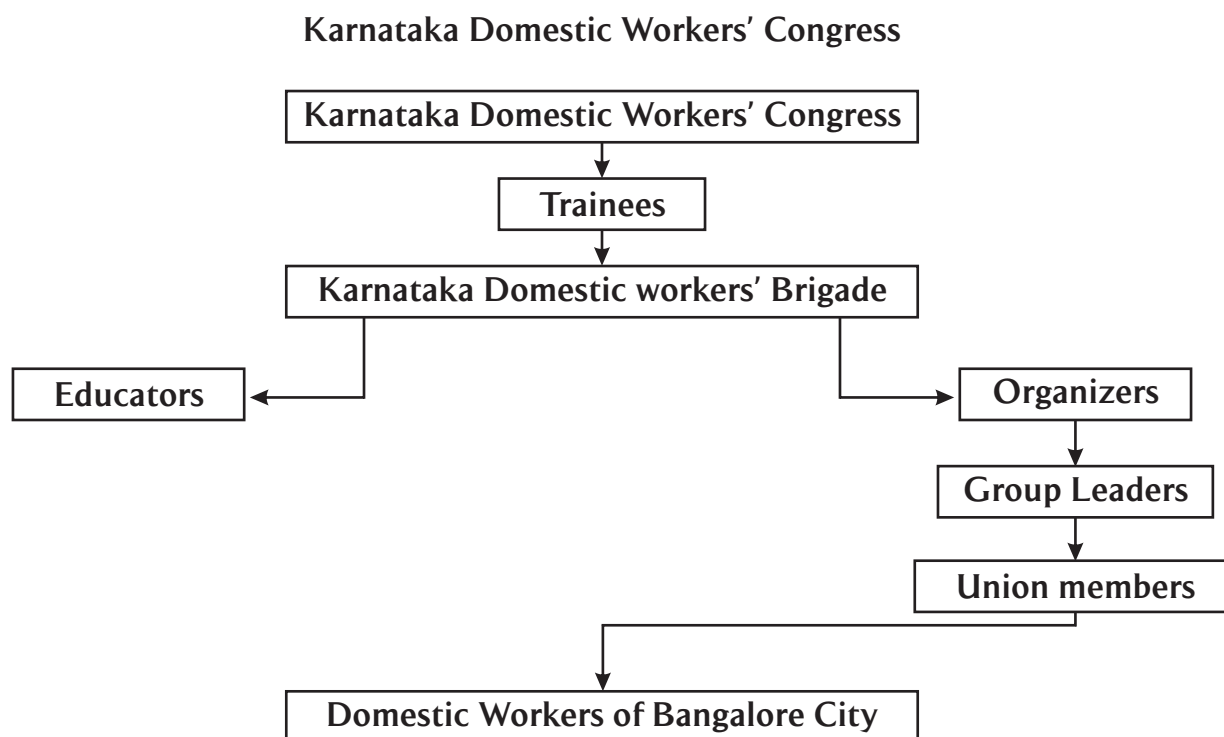


experience and were working as social workers in and around their residential localities in various fields. Some of them were voluntary health workers, some helped people in applying for small scale loans, and some worked with the Congress party and INTUC as their cadre. These women were selected on the basis of the following criteria: 1) women who are already in the public domain and actively engaged with various societal issues; 2) women who won the confidence of the people of their residential locality and whom people regularly approach in case of any necessity or trouble; and 3) women who understood the necessity of organizing domestic workers and showed commitment in this regard. When Muthaki Uthaiiah, Chairperson of INTUC Women's Wing Karnataka, was asked about the criteria followed in selecting the trainees, she responded that "we looked for dynamic people who had capacity to understand, somewhat educated people, in terms of writing and reading, and women who are fearless to speak in public".

Trainees' Educational session: The trainees were given training through a workshop in Hotel Mayura in Bangalore. These trainees comprise women with various backgrounds who were involved in various small scale activities, such as health workers, small scale business women, and so on (the details were given in the narratives of some of the organizers included as Appendix). Working for domestic workers was an arena that they chose voluntarily and continued to do so while earning their livelihood through other means.



Structure of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress:



Picture 1: Structure of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress. Prepared by authors based on inputs from INTUC leaders

Registration of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress: The campaign led to the registration of the Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress on 02 September 2009 under Trade Union Act, 1926. The Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress (referred to as KDWC henceforth) initially obtained provisional affiliation with INTUC and then got full-fledged affiliation on 14 February 2011. According to the procedure, Karnataka INTUC leadership had to wait till the Working Committee meeting, which happens twice a year, to seek permanent affiliation with INTUC. Mr. Ramachandar was the first President of the KDWC, but because of his prolonged illness, currently Mr. Shantha Kumar has taken his position. At present, Mr. Veerbhadra is the General Secretary and Muthaki Uthaiiah is the working President for the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress.

II. Karnataka Domestic Workers' Brigade

Once the training was completed and the trainees were equipped with organizational skills, the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Brigade was constituted with the trained Educators and Organizers were to recruit domestic workers to KDWC. Though two different names were given and two different tasks were assigned at the initial stages, eventually both Organizers and Educators performed more or less similar tasks. But, though all Educators are Organizers, all Organizers are not Educators. Organizers also comprise some domestic



workers who were not trained as Educators but were enthusiastic, energetic, and committed to recruit fellow workers to KDWC. Soon after the constitution of the Karnataka Workers Brigade, both the Organizers and the Educators ventured into the mission of recruiting domestic workers into the union.

Membership Fee for the Domestic workers' Congress (KDWC): In the meetings of the Workers Brigade, it was decided that the Organizers would collect Rs.12 as registration fee from each domestic worker willing to be a union member, along with filling up the prescribed form. The monthly subscription to the Union was to be Re.1 and Rs.12 for 12 months. Later, after the government declared the inclusion of domestic workers under the RSBY scheme, Rs.17 was collected from each worker during recruitments, the additional Rs 5 was meant for the RSBY application form.

III. Reaching and organizing domestic workers

The INTUC leadership guided them to visit various wards identified beforehand, mostly in and around the specific Educator's and Organizer's residences. Organizers approached domestic workers with a lucid understanding of advantages of being unionized, well-prepared to convince the workers. Organizing domestic workers is a challenge since there has not been much experience in organizing them. Further, there is no one work site where these workers can be approached at a time. Approaching them at their work site is simply impossible as it may even lead to them losing their jobs if the employer gets the wrong signal. Therefore, approaching them itself is a tough task during normal day hours. As per the situation and locality, organizers decided upon the meeting place and time with the domestic workers.

Campaign about the KDWC among domestic workers: As a first step, the Organizers and Educators approached one domestic worker from their locality with whom they were familiar and explained their mission. With the help of this worker they fixed a meeting in their locality and informed as many domestic workers as possible. Once they informed one worker, they asked her to inform her friends, neighbors, and relatives who were working as domestic workers. This campaign went on as a word-of-mouth campaign. Once they fixed the date and venue of the meeting and campaigned of the same, they also invited INTUC leaders for the meeting. The various venues they chose to conduct the meetings were interesting— public parks, tailoring classes, any place in the locality which can accommodate a group of people to vacant function halls, temple premises, and houses of domestic workers. They called for



meetings at places where gathering was possible and which were most accessible for the workers during late evenings. The Organizers planned in such a way that the meetings were held during late evenings, in order to ensure the presence of maximum number of workers from that particular area. Meanwhile, the Organizers also met with local elected representatives, such as corporators, ward members and local political leaders of various parties, and explained them about the campaign for union recruitment and asked for their assistance. Some elected representatives actually did help them through in mobilizing domestic workers and organizing meetings, whereas some actually troubled them (See 'Challenges and Strategies' for details).

Interactive sessions among Brigade members, Domestic workers and INTUC leadership: Brigade members met the workers along with the INTUC leadership and explained to them the necessity of unionizing and advantages of being a union member. Domestic workers asked several questions and expressed their doubts. Once they were convinced, they expressed their willingness to be part of the union. In this manner Educators and Organizers conducted 14 meetings by May 2011 and the union membership went up to 325. KDWC conducted a general awareness programme on rights of all unorganized workers, with special emphasis on domestic workers, at Gandhi Bhavan on 26 June 2011, in which more than 200 workers took part.



Expansion of organizing team: By the end of July, considering the requirement for more number of Organizers and the scope to further expansion of union membership, KDWC felt the need to train more Organizers. Consequently, 35 additional organizers were trained and equipped with the skills of organizing and knowledge regarding trade unions.

Issuance of Identity cards to the Brigade members and Union members: While recruitments are taking place, in one of the monthly meetings of the Brigade, conducted on 9 July 2011, some members raised the necessity of issuing identity cards, both to Brigade members and members of the Domestic Workers' Congress. As per their request, KDWC issued identity cards to both workers and the Brigade members. This helped the Brigade members in approaching new domestic workers who were residents of other localities and as a proof of the mission they were engaged with.



Distribution of pamphlets and posters: Karnataka Domestic Congress also publicized their union by printing several posters, pamphlets, and handouts. This published material contains information regarding KDWC and the rights and constitutional entitlements for unorganized workers. Considering the cosmopolitan nature of the city and the migrant domestic labour from various parts of the South India, this material was published Kannada, Tamil, and English. The union recruitment went on and at various phases it registered 325, 1850, 2000, 5000, and 7000 workers. At the time of conducting this study, the union membership stood at 7000.



Monthly meetings of Brigade members: Organizers and Educators meetings were held every month. The INTUC leadership, along with the KDWC leadership, got feedback from the Brigade members from time to time. They also intervened during various phases of the recruitment drive, whenever their intervention was asked for by the Brigade members. Gradually, the usage of the word 'educator' was replaced with the word 'organizer' and now, verbally and in practice, there is no difference observed between the educators and organizers. Now it is the Organizers who are Brigade members.



Workers gatherings at various localities: In the initial stages, a team led by Ms. Muthaki Uthaiah, along with Smt. Lakshmi Devamma and Mrs. Franchina Thavamani, was invited by Organizers to address the workers gatherings in various wards. But later, the Organizers and Educators started addressing the gatherings and led the membership drive themselves in their localities.

Domestic workers issues to the notice of state and central governments: While the membership drive was going on one side, KDWC simultaneously put in efforts to bring the issues of domestic workers to the notice of state and central governments. The KDWC leadership, along with the INTUC Bangalore city leadership and members of the Domestic Workers' Congress and members of Workers Brigade, held a consultation with the Karnataka Government Labour Minister, Mr. Bache Gowda. The delegation submitted a memorandum to the Minister with a set of demands, including the demand for the inclusion of domestic workers under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), creating a Welfare Board for Domestic Workers (like the Board created for Construction Workers), and measures to be taken for strict implementation of Minimum Wages Act for domestic workers. With these demands, KDWC representatives met the Ministry more than once and pressurized the Ministry for the fulfillment of their demands. KDWC, along with INTUC



and the Workers Brigade, also held consultations with the Labour Department of the Karnataka state government.

Domestic workers in the purview of unorganized workers: While the recruitment and educational sessions were being conducted, two positive developments took place at the Karnataka state level which helped in speeding up the recruitment process. In the light of ILO's Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) and the constant pressure from trade unions, the Karnataka State Unorganized Workers Social Security Board, chaired by its labour Minister Mr. B.N. Bache Gowda, took a decision to bring domestic workers under its purview, as per instruction from the central government. This Board was constituted as per the provisions the central Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008. Till July 2011, the Board included washer men and women (dhobis), tailors, loading and unloading workers (hamalis), workers in automobile workshops, auto, taxi, lorry, and bus drivers, and hotel workers. Now domestic workers are also included in the Board. Geetha Menon, member of the Karnataka State Unorganized Workers Social Security Board, who has been working on the cause of domestic workers in Bangalore city, said,

“The Centre had written to the State Labour Department recommending their inclusion. This follows a decision taken by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in its convention last month to adopt a set of international standards to improve the working conditions of domestic workers worldwide”⁸.

The inclusion of domestic workers in the Board will fetch them certain proposed health care and educational benefits, like the other unorganized workers covered in the Board. To avail the proposed benefits, the domestic workers have to enroll themselves with the Board.

Extension of RSBY scheme to Domestic Workers: Yet another positive development, and a major achievement for domestic workers, has been that the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India took a decision on 23 June 2011 to include domestic workers under the RSBY scheme and directed state governments to proceed in this direction. Considering the increasing cost of the health expenditure, the RSBY scheme is intended to provide health care for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. As per the scheme, Central government contributes 75 per cent of the estimated annual premium, which is of Rs. 750, subject to a maximum of Rs. 565 per family per annum, and the contribution from the respective state government is 25 per cent and any additional premium that is to be paid. The beneficiaries' contribution is Rs.30 per annum as registration/renewal fee. The administrative and other related costs of the administering the scheme are to be borne by the respective State Governments. Once the workers enroll themselves with the scheme by paying Rs.30 per annum, they are covered for Rs.30,000 in insurance benefits and this

⁸ Bageshree S, Longstanding demands of domestic workers fulfilled, They have been brought under social security Board, The Hindu, Bangalore, July 14th, 2011



insurance coverage is applicable to five members of her/his family. In the whole process, the employer of the domestic worker also has a role to play, in terms of signing the application and certifying that the worker works at her/his house.

Here, who comprises BPL families is to be decided by the definition and guidelines prescribed by the Planning Commission. Most of the domestic workers were unable to register for this scheme since there are issues such as lack of permanent address, not having ration cards, and not being certified under the BPL category. The inclusion of domestic workers under the RSBY scheme and the relaxation of BPL certification enabled domestic workers to register themselves for this scheme.

As per the agreement between Karnataka INTUC and KDWC, the KDWC members list will be submitted to the Karnataka Labour Department, which will then forward the list to the central government. Approval from the central government will entitle them to medical insurance and cashless treatment worth Rs.30,000 in all the empanelled hospitals across India.

The inclusion of domestic workers in the RSBY gave a new strength to Workers Brigade. This inclusion opened up a new avenue to approach more and more domestic workers. The Brigade members campaigned about the RSBY scheme and recruited more workers to the union. At present the recruitment to KDWC is going on in all parts of Bangalore city.

Progress of the events of Karnataka Domestic workers' Congress

Time Period	Event	Objectives and methods used
May 2009 to April 2010	Decent work for Domestic workers: Organizing skills	This pilot project is aimed at organizing domestic workers in Bangalore city and improving their living and working conditions through a systematic campaign and awareness programmes
2009	Constitution of the Domestic workers' Congress	The constitution of the domestic workers was formulated with objectives, regulation of work, rules and regulations for the elected body and membership procedure and so on. Some of the objectives include: 1.Promoting awareness about the rights and duties of domestic workers



Time Period	Event	Objectives and methods used
		<p>2. Addressing workers' grievances through negotiations and representations</p> <p>3. Equipping workers towards self-employment and promoting avenues for such employment</p> <p>4. Promoting educational and cultural development of workers</p>
	Identification of the localities of domestic workers	198 wards in Bangalore city were mapped to organize domestic workers
	Identification of organizers	30 women who were having prior experience in working with people on various societal issues were identified as trainees and organizers
2nd September 2009	Registration of the Domestic Workers' Congress	Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress registered as a trade union by the department of Labour, Karnataka State.
24th December 2009	Provisional affiliation from INTUC	INTUC granted provisional affiliation to the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress
26th February 2010	KDWC obtained permanent affiliation from INTUC	INTUC working committee's 276th meeting granted affiliation to the KDWC in its Korba, Chhattisgarh session
December 2010 to July 2011	Decent work for domestic workers: Organizing, skills upgrading and advocacy (Phase 2).	Phase II is the extension of the pilot project, launched to sustain the results obtained through the short term project and to further strengthen the domestic workers' union(s)
12th September 2011	Government of India appointed a task force to look into the issues and concerns of domestic workers in India	The report of the task force recommended to extend all the constitutionally guaranteed rights to the domestic workers



Time Period	Event	Objectives and methods used
26th June 2011	Working committee meeting of INTUC	Organizing domestic workers is one of the agendas and the proposal to launch the phase II of the project was unanimously accepted
30th June 2011	Trainees' educational session	INTUC conducted a session to educate trainees about the relevance and emergency in organizing domestic workers at hotel Mayura, in Bangalore
30th June 2011 onwards, and continuing till the date	Campaign about the Domestic Workers' Congress	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. House to house campaign was carried out by organizers 2. Group meetings at domestic workers' houses 3. Public meeting for all the domestic workers in the locality at common places
	Extension of organizing team	As per the requirement, KDWC decided to train more number of organizers to reach out to large number of domestic workers.
	Issue of identity cards	As per the request of the organizers, KDWC decided upon issuing identity cards to domestic workers and organizers.
	Distribution of pamphlets and posters	In order to create awareness about Domestic Workers' Union, KDWC distributed pamphlets in multiple languages: Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and English.
	Monthly meetings	KDWC organized monthly meetings of organizers at INTUC office to get the feedback on membership drive as well to provide the necessary guidance for further memberships



Time Period	Event	Objectives and methods used
	Workers gatherings at various localities	Workers at various identified localities were called for meeting and leaders of KDWC and INTUC addressed those gatherings and cleared the doubts and apprehensions about the trade union recruitments
	Domestic workers issues taken to the notice of state government and elected representatives	A Delegation constituting, domestic workers, KDWC leaders, INTUC leaders, and organizers submitted memorandum to the Labour Minister Mr. Bache Gowda, demanding government's intervention to address their concerns
July 13th 2011	Domestic workers brought under the purview of unorganized work force	State Government of Karnataka brought a notification including the domestic workers under the unorganized work force which eventually led to securing certain health and social security benefits to the domestic workers
23rd June 2011	Extension of RSBY scheme to the domestic workers	Cabinet Ministry approved the proposal to extend the RSBY scheme to domestic workers and domestic workers can avail health insurance worth Rs 30000 under this scheme
	Continuation of the enrollments to the KDWC	The membership drive is still continuing with much momentum than initial days. INTUC and KDWC demonstrated their commitment over organizing domestic workers over a period of time and continue to do so even now



Mobilizing and organizing domestic workers

Challenges, strategies, Experiences and Lessons Learnt

The fact that organizing domestic workers is a challenging task has been unanimously accepted across countries. Though the KDWC was rapidly expanding its membership and achieved two of its long pending demands (inclusion in the Unorganized Workers Social Security Board, 2008 and as RSBY beneficiaries), the leadership of the Union faced several challenges to arrive at this juncture. Organizing domestic workers is a tough task, considering the nature of work and the work hours. In India, majority of the domestic workers are women. It was not an easy task to dismantle certain notions associated with unions and union activities, particularly in a country like India where there are many cultural constraints against women and women's activity. Trade unionism is usually identified with male factory workers and it was unimaginable for a typical female domestic worker to think of being a member of any union and fighting for her rights. Initially they were unable to see themselves as union members and organizers. But the constant efforts of Brigade members yielded results and now 7000 women domestic workers have come under the fold of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress.

I. Challenges encountered by Brigade members

Here are the some specific challenges encountered by Brigade members and INTUC leadership while organizing domestic workers under the KDWC at various levels of organizing.

Work hours of domestic workers as the prior most challenge to organize: The very first challenge was the work hours. Domestic workers are not available during day time. The only time they can be approached is late evenings. Organizing domestic workers is a challenge as there is hardly any prior experience in organizing them and therefore there is no guidance available. Further, it is not one work site where these workers can be approached at a time. Approaching them at their work site is simply impossible; it may even lead them to lose their jobs if the employer gets the wrong signal. Therefore, approaching them itself is a tough task during normal day hours. Domestic workers finish working in one or multiple employer's house and return to their homes by afternoon. In fact there are no fixed timings of returning from work and it all depends on the amount of work and the employer's timings. Usually they return from work in the afternoon at around 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. and thereafter they start with chores for their own house, like washing, cleaning, bathing kids, cooking, feeding kids and elderly people, taking bath, and so on. By the time they finish work at home, it is again time to go back to the employer's house. Some people need to go twice, i.e., in the evening at



around 4 p.m., whereas some are exempt from going for a second time. People who were not needed to go second time spend more time in the first half so that they can finish all the work in one go. Domestic workers who need to go a second time finish all the work and return home by 5 or 6 p.m. With such work timings, it is difficult to approach them during day time. They can be approached on Sundays or weekly half-days, but very few workers are privileged enough to get weekly holidays. The only option left to organizers is meeting them in the late evenings⁹.

Brigade members winning the confidence of the domestic workers: If organizers manage to catch hold of one or few domestic workers, then there is a problem of winning the confidence of these workers. In the past, these workers have seen many such initiatives which led nowhere, therefore, it made them reluctant to come forward. Brigade members approached workers explaining the advantages of being in a union. They campaigned by saying that collective bargaining power will empower them to demand certain benefits from the government like workers in other sectors. They quoted the case of construction workers, who, by organizing themselves into a union, had achieved a separate welfare board for themselves and got pensions sanctioned. The Brigade members explained to the domestic workers that if you can similarly fight for your rights, you can bargain with the government through your collective strength and demand a welfare board and entitlement to retirement pension on reaching 50 years of age.

Mixed responses to the Brigade members' campaign: This kind of campaign led to mixed responses from domestic workers at various localities. It was well-received in some places, but there were places where domestic workers were unable to differentiate these attempts to cultivate a collective spirit from the hollow promises of political leaders just before elections. There is a kind of cynicism among some workers and who pointed out, "we have heard several such promises and earlier also many people came to us, making many promises, but till now no one could do any good for us". It was a real challenge for Brigade members to differentiate their work from election campaigning and the hollow promises of political leaders. They explained to the workers in how they are different from political leaders and NGO organizations, and also explained the modalities of trade union functioning. Repeated visits, explanations, clearing doubts, and frequent conversations and meetings finally convinced domestic workers about joining the union. In the whole process, area-wise group leaders played a major role as the connecting link between the workers and Brigade members. The Brigade members could have a discussion with the workers and clarify their doubts and convince them towards union membership with the help of group leaders. Though, in case of Organizers and Educators who are well known and reputed people in their localities, these problems seem to have been less or never occurred, but these incidents were reported from localities where the Brigade members time ventured for

⁹ The interviews with the domestic workers were conducted on late evenings, between 6 to 7 PM



the first time into such activities and who were not familiar in their localities. It took some time for these members to instill faith in domestic workers and win their confidence. In the localities where Organizers were well known to the residents, Brigade members received an overwhelming response. Domestic workers of such areas welcomed them and appreciated their efforts by saying, “so far no one came to listen to us. It is the very first time that someone has come to meet us. Till now no one bothered about our issues. Since you are saying union is for our own good, we will join the union”. Here it is the organizers familiarity with the residents which mobilized the workers for joining the Union. However, these are the mixed responses Brigade members encountered at various localities.

Opposition from male members of domestic workers family towards joining KDWC: Visiting domestic workers in their locality during late evenings and calling them for a meeting also has other repercussions. Often male family members of domestic workers will not approve either their women coming out or others approaching them at such times. Some of the Organizers mentioned that there had been instances where husbands of some of the domestic workers argued with them in a drunken stupor. They fought with the Organizers and asked them to return the Rs.17 collected from their wives as membership fee. There are some incidents where the male members of the family even forced the Organizers to leave the premises of their house. To counter these kinds of situations, Brigade members avoided approaching domestic workers individually. They started approaching workers in groups. Even though such incidents occurred even after going with groups, the presence of a larger number of women gave them strength to counter such arguments and situations.

In order to further solve this problem, some Brigade members approached local elected representatives like MLA's and Councilors and asked for their support. With the help of these leaders, the Organizers continued their membership drive. Some elected representatives even helped organizers in campaigning for meetings and arranged meeting halls for the workers gathering. Approaching workers in a group and approaching the local leadership is a strategy adopted to counter certain disturbances in the process. After a point, when these incidents occurred, domestic workers themselves took charge and protested against the male family member's behaviour and condemned them severely. One such incident was reported from Konana Kuntae, where women of the locality strongly responded to such a situation and warned the male members of their community to restrain from such actions and said, “if you guys were able to take care of the family properly, we would never have had to work as domestic workers. It is your incapability because of which we have to work like this”.

Once the domestic workers were convinced about the union, there was a remarkable increase in the number of recruitments to the KDWC. In some localities, organizers recruited as many as 300 to 400 members in a single meeting. Vijaya laxmi, a Brigade member from Ulsoor, says,



“It is all about how you (Organizer) convince them (domestic workers). We should be able to explain them the advantages of being a union member. Not only recruiting them as union members, but we should also be able to do something for them. We need to show some results in concrete to win their confidence”.

Intimidation from local political leaders: The second challenge which some of the Brigade members faced was with the local political leaders in a few areas. When the local political leaders learnt that Brigade members from KDWC were recruiting members to their union, they approached them and intimidated the Organizers. While recruitments to the union were taking place, they demanded that the Organizers say that it was their (the local politician's) initiative and that credit should be given to them. They even proposed that they will pay the membership fee that is Rs.17 for all the domestic workers in that area and in return the Organizers should give them credit by campaigning that these recruitments are taking place on their behalf and that they are responsible for securing health insurance for the domestic workers in that area.¹⁰ The Brigade members refused to do so, which made the local leaders furious and it led to heated arguments between both the parties. Since the Brigade members refused to bow down to such demands, they were intimidated and told that recruitments will not be allowed in their localities. They further threatened Brigade members by saying that they will book a cheating case against them for collecting Rs.17 from workers and will call the media to expose them. They even tried to provoke workers against the Brigade members by saying, “these people will take Rs 17 from each of you and abscond. They are trying to cheat you”. But domestic workers of the area stood in support of the Brigade members. The Brigade reported this incident to KDWC and INTUC leaders. INTUC immediately intervened, talked to the people involved, and solved the problem. One of the INTUC leaders says, “Sometimes it was our own party workers who created trouble in some areas and insisted that they be given credit among domestic workers. We were informed about it by the Brigade members and we discussed it and took appropriate action to prevent further unwarranted things as such”. In one of the areas, when a local organizer approached the leader of one of the political parties, he refused to help on the grounds that “the workers of this area didn't favor me during elections and they cast their votes for the opposition party, so I will not work for them”. He even tried threatening the organizer by asking her to stop union enrollments.

Attempts to mislead the domestic workers by some local forces: There is another major problem that Brigade members faced while recruitments were taking place in one of the localities in Banerghata Road. Brigade members went to that area and talked to a group of workers. They distributed the application forms to the workers and gave guidance regarding

¹⁰ In order to gain mileage out of such campaign and to be projected as worker friendly leaders, local leaders of some political parties insisted the Organizers to mention their names. This will help them to be popular among the domestic workers as the leaders working for them and will help in getting their votes in elections.



fill up the same and informed them that they will collect the completed forms in the next visit. Later, they got a phone call from one of the residents of the area saying some people are distributing the same forms and demanding for Rs. 200-300 from each worker in order to become a member of the KDWC. Learning this concerned Brigade members went to the locality and met the workers and enquired about it. Looking at the form, Brigade members were shocked since it was a photostat copy of the membership form which they had distributed the other day. But the photostat copy of the form contained some additional papers with several other columns and false promises and assurances. The Brigade members understood that some people were trying to deceive the workers and appropriate money by using KDWC membership forms and raised an alarm. They were able to trace the person who was responsible and they approached her as a group and collected the money back and reimbursed the workers from whom it has been collected. Brigade members then decided to file a police complaint against the person, but local leaders intervened and assured the Brigade members that there won't be any repetition of such actions because of which dropped the idea. Brigade members suspect that it was in fact some local leader who had planned the extraction of the money from workers through this particular person. However this incident raised an alarm and led to the issue of identity cards to the Brigade members as a precautionary mechanism. This issue was brought to the notice of INTUC and KDWC leadership and subsequently the leadership issued a public notice informing workers of all the areas that the membership fee for KDWC is only Rs.17 and asking them not to fall prey to such false propaganda in future.

Restrictions over domestic workers attending meetings at INTUC office by male members of the family: There have been instances of male family members of domestic women workers, who are also Organizers, raising objections regarding them gathering together and attending meetings at the INTUC office and elsewhere. "Why are you going? What do you achieve by going? Is it necessary to go?" While some men encourage them to go, some discouraged and even forbade them from going to meetings. In a country like India where there are several cultural restrictions over women's activities, it is difficult for women to break those chains and be visible in the public domain. Particularly, there is a prevalent conception that the trade union movement is meant for men and women have nothing to do with it. Things became somewhat easier once the Karnataka government announced the inclusion of domestic workers in the RSBY scheme. Since there a direct benefit was seen, men of the family compromised with the women attending meetings. These are the challenges Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress leadership and Karnataka Domestic Workers Brigade members faced while they were organizing workers at the ground level.

Lack of statistical account of number of domestic workers: There is another set of challenges they faced while working at policy level changes. One of the major challenges for them was not having a statistical account of the number of workers in an area and other related details, which is necessary in order to lobby for policy changes at the governmental



level. Not having statistics is a major setback for both the government as well the trade unions. An issue regarding permanent address proof for migrant domestic workers is yet another major and important issue as such an address proof would enable them to avail certain governmental schemes. The KDWC was unable to help these workers in terms of availing ration cards, old age pensions, since most of them lack permanent residential proof.

II. Strategies adopted to overcome the challenges at field

While there are several challenges in the way of organizing domestic workers, the KDWC leadership and Brigade members evolved strategies from time to time to counter such challenges and continued with the recruitment process.

Selection of organizers: The very first strategy of INTUC may be observed in the choosing of women of caliber to carry forward the mission as Brigade members. It would have been difficult, rather impossible; to bring these many workers under the fold of the union if it had not been for the women who worked as brigade members. Factors such as their prior contacts, experiences, networks, and relations with locals were explored while they engaged in the field. Credit also goes to the awareness meetings conducted by INTUC from time-to-time which equipped them with knowledge of trade union functioning and various governmental policies for unorganized workers. In a nutshell, it is the very selection of brigade members and the periodical training which were the important strategies on INTUC's part.

Creating awareness about the very purpose of trade union: It is a well-known and proved fact that organizing under a trade union provides collective bargaining power to the workers. But the real challenge lies in making the workers at the ground level realize this fact. Particularly with women, who are often not aware of trade union activism, it is quite a challenge. INTUC countered this situation by adopting a very interesting strategy. It assisted KDWC in formulating certain reasonable and short-term demands for domestic workers and guided the Brigade members to approach workers with these demands. For example, while engaged in recruitments, the Brigade members campaigned about the inclusion of domestic workers under the Karnataka State Social Security Board as a demand. After a point, the announcement of the state government to this effect became a point of rejoice for the workers and the Brigade members and it gave new strength and hope for further recruitments. Likewise, the RSBY scheme was included as a campaign demand for Brigade members and the State government's announcement to this effect and the Labour Department's delegation responsibility to KDWC as an implementing agency worked as a positive influence. Here INTUC and KDWC's strategy worked and yielded the positive result.

KDWC Lobbying with elected representatives: Lobbying is the other strategy which was constantly employed throughout the process. Lobbying with local elected representatives



and the Labour Ministry, repeated representations to the Karnataka State Labour Minister, and submission of memoranda yielded results over a period of time. In some localities, lobbying with local elected representatives ensured smooth recruitments. It was reported by one of the Organizers that when she was hesitant to approach the workers in an area all by herself, she consulted the area councilor and in partnership with him she was able to successfully continue the recruitments. That specific councilor helped her and took the responsibility of arranging a meeting place, campaigning among the workers and was also present when the membership process was on. There have also been attempts to raise issues at a larger level and attempts were made to bring the issues of domestic workers to the notice of the central government.

Media attention for wider publicity of issue: Aiming at media attention was another strategy and media coverage of public events organized by KDWC aided in publicizing the cause of domestic workers widely. Addressing the local media and gaining their attention towards the issues of domestic workers helped the KDWC in reaching out to more workers. Till then the media reported on the issue of domestic workers only when unwarranted occurrences, such as domestic workers being subjected to physical or sexual violence by employers, came to light. Listening to these reports, domestic workers often felt helpless, but now the media coverage of the domestic workers union and its activities filled them with positive energy. They were happy that it was not only inhuman incidents, but also issues related them and to their pay scale, paid leaves, and secure work conditions which was given attention, which could also raise public consciousness.

Printed material in various local languages: Considering the cosmopolitan nature of the workers and the huge number of migrant and domestic workers from neighboring southern states, KDWC decided to bring out pamphlets, handouts, posters, banners, and all other related material in multiple languages. This strategy actually worked and some members mentioned during a group interview that though they could speak and understand Kannada, the official language of the state, they could not read it since they were migrants from Tamil Nadu and their mother tongue was Tamil. They further added that they were given pamphlets written in Tamil by some of the Brigade members and through this pamphlet they learnt about the domestic workers union and KDWC and approached Organizers for union membership. Producing the literature in multiple languages is a strategy which yielded results. Printing pamphlets in English helped in reaching employers. When workers needed to get signatures from their employers for the RSBY coverage, they handed over the English pamphlets to them. Since there are many non-Kannada speaking people in Bangalore, these pamphlets helped in explaining the issues to them.

Awareness and information about government policies: INTUC guided the KDWC leadership to use information about various governmental policies as an entry point to approach workers. The Educators and some of the Organizers were trained and encouraged



to learn about various governmental policies and to share it with the domestic workers in their conversations. Following this strategy, many Organizers talked, guided, and campaigned about various governmental policies, such as old age pensions, minimum wages fixed by the Karnataka State government for domestic workers, the revised rates of Minimum Wages Act, the RSBY scheme, the Annapurana scheme meant for the BPL (Below Poverty Line) families, etc. Entry made through campaigning about various government policies yielded results in the recruitment endeavor by the Brigade.

Training and educational sessions: Periodic educational sessions for the Brigade members and providing training to more Organizers were also important moves by the KDWC leadership which brought effective results in due course of time. Educational sessions, both on basic trade union functioning and on knowledge about various governmental policies, increased the capacity of Brigade members and energized them for further activity.

Using public places as campaign centers: Brigade members used public places, such as parks, temple premises, workers houses, vacant halls, and tailoring classes, to conduct their meetings. Conducting meetings in larger premises with visibility and in easily identifiable and reachable locations of the locality solved certain problems pertaining to unwarranted intervention by male family members. Some of these places continue to be meeting points of domestic workers on regular basis. Places like the tailoring class in Shrirampur, Dayanand Nagar, have become a place for women workers to meet and to relax and share their sorrows, happiness, family problems, employer's behaviour, etc., with one another. Such places now act as a binding force between workers. After a point, even male members got used to the fact that women workers meet and talk to each other and do not raise objections when these women get out of the houses to meet their fellow workers. This is one of the positive developments that took place as a result of conducting meetings in public and easily accessible places.

III. Experiences of INTUC

Though there is a lacuna in organizing and addressing the issues and concerns of unorganized work force in India, trade unions are gradually attempting to overcome it. A recent study reveals that the unorganized workforce constitutes more than 90 per cent of the total workforce of India. Now trade unions in India understand the urgency in organizing the unorganized and are working in that direction. In a way, it became important for trade unions in India to organize unorganized workforce to safe guard the interests of the unorganized work force on one side and preserve the relevance and essence of trade unionism in India. The increasing unorganized and informal work force actually has resulted in a situation where unless the trade unions organize the unorganized, there will be a threat to the concept and operation of trade unionism itself. Organizing the unorganized is the necessity realized by trade unions, on one side to fight for the better working and living conditions of workers and the other, for the very existence of trade unionism.



While INTUC acknowledged the importance of organizing the unorganized work force and of working in that direction, the proposal for the pilot project Decent Work For Domestic Workers: Organising, Skills Upgrading And Advocacy, from ILO ACTRAV struck them as one of the various means to approach the unorganized workforce of the Bangalore city. The project specifically being on domestic workers, who stand as the most deprived, un-regularized, and rapidly increasing work force of the urban areas of India, also motivated them to work on it further. Further, discussions on the project in various meetings of INTUC at various levels strengthened their willingness and commitment to carry forward the project since there was already an acknowledgement on working on the unorganized work force, particularly on the most deprived of them, the domestic workforce. The INTUC Bangalore leadership is of the opinion that one of their leaders being a member of the ILO governing body helped them grasp the essence of the project in no time. The INTUC consciously chose to work with women domestic workers and avoided including male domestic workers in the initial stages. When INTUC was asked about the reason for choosing to work only on women, they gave the following reasons: (1) The lack of clarity over the definition of domestic workers as there is confusion over whether to include drivers and malis (gardeners) as domestic workers or not; (2) the predominant number of domestic workforce comprises women workers; (3) Considering the restrictions over the mobility of women in Indian context, the involvement of both men and women domestic workers in union activities may lead to restrictions over women domestic workers' participation by their male counterparts in their families; and (4) Considering the same Indian cultural context, to avoid the scenario where women domestic workers feel intimidated and discouraged to share their experiences in the presence of male domestic members of the union. There are valid grounds for the two last mentioned apprehensions and there are occasions where it was proved that women workers are not allowed by their family members since male workers are also part of those activities. At the same time, due to the inhibitions and the closed circles women are forced to grow up in, they do hesitate in getting involved and opening up freely. Considering these factors, INTUC decided to work upon women domestic workers and then gradually approaching and including male domestic workers over a period of time. The INTUC leadership mentioned that at the present juncture, where trade unions have recognized the necessity on concentrating unorganized work force, INTUC had gone ahead even without the financial assistance from ILO-ACTRAV. Further, INTUC added that it was important even for them as a trade union to bring more number of workers within their fold. The INTUC expressed their willingness to continue further with organizing and creating awareness among domestic workers and to be the torch bearer for the KDWC.

IV. Lessons Learnt while Organizing Domestic Workers

The concerned project threw up the challenge of dealing with the complex situation involved in dealing with the concerns of workers where there are multiple employers



involved. Here, INTUC says that one of the lessons they learnt while carrying forward this project is the necessity of resolving the complexity of addressing the concerns of workers in case of multiple employer involvement. There is a need for the evolution of a mechanism to regularize the multiple employer-worker relationship and set up standards for decent work atmosphere. The practical constraints involved in addressing the concerns of workers engaged in informal and unconventional work sites, such as private households, was also yet another situation which INTUC had to deal with for the first time. INTUC mentions that this opened up new ways of understanding the workers in particular and unconventional work sites.

The INTUC feels that there is a lack of conceptual clarity over the very definition of 'domestic worker' and 'domestic work'. It feels that there is a need clarify who can be considered as a domestic worker and who cannot be brought under the purview of domestic workers. This again exposed INTUC to complexities involved in organizing women workers against the all societal odds.

Formulating certain short-term goals and working towards realizing them and once they are realized, using their success and consolidating the support for further long term goals is a much used strategy in trade union activism. In the present INTUC project too they followed this same method. The INTUC leadership says that the inclusion of domestic workers under the unorganized sector workers and the extension of the RSBY scheme to domestic workers resulted in winning the confidence of the workers. The INTUC says that it is a positive lesson for the future as well, to look for such worker friendly policies and campaigning through them among workers.

The INTUC mentions that the whole process of organizing domestic workers itself is a learning process for them since this is their first such attempt. They feel this project led them towards identifying women activists both to work for the KDWC and the INTUC.

Summary

- Trade unions face diverse challenges while organizing domestic workers, in comparison to organizing workers in other traditional sectors and work sites
- There is a need for developing a clear understanding of the relationship, among multiple employers-and domestic workers by trade unions
- The time and space dimensions of the domestic work such as irregular working hours and the work place being the very private location, is the prior most challenge in organizing domestic workers.
- The domestic workers are caught up in a situation where on one side their incomes are inevitable necessity to run the family, at other side there are societal and their family restrictions over their movement and their presence in the public domain.



- KDWC leadership used various strategies to organize the domestic workers, which includes, selection of socially active women as organizers, lobbying with the elected representatives, distribution of published literature, training and educational sessions to the domestic workers, using public spaces as for workers gathering etc.
- Formulating certain short goals and working in the direction of realizing them in order to obtain consent from workers towards long term objectives is the strategy used by INTUC and KDWC leaders while working with the domestic workers
- INTUC consciously choose to work with the women domestic workers at the initial stages of the project
- Working on this particular project helped INTUC, in terms of gathering more members under the fold of INTUC and strengthening the leadership capacities of their own cadre



CONCLUSION

The entire process of formation of the Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress (KDWC) was a very exciting and learning one. There are several women across Bangalore city who took active part in this process. Along the way, they enriched the organization as well as their own individual capacities, as leaders and members of the trade union. These women played multiple roles, as organizers, social workers, domestic workers, mothers, daughters, wives, political activists, religious activists, and members of their own communities. When one looks at a domestic worker, or an organizer of KDWC she strikes as an assimilation of multiple roles and identities. With all these capacities, weaknesses, and the burden of playing multiple roles, these women struggle on an everyday basis to improve their living condition. The whole exercise of unionizing and articulating is about getting what is legally entitled to them, drawing a mutually beneficial situation from the context of mutual necessity (in terms of the employer and the domestic worker depending on each other), and, above all, aiming at improving their living and working conditions.

There are certain limitations which were observed in the process of organizing, such as lack of attempts from the KDWC and the INTUC to recruit live-in domestic workers, maintaining records containing the profiles of workers recruited to union, and information about child and migrant workers. Hopefully, the KDWC will overcome these limitations in the future. While the INTUC claims to provide training to the domestic workers towards strengthening their capacities and improving their skills, it only chooses to conduct public meetings as the method to do so. There need to employ innovative and creative methods to empower workers with the knowledge of trade union functioning as well other policy information apart from conducting public meeting for the same effect. It is one of the shortcomings of the INTUC which needs to be overcome in the future. In the overall articulation of the INTUC and the KDWC, the demand for implementation of minimum legal wages is not articulated as much as it is needed and there should be consistent and rigorous attempts for campaigning for minimum wages and formulating action plans to achieve its implementation. Implementation of minimum wages for domestic workers should be the focal point of the further action plan for KDWC. Issues concerning lack of proof of workers identity in case of migrant domestic workers and exclusion from certain governmental policies on this pretext should be addressed by unions by evolving a mechanism towards proving their identities in urban centers. These issues did not seem to have caught the attention of either INTUC or KDWC. This is an important issue which must be addressed in order to provide decent and just working and living conditions for domestic workers.

This study explained the huge gaps between the law and its enforcement, in terms of the discrimination and social exclusion domestic workers are facing on grounds of caste. This is the exclusion from exercising their democratic rights guaranteed by the Constitution of



India. Now the responsibility lies with the trade unions to address the issue of social exclusion and discrimination. Often the economic agenda, such as fair and minimum wages, fails to accommodate concerns of social exclusion and discrimination and there must be a simultaneous effort to address these concerns. KDWC and INTUC should take measures for abolishment of such inhuman, unconstitutional, and feudal practices of the past by adding this as an agenda to the domestic workers campaign and future action plan of the KDWC.

At the same time, it was an immense pleasure to learn about women, who strike to be soft spoken and inarticulate, facing the challenges and coming out with hundreds of memberships in their union register. It is their articulation, discipline, awareness, and, above all, their commitment which has resulted in breaking the existing silence on unfair working conditions of domestic workers. In spite of the challenges they have faced, the problems they have encountered, and the bitter situations they have met on the ground, they proved themselves as the leaders of the unheard and unspoken of sections of Bangalore society. Their sense of identity, recognition, and eagerness to take part in the public domain and their enormous belief in unity acted as a driving force for these women to organize domestic workers.

There are several evident positive aspects of unionization, domestic workers identified with each other and developed a sense of belonging and meeting venues such as public parks, temple premises, tailoring classes, etc., gradually developed as places of sharing for them. They continue to gather there and discuss several issues, including their family sorrows and joys. Stories of some workers, of winning paid leave and getting bonus from employers inspires other workers to negotiate with their employers for similar benefits. In this way, the newly developed meeting points are promoting the spirit of fighting for their own rights even without any external intervention and support. It is also noticed that the process of unionization also equipped these women with information about various government policies. Now they have access to information and are able to guide their fellow workers. In the era of information, where knowledge is considered as power, this is a positive development and it has fulfilled one of the objectives of the project.

It is evident that workers grasped the essence of trade unionism and realized the necessity of enrolling themselves and fellow workers. They realized that collective bargaining power is an essential tool for achieving their rights. It can be termed as one of the successes of the project, where creating awareness about the trade unionism was one of the vital project objectives. It is interesting to notice that the reality of the present day exploitation of domestic workers is juxtaposes with the dynamic and vibrant spirit of trade union activism. The newly cultivated spirit of oneness and unionism for a collective cause is allowing them to think of possible non-hierarchical work relations.

Now the great challenge lies in sustaining the collective spirit that has been inculcated in the domestic workers. It is quite a challenge for the Karnataka Domestic Workers leadership to



sustain the spirit by adopting innovative strategies from time-to-time. While acknowledging the achievement of certain goals, such as inclusion of domestic workers in the RSBY and the Unorganized Social Security Board and applicability of Minimum Wages Act, one also should be cautious of the fact that often there is a huge gap between legislation and its implementation. It is a challenge for the KDWC, the domestic workers of Bangalore city, and INTUC to persuade the government for effective implementation of these policies. It is also a challenge for INTUC to provide favorable conditions and training for the KDWC, in order for it to become self-sufficient and look after its matters independently. There is a necessity to evolve a mechanism where the Brigade members exercise their decision-making power and are able to carry forward their union by themselves. It is also important to encourage full-scale leadership from among the domestic workers and to provide training and skills to improve their organizational capacities and policy knowledge to more domestic workers.

This study also throws light on the destruction of certain stereotypic assumptions, for instance that trade unionism is essentially a male-centric and male-dominated arena. It proved that if given an opportunity, there is no dearth of capacity among women for leadership. In the Indian context, trade unionism is primarily identified with middle class articulation of organized sector industries, but this case proved the contrary. It is interesting to note that women, who are not domestic workers themselves, pledged to take up the cause of domestic workers and are rallying for it. We often watch bank employers or school teachers rallying for their own rights, but here we see a group of women, who are into multiple activities in their private and public lives, rallying for the cause of domestic workers. Their commitment must be applauded, but at the same time they should be trained to develop secondary leadership from among the domestic workers to further lead their own union.



Narratives of Domestic workers, KDWC Organizers, INTUC leaders

Ms Girija, KDWC Organizer

Girija is a 41 year old woman belonging to a Tamil family settled in Bangalore. She has been working as a social worker for the past 15 years. A resident of Konan Kuntae, she has completed her matriculation and assists people by providing them accurate information about health-related services in Bangalore. She suggests hospitals to them as per their requirements and accompanies them. She also helps young boys of the locality in finding small-scale jobs in nearby factories. She also helps people in applying for bank loans. Every year she arranges 24 buses for Om Shakthi devotees to go for their pilgrimage. She runs a sari business from her home for a living; she buys saris on wholesale and sells them on retail to the residents of her locality. She is financially self-sufficient and has one male child. She is received warmly by the people in the locality and commands respect due to her long-term association with the people and her experience in serving as a social worker. It is her two-wheeler vehicle which enables her mobility across the city. INTUC women's wing Chairperson, Ms. Muthaki Uthaiah, approached her to be an Educator-cum-Organizer for the Domestic Workers Congress. When she was asked why she thought she had been chosen as an Organizer, she smiles and says, "I can deliver. They recognized my capacity to mobilize people. I am widely accepted in this area. It's my reputation as a social worker which made them to choose me". She organizes domestic workers not only in Konan Kuntai but also in Kothanur (4 km from Konan Kuntai), Jigani (22 km), Basvanthpur (6 km), JP Nagar (8 km), Hari Nagar (2 km), KP Agraharam (16 km), and Bhuvanewari Nagar (16 km), which are quite far from her place. When she was asked about the way she approaches workers, she responded by saying, "since I have been a social worker for a long time, I find one or the other person whom I have worked with earlier on one or the other occasion. I catch hold of that person and proceed further". She has area leaders in every area and she keeps in touch with them on a regular basis. Whenever her presence is required, the area leaders inform her over the phone. Area leaders usually call her when new workers are to be recruited and when any worker needs information on union-related activities or governmental policies, or any other help as such. There have been instances when she was asked to intervene in cases of friction between a domestic worker and their employer. When she was asked about the kind of queries she faces from the workers in general, she responded,

"They mostly ask me about the procedure to get better wages and they enquire about governmental provisions for educating their kids. After the RSBY scheme, they also ask several questions about insurance policy. In general they complain about their living conditions and they talk about their inability to afford good food for their family and say that they get to eat only one meal per day. They sometimes ask me, 'madam do you think earning Rs 1200 per month will be sufficient to lead life in



Bangalore city?' I feel embarrassed and feel bad for their condition when they pose such questions".

After finishing her sentence Girija murmured to herself, "how anyone can live with such a meager amount in cities?" This is a question not only for Girija, but for all of us.

When Girija was asked about the campaign among workers to recruit them to the union, she said,

"We basically told them that being together under a union umbrella will empower you with collective bargaining power, through which you can negotiate with the government for retirement pension, Domestic Workers Welfare Board, and implementation of minimum wages. We only talked about the things in our agenda, we never created false hopes like the election campaigners."

When she was asked how successful she is in her mission, she reacted with a broad smile on her face and said, "I am confident. It is all in our hands and it is about how effectively we can convince the workers about their own good. I feel I am successful. I recruited more than 100 workers in a day into the union during one evening gathering". When Girija was asked about the occurrence of any unwarranted instances while organizing, she recollected two incidents where drunken husbands of workers behaved rudely and picked up a fight with her. When Girija was asked whether she notices any changes in her own self after joining the Brigade as an Organizer, she said, "during the initial stages of working as an Organizer, when I called for workers gatherings in the localities, I waited for INTUC leaders to come and address the gatherings. But now, I address the gatherings myself". She further adds, "my articulation skills were good even prior to venturing into organizing. But my knowledge of trade union activity and various governmental schemes improved with my association with KDWC". With regard to the dual responsibility of making her own living and working as Organizer, she says that "organizing never came as an obstacle in my sari business, since I run the business from my home itself".

Girija mentioned during the conversation that while organizing domestic labourers she mostly encounters migrant labourers from Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. Girija also brought a new element to light— some domestic workers work in the employers homes in the early hours of morning and after that they work in garment units and construction sites as daily wage labourers.

Girija describes the condition of domestic workers in Bangalore city as miserable. Many domestic workers are ill-treated by their employers. They are restricted from touching the sacred items of the house. Employers also give them spoiled food. Domestic workers never get any bonus from their employers. If they are unable to come for one or two days because of illness, employers deduct their monthly salaries. They are not given any paid leave or



compensation for working overtime. She adds, “only a domestic workers union can save them from this misery”. According to Girija, effective functioning of the Karnataka Domestic Workers’ Congress is the only solution for the problems faced by domestic workers. When Girija was asked whether she had noticed any change in the domestic workers she had organized after recruitment to the union, she said, “it is little too early to draw any conclusions. But one thing is that they became much more open and vocal about their condition and are gradually realizing that there is a Minimum Wages Act and that they can fight for its implementation”.

When asked about the motivating factor for her commitment towards the cause of domestic workers, she seemed a little shy and said, “the sense of satisfaction, recognition in the public domain as a leader, opportunity to meet new people, and the kind of exposure are the driving forces for me to work as Brigade member”. Over a period of time, Girija acquired the skills of a perfect Organizer through her own experience of working and the periodic educational sessions added to it. With a firm voice, she concludes her interview by saying

“Domestic work should be respected like any other work. They also work like any other worker. In fact, all of us are workers, working for one thing or the other. Even government officials are workers, they work for the government like domestic workers work for their employers”.

Girija has made a significant contribution to the Domestic Workers Congress in her capacity as an Organizer. She helped the union and attempted to empower domestic workers through union membership and in the process she has also improved herself in terms of acquiring knowledge about trade unionism and government policies. Her experience, courage, and fearlessness in addressing the public gatherings and her articulation, have drawn many workers towards union membership. Women like Girija are a constant source of inspiration for many men and women in trade union movement.

Malathi S Balaji, KDWC Organizer

Malathi S Balaji is an Organizer who resides in Konan Kuntai and works along with Girija. She completed her Graduation, B.A. degree, and has been working as a social worker with Shree Shakthi Sanghatana for the past two months. Earlier she worked with the Development Institute for Social Cause (DISC) for two years. She assists people in availing small-scale loans. When she was asked about the difficulty in managing two jobs at a time (as social worker for Shree Shakthi Sanghatana and Organizer for KDWC), she replied,

“I perform both simultaneously. One thing which is common to both these jobs is meeting people. When I go to talk about loan-related issues, I also talk about domestic worker's rights and the union and when I go to talk about domestic workers union, I also talk about loans. Both of these jobs involve meeting people on an everyday basis. So I have not faced any problems so far.”



Malathi talked about the training sessions she attended and said, “they explained so many things to us, like the necessity to organize and what all can be achieved through unionization. During one session they taught us various methods of organizing domestic workers, various means to approach workers and other related things.” When she was asked to why she thought she has been chosen as an Organizer over others, she said, “I know many people and I have wide network. May be this made them give the organizational responsibility to me”. She added further, “after taking up this work (as Organizer), I was respected and recognized more. I realized that workers have some expectations from me”. When she was asked to about her style of functioning, she said,

“Like all other Organizers, I also have group leaders in all the areas. I call for meetings through group leaders and explain the context and necessity and then recruit workers to the union. Since we are the first ones who went to meet them and listened to their miseries, sorrows, and problems and considered them as equal to workers of other sectors, they seem very happy. They are satisfied with the fact that they were also recognized. They also like to be respected and recognized. Isn’t it? They had some expectations that something positive will happen through our association”.

When she asked whether she has seen any changes in herself since she ventured into KDWC activities, she responded by saying,

“I was basically a soft-spoken and very straight forwards person. But my association with KDWC has taught me ways to mingle with workers, effective ways of conveying information, and, above all, how to be convincing. Now I know the ways to convince workers towards union”.

She also says with, in a complaining tone,

“Workers don’t get time to meet and discuss issues; they don’t feel the necessity of it. Most of them are not aware of certain governmental provisions aimed at their welfare. They don’t read newspapers or watch news on TV. Through the union, we can make them realize about welfare policies. Trade unions empower workers and bring people together”.

Vijaya Laxmi, KDWC, Organizer

Forty-five year old Vijaya Laxmi works as a Brigade member and she performs the role of both Organizer and Educator. She completed her PUC and is a resident of Ulsoor. She used to work as an office assistant in an NGO based in Bangalore city, but after taking up the responsibility as an Organizer, she left her job and now devotes all her time to union activities. She organizes domestic workers in and around Ulsoor. She has to look after her two children and dependent old parents. But she says that the responsibilities at home never effected her commitment to the cause of domestic workers. Once she approached Ms.



Muthaki Uthaiyah, Chairperson, Women's Wing INTUC, seeking her help for neighbour's loan application in Canara bank. At that time she got to know about the domestic workers issues and INTUC's plan to unionize them. She says that "Muthaki madam told me about the issues of domestic workers and the necessity to organize them. She also asked me if I can volunteer to organize workers". At that time Vijaya Laxmi did not respond to Ms. Muthaki. She adds, "Though I did not respond to her immediately, the proposal she made was lingering in my mind till I got a call from them three months later". After three months, she got an invitation from Ms. Muthaki for a workshop conducted in a Hotel. Vijayalaxmi feels that most of the government policies aimed at the welfare of workers fails to reach them. She says,

"Since my brother and sister are associated with trade union activism, I have been somewhat aware of trade unions and their functioning and the advantages of being a trade union member from the beginning. Both of them worked in public sector unions, HAL and LIC. They used to discuss about their union-related issues at home. It was through this that I got some awareness. I got in touch with many people through the workshop, got introduced to other INTUC leaders and I even know Ariel sir since then. I also know Ramachandraiah sir from that workshop only".

She says that she is convinced about women's visibility in the public domain and is committed to the cause of domestic workers. Vijaya Laxmi feels that INTUC trusted her as a capable person to convince workers and organize them. She further says that "I pray to god that my participation in the whole endeavor results in some positive developments. I feel that I am actually delivering more than what I expected from my own self". She says,

"Only recruitments to the union are not enough. It is also important that we should be able to secure some benefit for them. I asked several questions about whether the health insurance coverage for domestic workers will come true or not, the practical constraints, possibilities, etc. I insisted for an assurance from INTUC and KDWC that it will be possible. I started campaigning only after I got assurance from them. Otherwise there is no point in talking about it to workers, isn't it?"

According to her, success in such things makes the workers trust them and helps them win the confidence of workers for future major struggles. When she was asked about organizing style, she says,

"In my area I called for a small meeting and expected some 10 to 15 people. But to my surprise, more than 50 people turned up for the meeting. With prior intimation, INTUC leaders also attended. We explained everything to workers and distributed the forms. Next day I went all alone to workers houses and collected the forms back. That day's membership in my area was 80. With this inspiration I went alone for a



door-to-door campaign in the nearby locality, Gouthampuri. But I was unable to convince workers to join the union. I got discouraged and told myself that I won't be able to do anything further. Then I went and consulted the area councilor. I explained everything to him and asked for his partnership for recruitments. He agreed and we campaigned together. He arranged a meeting in his office. It started with 100 people, later the number increased to 200 and at the end of the meeting there were 350 members. They asked many questions. Is it a genuine programme? If we join what will be our benefit? Can we trust you and give Rs.17? I answered all the queries. No false hopes and pseudo-assurances. We told them that it is not about immediate benefit, but in the long run, as a collective force, you can demand separate Welfare Board for domestic workers, retirement pension, etc. We also told them that if there are any problems with employers and if the employers are not treating you fairly, the union can intervene and argue your case. It was quite successful and many workers got convinced and came forward to join the union"

She finished by saying, "it was quite late by the time I got back home, since many workers attended, we had to stay till the late night". She says that in some areas she approached workers through CDS (Community Development Scheme) volunteers and in some through ISCON devotees. She also says that she has group leaders in all the areas.

When asked whether she had observed any changes in herself after her association with the union, she smiles and says that she is able to talk better and convince people now. She also says that her knowledge about government policies has improved and that now she knows almost all the policies aimed at workers welfare now. She also said that she visits INTUC office once in a month for KDWC activities and also goes to the office whenever there is a meeting. When she was asked about the challenges and problems she encountered while Organizing, she told about an incident.

When she was asked why they excluded men from joining the union, she responded by saying, "we decided consciously to organize only women domestic workers as of now. Some men domestic workers came and expressed their willingness to join the union but we did not let them take membership. But in the future we will organize male domestic workers also". She says that some domestic workers in Bangalore have been working in some houses for 10 to 15 years and even then they get paid only Rs.500. There has been no hike in the wages. In one such house the employer makes them work from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. "We intervened in one of such house, and demanded that the employer pay Rs.1500. Now the domestic worker of that house is getting Rs.1500 per month", she adds.

When asked about the various strategies used for recruitment, she mentioned that the strategy of going door-to-door and addressing the workers individually was a failure in her case.



“I am more successful when I went in a group and got good response. Approaching in a group also saves lot of time. On the other hand, approaching individually takes much time and energy and in the end the worker is not convinced. So it is better to go in a group.”

About the workers response, she said,

“They felt some sense of being together, some collective spirit... they felt happy that someone had finally come to represent their case. They were also happy since the union provided them a common platform to share, discuss, and at times vent their anger against their employers. They now feel that they have a union to fall back on in case of any necessity”.

About her performance she said, “I was unable to convince people, but over a period of time I am able to do so. I wanted to continue as an organizer and recruit more and more people to union. My motive is that government policies should reach people who are in real need of them. I am now very busy in this mission and I don’t find time for myself, but I would like to continue to do so”, she concludes with a graceful smile on her face.

Laxmi, KDWC Organizer

Thirty year old Laxmi is a resident of Shrirampuram. Educated till SSLC, she is married and her husband works as a driver. She has two girl children. She basically looks after her home, kids, and husband (avoiding the phrase 'housewife'). She assists people in her locality in applying for BPL cards, pensions, etc. She has been working as an Organizer for KDWC from the past six months. She was introduced to KDWC by Iruday Mary. She organizes domestic workers in Swatantra Nagar, Bandradi circle. When she was asked about the double responsibility of looking after her house and children and working as an organizer, she said that she never felt that it was a burden. When asked why she was asked to be an organizer, she said, “I can convince people. I am not scared of meeting people and talking to them. In my area people call me a dare devil. That is the reason, I am chosen as an organizer”. When asked to analyse her performance as an organizer, she graded herself as a good leader. When asked about her reaction to the fact that she commands respect in her locality and that people welcome her proposals on anything, she replied, “It is because I have been helping people for some time. This trust and respect evolved over a period of time”. When asked about her way of functioning, she said, “We call for a meeting in the Corporation's tailoring class. We tell the workers about various provisions. We explain to them the benefits of getting organized. I also specifically mention about the kind of problems they face being women on one hand and by being domestic workers on the other”. She added, “Since no one ever came here to address their issues, domestic workers responded very positively and came forward to join the union”.



When asked about the responses to her efforts, she said, “men of the community get curious about what we do by gathering at one place. But they never dared to comment on our activity”. When Laxmi was asked about the changes she had undergone with her new association with the trade union, she says, “I became very free and I am not scared of anything now. Now I am good at delivering public speeches. I also learnt that being all alone will not secure anything. It is only by being in a group that we can achieve everything. We can fight for our rights only through a Union”. She further adds, “The union gives you a sense of unity and a sense of belonging to each other”.

Radhika, Domestic worker and Organizer of KDWC

Twenty eight year old Radhika is a domestic worker herself and works as an Organizer for the Workers Brigade. She is a resident of Vijayanagar and belongs to a Scheduled Caste. She is married, has two children and her husband works at a flower shop. She works in two houses as a domestic worker and earns Rs.1200 per month (Rs 700 and Rs 500 each). Her work includes, washing clothes, cleaning utensils, and sweeping and mopping the floor. Radhika's mother-in-law, who is bed-ridden, also stays with them. It takes about 5 minutes, by walking, for Radhika to reach her employer's house. She decided to work as a domestic worker to support her family. She thought of working in a garment unit or in a flower shop before joining as a domestic worker. But she decided to be a domestic worker since there was no one else to look after her children till she returns back from work. Radhika says, “My children get back from school at 12.30 p.m. So I need to be home by then. Once they are back, I take care of their needs, finish work at home, and go for work again in the evening”. She said that so far she has worked in six houses. When an employer changes her/his house, she was terminated from work and she changed houses. When asked the reason for termination, she said, “I could not go for a day or two since I was unwell. The employer got angry and removed me from work”. She also said that some of the employers don't deduct the money at the end of the month if she won't show up for a day or two, but if it is more than two days, they also deduct. She adds further,

“If I do not go to work even for one day, my work will be accumulated. Employers keep all the vessels, clothes and everything for the next day. So what is the point in taking leave and doing double work next day? So even if I am not well, I make it a point to go and somehow finish the work”.

When she was asked about whether she gets any leave, she turned gloomy and said that she is not entitled for any leave. When she was asked how it is to be a domestic worker and what she thinks of her own work, she continued with the same disappointment and said,

“I don't want to work as a domestic worker, but I don't have any other option. Sometimes, I have to go for work even when I am not well and sometimes there is so much work that I feel depressed. I look at women doing other work, I also feel like getting into some decent work. But there is no way to do that, I have no choice”.



She stopped for a while, and seemed to be thinking about something, and then continued with some excitement on her face, as if she recollected something which she forgotten to mention,

“Some employers make us feel that we are very important for them. They wait for us desperately and they express it. On those occasions I feel that they won’t be able to manage without me and this thought makes me feel that I am also an important person, I feel happy. But in some houses people ill-treat us and restrict us and keep saying don’t touch this, don’t touch that, don’t get into the kitchen, wash clothes outside only, etc.. I feel depressed. This is where I hate being a domestic worker. In the two houses I am working in right now, I am allowed inside the house only in one house, the other one they will not let me in. I have to do everything from outside. I like to work in a house where the employer treats me fair”.

When asked why she thinks so many women like her are getting work as domestic workers these days, she responded by saying, “these days all family members, both men and women, work in offices, and so we are getting work”. She also talked about the excessive supervision in some houses which makes her feel disgusting. When she was asked how she got introduced to the Domestic Workers Congress, she said that a few of the organizers, Ratna, Archana, Muthaki madam, approached her in 2010 and it was Ratna and Archanan who gave her the union membership.

When about why she chose to be a union member, she said with a conviction in her voice, “if all of us are together, we can get health card, pension sanctioned, and demand for better wages”. She said that earlier she did not know what a trade union was. But she is aware now that being together secures some benefits and it will help them in sharing their problems. She said she is not aware of the applicability of Minimum Wages Act to domestic workers. When she asked whether she ever asked for hike in her wages, she said, “sometimes I asked, but they just increased Rs 50 or at most Rs 100, that too after so much persuasion and after working for long”. With regard to paid holidays she said that she argued with her employer recently, after getting to know that some of the workers are entitled to such leave, but till now she had not been able to convince her employers. She said that there are several workers like her and that they all share almost the same experiences. “We do talk about each other’s experiences, our family problems, about hike in grocery prices, about the newly joined union, about the possibility of getting or not getting health card and sometimes we also joke about some of our people and incidents”. Radhika also said she helps her neighbors and friends in finding work in the locality where she is working. When she was asked whether she informed her relatives and friends about joining the Domestic Workers Congress, she said, “Yes, I told everyone. All of my people know that I am a member now and they also know that I also work for the union by making others join as members”. When asked whether she had informed her employer about joining the union, she said, “Yes, I told



them because I needed a signature from one of the employer to certify that I am a domestic worker. I told them and my employer signed for me". She continues, "In case of some of my fellow workers, their employers refused to sign for them. I told my employer that if she signed for me, I would be able to get benefits of some governmental schemes. So she signed for me".

She said that she attended some of the educational sessions conducted by INTUC and KDWC for domestic workers. She recollected, "One in a hotel where Laxmi Devamma, Muthaki Madam, and that sir (pointing Adyanthaiah, INTUC state secretary) were also there. They told about our union. They also handed over some pamphlets to us. But I don't remember if they taught us anything about improving our work skills". When asked about the improvement in her knowledge about various government policies after joining union, she said that she was aware of the proposal from the union for a Welfare Board and that she also knows about the inclusion of domestic workers in the Social Security Board. She is also aware about other provisions, like old age pensions and widow pension, but in her family, her mother-in law is unable to claim it since she does not have her husband's death certificate. She said, "I asked for help from union leaders, they asked me to go and approach one of the government departments. I went there but it was of no use". When she was asked whether she knows what a 'hazardous occupation' is and whether she aware that domestic work is a hazardous occupation, she said that she was not aware of it (the literal meaning of hazardous was explained to the interviewee before asking this question). When she was asked whether she had noticed any changes in herself after joining the union, she said, "The way I talked earlier is different from the way I talk now. Since I know something now, I talk fearlessly. I keep listening when people talk in meetings and at the INTUC office. Whatever I hear, I go back and try to explain it to the people in my community. Now I am able to tell my people, who and which department is to be approached for old age pensions and widow pensions. I also tell them about health cards. Now I can guide them", a smile flashed on her face. She added, "After joining the union I have started respecting my own work. Earlier I used to curse myself for doing this and used to get depressed at times". When she was asked whether there had been any qualitative changes in her work, she asserted strongly, "No, I always worked hard and worked well. What is there to change? I have always been a good worker". When she was asked about her further involvement in the union she said that she would like to continue working for the union and that she wanted to prove herself as a good organizer. With regard to the support she expects from INTUC and KDWC she said that she was happy with the fact that INTUC recognized her and it is the only union that had come forward to approach them. Responding to a query regarding her expectations from the government to improve their condition, she came out with a very interesting suggestion that,

"Physically we work so hard. Because of the amount of physical work we are doing now, we age sooner than others. Domestic workers should be granted old age



pensions on the attainment of the age 50 years (old age pensions are usually were given to people who complete 60 years) and declare the age of retirement of domestic workers as 50 years”.

She also demanded that health cards should be issued immediately in order to enable domestic workers to claim health insurance. She also that women do more work than men, therefore, women should also be paid more money since they work both outside and inside their home.

When she was asked whether she would encourage someone from her family, her sisters or her children, to choose to work as a domestic worker, her reply was a very strong no.

“I won’t let them do this work. They should study well and go to offices and work, not like this. I myself could not get into a decent work, at least my children should get into office work.”

Susheela, Domestic worker and a group leader

Susheela is a thirty year old domestic worker and group leader of the Workers Brigade for Shrirampuram, Dayanand Nagar Colony. She studied up to 7th standard and belongs to a Scheduled Caste community. She is married and she has two children and her husband works in a dhoop sticks (scented sticks) manufacturing unit. She works in two houses and gets paid Rs.1300 per month. Her employer's houses are in Malleswaram and Ramachandrapuram, both at walkable distance from her home. At both the places her work includes washing clothes, cleaning vessels, and mopping the floor. Three years back her family took a loan from a money lender for her husband’s surgery and till date they are the paying interest on it. Susheela says that she often takes an advance from her employers to meet the needs of the family and at the end of month she ends up receiving only Rs. 600 or 700. She has been working in one of the houses for the past 13 years. When asked whether her employer gives her leave, she said, “they don’t give, but I do take and they deduct the amount at the end of the month”. When asked about her own perception of domestic work she said, “Sometimes I find it very difficult to cope with it. But if I leave this, there is no other option. Washing heavy clothes like jeans, pants, and uniforms is very difficult. If I have any other option, I would have left it long back”. When asked about how employers perceive her work, she says that they don’t value her contribution. When asked about why many women like her are getting into domestic worker now, she says, “these days both the women and men of families work in offices, so they need someone to make things ready for them to go out and work”.

She says that, domestic workers are facing many problems; they are not given any paid leave or sick leave. Most of the times, after rigorous physical work, they suffer severe body pains. “I get sever back pain. I underwent a cesarean operation, may be because of that I often get sever back pain”, she adds. She said that it is Franchina Madam who introduced her to the



Domestic Workers Congress, gave her membership and recruited her to the union. When asked about her perception of the Union, she said, “We will not be able to get anything if we are alone. Being in a union will secure us health card and other provisions”. When asked about her familiarity with other trade unions, she said that she is a member of Ambedkar Sangham.

Susheela thinks that since she has been a Congress party worker the past 15 years and mobilizes voters for the party in her locality, INTUC leadership took her into the union and gave her responsibility as a group leader and later promoted her as Organizer. She adds, “If there is any problem in my area, like water problem, sanitation problem, or anything else, people complain to me”. When asked about what constitutes her strategy while recruiting workers to the Workers’ Congress, she says, “I tell them that being in union, we all can together struggle for our rights, pension, health card, and our situation will also be improve. Over a period of time, I was able to win the confidence of my fellow workers.” When asked about her husband’s response to her union activism, she responded, “What will he say? When things are meant for our own good, why should he have a problem?” She says further that the union helps many women like her to share experiences, personal problems, and work related issues and this gives them some courage and confidence to face things. She said that apart from what she mentioned, she cannot actually think much about the benefits of joining the union. She said that she attends KDWC meetings almost every month and that she likes being a part of the union. She says she has not observed any significant change in herself after joining the union. She adds, “I have been a Congress Party worker from the beginning and am also an active part of Ambedkar Sangham. In my locality, people listen to what I say. They come wherever I ask them to come. I don’t find any change in my work; I am working in the same way”.

When Susheela was asked a final question, whether she would let any of her family members to work as domestic labour, she responded by saying “no”.

Kavitha, Domestic worker

Kavitha is a twenty eight year old domestic worker who resides in Shrirampuram, Dayanad Nagar. She is married and she has four children. Her husband works on road construction as a daily wage labourer. She says, “I have no option other than working as domestic labour to lead a family of six members. We took debt to buy a house and we also borrowed money to perform marriage rituals. In the rainy season, my husband does not get to work since there isn't any road construction. Then the responsibility of running the family lies solely on me”. When asked about her work and about her employer, she said

“I have been working in the same house for the past 16 years. Apart from washing clothes, cleaning vessels, and sweeping and mopping the floor, I also make chapathi dough, iron clothes, and shop for groceries and vegetables. I don’t get paid holidays. If I take leave, they deduct money at the end of the month. Sometimes, if I say that I



am not well and unable to continue work for the day, they give me a tablet and ask me to have it then and there and continue working. Employers suspect us so much and supervise us continuously while we work. Because of continuous work I get body and back pain and since I have to stay in water for long, my feet often swell up and I often suffer from skin allergies.”

When Kavitha was asked about the Karnataka Domestic Workers Union, she said that she is a member and regularly attends meetings of the union. When asked if she faces any restriction from her family for her involvement in union activities, she says, “No, union is for our own betterment. Why will my husband object?” She also says that she wants to continue with the union and wants to recruit more fellow workers as union members. When asked why she was chosen as an Organizer, she said “I am familiar with the locality and the workers share their personal and work related experiences with us”.

When she was asked whether she encourages any of her family members to be a domestic worker in future, she said, “I have been working so hard and I will not let them work like me”.

Dhana Laxmi, Domestic worker

Dhana Lakshmi is a forty three year old domestic worker who resides in Shanthi Nagar colony. She belongs to an OBC family and has studied up to 10th standard. She is married and has two children. She decided to be a domestic worker as her husband’s income was not sufficient for running the family. When asked about her work, she said,

“People never consider that a domestic worker is also doing some work, and it is just like any other kind of work. Isn’t it the work like any other? If we are sick and don’t go for work for one day, work will be accumulated for the next day. No leave will be given by employer for sickness or for festival holidays. It is better to make an agreement with the employer at the time of joining work. We should demand for a specific number of leaves in a year or for festivals, or else we won’t be given a single paid holiday. If we work, we get money; if we don’t work then we have no money. If we put any conditions regarding leave and hike in wages, most of the time the employer simply say, 'if you want to work, you work or else we will get someone else'. Actually, there will be many workers who will be ready to work for a lesser amount than what we are getting paid now. Considering this, we cannot demand a hike in wages, even if it is a genuine demand. Fear of termination and of someone waiting to replace me makes me work without expressing any dissent. Some employers also terminate us on the pretext of being sufficiently neat and clean in performing the work.”

When asked about how she manages to work at her own home and at that of employer’s house, she said that it is definitely a burden. Working at home, sending children to school, sending husband to work, cooking at home, and cleaning and washing at both the places is a



double burden. “I am getting skin allergies because of excessive use of soaps.” Dhana Laxmi also talked about the excessive supervision and suspicion by her employer.

“They do say that we took the lost objects, without any evidence. They look at us suspiciously even if an under garment goes missing in their house...some employers bother us so much when we are working. They tell us make it fast, do it clean, not here, not there, all that. We have to put up with all that. If we say anything, we may face termination and there may be many people waiting to get into this work”.

Dhana Laxmi is a member of KDWC and has about 100 workers to the union. When asked about what the union meant for her, she said, “The union means paying some membership fee and all of us coming together and solving our issues. If the union is there, we can achieve pension, insurance, Welfare Board, etc.” When asked about what she understood from the various educational sessions given by INTUC, she said, “In those meetings it was discussed that domestic work should also be respected like any other work and that domestic workers also should be provided facilities like other workers”.

When asked about what she expected from the government to improve her life standards, she said, “Our work should be treated with respect. We should be given pension. The Minimum Wages Act should be implemented strictly. Health cards should be given to all of us. The government should constitute a Domestic Workers Welfare Board”. When asked whether she will encourage her children or any other family members to work as domestic worker, she said, “No, we are committing wrong by working as domestic worker, why should our kids undergo this humiliation”.

Franchina Thavamani, office bearer, Organizer of KDWC and INTUC activist

Franchina Thavamani is an office bearer of INTUC and an Organizer for the Domestic Workers’ Congress. She is a resident of Shrirampuram, Gandhi Nagar. She plays multiple roles and she is the perfect example of a woman with enormous capabilities and organizing skills. She is a trade union activist, religious activist, social worker, and is known for her activities in her neighborhood localities. When asked about the organizing strategies she used to enroll the workers, she said that campaigning about various government policies is an effective campaigning tool. Her job was made easy because of her diverse activities such as organizing pulse polio camps, church related activities, blood donation camps, and beauty parlours. These activities helped her to reach people with diverse needs and interests. She says that by joining the Workers’ Congress, domestic workers have become more confident and have developed loyalty towards INTUC. They think that only INTUC can provide solutions to their problems. Here she means to say that through organizing domestic workers, INTUC has also benefitted in winning their confidence and loyalty. She also says that it was domestic workers coverage under the RSBY that ensured them more membership enrolments than earlier. When she was asked about domestic workers who are



not members of the Congress, she said that they will further visit these workers' houses and convince them to take membership. Along with Muthaki, Franchina addresses the workers' gatherings at various localities in Bangalore city.

Muthaki Uthaiah, Chairperson, women's wing INTUC

Muthaki Uthaiah, INTUC Women's Wing Chairperson and working president for KDWC, has led KDWC from its inception. She played a crucial role from the beginning, i.e., from the inception of the Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress to its vibrant growth as a trade union with 7,000 membership. In the present case study, she acquires importance as a woman trade union leader as well one of the very first central trade union leaders in India to have organized domestic workers.

She faced several challenges in coordinating the day-to-day activities of the union as well directing women towards recruitments in their respective areas. Muthaki Uthaiah said, "It is the ILO which motivated us to organize domestic workers even prior to the Convention. The Convention on Domestic Workers gave us further strength to intensify our attempts to reach the most deprived workers of the society".

She said that prior to the pilot project there were no significant attempts made by either INTUC or any other central trade union to organize domestic workers. She added, "The vulnerable life standards of domestic workers and their invaluable contribution to national economic growth made us think and respond to the crisis. The Government could have taken up some measures to improve their life standards but it failed to do so. Now it's a good sign that unions are concentrating on domestic workers under the guidance of ILO."

When she asked about her very first move as an individual and INTUC's first move as a project implementing partner after it was decided in the INTUC Working Committee meetings to organize these informal and unorganized domestic workers, a smiling Muthaki responded,

"With regard to my very first individual move, I started with my domestic help. We two sat together and discussed at length and I recruited her to the union first. From there our journey of recruitments and awareness sessions started. One evening, after 6 p.m., she arranged a meeting of about 100 domestic workers and gradually we called for meetings in other localities where the relatives and friends of these workers resided. As a project implementing partner, we (the INTUC leadership) discussed about whom to approach at initial stages. The Organizers, who are working right now are the first people who were approached. We identified dynamic, strong, and socially committed women in the public domain whom we had met earlier on various other occasions. We called them to the INTUC office and discussed with them further. We explained to them the context and asked for their further participation".



Muthaki was critical about a perception that is prevalent in the Indian society, of viewing domestic work as only being a women's affair. She terms it as an Indian mentality. When asked about domestic workers being recruited through placement agencies she said, "There are several such agencies in this city, but in our process, we didn't come across any one. Since most of the workers recruited by placement agencies works as live-in workers, it is difficult to approach them. So far we have not approached them. We will try to do it in future."

When Muthaki was asked about what she thinks, as leader of a central trade union and as a resource person for KDWC, should be an immediate step to improve the working and living conditions of domestic workers, Muthaki said that at the national level, the government, trade union representatives, and representatives of employers of domestic workers should sit together and deliberate upon the situation. When Muthaki was asked about her statement on domestic workers contribution to the national economy and her arguments about domestic work not being considered as a productive and positive contribution to economy, she said that it should be considered as productive work and it should be made into respectable work. She further says, "In order to reduce the physical burden of domestic workers, households should observe preference for machinery, such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners and teach these women how to operate such machinery". She also added, "These women have never failed us or the domestic workers union. They have understood the essence of unionization over a period of time, their articulating skills have improved, and they have become effective carriers of information. Now they are aware of almost all the government policies. In fact, things went smooth since they are people who are already in the public domain".

When asked about the most successful strategy while approaching workers, she said that campaigning about various governments policies helped them in getting close to workers. "We also told them about the success story of construction workers.¹¹ We basically encouraged them to speak in gatherings and we listened to them. We consulted the Labour Minister and our consistent persuasion resulted in some positive developments in policy formulations". When Muthaki was asked about the challenges they encountered on the ground, she said, "In some places we were seen only as party people and they were hesitant about identifying with us. But when we made our mission clear, they slowly joined us. People are vexed with the false promises made by political parties. They have developed a cynicism and it is pretty hard to win their confidence. But we managed to do it". When asked about what should be the further measures to address the issues of domestic workers, she said, "The ILO should insist not only on ratification of Conventions, but also implementation". She expressed satisfaction about the support and guidance they received from ILO and said that other trade unions should also concentrate on organizing domestic workers.

¹¹ Construction workers in India are the first informal workers, organized and through a consistent struggle achieved construction workers welfare Board and got pension sanctioned.



Mr Shantha kumar, General Secretary INTUC Karnataka

At present, Shantha Kumar, General Secretary of INTUC for Karnataka, is acting as the President of Karnataka Domestic Workers' Congress (KDWC). He is involved with the day-to-day functioning of the union and also attends workers gatherings at various localities. Shantha Kumar says that it is important to have exact statistics of domestic workers. When asked about the difficulties involved in organizing, he says, "most of the time, workers look for short term benefits and tend to forget that things won't change overnight and that they will take their own course. It is difficult to organize workers for long term goals". He feels that constant persuasion of domestic workers under the leadership of KDWC has resulted in achieving certain benefits such as inclusion in the Social Security Bill and under the RSBY and Minimum Wages Act. When asked about the lack of funds which are hampering the functioning of the Social Security Board, Shantha Kumar came out with an interesting proposal. He says that irrespective of whether all the households in the locality will appoint domestic workers or not, there should be a 0.5 per cent or 1 per cent tax collection for a domestic workers social security fund from each and every household or locality, like garbage and water taxation by the government. This fund can be used for the welfare of domestic workers. Regarding the Domestic Workers Board proposed by KDWC, he says that the Board should have representation from trade union leadership, resident associations, and the government. He also feels that it is important to equip domestic workers with skills that can facilitate their professional functioning and help in reducing their burden. He is also of the opinion that workers should be taught how to use machinery while engaged in domestic work. Shantha Kumar added, "The project is an ILO-ACTRAV initiative and we are project implementing partners. We need to increase trade union membership and we would like to continue our efforts further, both for strengthening the union as well achieving better working and living conditions for the workers."

Response of Labour Department, Karnataka

Karnataka stands as the first, and one among the very few states, which has included domestic workers under the purview of the Minimum Wages Act. The Karnataka government fixed the minimum wages for the domestic workers in state in 2004 and revised the wage structure in 2011. Minimum wages were fixed on the basis of 8 hours of work per day. If the number of hours is less than 8, wages are to be calculated per day or per month accordingly. The general nature of work includes washing clothes, washing vessels, housekeeping, and looking after the children. Though guaranteeing minimum wages to domestic workers is a positive development at the policy level, there have been no attempts, either by the government or the trade unions, to bring this enactment to the notice of the larger public. Neither domestic workers nor their employers are aware of the applicability of the Minimum Wages Act to domestic workers. It must be understood that it is not only about framing and passing laws but about the enforcement and supervision over the implementation of these laws.



The Karnataka government also included domestic workers under the Unorganized Workers Social Security Board in 2009. Narsimha Murthy, Joint Labour Commissioner, Government of Karnataka says, “The social security board was given shape in 2009. We included workers from six sectors initially, now we have also included domestic workers as a seventh category. From now on, domestic workers can avail all the benefits granted through the Board”. This inclusion will allow domestic workers to avail certain educational and health facilities, such as insurance, health/medical insurance, ration cards, and pension plans. However the Board is not a self-sufficient body and lack of funds, which is a major constraint coming in the way of its functioning. In the words of Geetha Menon, “there is a lot of work yet to be done before enrollments can begin, which are a must to claim benefits. The Board is not a self-sustaining body and funds have not been released”.¹² The lack of funds and as yet non-operationalized Board reminds the trade unions and labour activists of the long journey ahead.

Narsimha Murthy points out that in order to secure those benefits, the identification of domestic workers should be done, but that itself is a very tough job. In his opinion, the foremost necessity is preparing a detailed and comprehensive statistical account of domestic workers in the state. This data will help in securing them benefits under various government provisions. As per the Labour Department of Karnataka, the expansion of the city and the increasing demand for domestic workers calls for the immediate attention. Anuradha, the Deputy Labour Commissioner, expressed contentment over extending the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)¹³ to domestic workers. She says that though the realization of a separate board for domestic workers may not be a possibility in the near future because of the lack of resources, but attempts are being made to grant pension to all the unorganized workers, with contribution from the beneficiary and a matching contribution from the government. She also mentioned about various other schemes intended for workers in the unorganized sector. Having mentioned about the various government provisions, Anuradha also says that the mere provisions will not secure justice for the unorganized workers, there should also be legislation to that effect.

Zinkalappa, Joint Labour Commissioner, describes the several practical difficulties involved in supervision by the Labour Department over the working conditions of domestic workers. He says that domestic workers constitute the most exploited class of present day's society. There is no job security and they face tough working conditions. “If we receive any

¹² Bageshree S, Longstanding demands of domestic workers fulfilled, They have been brought under social security Board, The Hindu, Bangalore, July 14th, 2011

¹³ Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana is a programme by Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India. It is basically intended to provide health care to unorganized sector workers. As per this scheme the unorganized sector worker and his family (unit of five) will be covered total sum insured would be Rs 30,000 per family per annum on a family floater basis. This is a center and state partnership project where 75 per cent of annual premium will be paid by center government and 25 per cent by state government. The workers have to pay Rs 30 for annum as registration or renewal fee.



complaint in this regard, first of all we have to inspect the house of the employer along with a female colleague. Even with the female colleague, it is not an easy task to enter private premises. With our inspection, the domestic worker may permanently lose her job". He also emphasized on domestic workers organizing themselves as a trade union. He says, "Organizing is important. Unless they organize their voices will not be heard". He also says that a union provides workers a platform. In his opinion, a separate Act is needed to address the concerns of domestic workers such as security at work place, regularization of work hours and paid leave. He further says, "Unless you bring an act, it is not possible to improve their conditions". While the Labour Department is positive about the certain new provisions created for the improvement of domestic workers life standards, they also acknowledge that whatever has been done so far is a minuscule effort and that there is a long way to go for the realization of the rights of this particular section of unorganized workers.



Un-organised Sector



12585

This is to certify that
Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress

Bangalore (Karnataka)

has been granted affiliation to the

Indian National Trade Union Congress

SURAMHEHNDRA

4 Bhairav Venkatesh Marg, New Delhi - 110 001

14th Feb, 2010

For Office: Dated: 26.02.2010

S. B. D. D. D.
Secretary



THE KARNATAKA DOMESTIC WORKERS CONGRESS

CONSTITUTION AND RULES

1. NAME AND ADDRESS:

- a) The name of the union shall be **Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress** and it shall be in the following rules referred to as Union.
- b) The office of the Union shall be at No.26/1, 2nd Main, 11th Cross Vyalikaval, Bangalore-560003 for time being. Any change of addresses shall be notified to the Deputy Registrar of Trade Unions within the stipulated time.

2. OBJECTS

The objects of the union shall be:

- a. To promote awareness among the workers about their legitimate rights and duties.
- b. To create a healthy spirit of fellowship and co-operation among workers.
- c. To secure redressed of workers grievances through representations and negotiations.
- d. To prevent all forms of child labour including domestic child labour.
- e. To promote education and literacy of worker's children.
- f. To inculcate habits of thrift and savings amongst workers.
- g. To equip and train workers for self-employment and to promote avenues for such employment.
- h. To promote education and cultural development of workers and their families through providing facilities for leisure such as reading rooms, libraries, recreation, sports, entertainment, cultural programmes.
- i. To promote the rights and privileges of all the members in all matter relating to their employment or otherwise.

1. Regulation of work

The union shall work to empower the men and women as workers and take measures to regulate their employment conditions which would include

- a. Fixing and regulating the hours of domestic work
- b. Fixing a weekly day off and other kinds of leave



- c. To take all necessary steps to notify domestic work under the schedule of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and to secure for all workers, minimum wages under the Act.
- d. To ensure the periodic revision of wages under the Act according to the Consumer price Index
- e. Act as a forum for grievance redressed in disputes arising between the employment.
- f. To provide legal assistance to workers in respect of all matters of dispute arising out of or incidental to their employment.
- g. Take all necessary measures the enactment of various statutes for the protection of unorganized works and for the effective setting up and functioning of the Board for Domestic workers under the statute.
- h. Take any other measures for the regulation of work

II. Social Security

The union shall work to promote social security and welfare measures which include:

- a. Fixing provident fund and retirement benefits
- b. Fixing the rates for festival bonuses.
- c. Instituting mechanism for accident and illness insurance
- d. To secure housing, education, health and other benefits conferred Government and other agencies
- e. To organize and render relief to the employees during sickness, unemployment, old age, accident and in the event of death to their successors and during the pendency of a dispute with the employer in accordance with the bye laws framed by the union from time to time.
- f. Taking any other appropriate social security or welfare measure.

III. Advocacy and lobbying

The union may take all appropriate measures to publicise issues affecting domestic workers and to negotiate and advocate with the Government to highlight the concerns of these workers and to regulate and improve their work conditions.



IV. Dissemination and sharing of knowledge and information

The union may publish newsletters and magazines in order to enable the sharing of knowledge and information about the rights of unorganized workers, developments in law and policy and of the rights of domestic workers.

V. Networking

The union shall network actively with other unions, both in the organized and unorganized sectors of employment, progressive peoples and women's groups and other like-minded groups with similar objectives.

3. ADMISSION OF THE ORDINARY MEMBERS:

Any person who is a domestic worker and who has attained the age of 16 years shall be entitled to become an ordinary member of the union provided s/he agrees to abide by the rules/ regulations/-bye-laws as may from time to time be framed by the union.

4.SUBSCRIPTION, FINE AND FORFEITURE OF MEMBER/MEMBERSHIP.

- a. Every member shall pay an entrance fee of Rs.5/- and an annual membership fee of Rs. 25/- which shall be compulsory and which shall be paid before 31st march each year.
- b. Failure on a member's part to pay the annual membership shall result in loss of membership. However, such member may be of membership due.
- c. Honorary Executive Members: Membership of outsiders who are not domestic workers shall be restricted to one-third of the total strength of the body or 5 members, whichever is less. Such members are to be referred as 'Honorary Executive Members' and shall be nominated by the Executive Committee.

5.FUNDS

The general funds of the Union shall consist of the subscription fees, donations, fines, contributions, grants etc. The General Fund shall be spent in accordance with the objects specified in Section 15 of the Indian Trade Union Act and regulations framed there under and shall not be spent on any other object but the following:

- a. payment of salaries, allowances, and expenses to the office-bearers of the union
- b. Payment of expenses of for the Union



- c. Prosecution or defense of any legal proceeding to which union or any member thereof is a party, when such prosecution or defense is undertaken for the purpose of securing or protecting any rights of the union or any member thereof.
- d. Conduct of trade disputes on behalf of the Union or any member thereof.
- e. Compensation of members for loss arising out of trade disputes
- f. Allowances to members or their dependants on account of death, sickness, old age accidents or unemployment of such members.
- g. Issue of undertaking of liability under policies of assurance on the lives of members or under policies insuring members against sickness, accident or unemployment.
- h. Provision of educational, social or religious benefits for members or their dependants including payment of expenses of funeral
- i. Upkeep of a periodical published mainly for the purpose of discussing questions affecting employment.
- j. Propagation and promotion all objects of the union, women and the working class in general.
- k. Apart from these, subject to any condition contained in a notification by the Government, any other object notified by the Government in its official gazette.
- l. payment in furtherance of any of the objects on which the General fund of the Union may be spent and contributions to any cause intended to benefit workers in general. Provided that the expenditure in respect of such contribution in any financial-year shall not at any time during that year, be in excess of one-fourth of the combined total of the gross income which has up to that period accrued to the general Funds of the union during that year and of the balance at the credit of these funds at the commencement of that year.

6.SAFE CUSTODY OF FUNDS AND ASSETS OF THE UNION

All bank documents such as cheque book, fixed deposit receipts and pass book and petty cash shall be kept in safe custody under lock and key in the registered office of the union. Similarly all fixed assets such as furniture shall also be in the registered office.



7.MAINTENANCE OF A LIST OF MEMBERS

A list of members shall be maintained in a Register of the membership of the Association. The Register shall contain the names of all the members of the Association with such other details that may be required

8.BENEFITS TO THE MEMBERS

No member of the Union shall be entitled to any benefits that the union may decide to give to its members unless he has been a member for at least six months and has paid all contributions.

9.MAINTENANCE OF OFFICE RECORDS

Register of members shall be open for inspection by any officer or member of the Association during office hours on any working day of the union. The Register shall be in the custody of the president or in his absence, the secretary. The Union shall maintain all records as prescribed under sec.-14 A of the Karnataka Trade Union Regulation, 1958, and the same shall be made available for inspection of any officer of the Department.

10.FINANCIAL YEAR

The financial Year of the union will be from the 1st of April to 31st March.

11.EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- a. The Executive committee shall hold office for only a term of three years. The Executive committee of the union, which shall consist of the following members who shall carry out the day-to-day management of the union.

1	Advisor
2	Honorary President
3	President
4	Vice President
5	Vice President
6	General Secretary
7	Secretary
8	Secretary
9	Joint Secretary
10	Joint Secretary
11	Organising Secretary
12	Organising Secretary
13	Treasurer
14	20 Executive Committee Members



- b. Membership of outsiders, who are not domestic workers, shall be restricted to one-third of the total strength of the body or 5 members, whichever is less. Such members shall be nominated by the Executive Committee.
- c. Executive Committee Members shall be 20 Nos.
- d. A member of the Executive Committee shall have completed at least 18 years of age and shall not have been convicted in any court of law.
- e. A member shall be eligible for re-election but shall however, hold office for more than two terms continuously.
- f. Only domestic workers shall be eligible for elections to posts in the Executive Committee.
- g. Any casual vacancies in the Executive Committee including the office Bearers occurring between the general election shall be filled by the Executive Committee and such members shall hold office till the next election is held.

12.EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a month and may meet often as necessary for the purpose of management of the union. The quorum for a meeting of the Executive Committee shall be half of the strength of the Body. On receipt of a requisition from one-third of the committee, the President shall convene a special meeting of the committee within ten days of the receipt of the notice. However, if there is less than the quorum, the meeting shall stand adjourned and the members shall be duly notified the next meeting.

Generally 3 days notice shall be given with agenda for a meeting of the Executive Committee. However, urgent meetings of the Committee may be called at 24 hours notice. The notice shall specify the subjects to be discussed.

13.GENERAL BODY MEETING

- a. All members of the union constitute the General Body.
- b. The General Body of the Union shall meet at least once in a year for its Annual General Meeting.
- c. The Annual General Meeting. Of the union shall be held at the end of the financial year and in no event later than six months following the end of the financial year which would be from 1st April to 31st March. The audited statement of accounts shall be presented at this meeting and the



income and expenditure account and the balance sheet of the union shall be approved at this meeting.

- d. The General body of the Union shall elect a president, a General Secretary, Vice President, two Joint Secretaries and Treasurer as office-bearers of the union at the Annual General Meeting of the union.
- e. Special meetings of the General Body shall be convened by the President on his accord, or on a requisition signed by not less than one fourth of the members of the union, to consider any specific any agenda. In the absence of the President, or in the event of refusing to convene the meeting, the General Secretary shall convene the Annual General Meeting or Special Meeting of the General Body.
- f. Ordinarily 21 days notice shall be given for an ordinary or special meeting of the General Body. The notice shall specify the subject to be discussed.
- g. The Quorum for such meetings shall be at least one third of the strength of the Body. Resolutions shall ordinarily be passed by simple majority of members present and voting.

14.FUNCTIONS OF OFFICE BEARERS

1. The President

The President, and in her absence, the Secretary shall Preside over the meetings of the union. The President shall supervise and monitor the work of the union in consonance with the objectives of the union.

2. Vice- President

The vice – President shall assist the President in all her work and preside over all meetings in the absence of the President. She shall also take decisions on behalf of the President in her absence.

3. General Secretary

The Secretary shall conduct the day-to-day work of the union, transact all official business, maintain minutes of meetings and all records pertaining to the union and shall implement decisions of the Executive Committee.

4. Joint Secretary

The Joint Secretaries shall assist the General S Secretary in all her work and shall act for her in her absence and whenever necessary, the Executive Committee also specifically assign duties among the General Secretary and Joint Secretaries.



5. Treasurer

The Treasurer shall maintain the accounts of the union for all the money received and spent along with duly signed receipts and vouchers. She shall open an account within a bank or society selected by the Executive Committee and deposit in the bank or society, all the monies received. The account shall be operated upon jointly by two signatories- president and Treasurer or Secretary and Treasurer, as authorized by the Executive Committee. All expenditure on behalf of the union shall be authorized by the Executive Committee and shall be paid as far as possible, by cheque. The Executive Committee may authorize an impress advance not exceeding five hundred rupees to be kept with the Secretary for emergency expenses. An account of this amount should be submitted to the Executive Committee during the forthcoming meeting.

6. Absence from three consecutive meetings of the Executive Committee by any member shall result in her removal from office.

15. STRIKE

No member/s of the union shall go on strike except on the basis of a resolution passed by the Executive Committee. At a meeting held specifically for that purpose. Any member/s who act/s in derogation to this rule shall be subject to disciplinary action by the General Body of the Union.

16. REMOVAL

The General body of the union may remove any member including an Executive Committee member who acts against the interest of the union by a simple majority resolution. Any member who is removed from the membership of the union to reconsider the decision.

17. ANNUAL AUDIT

The audit of the union consisting of the preparation of trial balance, income and expenditure account and balance sheet shall be carried out by certified chartered accounts on payment of fees. The audit shall be completed with a month of the close of the financial year.

18. AMENDMENTS

No amendment, alteration or addition in respect of any of the provisions of the constitution shall be carried out unless it has been ratified by two-thirds of members president and voting at a meeting and the proposed amendments should have been mentioned in the agenda circulated prior to the meeting. Amendments may be made through resolutions passed by simple majority.



19.FORMATION OF SUB-COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee may appoint one or more sub committee for specific purpose.

20.RESIGNATION

For any reasons if the president, Vice President, Joint Secretaries or Treasurer wish to tender resignation from their respective posts, they shall submit the same to the General Secretary. The General Secretary shall submit resignation to the president. The resignations shall be placed before the Executive Committee for its decision.

21.SOURCES OF INCOME

The union would mobilize income through admission and membership subscription, contribution and donation, grants from organizations, government grants and schemes and through any other sources as may be determined by the Executive Body from time to time.

22.RULES AND REGULATIONS

The Executive Body may from time to time, frame rules and regulation to carry out the objects of the union and to manage its activities. These rules shall be approved and amended if necessary from time to time, General Body of the union.

23.INTERPRATATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

In the event of a conflict of opinion between the interpretation of the Kannada and English versions of the Constitution, the interpretation based on the Kannada version shall prevail.

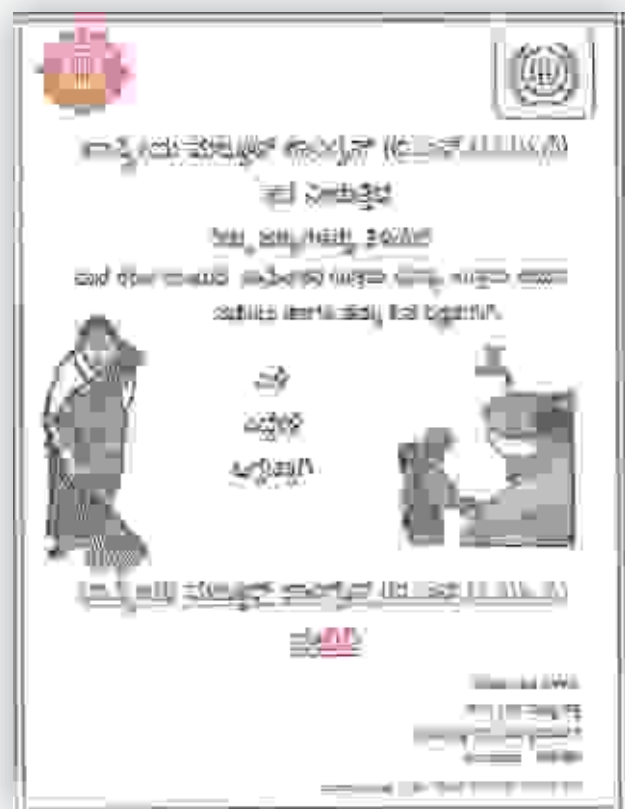
24.MAINTENANCE OF RECORDS AND BOOKS

The General Secretary of the union shall maintain a membership register, an income and expenditure register and a minute book with a record of all meetings in the Register office of the union which shall be open from 1-5 pm.

25.DISPUTES

Any dispute arising between employer and employee shall be referred to a Grievance Redressed Committee comprising of at least 3 members of the Executive Body and 3 members of the General Body. This shall not preclude the jurisdiction of the civil court.





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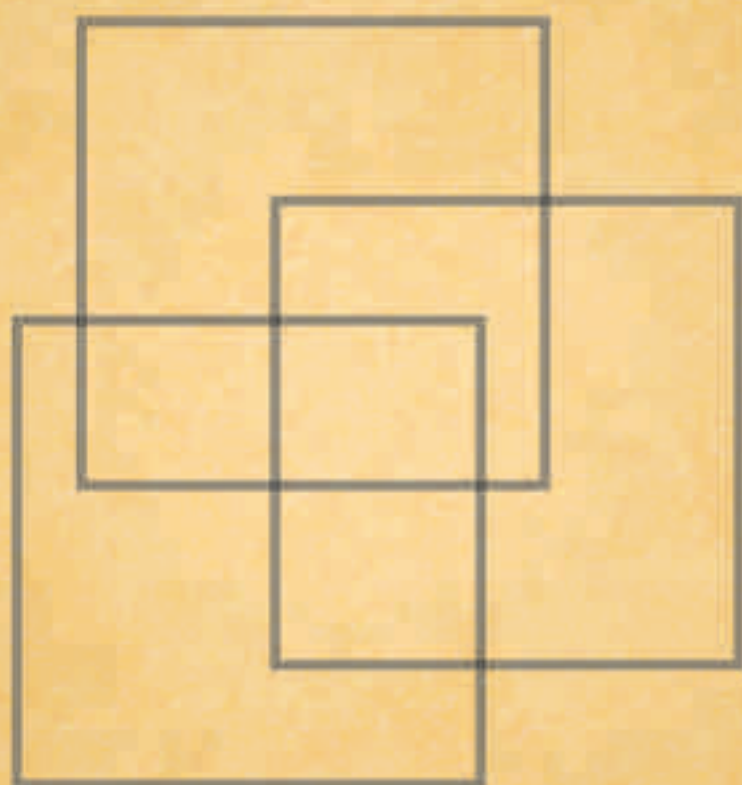
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