

The marginal among the invisible: women in the informal economy with Faith Shaba (Malawi) and Patricia Estrada Rivera (Nicaragua)

Monday, November 11th 2013, 5:30 – 7:30 pm
C3 – Centre for International Development (Alois Wagner Saal)
Sensengasse 3, 1090 Vienna

When we talk about employment, we generally focus on formal jobs, thereby ignoring millions of workers and making them invisible. Many workers are self-employed in small unregistered businesses, others are wage-earners in cleaning, catering, commerce and other sectors of the informal economy, where economic activities are either not regulated or not controlled by the State. As unjust trade regimes and structural adjustment become commonplace, the dimension of the informal economy is growing across the globe. More than half of the employed global population work in the informal sector. Women are overrepresented among workers with non-standard employment arrangements and have indeed joined the informal economy in large numbers.

With two workers rights activists from Malawi and Nicaragua we would like to look deeper into the situation of informal workers in those countries and look at the strategies to fight for improvements of women's working conditions.

Program

Address of welcome

Panel discussion

Faith Shaba, Malawian Union of Informal Workers (MUFIS)

Patricia Estrada, Movement of Working and Unemployed Women Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC)

Discussion with the public, Q&A

Reception and time for informal exchange

Moderation: **Claudia Dal-Bianco**, Frauensolidarität

Language: English and Spanish (Spanish is translated into English)

Please register until November 6th at: c.dal-bianco@frauensolidaritaet.org; +43-1-3174020-403

Organizers:


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 **Österreichische
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Faith Tapiwa Shaba works as a street vendor in Blantyre, Malawi. She makes a living selling clothes, for which she travels across various Malawian provinces. Faith joined the Malawian Union of Informal Workers (MUFIS), where she is active in the women's committee as well as in the organization's own micro-credit initiative. As an advocate for women's rights, Faith denounces how women working as street vendors in Southern Africa are unaware of their rights and are harassed and abused by council officials, police and other vendors. With MUFIS, Faith works to raise awareness on these issues among other male and female unionists and to build a culture of respect for women's rights among street vendors.

MUFIS was established in 2001 to represent the growing numbers of informal economy workers, which now stands at 88% of the active population. Working together with existing street vendor and market trader organisations, it aims to provide a national platform for informal economy workers to raise their concerns to government authorities. Through drama and theatre, MUFIS raises awareness and mobilises street vendors to join the organisation.

Patricia Leonor Estrada Rivera joined the Movement of Working and Unemployed Women Maria Elena Cuadra (MEC) in Nicaragua as an outreach and advocacy worker in 1998, when she was 14 years old. Patricia has now extensive experience as an advocate for the rights of women working in the informal sector and has expanded MEC's networks and membership with hundreds of street vendors, market traders, domestic workers, entrepreneurs and rural workers. She delivers trainings for women on issues of gender, economic literacy, gender budgeting, human and labour rights and sexual and reproductive rights, and supports members as a paralegal in the defence and promotion of their rights.

MEC was established in 1994 and today has a membership of more than 70,000 women in seven departments of Nicaragua, including *maquila* factory workers, small entrepreneurs, rural women, women working in the informal economy and unemployed women. MEC works to improve the quality of life of working and unemployed women in the poorest sectors of Nicaragua and fights for women's equality and in defense of their rights as women, workers and mothers.