

Cornell-SEWA-WIEGO

CALL FOR PAPERS

Workshop on

**Membership Based Organizations of the Poor:
Theory, Experience and Policy**

Ahmedabad, India

January 17-21, 2005

Please note that this is not a general invitation to attend. It is a call to submit paper proposals for a small workshop. Attendance is restricted to one author per paper selected for the workshop.

This workshop is predicated on the hypothesis that membership based organizations of the poor--organizations whose governance structures respond to the needs and aspirations of the poor because they are accountable to their members--are central to achieving equitable growth and poverty reduction.

A membership based organization of the poor (MBOP) is to be distinguished from a conventional NGO which, however well-intentioned, operates as an outside entity that is not formed out of a membership base of the poor. Political parties are membership based organizations but are not exclusively concerned about the welfare of the poor. Trade Unions are membership based, but only some of them are directly concerned with advancing the cause of poor workers. Cooperatives are classic membership based organizations, but again not all of them are poor focused.

The example we have in mind when we talk of MBOPs is that of SEWA, the Self Employed Women's Association in India. SEWA is governed by its members, poor informal sector women whom SEWA serves through a range of activities. As a MBOP, SEWA acts as a channel for carrying the voice of its members to policy makers and in turn helps to transmit the benefits of poverty focused government projects and programs to its members. Its twin pillars are economic activities to enhance income earning opportunities, and organization to enable its members to claim and exercise their rights in the economic, legal and social spheres.

Some MBOPs have been remarkably successful, while others have failed. What structures and activities characterize MBOPs? What is meant by success? What factors account for success? In particular, what are the internal (governance structure and leadership) and external (policy environment) factors that account for success? Are these

factors replicable across countries or even within countries? What are the constraints to successful MBOPs expanding, or to new ones being formed? What sort of policy environment enables the success of MBOPs, and the formation of successful MBOPs? What types of institutional reforms are needed to ensure the representation of the poor through their own MBOs? These are the types of questions to be addressed in this workshop.

The workshop is being organized by Cornell University (www.cornell.edu), SEWA (www.sewa.org) and WIEGO (www.wiego.org). The workshop organizers are Martha Chen (Harvard University and WIEGO), Renana Jhabvala (SEWA) and Ravi Kanbur (Cornell University).

The organizers invite submissions of completed papers or substantial abstracts (3-5 pages), addressing the themes of the workshop. The papers can be theoretical, empirical, or policy oriented, and can approach the issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The remit of the workshop is global--experiences and issues from any part of the world are welcome.

Submissions should be sent electronically to Ravi Kanbur at sk145@cornell.edu.

The submission deadline is September 30, 2004.

Decisions on selection will be communicated by October 30, 2004.

The workshop activities will include paper presentations as well as field trips involving interaction with poor informal sector women members of SEWA to understand and appreciate the realities of their working lives. The plan of the workshop is as follows. Participants arrive on the 17th. After introduction to SEWA, on the 18th participants depart for a field trip involving exposure to the realities of organizing in SEWA-- participants will spend the night of the 18th in the home of a SEWA member. On the 19th, return to SEWA Academy for the opening session of the workshop in the evening. On the 20th and 21st, paper presentations and discussions.

The workshop will meet the travel and accommodation costs of ONE presenter per paper selected.

Papers presented at the workshop will be further considered for publication in an edited academic press volume.

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