CHAPTER: 4
ORGANISING THE UNORGANISED

The advent of globalization since 1991 ushered in a phase of informalisation and feminization of workforce across the spectrum of developing economies. For India, the organized and protected workforce was always a miniscule minority and the large unorganized workforce remained outside the labour protection that law offered to the organized workforce. In addition to absence of legal protection, unorganized workers also were bereft of any support from trade union thus lacking any collective voice. However, in the last decade and a half, the collective conscience of unorganized workforce began to manifest itself in the form of informal workers associations taking various shapes, adopting novel strategies and engaging with the state rather than with the employers for their demands. The issues that these collective entities raise include social security demands, work and livelihood protection and dignity for their work. The movement has been described as ‘organising the unorganised’

This chapter aims to look at the process of ‘organising the unorganised’ with specific reference to domestic workers organizing. The chapter is organized as follows

Section 4.1 gives an overview of informal sector workers and their organising efforts. It traces the history of organizing the unorganized workers with various models of organizing. It also covers discussion on benefits of organizing, challenge of organizing and organizing women workers in the informal economy.

Section 4.2 elaborates on the organizing of domestic workers at international, regional and national level.
Section 4.3 presents a discussion of domestic workers organizing in India.
Section 4.4 describes the organizing experience of domestic workers in Pune city.

4.1: Informal Workers
In India the term ‘unorganised sector’ is used to denote the employment and production activities in the enterprises that employ less than 10 workers. Internationally, the term informal sector and later informal employment have been used to indicate absence of regulation and protection to the workforce employed in this sector. Conceptually, the term informal employment also includes those who are informally employed within the formal sector. Thus, the nature of employment relationship and the extent of legal coverage are the key elements in identifying and measuring informal employment. As the informally employed workforce is not identified as ‘worker’ by the law, such workforce also remains largely outside the realms of organizing, representation and voice through trade unions which remains a privilege enjoyed by the formal workforce.

4.1.1 Extent of Informal Employment in India
The database\(^1\) compiled by ILO and WIEGO on informal employment indicates that in 2009-10, 83.6 % of total non agricultural employment in India was in the informal employment category. The burgeoning size of the informally employed workforce also reflects upon the increasing incidence of vulnerability of this workforce and underlines the need to address those. One of the ways in which the gaps in legal

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see also http://laborsta.ilo.org/informal_economy_E.html accessed 9/6/2014
protection can be identified and made visible to society and policy makers is by organizing the workers into their representative organizations. While the form of these organization may be diverse, they can work as the voice of these workers and become partners in the movement to realize decent work. Organizing and creating responsive organizations makes critical contribution to the economic, social and personal empowerment of the workers. The growing size of the informal work force also has implications for traditional trade union movement which is facing a thinning membership. As Gallin (2001) puts it, informal sector is here to stay and it is growing. Any serious effort at organizing would be futile if it excludes the vast majority of workers earning their livelihood in the informal economy.

4.1.2 Organising the Unorganised
Organising the unorganized is a movement that seeks to mobilize the informally employed workers into their representative organizations for the purpose of improving their work conditions, overcoming the sector specific challenges and negotiating with employers or governments.

4.1.2. A: Various Models and Forms of organising the unorganised
While discussing the forms or structures of labour organizations organizing the informal workers, there is a common perception that there is no fixed structure that fits all. Sundaram (2000) has noted several forms of labour organizations active in organizing informal workers. Some of the forms are trade unions, NGOs, associations, cooperatives and labour boards. He also observed that the trade unions have been most effective in mobilizing the workers, but they have not been able to address
the issues and concerns of some workers like hawkers. This indicates that some organizational form may be better suited for certain category of workers to address the issues and problems facing the informal workers.

**Bonner and Spooner (2011)** reflect a similar view suggesting that there is no single appropriate organizational form, approach or strategy; In fact, a range of organizational forms and a multi-faceted approach is required. A strategic and tactical alliances among the range of organizations representing informal workers will increase their visibility and voice.

**Mather (2012)** has highlighted certain key factors the shape the labour organizations in the informal sector. Among these, an important factor is the employment status- wage employment or self employment. The economic demands of these groups are varied and therefore, the effective form of their organization also differs. Other factors influencing the forms of organizations of informal workers are- political contexts, gender considerations, and leadership that moulds the movement.

**Ahn Pong-Sul and Yeonju Ahn (2012)** have elaborated on the variety of organising models or showcases that may be followed in the informal sector organising. These include the cooperative model, the study circle model, Self Help Group model, welfare aid model, organizing based on vocational training among others that are followed by trade unions while organizing the unorganized workers. They conclude that there is no single formula for organising informal workers.

4.1.2. B: History of organizing the unorganized

According to **Gallin (2011)** the history of organizing the unorganized workers can be traced back to 18th century Europe at the beginning of industrial revolution when all the workers
were informal and they organized themselves to earn their rights as workers through mutual aid and solidarity. Subsequently they became formal workers as a part of industrialized economy and were represented by their unions. The phenomenon of rising informal employment in the last two decades has created a huge mass of informal labour that is not formally represented by unions. The trend of organizing among these informal workers is known as organizing the unorganized. A recent history of organizing informal workers internationally is presented by WIEGO\(^2\).

**1970s**

The formation of Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) as a first trade union of informal workers in India in 1972 represents the beginning of a new era organizing the unorganized.

**1980s**

- SEWA gained affiliation to the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IUF) in 1983.
- In 1988 the regional Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO) held its first Congress, a representation of domestic workers in that region.
- In this period waste pickers also began organizing into cooperatives in Latin America.

**1990s**

- Organising movement of Home-based workers came to the fore in the 1990s, with the setting up HomeNet International

\(^2\) Available at http://wiego.org/informal-economy/informal-workers-organizing-internationally

Accessed 5/2/2013
(1994) and a successful campaign for an ILO Convention on Homework (C177), which was adopted in 1996.

- Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organising (WIEGO) was established in 1997 as an international research network that grew out of collaboration between the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIIV) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

- WIEGO is concerned with advancing the interests of women in the informal economy through research, action programs and policies. It includes women workers’ organizations such as HomeNet and StreetNet International, or national unions, such as SEWA.

- WIEGO has five program areas: urban policies; global markets; social protection; and organization and representation. WIEGO works with membership-based organizations of workers in the informal economy to strengthen organizing capacity and to increase the visibility and voice of women in the informal economy. WIEGO also works with international trade union organizations and tries to put informal sector workers on the agenda of governments and international organizations.

- WIEGO organizations—particularly SEWA and HomeNet—have worked closely with the international trade union movement in securing the adoption of the ILO Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177).

- Initially an informal network, WIEGO now has a constitution and provisions for formal membership. Its Steering Committee includes representatives from membership-based organizations, research or academic institutions and international development institutions.
• Street vendors held their first international conference in 1995, and in 2000 the StreetNet Association was formed, paving the way for the launch of StreetNet International in 2002.
• Waste pickers in Latin America were also actively organizing into cooperatives throughout the 1990s.

2000s
• HomeNet South Asia was founded in 2000 following a successful regional dialogue with employers and governments leading to the Kathmandu Declaration.
• In 2002, the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted a Resolution and Conclusions on Decent Work and the Informal Economy, which recognized informal workers – both wage earners and own account workers – as workers with the same rights to decent work as other workers.
• In Latin America, the Latin American Waste Pickers Network was founded in 2004.
• In 2006, domestic workers came together internationally to form their own international network, the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN) which successfully campaigned for ILO convention on domestic workers.
• The first World Conference of Waste Pickers took place in 2008, resulting in ongoing global networking.

2010s:
• The visibility, representation and voices of the informal workers represented by the national and international organizations continued to grow throughout the decade of 2010.
• In 2009, 2010, and 2011 waste pickers set out their demands at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conferences.
• In 2011 domestic workers won a major victory when the ILC adopted an ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.

4.1.2. C: Benefits of Organising
Organizing the informal workers is likely to bring the following benefits to the workers-
• increases their earnings and create more favourable and more secure working conditions for them
• helps workers with limited means to pool resources, thereby increasing their economic power.
• helps informal workers to access services and systems of social protection such as health care and pensions.
• increases the visibility and voice of the workers and creates validation of their demands
• rallies support from society and from the government and mobilize assistance for the workers.
• gains representation in local, national and international policy-making forums thereby affect changes in policy and law.
• raises the “worker consciousness” of the informal sector workers through raising awareness, education, advocacy, vocational training, campaigning, and networking.

4.1.2. D: Challenges in Organising the Unorganised
Organising the informal workforce is fraught with extreme difficulties that seldom appear in organizing formal workforce. Following are the reasons why organising in the informal economy remain an uphill task.
• **Challenges in mobilizing the workers**
  - absence of single or definite employer,
  - difficulties in approaching the workers at their unconventional, scattered, and often unapproachable workplaces like a private household,
  - worker’s unresponsiveness since he/she is burdened with the more important task of survival,
  - Lack of ‘workers consciousness’ as many workers especially women workers do not regard their work as ‘work’ or themselves as ‘workers’ e.g. domestic workers

• **Legislative Challenges**
  As the informal labour is a legislative blind spot, the procedures for representing informal workers are not in place putting a legal challenge before the organizing movement.

• **Internal Challenges**
  Within the organizations, leadership issues, deficits in finances and manpower, constraints on research and data gathering pose important challenges to these organizations.

  According to RoyChowdhury (2003), the central challenge faced by new unions is that of organising those who have hitherto been unorganised, and to define, as political, issues that so far have not been considered to be so.

4.1.2. E: Organising women workers

Women form a significant share in the informal employment. According to the ILO – WIEGO dataset, women form 84.7% of the non agricultural informal employment in India. Further, women are invariably assigned the low paid, low profile work that undervalues her labour. For Gallin and Horn (2005), women's unequal status on the labor market and their concentration in the most precarious jobs is linked to the persistence of patriarchal power relationships in society and the
paternalist ideology of a gender-based division of labor. Some of the sectors like domestic work are actually seen as extension of women’s work inside home and is hardly counted as “work”. Therefore, the organizing effort for women employed in informal sector has to begin with the attempt at making the women’s work count.

Gailin (2011) argues that the process of negotiating and achieving labour rights by the trade unions in the beginning of Industrial revolution contributed to creating a formal and regulated class of workers which was a male dominated sector as the unionism failed to take into account gender considerations. Nonetheless, informal women workers organized themselves without the support from the formal trade unions and sometimes against them. Some successful models of informal women workers organizing include SEWA in India, rice field workers (mondines) in Italy and cooks in Bolivia. The literature (Gailin and Pat Horn 2005, Gallin 2011) also focuses on the issues such as -

• the necessity of having ‘women only’ organizations sometimes by breaking away from the existing male dominated parent institution,
• treating women’s issues with priority and sensitivity,
• the imperatives of women leadership.

While all the benefits of organizing outlined in the earlier subsection are applicable to women workers also, there is an innate benefit of organizing that comes to women. “... the organization of women workers in the informal economy into unions is an act of self-empowerment both as workers and as women”.3

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As Chen et al (2005) put it, “organizing can address the many limitations that poverty imposes on these workers, including a lack of knowledge about the outside world and how it works. For women workers engaged in informal economy, whose world has been confined to home, family and work, the very act of joining an organization adds breadth to their lives. When women actively participate in an organization, or take on leadership roles, their self-confidence, knowledge and understanding of the world generally increases and they gain new skills.”

Moghe (2013) has noted that “....the consciousness generated by a trade union, if dovetailed with gender consciousness, can create a large section of politically aware women workers who will not merely participate in but also initiate struggles for change.”

4.2: Organising Domestic workers –
In the context of organizing the informal workers, domestic work remains a critical sector for organizing, considering that it is predominantly female, invisible employment sector with large decent work deficits.
In the recent past, mobilizing domestic workers into their representative organisations has gathered momentum at the international, national and local level.

4.2.1 Organising Domestic Workers at the International level-
• Amsterdam Conference (2006)
An action conference of domestic/household workers’ organisations, trade unions and support NGOs was held in

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5 Moghe (2013) “Organising Domestic Workers in Pune City” Economic & Political Weekly Vol XLVIII no 43; pp 68
Amsterdam, at the headquarters of the FNV trade union federation of the Netherlands on 8-10 November 2006. The report of the conference (IRENE, IUF 2008) firmly put forward the demand of the domestic workers worldwide for Decent Work and also highlighted the need for international collaboration of organizations of domestic workers to campaign for adoption of international labour standards on domestic work.

A milestone in international organizing of domestic workers was reached when the International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) was formed in 2009 with the objective of pursuing for ILO convention which was put on agenda and was expected to come up for adoption in 2011.

• **The International Domestic Workers' Network IDWN- (2009)**

  The International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN) is made up of domestic workers' organizations and other trade unions around the world. Its steering committee comprises representatives from domestic workers' organizations, and it is provided with an organizational base by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF). It is also supported by Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

  In 2009, The IDWN was launched as a special, self-funded project in the Global Union Federation (IUF) and since then, it has been actively participating in the ILO process to realize an ILO convention for domestic workers by coordinating campaigns of domestic workers at various levels.

  In 2013, IDWN transformed itself into a Federation (IDWF). Its objectives and functions include-
• Lead and monitor the campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention for domestic workers (C189), its implementation and to report complaints to the ILO.
• Raise awareness in each region of the situation of domestic workers and increase the visibility of the network of domestic workers.
• Participate in international forums and influence international policies in e.g. UN Women, ILO, ITUC, etc.
• Build strong trade union solidarity in all countries, and form alliances with social justice and labour movements.
• Empower domestic workers as leaders.
• Provide a platform for exchange and to facilitate constant communication amongst members.
• Expand the membership of the network so it can be wider and stronger.
• Share and exchange to learn from one another and to develop educators and trainers.

4.2.2 Organising Domestic Workers at the Regional Level
• The Asian Domestic Workers Network (ADWN) –
The Asian Domestic Workers Network (ADWN) was officially formed in the year 2005 as an outcome of an Exchange workshop of Asian Domestic Workers in Hong Kong in 2004, organised by Committee for Asian Women (CAW). The Committee for Asian Women also acts as the secretariat and advisory member of the ADWN. The network comprises of local adult domestic workers organisations/unions and support NGOs from South Asia, East Asia and South East Asia who are mostly domestic workers organisations including societies, trade unions and NGOs. ADWN membership has two categories: regular and associate.
The mission of ADWN is to:

- Support self-organising efforts of local adult domestic workers in Asia by providing assistance to member organisations in strengthening their formations and in sustaining their initiatives.
- Advocate the policies and programs for domestic workers, in local and international levels.
- Mobilise the support of different social partners and stakeholders, both in the local and regional levels, for the cause of domestic workers.

The strategies employed by ADWN towards achieving dignity, respect, recognition and labour rights for domestic workers include:

- Strengthening the capacity, skills and knowledge of member organizations, supporting campaigns and advocacy activities of domestic workers’ organizations;
- Networking with other domestic workers organisations in Asia, adding more social partners and stakeholders to the cause of domestic workers; and
- Building alliances with other social movements.

**Asia Migrant Domestic Workers’ Alliance (ADWA)**

In 2008, the Asia Migrant Domestic Workers’ Alliance (ADWA) was formed for migrant domestic workers with its secretariat based in the Migrant Forum in Asia (MFA). The formation was led by a coalition of NGOs operating in the region together with the Alliance of Progressive Labour (Philippines). It is described as a joint Asian regional platform to promote the rights, welfare and empowerment of migrant domestic workers.
• **Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO)**

The Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers (CONLACTRAHO) was founded in Bogota, Colombia, on 30 March 1988. It has member organizations from 13 countries, plus Canada and an organization of migrant workers in Europe. The organization is committed to promoting law reform to achieve equal rights and respect for recent legislative reforms in member States, notably Bolivia, Brazil and Peru. CONLACTRAHO also promotes cooperation with trade unions, including support for political training and lobbying for law reform. Some member unions are engaged in cross-border organizing, including collaboration with organizations in the Dominican Republic, a major migration-sending country.

• **Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers (FADWU)**

The Hong Kong Federation of Asian Domestic Workers (FADWU) was founded in November 2010. It represents domestic workers from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Nepal. The federation has joined the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU). In Hong Kong, domestic workers are 300,000 strong, and comprise almost 9% of the population.

4.2.3. Organising Domestic workers: Country experiences

• **Brazil**

In Brazil, the first organization of domestic workers was formed in 1936 in Sao Paulo, and since 1988 article 7 of the Constitution has provided protection for their right to do so. Some of the associations founded in the 1960s have

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6 This section is based on ILO (2010) “Decent work for Domestic Workers” Report IV (1)
transformed themselves into trade unions, such as the Domestic Workers’ Trade Union of the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro (STDRJ). The main organization, the National Federation of Domestic Workers (FENATRAD), was founded in 1997 and has 35 union affiliations. It promotes the visibility of domestic work under the banner “Respect begins at home”. The STDRJ plays a major role in raising domestic workers’ awareness of their rights and facilitating their access to justice and supporting domestic workers through the dispute resolution process.

- Peru

In Peru, associations of domestic workers have banded together with trade unions, women’s groups and a range of support centres to protest against the Household Workers Act, which institutionalizes discrimination against domestic workers by according them less favourable rights than other workers. The campaign was led by the Centre for Household Workers’ Capacity Building under the slogan, “We are the exception to labour rights”. The Centre also assisted in the founding of the National Union of Household Workers in October 2006.

- Trinidad and Tobago

The National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) was founded as a section of the Shipbuilders and Ship Workers’ Allied Union (SSAU) in 1974 and was registered as a union in its own right under the Trade Union Ordinance in 1982. The union identifies the linkages between international engagement and local activism. NUDE has successfully lobbied for passage of the Unremunerated Work Act, 1995, which legislation committed the state to measure and value unpaid work in national statistics. In 1999, the Union won the right for domestic workers to bring minimum wage disputes to the Industrial Court.
• **Kenya**
The case of the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotel, Education Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers” Union (KUDHEIHA), which was registered as trade union in 1958, represents a case of union linked organization with a supportive and proactive male leadership. With the help of initiatives from various international trade unions, the KUDHEIHA was able to revive the organization and increase the membership from 10 in 2008 to 10500 in 2009.

• **South Africa**
The domestic workers organising efforts in South Africa can be traced back to 1955 when The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was established. In 1986, the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) was formed which began more progressive efforts to unionize domestic workers and organise against apartheid. In 1998, this organization the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) had to fold because of financial constraints. The South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers’ Union (SADSAWU) was established in 2000 and has 25,000 strong membership. In 2006, SADSAWU participated with other domestic worker unions and allies in the first domestic workers international conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands and participated in lobbying efforts for an ILO instrument for decent work for domestic workers. In 2010, SADSAWU representatives were involved in negotiations concerning domestic workers’ rights at the 99th International Labour Conference. Some of the successful campaigns of SADSAWU include campaigns for living wage and skill development for domestic workers and prevention of exploitation by recruitment agencies, sexual harassment at
work. The challenges before the organization are- ensuring that domestic workers are educated in their rights and enjoy these rights and they are given the freedom to inform their employer of their desire to join the union as well as to guarantee the universal recognition of domestic work as a valuable workforce in the modern economy.

4.3: Organising Domestic workers in India

4.3.1 The efforts at the organization of domestic workers into unions and other membership based organizations are traced below.

- **Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)**
  SEWA movement can be termed as the pioneering movement of informal women workers and self employed women which has domestic workers organizing under its umbrella. SEWA Delhi has successfully organized more than 2000 domestic workers who are benefiting from various programme of the organisation such as the microfinance, capacity building programme and linkage with social security schemes of the government. SEWA Delhi runs campaigns for domestic workers which aims at making them aware of their rights and enabling them to organize for collective strength.
  SEWA Kerala was registered in 1986 and its members affiliated to the National SEWA Trade Union in 1990. Subsequently, it was registered as a trade union in Kerala in 2008. The main objective of organizing domestic workers was to retain their identity as workers and their visibility as a part of the workforce so that they would get their rights. Another theme was to professionalise domestic services such as caring for the sick and old, assisting in the post-natal care of women and looking after

[^7]: [http://www.sadsawu.com/history.html](http://www.sadsawu.com/history.html) accessed 17/12/13
babies and children. The short training courses, better wage rates, rules for employment, uniforms and badges were some of the elements of professionalizing the domestic work. Solidarity among the workers and nurturing their worker and feminist conscience were the motivational factors behind the movement. Over the years, SEWA Kerala has started Provident Fund with contributions from workers and employers and insurance schemes for workers. In its efforts to ensure legal protection for domestic workers, SEWA Kerala has submitted a draft bill to the state government. (Nayak, 2010)

- **National Domestic Workers’ Movement (NDWM)**
  The National Domestic Workers’ Movement has been involved with domestic workers, children in domestic work and migrant domestic workers. Started with 23 groups in Dindigal (Tamil Nadu) in 1984, NDWM is now working across 17 states of India. The three main planks of the movement are - dignity of domestic work, a rights-based approach and empowerment.
  NDWM adopts an area-wise organizing wherein small groups, with a group leader, are formed in a locality. These groups organise themselves around issues ranging from ration cards, water, to right to information. The issues are resolved through discussion and then collaboration. These groups, bound by feelings of solidarity meet on a regular basis. Importantly, the leadership comes from within the groups despite lack of education or formal schooling.
  NDWM also undertakes capacity building programmes among the groups like developing leadership skills, public speaking, rights on health, educating their own children and ban on child labour. NDWM has successfully run the following campaigns- ban of child labour in domestic work, an anti-trafficking campaign and a media campaign through billboards, posters, TV
and radio to spread awareness that domestic work is work. (Devos, 2010)

- **Bangalore Stree Jagriti Samiti-**

  Stree Jagruti Samiti (SJS) is a mass organisation in Bangalore that emerged in the 1980s, set up the Domestic Workers Rights Union in 2006. The movement aims at spreading awareness to organizing workers, increasing their bargaining power and achieving decent work. The movement has attempted unconventional organizing models using symbolic politics in order to bring visibility to domestic workers’ issues. The organization has been able to create a sense of dignity, assertiveness and pride in their work among the domestic workers. The organization has also proposed a wage rate card for domestic workers. (Menon, 2010)

- **Nirmala Niketan**

  Nirmala Niketan, which trains and places tribal girls in Delhi, was formed in 1998 by the tribal girls of Jharkhand, working as full-time, in-house domestic workers in Delhi. Nirmala Niketan is a part of the Apna Nirman Mazdoor Co-operative Society Ltd., a registered cooperative society of construction workers, and an active partner of the National Campaign Committee for Unorganised Sector Workers (NCC-USW). The Nirmala Niketan experience has opened up the possibility of developing placement work on a cooperative basis and eliminating the vulnerabilities and victimization of tribal domestic workers. (Bhatnagar, 2010)

- **Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union**

  The Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union was registered in June 2008. The union runs a drop in centre near the residential area
of the domestic workers. The union handles cases of accusations of theft, domestic violence and sexual harassment in public spaces with the local police stations. The discussions and interactions at the union create confidence among the domestic workers enabling them to make legitimate demands regarding wages, increments and leaves. The union members receive information about the welfare policies of the state government such as old age pension for the members as also assistance in applying for such schemes. Regular capacity building sessions are held to provide the members an opportunity to discuss a issues such as gender, health, domestic violence and violence at the workplace. (Bharati, 2010)

• **Parichiti**

Parichiti is an organisation working for the welfare of domestic workers in Kolkata and aims at asserting their identities and rights. The organisation mobilizes domestic workers through meetings at railway stations. Information dissemination is an integral part of these interactions. It also runs a drop-in centre, where domestic workers can come to relax, rest and exchange information about prospective jobs, education of children and confronting/negotiating with employers. Parichiti staff members also hold discussions with domestic workers about work-related issues, transport problems, personal issues and information on government schemes. Parichiti also engages with the local law and police authorities while addressing the issues of violence at home or work place. It supports victims -survivors of violence through securing justice from courts, arranging schooling or jobs, and finding shelter. (Ghatak, 2010)
• **National Domestic Workers’ Union**

National Domestic Workers’ Union (NDWU) has been mobilising domestic workers around the issues of housing, employment and public transportation. The identity cards issued to the workers by the union have empowered the workers. They feel connected to a larger group with a distinct collective identity, which gives the workers a legitimacy to settle disputes with their employers on respectable terms. (Rajendra Ravi, Sunita, 2010)

• **Astitva**

Astitva is a community based, working women’s organisation in Dehradun working mainly with migrant domestic workers and their children in southwest Dehradun. *Astitva works for* proper wages under reasonable work conditions, access to support services such as crèches, clinics and legal aid, ensuring gender equality in homes and communities, awareness building and rights advocacy. It has successfully organized women, ensured their job placements and established an employers’ support group. (Kirbat, 2010)

• **Vidarbha Molkarin Sanghatana—**

The Vidarbha Molkarin Sanghatana (VMS) was formed out of the efforts of domestic workers with the demand such as annual increment, one weekly-off, bonus and festival gifts, medical aid and medical leave, and recognition as a worker i.e. the inclusion of domestic work in the list of scheduled employments. As the VMS was born out of the collective efforts of the domestic workers themselves, self organizing through agitations, demonstrations and rallies remains a dominant strategy. VMS has provided the domestic workers with the strength as workers, thereby enhancing the value of their work. Empowered through the movement, domestic workers are now capable of
solving general problems of their slum settlements reflecting a new leadership of working class women emerging through VMS. (Kulkarni Rupa, 2010)

4.3.2 Mainstream Unions and Organising Domestic workers in India

- **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)**
  AITUC has successfully formed unions of domestic workers in various states. One of the AITUC initiative has been to encourage the unionised employees from the middle class unions (banks, LIC, oil, coal and other public sector), committed to the Left unions, to come forward in helping the domestic workers to get organised. Such initiatives have already begun in Maharasthra. Middle-class employees, who are better placed, and also understand the strength and need of unions, can contribute in a better way for the well-being of the domestic workers. They, by paying the domestic workers decent salary, allowing them freedom to form unions and making them realise the need for being unionised, can serve as the model employers for domestic workers. According to the AITUC strategy, the demands of the domestic workers concerning ration cards, education of their children and their social security needs must be addressed through government action. Government action in this regard will also reduce the resistance from employers. Further, the AITUC condemns the general tendency of the society and employers to view domestic workers as criminals (Amarjeet Kaur 2010).

- **Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC)**
  ILO, as a part of a larger effort of promoting decent work for domestic workers, extended both financial and advisory support
to the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) initiative of organizing domestic workers in Bangalore city. The organizing mission consisted of a pilot project, Decent Work for Domestic Workers: Organizing, skills upgrading and advocacy. The project was carried out by the INTUC Bangalore leadership from May 2009 to April 2010 and aimed at

- 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 project aimed at improving the working and living conditions of domestic workers and strengthening the capacity of the trade union, which is the project implementation partner.

The Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress was registered on 02 September 2009 under Trade Union Act, 1926. The Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress (KDWC) got full-fledged affiliation to INTUC on 14 February 2011. At the time of conducting this study, the union membership stood at 7000. The organizing strategies of the union included training the educators and organizers who led the recruitment drive at the grassroot level. The report (Eluri, Sigh 2013) presents a detailed account of the process of union formation, membership expansion, the benefits that accrued to the union members and also the active and strategic role played by the women leaders at the basti. The report claims “Along the way, they enriched the organization as well as their own individual capacities, as leaders and members of the trade union”.

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8 Eluri Suneetha and Alok Singh (2013) “Unionizing Domestic Workers: Case Study of the INTUC- Karnataka Domestic Workers Congress” ILO; pp 49
The report points out several positive aspects of unionization namely-
- Domestic workers identified with each other and developed a sense of belonging and sharing with each other their work life as well as family life.
- Stories of some workers, of winning paid leave and getting bonus from employers inspires other workers to negotiate with their employers for similar benefits.
- A spirit of fighting for their own rights is promoted amongst them, at times without any external intervention and support.
- The process of unionization also equipped the members with information about various government policies. With this access to information, they are able to guide their fellow workers.

For the union now, the challenges ahead are- sustaining the collective spirit, encouraging full-scale leadership from among the domestic workers, providing training and skills to improve their organizational capacities and imparting policy knowledge to more domestic workers.

- **Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS)**
  During 1971, BMS, a mainstream central union started working among the unorganised domestic servants in Mumbai and formed a separate union for them by name “Gharelu Kamgar Sangh”. When the Gharelu Kamgar Sangh was formed, its membership was mostly male full-time domestic workers called Rama Gadi. The objectives that the GKS worked for were-legislative protection, better working conditions, wage increases, benefits and strict action against cases of sexual harassment of women domestic workers (Gothoskar 2005). BMS organizes domestic workers through the strategies such as rallies to give
domestic workers visibility in society, to put forward their demands and voice their opinions on various issues. Study Classes, Conventions and Workshops are organised wherein the domestic Workers are educated about their rights and are guided on how to approach authorities in solidarity and dignity. Other Stakeholders are also invited to these conventions. Such conventions give Domestic Workers a sense of self-worth and assurance of a social identity. Cultural activities and collective celebration of festivals by GKS brings recognition for domestic workers. It gives them a sense of solidarity and community.\(^9\)

- **Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)**
  The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) decided to work among domestic workers at the state level in 2002 although it was already doing so informally in many districts. Its sister organisation, the All India Democratic Women`s Association (AIDWA), has been working among these workers since the 1980s. In 2002, CITU and AIDWA decided to formalise their activities among domestic workers and started registering their unions under the Trade Union Act in various districts. Unions in Pune were a pioneer in this with the Pune Zilla Ghar Kamgar Sanghatana (PZGKS) being registered in 2004. All these district level organisations held their first state-level convention on 27 August 2005 which was attended by more than 5,000 domestic workers. A State Co-ordination Committee was formed in August 2006, The Committee meets regularly to discuss and identify the problems that need to be addressed, the demands to be placed and the plans of action. (Shamim Subha, 2010)

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4.4 Organising Domestic workers – Pune experience

Pune has been a centre and home to many progressive social movements. In recent times, Pune has witnessed unprecedented growth in population along with its geographical expansion. As a vibrant urban centre, Pune also represents an educated urban middle class which contributes to rising demand for paid domestic work.

The history of organizing domestic workers in Pune can be traced back to 1980s when the first organization of domestic workers in the city was formed. It was a successful agitation in the sense that it brought about some increment in wages for the domestic workers and more importantly brought the plight of domestic workers to the forefront. The formation of Pune Shahar Molkarin Sanghatana was in fact a result of self organization and initiative shown by the domestic workers themselves. In recent times, many other organizations of domestic workers have started organizing and mobilizing domestic workers. These include mainstream trade unions like CITU and BMS organizing domestic workers into their fold as well as self organising by domestic workers into informal sector unions like Molkarin Panchayat.

• Observations on the Functioning and Strategies of Domestic workers’ organizations in Pune

The local level organizations are often the site of struggle and deal with grass root realities of the people they represent. In the process, these organizations engage with all the stakeholders i.e. workers, employers, local government and administration. Following is the discussion of some of the observations derived from the study of working of these organizations.
1. Engagement with workers-

- Creating Identity as workers –

As membership based organizations, the domestic workers form the core of the existence of these organizations. The engagement begins with the nomenclature used for referring to domestic workers. In case of domestic workers, it is absolutely essential to impress upon them that their work is ‘work’ like any other productive work and hence needs to be valued.

As against the Marathi word *Molkarin* which has been traditionally in use for paid domestic worker and which has gender connotations and a notion of inferiority associated with it, the new organizations especially the unions affiliated to mainstream unions have chosen to use gender neutral phrases like *Ghar kamgar* or *Gharelu kamgar* meaning household worker. Thus, the concept that domestic work is work is reflected in the nomenclature chosen by these organizations.

- Issue of identity cards

Each of the four organizations studied issue identity cards to their members that carry the name and photo of the domestic worker along with union credentials. For the domestic workers, identity cards issued by the unions authenticate their individual identity as workers as also their status as a member of a collective entity. Additionally it gives a sense of respectability and dignity while bargaining with the employers.

- Platform for Interaction

The meetings organized by unions regularly, usually once or twice a month, provide a platform to the domestic workers for sharing their grievances (work related as well as personal), exchange of information and for charting future course of action.
The psychological bonding with fellow workers, courage to speak out and self confidence are some of the empowering outcomes of these meetings. Through such meetings, a sense of cooperation is generated which helps prevent the practices like competition among the domestic workers and undercutting of wages.

- **Bringing Visibility and Voice to the cause**
  The issues which are most critical for the domestic workers may not be on the top of agenda for other stakeholders including the government. Therefore, bringing those issues and concerns in the public domain and lending them visibility and voice remains the primary function of these organizations. Protests, agitations, demonstrations and marches are the ways in which domestic workers and their problems are brought before the society.

- **Creating and nurturing leadership**
  All the organizations in the study follow a recruitment and contact channels that are vastis or localities. Leadership at the vasti level is crucial for spreading awareness and widening membership base. In the process, several women who have not been a part of any collective movement previously also transform into capable leaders. These women take the movement forward and expand it to other locations (PSMS) handle vasti level problems like availability of food grains at ration shops (Molkarin panchayat) run self help groups (Pune Zilla Gharkamagar Sanghatana). Apart from developing leadership, the union members are also encouraged to pursue academics. A domestic worker from Sinhgad area, who is a member of PZGKS, informed that she has been inspired to study further and intends to pass S.S.C. examination.
2. Engagement with Employers

Among the approaches taken by the domestic workers organizations in Pune towards the employers of the domestic workers, the most direct approach is that of PSMS. The Sanghatana prescribes rate cards for various jobs and prevents any undercutting of wages. The Sanghatana has also convinced some of the employers to start contributions towards provident fund while the Sanghatana activists make sure that gratuity is paid to the domestic worker at the end of her service. (Thatte, 2010)

The approach taken by other organizations reflects a more cautious approach that the wages of the domestic workers can only be regularized by government action. Moghe (2013) points out that an antagonistic approach with the employers can lead to job loss for the worker. However, indirect engagement with the employer continues in two ways. One, by making the voice of the domestic workers heard and their cause seen by employers and by society at large. PZGKS carried out a health check up camp for their members and shared the poor health status of domestic workers with their employers.

The second manner of engagement with employers is that of grievance redressal through appropriate government agency i.e. dealing with unfair termination, theft charges, wage deductions or nonpayment of dues.

3. Engagement with Local government bodies and law enforcement agencies

The organizations carry the just demands of their members to the appropriate government bodies. A more visible form of such interaction is the demonstrations, agitations and protests in front of government offices like Labour Commissioners’ office, Collector office etc.
At the time when the data collection for this study was in progress, the registration of domestic workers at the Labour Commissioner’s office had begun. Therefore, all the organizations and their vasti level leaders were engaged in the exercise of form filling, pursuing government identity cards, collecting and disseminating information about government schemes and ensuring that all the members get their due benefits.

The struggles of the domestic workers invariably involve a skirmish with the police department. The instances of domestic workers being falsely accused of theft and arrested by police without verifying the facts have been reported by the activists (PZGKS, 2011). Domestic workers’ organizations have been protesting against such mistreatment meted out to the wrongly accused domestic workers. The strength derived from the organization has also created more confidence among the members to deal with police.

4. Engagement with Policy Makers at the National Level

The issue of public policy on domestic work has come to the forefront in the recent past. A grass root view of the situation of domestic workers is a critical input in the exercise of policy making at a broader level. In this sense, these organizations become a crucial link between the policy makers and the people for whom the policy is being designed. Several such initiatives have been undertaken by the leaders who have been associated with these organizations. Dr. Baba Adhav has worked as the working president of National Campaign Committee for Unorganized Sector Workers that submitted a draft bill for domestic workers entitled- Domestic Workers (Regulation Of Employment, Conditions Of Work, Social Security And Welfare)
bill 2008. Dr. Adhav was also a part of the consultations on domestic workers under the WIEGO Law Project. Medha Thatte of PSMS has represented domestic workers on the study group appointed by government of Maharashtra. (Bhosale et al eds. 1999) She is one of the national conveners of National Platform for Domestic Workers formed in 2012. Kiran Moghe has authored papers and articles to bring to light the plight of domestic workers in Pune city.

A vital characteristic of the struggle of domestic workers in Pune city, which dates back to 1980s, has been the force of self organization that led to rise of domestic workers organizations created and nurtured by domestic workers themselves. Pune Shahar Molkarin Sanghatana and Molkarin Panchayat are the prime examples of this motivation to organize from within. In recent years mainstream trade unions have shown considerable interest in organizing informal workers and specifically domestic workers. While the independent organizations benefit form able leadership coming from labour leaders Dr. Baba Adhav and Medha Thatte, the unions of domestic workers affiliated to central unions are more likely to draw upon the organizational

strength and union apparatus of the parent organization. Interestingly, the effective weapon of union movement i.e. strike has been successfully employed by domestic workers in Pune before organizing into any formal structure. The effects of unionization process on various aspects of work and personal lives are briefly described below.

As mentioned in the preceding sections, participation in union activities like meetings and demonstrations makes valuable additions to workers' self confidence and courage. A successful agitation resulting in favourable wages, increments or any other benefit creates a sense of control over the elements that crucially affect their lives. The belief, that their collective action can be effective even when pitted against the established sections of society and authorities of law and government, encourages them to fight for what they believe to be rightfully theirs. The empowerment process thus generated out of organizing efforts at work level also seeps into the personal lives making them more confident individuals and agents.

From the perspective of labour market, the situation in the job market remains extremely precarious. On the one hand, there is an ever increasing flow of migrants who add to the already overflowing supply of domestic workers in the city, while on the other hand, economic recession and inflation together has made the survival of the working poor increasingly difficult. Thus, caught between the competition at workplace and economic compulsions that push her into the workforce, domestic worker could have faced inhumanly low wages had it not been for the persistent efforts by the domestic workers' organizations to hold the wage rate and to press for increment from time to time. The contribution of the domestic workers' organizations in Pune city should be viewed from this perspective.