

Research Project

Increasing Political Leverage of Informal and Formal Workers' Organisations for Inclusive Development: The Cases of Ghana and Benin

The NWO-WOTRO funded research project *Increasing Political Leverage of Informal and Formal Workers' Organisations for Inclusive Development: The Cases of Ghana and Benin* kicked-off with an inception workshop on 8 and 9 December 2014 in Cotonou, Benin. The workshop brought together representatives of almost all consortium members. From the academic side the following partners attended: African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden, HIVA Research Institute for Work and Society (Leuven), the International Institute for Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Accra, the Labour Research and Policy Institute (LRPI) in Accra and the *Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion de l'Université d'Abomey-Calavi* (FASEG-UAC, Benin). From the side of the practitioners we were glad to welcome *Confédération des Organisations Syndicales Indépendantes* (COSI), Informal Hawkers and Vendors Association of Ghana (IHVAG), *Union Syndicale des Vendeuses de Pièces Detachées et Divers du Marché Dantokpa* (USYNVEPID), and CNV Mondiaal.

The overall aim of the workshop was to make sure the research plan can become operational and will have practical value. This was done through participatory discussions between all consortium members. In addition, consensus was sought on the main conceptual and methodological framework of the research. In order to allow for thorough, well-guided discussions, all members were asked to prepare short presentations on the research sections they are involved in.

The workshop started on Monday with a brief recap of the research plan as described in the research proposal. Some lack of clarity was resolved and all consortium members agreed with their position within the project. During the rest of the morning the theoretical framework was discussed. An actor-oriented approach from the viewpoint of informal workers (IWs) and their livelihoods (income, economic context, political context and social context) was agreed on. Participants concluded that the study, from a political economy perspective, should engage in a collective action analysis focusing on the vibrant (official and unofficial) relationships and power dynamics between the different actors such as informal and formal workers and their organisations, state actors and international partners, by investigating the (possibly conflicting) fluctuating interests, perceptions and motives of the various stakeholders. In addition, all agreed that it is important to also pay attention to the larger context in which the representation, mobilization and bargaining processes of IWs will take place.

Building on this, the participants discussed key concepts such as informal workers and IWOs. Informal workers were defined on the basis of the [WIEGO classification](#), which allows for a study of informal workers as a heterogeneous group, in which different employment statuses co-exist. The research will use a continuum approach to informality that also accentuates the mutually reinforcing and fluctuating

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links between the formal and the informal economy. In the end it was agreed that all IWs operating in the formal and informal economy would be included in the study, with the sole exception of those strictly involved in agricultural activities. When it comes to defining workers' organisations (IWOs & TUs) participants concluded to analyse them as fields of social processes, in which e.g. negotiations, collaborations and power games influence outcomes in terms of agendas, strategies, and collective action.

The afternoon of day one was dedicated to an in-depth discussion of the first stage of the research project, namely the *mapping of the ways in which IWOs and TUs collaborate on labour issues for IWs in Ghana and Benin*. In sub-groups per country participants discussed the main objectives and operationalisation of the mapping exercise, after which ideas were shared in plenary. The outcome of these discussions was an agreement on the core guidelines of the mapping, which will enable a well-grounded case selection in both countries.

The second day was devoted to the other research components, as well as the role of the practitioners in research valorisation and dissemination. First, the quantitative part of the research was scrutinized, looking into the aim, set-up, sample-size and data-collection methods of the surveys of IWs, which will be conducted during the second half of 2015 in Ghana and Benin. Second, the outlines of the donor chain analysis were debated and it was agreed that the main objective will be the gaining of understanding of: (1) key trends in international donor thinking & practice about IWs & IWOs; (2) interactions of donors in Ghana & Benin with IWs, IWOs and TUs. Third, we had a debate on the expectations and roles of the practitioner partners of the consortium, including the ways in which they will complement the research activities on the ground. Lessons were learned from previous experiences with joint academic-CSO projects and a strategy for active and effective practitioner engagement was developed. Building on this, workshop participants brainstormed on the creation of labour research networks, which could link knowledge institutes with the labour movements in Ghana and Benin more structurally. The LRPI in Accra was taken as an example, and connections with the African Labour Research Network (ALRN) were explored.

After two full and fruitful days of discussions the inception workshop closed with an outline of the time frame and the tasks and responsibilities of all consortium members throughout the first year of the research project, marking the actual take-off of the project.



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Discussion of expectations and roles of the non-academic partners. From left to right: Fandy Clarisse Gnahoui, head of USYNVEPID (non-academic partner Benin); Dr William Baah-Boateng, senior researcher IIAS (Ghana country-coordinator); Juliana Brown-Afari, head of IHVAG (non-academic partner Ghana)



Formal closing of the workshop. From left to right: Prof. Maxime da Cru, Vice-Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs at FASEG-UAC ; Dr Cyriaque Edon, senior researcher FASEG-UAC (Benin country coordinator); Dr Mayke Kaag, senior researcher African Studies Centre (overall coordinator)