

Women's actions through the FPAR

Through the labour FPAR, Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA) worked to: 1) identify key labour rights violations; 2) investigate and raise awareness of the working conditions of women street vendors; 3) advocate for the provision of identity cards recognising street vendors as workers with the right to proper vending space, stalls and sanitary working environments as well as social protection.

The labour FPAR was conducted in the following five markets in Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Phsar Deomkor, Phsar Trongmorn, Phsar DeomAmpil, Phsar Krormuon and Phsar and Rongchak Pouy. Through the labour FPAR, 401 new women street vendors joined IDEA as members¹¹ in order to collectively negotiate and demand their labour rights. Going forward, IDEA will continue to champion for improving the working conditions of women street vendors and the realisation of decent work.

¹¹ The number of women members has been increasing by about 85% in two years, 2017-2019 (IDEA, 2020)

Recommendations

To the government of Cambodia:

- **Implement International Labour Organisation (ILO) recommendation no. 204 concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy**
- **Provide social protection to women street vendors, such as free or subsidised health care**
- **Provide public child care services and schooling for the children of street vendors**

To the local authorities:

- **End harassment against street vendors immediately, and enforce Prakas no. 11 អង្គ ប្រកាស ចេញដោយរាជរដ្ឋាភិបាលកម្ពុជា ក្នុងឆ្នាំ ២០១៦ ទាក់ទងនឹងការប្រាមាណប្រឆាំងនឹងការប្រមូលថវិកាមិនច្បាប់ពីលក់ដាច់ដី**
- **Provide ID cards to women street vendors and create designated spaces for street vendors on the roadside with adequate stalls and clean working environments**

About Independent Democracy of Economy Informal Association (IDEA)

IDEA is a group of workers from the informal sector, established in 2005. They work to improve the working conditions in Cambodia and forward human rights and social protection. IDEA has approximately 14,000 members in Phnom Penh and five other provinces in Cambodia.



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

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APWLD, a regional feminist and women's rights organisation with 252 members in 27 countries in Asia and the Pacific. This FPAR is part of APWLD's Labour Programme. APWLD worked with and supported 11 partner organisations from nine countries to conduct FPAR on women's labour rights in Asia and the Pacific between 2017 and 2019.

Organising women street vendors in Phnom Penh to demand labour rights

Independent Democracy of Economy Informal Association (IDEA)
CAMBODIA

The situation of women street vendors in Cambodia

With the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1979, Cambodians started moving back to the previously empty city of Phnom Penh¹. The main occupation that people engaged in was trade, mainly in the form of barter. Today, vending remains the primary source of income for many people in Phnom Penh with 75 percent of women making up a majority of 16,419 street vendors² in 2019. Street vendors are part of the informal labour sector and contribute greatly to the national economy. Approximately 80 per cent of GDP and 95 per cent of employment in Cambodia come from the informal sector. In spite of the significant contribution that women street vendors make to the Cambodian economy, they remain an invisible and unrecognised workforce. There are no current laws in place to protect women street vendors and as a result, they continue to face various challenges and problems. For instance, women street vendors are often harassed by the police and authorities who demand money from them. Also, as self-employed informal workers, street vendors have no access to social security such as health care and child care.

Independent Democracy of Economy Informal Association (IDEA) Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)

IDEA led a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) to investigate the needs of, and the challenges that women street vendors face in five markets in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The data was mainly collected through interviews, surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), capacity building workshops and observations. A total of 41 women street vendors were interviewed.

¹ Kusakabe, K. (2006a). ILO Report - Policy Issues on Street Vending: An Overview of Studies in Thailand, Cambodia and Mongolia. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_119_en.pdf

² Oxfam in Cambodia. (2019). Social Protection For The Informal Workers. Retrieved from: https://oi-files-cng-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/cambodia.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/Street%20Vendor.pdf

Low wages and high rental fees

According to ILO estimates, the average net wage for street vendors is 6,000 Cambodian Riel or KHR (USD1.50) per day which amounts to approximately USD45 per month.³ However, this daily wage falls far below the living wage - a wage that allows workers to meet their basic needs, support their families and live in dignity.⁴ According to calculations by the Asia Floor Wage Alliance in 2017⁵, the living wage in Cambodia amounts to approximately 1,939,606 KHR (USD476.60) per month. In fact, the per capita income of women vendors is so low - it falls below the poverty level of Phnom Penh.⁶

Women street vendors have to pay both taxes and rental fees, but there are no regulations in place regarding the decision of the fee rates. FPAR findings show that some street vendors have to pay homeowners 406,420.49 KHR (USD100) per month for selling in front of their houses. Similarly, ILO figures show that many women street vendors have to pay rental fees to market committees of up to 80,000 - 90,000 KHR per month (USD19.62 - 22.07) and at least 2,000 - 4,000 KHR (USD0.49-0.98) per day to homeowners.⁷

³ Kusakabe, K. (2006b). ILO Report - On the Borders of Legality: A Review of Studies on Street Vending in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_120_en.pdf

⁴ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (2019). Decent Work and Living Wage Briefer. Retrieved from: <http://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/DECENT-WORK-LIVINGWAGE-BRIEFER.pdf>

⁵ Clean Clothes Campaign. Retrieved from: <https://cleanclothes.org/living-wage-old/afw/asia-floor-wage-in-local-currency>

⁶ Kusakabe, K. (2006b). ILO Report - On the Borders of Legality: A Review of Studies on Street Vending in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_120_en.pdf

⁷ Ibid

Harassment and abuse of authority

A majority of women street vendors reveal that they face regular harassment and abuse on the part of the local police and security guards. According to IDEA findings, authorities often collect heavy fees (in addition to the rental fees), move or seize stalls and/or confiscate and discard street vendors' goods. In 2016, the government implemented Prakas no. 11 ស្រី⁸ to put an end to the collection of fees by the police. Yet, the regulation is not implemented by local authorities and the police continue to illegally demand money from women street vendors on a daily basis. The continuous harassment by the local police and security guards perpetuates an unsafe environment of fear, and is a violation of street vendors' human right to space and live free from violence.

⁸ The order of Prime Minister of Cambodia that not allow the police or security guard to collect money from the street vendors and there is no requirement for street vendors to pay tax

Lack of access to credit

Street vending is rarely a temporary occupation and many women workers lack the opportunity to choose other professions. According to a study reviewed in an ILO report, 26 per cent of the street vendors surveyed claimed that they did not have other options while 41 per cent said that they only chose the occupation because they did not have sufficient capital to start another business.⁹ Indeed, IDEA identifies the lack of access to credit as a major issue for women street vendors. Many workers recount that they are forced to turn to moneylenders who often take exceedingly high interest rates. This results in women vendors ending up in debt they cannot pay off due to their low income.

⁹ Kusakabe, K. (2006b). ILO Report - On the Borders of Legality: A Review of Studies on Street Vending in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_120_en.pdf



Substandard working conditions and long working hours

Women street vendors work long, grueling hours. According to FPAR findings, 28 per cent of the participants worked 16-19 hours while 72 per cent worked 10-13 hours every day. Women workers report working in dirty, polluted and unsanitary environments with no access to public toilets or running water, which exposes them to various health risks. In 2017, all street vendors who were members of IDEA were provided health equity cards and were thereby eligible for free medical check-ups. However, after the 2018 general elections, the government revoked the health equity cards, further exacerbating the vulnerability of women street vendors. In addition to health risks, the lack of proper stalls and unsanitary work environments affect profitability. For instance, street vendors' income is halved during the rainy season, partly due to the lack of adequate stalls.¹⁰

¹⁰ Muong, V. & Sunjolinet, B. (2016). 'Profits for street vendors dry up in wet season.' The Phnom Penh Post, 4 August. Retrieved from: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-weekend/profits-street-vendors-dry-wet-season>

Lack of childcare centers

There are no public day care centers available for children under the age of six and most street vendors cannot afford to place their children in private day care centers. As a result, a majority of women street vendors have no other choice than to bring their young children to work, in spite of the fact that the work environment is inappropriate for children. According to Cambodian labour law, a childcare center has to be established at any workplace that employs more than 100 women. However, this law does not cover women street vendors as they are not recognised as formal workers and therefore not accorded equal rights. The government's non-recognition of women street vendors as workers not only affects them but also impacts the health and schooling of their children.

