



**CIRI Forum on  
Worker-driven Innovation in the Globalized Economy –  
Learning from Encounters  
– Forum report –**

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## Abbreviations

AFW	Asia Floor Wage
CBA	collective bargaining agreement
CGT	<i>Central General de Trabajadores</i> (General Workers' Centre)
CIRI	Civic Innovation Research Initiative
CIW	Coalition of Immokalee Workers
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FFP	Fair Food Program
FFSC	Fair Food Standards Council
FNV	<i>Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging</i> (The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation)
FoA	freedom of association
GSP	General System of Preferences
GVC	Global Value Chain
ICRSE	International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University of Rotterdam
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PILER	Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research
TNC	Transnational Corporation
USAS	United Students Against Sweatshops
WRC	Worker Rights Consortium
WSR	Worker-driven Social Responsibility

## Summary

In the context of neo-liberal governance of markets that has often taken place at workers' expense, in many cases workers have nevertheless struggled successfully to (re-)establish their rights and improve their working conditions. The Forum on "Worker-driven Innovation in the Globalized Economy – Learning from Encounters" that took place at the International Institute of Social Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS) from 13-15 June 2016 offered an open space to share, discuss and learn from a diverse and exciting range of such initiatives. Funding from the Mondiaal FNV, part of the Dutch trade union confederation FNV, as well as from the ISS Civic Innovation Research Initiative (CIRI) made the Forum possible.

### Forum questions

We invited the participating practitioners and scholars of worker-driven innovation to engage with the following key questions:

1. What particular conditions make organizing/strategizing more favourable?
2. Which factors promote worker-driven innovation?
3. How can worker-driven innovation be made effective in the long-term?
4. How can upscaling of worker-driven innovation be achieved in the globalised economy?

### What is worker-driven innovation?

The Forum broadly characterized worker-driven innovation as initiatives through which workers, labour organizations and their allies have successfully challenged the economic, political and social structures that marginalize them. Such initiatives build on workers' knowledge of their working conditions as well as on their understanding of the mechanisms that exploit or empower them.

The Forum represented a great diversity of forms of worker-driven innovation, ranging from cases where worker organizations' struggles led to an agreement with companies via the successful campaign for domestic workers' recognition and rights that led to the ratification of the international Domestic Workers Convention to the establishment of alternative forms of production based on workers' control and self-management.

## Lessons in organising

Organising workers is necessary for innovative collective moves towards decent work. Forum participants highlighted the role of intangible resources, such as effective communication with and confidence-building among workers. A shared background facilitates effective communication with and awareness-raising among workers. FairWork therefore tries to reach out to as many migrant workers in the Netherlands as possible through so-called 'cultural mediators'. These mediators are often migrants themselves; some of them are former workers who have experienced similar conditions of severe violations of their labour rights as the workers that FairWork tries to reach out to. The process of trade union renewal at the German trade union IG Metall exemplified that tangible resources in the form of available funds are important for organising, too. A democratic political environment as well as a favourable legal environment can catalyse workers' organisation, but they are not sufficient for workplace democratisation.

## How does worker-driven innovation come about?

Workers innovate in strategic response to the political and economic structures that oppress them. The Asia Floor Wage (AFW) Alliance in the Asian garment industry exemplifies this. The idea of AFW Alliance emerged in response to the power of a few brands and retailers in the global garment industry. These buyers hold oligopolistic power over suppliers in the global South, enabling them to drive down prices paid to manufacturers who pass these on to garment workers in the form of poverty wages. The AFW Alliance therefore decided to target buying companies with their demand for a regional living wage. More generally, in order to counter labour precarity in the globalized economy, workers often need to 'jump scale' and target powerful transnational buyers rather than their direct employers.

The visibility of these brands or the direct employers against which workers struggle came out as a catalytic factor for workers' initiatives. For instance, the migrant farmworker organisation Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW's) successes in empowering and protecting some of the most precarious workers in the USA have emerged in a context in which tomato buyers such as McDonald's and Walmart are highly visible to consumers. Especially in sectors with a strong consumer orientation, brands' reputation is an important factor for their ability to create and capture value. TNCs selling goods and services with a greater visibility to consumers are, therefore, more likely to be concerned about their 'reputational capital'. As a result, they are more eager to negotiate.

### Coalitions as catalysts of worker-driven innovation

The presence of coalitions with other social actors and movements came out as a key factor in worker-driven innovation during the Forum. The success of the CGT's campaign against union repression in garment company Fruit of the Loom's Honduran subsidiary was possible only because of the union's strategic alliances with partners such as the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS). USAS mobilized public opinion in the US and used their bulk purchasing power as institutional garments consumers against union repression in Fruit of the Loom's factories in Honduras. Brookes (2013: 192) calls this workers' 'coalitional power' as workers' capacity '[...] to expand the scope of conflict by involving other, nonlabor actors willing and able to influence an employer's behavior'.

Allies have played a different role in the Italian agricultural cooperative *Mani e Terra*. Cooperative workers rely on the support of progressive farmers and critical consumers. Farmers experiencing an income squeeze as a result of their marginal role in mainstream buyer-driven food chains search for an alternative by subcontracting the management and commercialization of their harvest and products to the cooperative. The role of critical consumers is equally crucial: by purchasing products from producers at a 'fair price', they enable workers and farmers to receive a fair remuneration.

### How to guarantee effectiveness of worker-driven innovation?

Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, flanked by the threat with market and/or state sanctions, have great importance for initiatives' effectiveness. In the absence of monitoring, powerful companies are unlikely to comply with agreements they have signed to reduce public pressure on their reputation. In order to be effective, enforcement, too, needs to be driven by workers. The effectiveness of the CIW-designed Fair Food Program (FFP) in US agriculture relies on the fact that the FFP places the job of monitoring labour rights squarely in the hands of those who work in the fields. Yet, workers can drive the enforcement of new initiatives to improve their labour conditions only if they are aware of their rights and entitlements. Therefore, labour education and the promotion of workers' self-organisation are key steps towards long-term effectiveness of worker-driven innovation.

Some form of state backing of worker-driven innovations can enhance these initiatives' effectiveness. Brookes (2013: 188) labels such state backing 'institutional power'. She defines it as: "[...] the capacity of workers to influence the behavior of an employer by invoking the formal or informal rules that structure their relationship and interactions". Domestic workers' lobbying of

states for ratification and implementation of the rules enshrined in the international Domestic Work Convention exemplifies such institutional power.

### **Scaling up worker-driven innovation**

The encounters the Forum suggested tentative answers to the question of how to bring worker-driven initiatives to scale. If such initiatives are strategic responses to a specific economic and political context, then this implies that there are no blueprints for upscaling. Several Forum participants proposed adapted replication instead of initiatives' economic growth in order to ensure that worker-driven innovations are not playing a merely symbolic role. The CIW, for instance, has collaborated with the dairy worker organization Migrant Justice in Vermont in an effort to replicate the FFP within their Milk with Dignity Program. Physical proximity is essential for such networking and mutual inspiration, and meeting spaces like the Forum have an important role to play.

### **A more central voice for workers in trade unions and research**

Trade unions have had a key, yet, ambiguous role in the worker-driven innovations represented during the Forum. Several initiatives emerged from local unions' struggles, such as the CGT's Fruit of the Loom campaign in Honduras and the FoA Protocol in Indonesia. The AFW Alliance's campaign for a regional floor wage is an example for how trade unions' regional networking enabled moves from competition to collaboration among workers in different countries. Yet, trade unions' limited presence in workplaces and the fact that coverage of initiatives is sometimes limited to the upper tier of complex value chains, raises the question in how far innovation is union- rather than worker-driven? Especially sex, migrant and domestic workers' voices during the Forum spoke of a widespread crisis of representation in the global labour movement, which has been slow to acknowledge that the ranks of the working class are filled with a more diverse crowd than permanent, male, industrial employees.

Academics and academic institutions, too, play an ambiguous role in worker-driven initiatives. On the one hand, they emerge as key allies in 'pro-labour civil society networks' (Chan 2016). However, the type of knowledge that scholars contribute and the way they generate it matters for the role of research in worker-driven innovation: Forum participants insisted on knowledge generation *with* workers rather than about them.

## 1. Introduction

In the context of neo-liberal governance of markets that has often taken place at workers' expense, workers have nevertheless struggled successfully to (re-)establish their rights and improve their working conditions. The Forum on "Worker-driven Innovation in the Globalized Economy – Learning from Encounters" that took place at the International Institute of Social Studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam (ISS) from 13-15 June 2016 offered an open space to share, discuss and learn from a diverse and exciting range of such initiatives.

### **Towards decent work with workers in the driver's seat**

When we started organising the Forum, we had innovative mechanisms for the regulation of labour relations like the Fair Food Program (FFP) in mind. This programme for the improvement of working conditions in Florida's tomato fields was designed and is implemented by migrant farmworkers organised in the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). The CIW has contracts with tomato buyers and agreements with growers. They ensure that failure to comply with the FFP labour standards is a reason for buyers to stop purchasing tomatoes from a grower. Two decades after the Coalition was formed and five years after the establishment of the FFP, their struggles against poverty wages and precarious labour conditions have borne fruit: significant improvements in the conditions in Florida tomato fields, and now along the entire southeast coast of the US, are visible. Among others, workers received nearly US\$20 million in wage premiums since 2011, and no cases of forced labour and sexual assault were reported on participating farms (FFSC 2016: 33). The FFP has been labelled as the best workplace-monitoring programme in the USA and was awarded a range of prestigious national human rights awards (Siegmann et al. 2016: 119). The message that this example of 'worker-driven innovation' conveys powerfully is that workers' enduring organised mobilisations and innovative campaigns do force even the most powerful corporations to address workers' demands.

### **Why is worker-driven innovation necessary?**

The FFP is a response to the increases in working poverty and insecure labour relations that have accompanied the neo-liberal governance of markets since the 1990s. For instance, poverty wages in Florida's agriculture have been the result of the concentration at the top of the US-American food industry, creating tremendous pressure on supplier prices. This has translated into downward

pressure on wages and deterioration of working conditions in the tomato fields (Asbed and Sellers 2013: 43-44).

Neo-liberalism is an expression of a secular shift towards the economic and political dominance of corporations. Forum participant Evangelina Argueta summarised this process succinctly when she stated that the state provides “[...] operational privileges to large companies without conditions or guarantees of labor or human rights” (Argueta 2016). It fetishises the powers of a free market to regulate human behaviour (Guthman 2007: 458). This has triggered a move from state to market regulation, associated with the successive liberalisation of markets and increased competition. Furthermore, it has led to the commoditisation of essential goods and services as well as to the weakening of protective labour regulation.

As a result, neo-liberalisation has often taken place at workers’ expense. Market liberalisation has catalysed the restructuring of the production of goods and services in global value chains (GVCs). Here, labour precarity is the flipside of capital mobility and corporations’ demand for flexible labour relations. Export-processing zones (EPZs) for transnational corporations (TNCs) were established in Asia, Latin America and Africa based on the argument that with the infusion of capital, productivity would grow and wages would develop in tandem with this growth. Yet, in contrast, EPZs are characterised by high productivity, but low wages that fall short of what workers require to meet their own and their families’ basic needs (Bhattacharjee 2016). Besides, the concentration of power in TNCs has resulted in cases of aggressive and often violent repression of trade union rights (Argueta 2016, Siegmann et al. 2014b). The rise of globalised production and distribution has caused a regulatory vacuum for labour rights, which are commonly governed at the national level. Not surprisingly, this vacuum has not been effectively filled by company-led initiatives. Mostly, such corporate social responsibility (CSR) has only been effective to address the “public relations crisis prompted by the revelation of gross human rights violations in a company’s supply chain” (CIW 2014).

Paralleling the capital-friendly re-regulation of markets, state regulation has become more restrictive in policy areas that indirectly aggravate labour precarity. This concerns migration governance, in particular. Discrimination against migrant workers with legal immigration status is often sanctioned by law. Increasingly restrictive migration regimes that do not offer legal immigration status for low-paid occupations, such as agricultural, domestic and sex work, fashion and entrench these workers’ poverty and precarity (Anderson 2010). For sex workers, these dynamics are compounded by anti-trafficking regulation used to curb sex work as well as by the widespread criminalisation of sex work.

## **The Forum as an open space for encounter and learning**

While labour precarity is widespread, we are also witnessing encouraging examples, like the FFP, where workers and labour organisations, jointly with allies, have successfully challenged the economic, political and social structures that marginalize them. Their diverse forms of organising, activism and advocacy can also inspire scaling up of worker-driven innovation in the globalized economy.

Building on research (Siegmann 2015, Siegmann et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, forthcoming) on and activism for innovative worker-driven initiatives at ISS, we started conceptualising the Forum on Worker-driven Innovation in the Globalized Economy in 2015. We imagined this Forum as offering space for sharing some of these experiences as a way to draw from the strengths and lessons learned of past experiences. Funding from the Mondiaal FNV, part of the Dutch trade union confederation FNV, as well as from the ISS Civic Innovation Research Initiative (CIRI) allowed us to put these ideas into practice.

In old Roman cities, the forum referred to an open public space. Our Forum offered such a space, too. Participation fluctuated between 45 persons and a core group of a dozen international guests plus a handful of ISS students and members of faculty. The group of participants was characterised by an enormous diversity (see Annex 1): Participants' origins ranged from India to Italy, from Pakistan to Paris. They represented workers cultivating oranges and tomatoes, stitching garments as well as providing domestic and sexual services. The group included workers, trade unionists and other labour rights advocates, researchers and students from the ISS as well as from other institutions – and not to forget the two sons of the CIW representative and co-founder Lucas Benitez. He proudly shared that the boys' first words were not 'Papa' and 'Mum', but 'boycott'.

## **Encouraging examples of worker-driven innovation**

The international guests represented and familiarised us a variety of innovative mechanisms for the regulation of labour relations:

- The FFP outlined above was one of them, represented by Lucas Benitez and Natali Rodriguez.
- Domestic workers around the globe have come out of the invisibility of their private workplaces to lead a campaign for recognition and rights that led to an international Domestic Workers Convention and the establishment of the International Domestic Workers

Federation (IDWF). We had the honour and pleasure to welcome Myrtle Witbooi, the IDWF's President.

- Karamat Ali, Director of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), shared the experience of the successful lobbying after Pakistan's worst industrial disaster, a factory fire in Karachi in 2012. Mobilisation by a number of civil society actors in Pakistan, led by PILER, resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding by the transnational buyer of garments from that factory, KiK Textilien, and PILER for the immediate relief and long term compensation to the affected families of the workers who lost their lives.
- The movement of the unemployed as well as workers' occupation and self-management of factories were just two of the multiple forms of workers' collective agency in the context of the financial and economic crisis in Argentina that Maurizio Atzeni, Centre for Labour Relations, National Research Council of Argentina, portrayed.
- Stefan Schmalz, University of Jena, outlined how IG Metall, the large German metalworker union and, according to Schmalz, an 'industrial dinosaur', celebrated a comeback through innovative organizing strategies among precarious, outsourced workers.
- Anannya Bhattacharjee, International Coordinator of the Asia Floor Wage Alliance, shared the concept of the Asia Floor Wage (AFW) developed by Asian labour organizations. The AFW would enable a regional move from poverty towards living wages in the global garment industrial framework.
- Lamine (Mohamed Rassoulou) Niang introduced the rural cooperative *Mani e Terra* (Hands and Land) in Southern Italy. *Mani e Terra* sells their agricultural produce at a fair price, higher than the one imposed by big retailers, that way guaranteeing a fair remuneration to workers and producers. In the context of the exploitation of migrant workers in Southern European agriculture, *Mani e Terra* establishes a small living example that an alternative, worker-led governance of the labour process is possible.
- Arguing that the bad working conditions in the sex industry and informal sectors are the new norms in a context of neo-liberal governance of markets, Thierry Schaffauser, International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE), emphasised that the experience of sex workers *does* matter. He shared sex workers' struggles for recognition and rights during the Forum.
- From Evangelina Argueta, Project Coordinator of the Honduran trade union *Central General de Trabajadores* (CGT), we learned about the CGT's successful struggles against TNCs'

repression of collective labour rights in a Honduran EPZ. They resulted in the signing of an innovative agreement with the garment giant Fruit of the Loom.

- Sandra Claassen, FairWork shared experiences from FairWork's fights against forced labour in a rich country like the Netherlands. Migrant workers, in particular, are affected. So-called 'cultural mediators' from migrant communities are used to reach out to as many workers as possible for awareness-raising about their labour rights.
- Jeroen Merk, ISS, introduced how Indonesian sportswear workers lobbied for the Freedom of Association (FoA) Protocol in the Indonesian sportswear chain. This innovative triangular agreement between Indonesian trade unions, sportswear manufacturers and buyers has the potential to re-balance power relations between workers, factory management and large sportswear brands.

### Participatory methods led to active engagement and mutual inspiration

We invited the participating practitioners and scholars of worker-driven innovation to engage with the following key questions:

1. What particular conditions make organizing/strategizing more favourable?
2. Which factors promote worker-driven innovation?
3. How can worker-driven innovation be made effective in the long-term?
4. How can upscaling of worker-driven innovation be achieved in the globalised economy?

In the sections below, we provide concise summaries of the Forum discussions and insights relevant to these questions that have emerged from the event.

The Forum programme was organised in such a way to catalyse active engagement of all participants (see Annex 2). Besides plenary and small group discussions that took place in the informal space of the ISS attic, we visited the FNV in Amsterdam to learn about and discuss some of the federation's new organising and regulatory initiatives. We used a range of participatory techniques to stimulate the building of trust, invite discussion and encourage networking among participants<sup>2</sup>. For instance:

- An ice-breaking exercise introduced participants' background and expectations whilst simultaneously developing a colourful network of woollen thread between them.
- The worker-driven innovations outlined above were introduced in a so-called World Café format. After concise introductions of the highlights of the initiatives (±5 minutes),

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<sup>2</sup> We gratefully acknowledge inspiration of and suggestions by our colleague Kees Biekart, ISS, here.

participants could raise questions and discuss aspects of these experiences that were of specific interest to them in smaller groups ( $\pm 20$  minutes).

- The discussion on how upscaling of worker-driven innovation could be achieved took place in a so-called Fishbowl setting. It implied that after initial inputs from a small panel of participants, those who wanted to comment or raise questions could do that by joining an empty chair on the panel.
- During the last day of the Forum, in a participatory process, all participants jointly set the agenda for how to take the discussion of the first two days further.

The different smaller groups that emerged as a result of these techniques, among others, supported trust building, mutual learning and catalysed networking across geographical and occupational boundaries. It brought together agricultural, domestic and sex worker representatives around a platform for informal workers, inspired trade unionists in the Latin American garment sector to learn from initiatives to counter the downward wage spiral in the Asian garment chain and allowed migrant workers in Italy to draw from the experience of the CIW's struggles in the US.



*Thierry Schaffauser explains the results of his group's discussion*

The background notes submitted by the international Forum participants and our notes taken during the three days of the Forum form the basis of this report. Selectively, we relate these experiences and insights to background research, including our own. The report summarises the experience of the Forum from our perspective and invites discussion of our interpretations and conclusions. In the following, we reflect on how Forum participants understood ‘worker-driven innovation’ (section 2) and how it comes about, can be promoted and made effective in the long-term (section 3). The roles of trade unions and academic allies are discussed in sections 4 and 5. In the concluding section 6, we return to the Forum objectives and key questions and reflect on what we have learned from the encounters during the three days duration of the event.

## **2. Giving meaning to worker-driven innovation<sup>3</sup>**

In preparation of the Forum, several of the invitees asked: “What do you mean by ‘worker-driven innovation?’” The Chinese labour scholar and Forum participant Chris Chan even politely apologised: “This concept is new for me”. There was no reason for apologies: The concept was new for everyone. It was coined for the Forum.

### **Reclaiming ‘innovation’ for civic movements**

The invitation to the Forum broadly characterised worker-driven innovation as initiatives through which workers and labour organisations, jointly with allies, have successfully challenged the economic, political and social structures that marginalize them. The term ‘innovation’ was included in an effort to re-claim it from management discourses. In our ISS research group, the Civic Innovation Research Initiative (CIRI), we use the term ‘civic innovation’ to identify, understand and promote forms of collaboration of civic actors that embody progressive social change. In the first CIRI book that aims at giving meaning to civic innovation, our colleagues have expressed this as the: “[...] multiple economic, political and social processes where people, organizations, movements and ideas are shaping struggles for global justice on the interface of capitalism. [...] Civic innovation is about focusing on what is positive, creative and imaginative in the face of a world that seems beset

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<sup>3</sup> The sub-title is inspired by Biekart et al. (2016).

by crisis narratives, whether financial, economic, ecological, social or cultural” (Biekart et al. 2016: 3).

### **Workers driving progressive change**

During the Forum discussions, however, several features that characterise worker-driven innovation came to the fore: it is driven by the workers themselves who experience poverty and precarity, and it builds on workers' specific knowledge of their working conditions as well as of the mechanisms that exploit or empower them.

As mentioned above, the FFP was an important source of inspiration for our understanding of what it means for an initiative to be ‘worker-driven. Mechanisms like the FFP, that the CIW has dubbed ‘worker-driven social responsibility’ (WSR)<sup>4</sup> - in contrast to corporate social responsibility (CSR) – respond to the demand for a ‘sea-change in the international business model and the active participation of informed and empowered workers’ (Brown 2013: 5). The CIW brings out the contradictions of company-led CSR when it asks: “Does the corporation whose supply chain is riddled with human rights violations drive the program, or do the workers whose basic human rights are being violated on a daily basis?” (CIW 2014). On that basis, the Coalition argues that: “If a human rights program is to be effective, the humans whose rights are in question must be key players in — the architects, not the objects of — the design and implementation of the program” (CIW 2014). The result of initiatives for decent work in which workers themselves are at the helm is the design of workplace standards in which workers themselves “[...] craft industry specific codes of conduct that reflect the particular rights and reforms necessary to transform a brutal job into a more modern, more humane workplace. WSR codes contain provisions designed to get at longstanding abuses that only workers could know, the forms of exploitation and humiliation unique to each particular industry that workers have experienced for generations, but no outside “expert” could ever divine” (CIW 2014). A prominent example from Florida’s tomato fields is the elimination of the practice of forced overfilling of harvesting buckets through the FFP. This practice effectively denied workers pay for up to 10 per cent of the tomatoes they harvested (FFSC 2016: 6-7).

### **Innovation builds on workers’ first-hand knowledge of working conditions**

Other initiatives discussed during the Forum, too, highlight that worker-driven innovation builds on workers' specific knowledge of the labour process as well as of the concrete expressions of

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<sup>4</sup> The CIW has a copyright on this term.

structures that exploit or empower them. Chris Chan summarised this succinctly, when he pointed out that: “The real problems only workers can tell you”. For instance, Asian garment workers know their costs of reproduction. They are therefore in the best position to design a living wage like the AFW that offers them compensation allowing for a decent standard of living. The FoA Protocol in the Indonesian sportswear industry addresses the micro-forms of union repression that the Indonesian trade unions involved in the Protocol's negotiation knew too well (Siegmann et al. 2014b: 14). In the innovative collective bargaining agreement (CBA) between the CGT and Fruit of the Loom’s Honduran subsidiary, workers' knowledge turned out to be key in a very specific way: Workers were aware of the managers involved in anti-union behaviour and workers' repression. Based on that, they ensured these were not recruited as part the managerial staff in the new plant.

### **‘Worker-driven’ is not necessarily union-driven**

During the opening of the Forum, we pointed out that worker-driven does not only contrast with corporate-driven initiatives as emphasised by the CIW. In many cases, ‘worker-driven’ is also different from ‘trade union-driven’. Historically, domestic and sex work are examples of two large occupations characterized by high degrees of precarity and rampant violations of key labour rights (ILO 2013, Sanders and Hardy 2013). Yet, often, traditional trade unions have ignored both, arguing that domestic and sex work do not constitute work and/or that organizing these occupations is too difficult (Pape 2016, Schaffauser 2015). Nonetheless, driven by domestic workers and their colourful coalitions, the International Domestic Workers Network lobbied successfully for the 2011 Domestic Workers Convention C189, an international legal instrument for respect, recognition and regulation of domestic work. While Amnesty International has urged governments to protect of the human rights of sex workers through measures that include the decriminalisation of sex work (Amnesty International 2016: 2), sex workers have not yet achieved broad recognition in the trade union movement. In sum, ‘worker-driven’ essentially refers to examples of workers getting together and organising to improve their lot – independently of what forms the organisation they give to themselves take.

### **Worker-driven innovation as ‘positive class compromise’**

Initially, we looked at worker-driven innovation from the perspective of Wright's (2000: 958, 967) notion of ‘positive class compromise’, referring to the mutual cooperation between opposing classes that emerges from strong worker organizations’ struggles. The Freedom of Association (FoA) Protocol in the Indonesian sportswear industry introduced by ISS researcher Jeroen Merk can be

seen as an example of this type of worker-driven initiative. The Protocol was catalysed by the collaboration of diverse Indonesian trade unions and supported by labour rights organizations in Europe and Australia. Working with the unions towards the FoA Protocol allowed manufacturers to overcome a situation in which violent labour struggles choked production. Furthermore, the Protocol 'rescued' sportswear brands from threats to their reputation as producers that 'play fair' with to collective labour rights. Wright (2000: 976) assumes this form of class compromise to be more stable than negative class compromise. This time dimension, the institutionalisation or 'long-term effectiveness' of improvements for labour is, of course, crucial.

### **Worker-driven innovation as alternative form of production**

Yet, the discussions at the Forum brought to the fore a much greater diversity of forms of worker-driven innovation. Other initiatives included the recent establishment of the agricultural cooperative *Mani e Terra* in Southern Italy by local and foreign labourers and the factory occupations that Argentinian workers organised in the midst of the collapse of the national economy in 2001. They represent attempts to promote a process of social transformation from below through the establishment of alternative forms of production based on workers' control and self-management (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016).

During the group discussion that followed his World Café teaser, Maurizio Atzeni therefore emphasised that there is a need not to focus strictly on industrial relations. Forms of organisation and mobilisation often go outside traditional class boundaries and encompass the neighbourhood, the community, the sphere of social reproduction, and everyday life. Other actors, such as police and landlords in case of many sex workers, contribute to labour precarity. As will be discussed below, to challenge them, workers in different sectors and geographical settings have joined hands with a range of allies outside their workspaces.

### **Innovation takes place from local to global level**

Diversity also related to the geographical scale at which innovation took place. For instance, while factory occupations in Argentina happened and *Mani e Terra* operates at a local level, the AFW, FFP and FoA Protocol address working conditions in one sector, each, at both national (FFP, FoA Protocol) and regional level (AFW). The Domestic Workers Convention C189 is a sectoral instrument that intervenes at the supra-national level following some form of 'boomerang pattern': the International Domestic Workers Network used lobbying at the level of the International Labour

Conference as an organizing tool in order to put more effective pressure on national actors subsequently (Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016: 119). More generally, a ‘boomerang pattern’ in transnational advocacy is based on linkages between activists in the global South and global North various parts. Through these networks, domestic actors seek international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 93).

### **3. The how of worker-driven innovation**

The debates at the Forum centred around the “how” of worker-driven innovation. Activists, scholars and students engaged passionately and extensively with the questions that we had raised in our call to the Forum. In this section, we analytically summarise the debates about conditions that make organizing more favourable, factors promoting worker-driven innovation and making it effective in the long-term as well as about ways to bring worker-driven innovation to scale.

#### **What enables organizing for worker-driven innovation?**

Whether worker-driven initiatives emerge from antagonistic class struggles, involve some form of collaboration with corporations or take the form of workers’ self-management: organising workers is a necessary condition for innovative collective moves towards decent work.

Our discussions provided rich learning experiences about which factors enable organising, as building workers’ ‘associational power’ (Wright 2000). Forum participants highlighted the role of both intangible resources, such as effective communication with and confidence-building among workers, as well as tangible resources in the form of available funds. A democratic political environment is important, but not sufficient for workplace democratisation.

Forum co-organiser Shikha Sethia, ISS, highlighted that anger and frustration about poor working conditions and violations of workers’ rights are common triggers for organising for progressive change. Domestic, sex and agricultural workers’ precarity, state-backed union repression in Honduras or Indonesian factories, as well as poverty wages in a wide range of sectors clearly motivated the organising efforts and the visions for change that the Forum participants shared. This anger and these visions are rooted in workers’ own experience. Myrtle Witbooi expressed this when

she declared: “You can only build an organisation if you are a worker yourself. You know the process, you know the worth. Your work is your education.”

The experience shared by several Forum participants highlights that the selection of organisers that, beyond being workers themselves, reflect the social identities of the targeted workforce is key to successful organising. Such shared background facilitates effective communication with and awareness-raising among workers. FairWork therefore tries to reach out to as many migrant workers in the Netherlands as possible through so-called ‘cultural mediators’. They can form a bridge to Dutch culture and institutions. These mediators are often migrants themselves. Some of them are former workers who have experienced similar conditions of severe violations of their labour rights as the workers that FairWork tries to reach out to. Stefan Schmalz underlined the same factor implicitly when he mentioned that young shop stewards were recruited to facilitate the organisation of a precarious workforce in the German metal industry (Schmalz 2016). Chun (2016: 179-180) describes similar experiences in the newly casualised British Columbian healthcare sector in Canada. There, co-ethnic organizers from the rank and file were hired whose cultural ties and language skills helped the Hospital Employees Union to reach new immigrant groups who had little prior contact with unions.

Thierry Schaffauser stressed that this process of ‘translation’ in a broader sense is required to build trust: “The best way to include them is to go to their places of work. Translate into their languages. They see we do an effort. You need one key person, then the link works.” Organising emphasises this trust and solidarity as the flipside of what *Mani e Terra*’s background note referred to as ‘savage competition among workers’ (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016).

More generally, Forum participants emphasised that workers’ subjective experiences and perspectives should be the starting point for organising. This involves overcoming the isolation and resulting lack of confidence that many precarious workers experience. Chris Chan argued that ‘docile’ migrant workers who have generally been understood as the victims of globalization are able to make changes once their confidence is built (Chan 2016). Physical isolation is part and parcel of most domestic and sex workers’ labour process. In this context, Thierry Schaffauser highlighted how sex workers’ isolation due to the social stigma that they experience acts as a barrier for organisation. Social events outside work can help to overcome this isolation (Schaffauser 2015). Migrant workers in agriculture often experience ghettoization in the places in which they reside and work as a result of public and employers’ policies (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016). Ways to break migrant workers’ isolation that were discussed during the Forum included the organisation of language classes, education about labour rights, as well as creating spaces that allow workers to socialise and empower them. Myrtle Witbooi expressed this confidence powerfully in the [song](#) she taught us on

the last day of the Forum, in which people who have historically not been recognised as part of the working class proudly claim a collective identity: “My mother was a kitchen girl/My father was a garden boy/And that is why I’m a unionist/I’m a unionist/I’m a unionist!”

The availability of funds is a relevant factor for organising, too. In the context of the German metalworker union IG Metall, the significant financial resources made available were crucial for initiatives to reach out to non-traditional members. Annually, EUR 16 to 20 million was invested in an innovation fund earmarked for gaining new members. This allowed the union to gain members in weakly organized sectors, such as agency workers, in a targeted manner. This way, the union responded to the challenges of a globalized economy and a flexibilised labour market and revert the trend of membership decline (Schmalz 2016).

The role of a democratic environment was discussed as an external factor for organisation among Forum participants. In the background note that outlines and analyses the agreement between the German discount clothing retailer, KiK Textilien, and PILER after the 2012 factory fire in Karachi, PILER emphasises that progress in Pakistan’s democratisation since 2008 has provided an encouraging socio-political environment for the negotiation of the agreement. Chris Chan highlighted that in authoritarian states like China, workers’ right to independent trade unions is denied. In South Korea, in contrast, the democratization of the political regime created conditions for labour organizing. Shikha Sethia contrasted the idea that political democratisation of a country supports workplace democratisation, unionisation and pushing for better implementation of labour rights with the view that people who get tired from democracy are also withdrawing from active engagement. The widespread acceptance of legalised age-based wage discrimination in the Netherlands is a case in point. Forum participants learned about the Dutch youth minimum wage and Young & United’s campaign against it from organiser Anne Wijers. The campaign illustrates that even in democratic environments, many other obstacles to organising are present. Hence, while a more democratic environment can facilitate organising, this is not necessarily the case.

More specifically, a favourable legal environment for specific sectors can catalyse workers’ organisation. Therefore, domestic workers saw the struggles to be recognized as workers with rights in an international convention as an important, first step. It helped them to build a movement and push for inclusion into national labour laws to provide for real improvements of their working and living conditions (Pape 2016: 189). With regards to sex workers, Thierry Schaffauser (2015: 2) argues that: “Full decriminalisation of sex work is not going to resolve all the problems, especially regarding exploitation, but it is a first step to help sex workers organise without fear.”

### Which factors promote worker-driven innovation?

External and internal factors promoting the emergence of worker-driven innovation can be distinguished. Externally, workers' initiatives respond strategically to structures that oppress workers as well as to acute crises. In the context of globalised production networks, this often implies targeting the buyer of products in spaces of consumption rather than direct employers in the workplace. Coalition-building comes to the fore as a key internal strategy that facilitates struggles connecting such different geographies.

#### *Worker-driven innovation as strategic responses to marginalisation*

Labour scholar Maurizio Atzeni pointed out that workers innovate in strategic response to the political and economic structures that oppress them. The AFW Alliance in the Asian garment industry exemplifies this. Annanya Bhattacharjee explained how the idea of an AFW emerged in response to the power of a few, mostly European or US-American buyers, brands and retailers in the global garment industry. These buyers hold oligopolistic power over suppliers in the global South, enabling them to drive down the prices paid to manufacturers who, in turn, pass them on to garment workers in the form of poverty wages. Based on this strategic analysis of the garment global value chain (GVC), the AFW Alliance decided to target buying companies, i.e. those actors in the GVC who realise the highest share of profits, with their demand for a regional living wage in order to stop the competition at workers' expense.

The CIW offers a similar story in a different industry – the agro-food chain. The Coalition's strategic decision to target buyers of tomatoes emerged in reaction to the failure of their initial campaigning strategy. During the first years of their struggles, the CIW was addressing the growers of the tomatoes they harvested with their demands for higher wages and more humane working conditions. Lucas Benitez described that: "Then, we understood that we were not seeing the real chains." The companies buying tomatoes were invisible. The realisation that these buyers were the real power holders changed the CIW's approach: It started to target the buyers of tomatoes.

The cooperative *Mani e Terra* emerged in a retailer-driven food chain, not very different from the case of CIW. In that context, small producers in Southern Europe are being squeezed and workers experience sub-poverty wages and extremely precarious working and living conditions. Their response is an economic model based on workers' self-management (Oliveri 2015; SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016). It is based on the analysis that, in the current framework characterised by economic recession and financial speculation, it is not realistic to think that the struggles of subordinated workers might successfully challenge the organisation of labour in production.



*Lamine Niang shares Mani e Terra's experience of creating an alternative form of production*

Given this contextual character of workers' initiatives, Karamat Ali's demanded workers' strategic engagement with existing legal mechanisms at national and supra-national level. While Pakistan ratified the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise decades ago, the ILO and national sanctioning mechanisms do not effectively protect workers against violations of this right. According to Ali, the EU's General System of Preferences (GSP) + that connects preferential trade access to the EU with good governance in the area of labour rights, in contrast, has the potential to become a tool for workers in Pakistan to protect this and other core labour rights.

#### *Crisis as trigger for worker-driven innovation*

Worker-driven innovation also responds to immediate crises that trigger action. The shapes of the crises discussed during the Forum were diverse. They may threaten the very life of workers and organisers or represent an immediate and serious threat to their basic, material needs.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) by the transnational buyer of garments KiK Textilien and the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) is a case in point here. The successful mobilisation for the new initiative was triggered by Pakistan's worst industrial disaster that led to the loss of 256 lives, while 55 workers remained injured in the incident. The MoU stipulated the immediate relief and long-term compensation to families of the workers who lost their lives in the 2012 factory fire in Karachi, Pakistan.

Such crises urge workers, organisers and their allies that something needs to be done – urgently and in a different way from the past. Maurizio Atzeni (2016) underscored how factory occupations and workers' self-management in Argentina emerged in response to "the threat of factory closure that the collapse of the economy in December 2001 accelerated, and in the absence of opportunities in the labour market".

Crisis, more specifically the crisis of organisation, has also been an internal trigger for innovation. For instance, Stefan Schmalz related the steps taken for renewal of the German metalworker union IG Metall to the enormous loss in membership and collective bargaining coverage since the 1990s (Schmalz 2016). The CIW's abovementioned strategic change of course since the turn of the millennium can similarly be read as a response to organisational crisis.

#### *'Jumping scale' to counter labour precarity*

Several Forum participants argued that, in order to counter labour precarity in the globalised economy, workers' initiatives need to 'jump scale' (Merk 2009) and target powerful transnational buyers rather than their direct employers. Several reasons were being noted for this strategic move: Firstly, these buyers have effectively emerged as 'indirect employers' who powerfully influence wages and working conditions. Secondly, as Annanya Bhattacharjee pointed out, brands dispose over the necessary financial power: "[...] their sharing of a negligible fraction of their profit could dramatically lift millions of workers and families out of poverty" (AFW Alliance 2016). Thirdly, 'jumping scale' shifts attention away from workplace-based struggles, where workers are vulnerable to dismissal. The experience of Honduran garment workers illustrates this. In 2008 and 2009, Fruit of the Loom shut down two Honduran factories in retaliation to workers forming a union. Yet, workers reversed this situation of union oppression and poverty wages through a landmark CBA. They achieved this victory in collaboration with labour solidarity groups in North America and Europe who put pressure on the brand through boycott and other means.



*Evangelina Argueta underlines the role of strategic alliances for CGT's campaign*

### *Power in coalition<sup>5</sup>*

For the success of the CGT's campaign as well as for many other examples shared during the Forum, the presence of coalitions with other social actors and movements came out as a key internal catalyst of worker-driven innovation. They allowed worker organisations to jump scale in some cases and enabled workers to establish alternative economic models in others.

Evangelina Argueta, CGT's Project Coordinator, argued that the success of the union's campaign was only possible because of the durable strategic alliances between her union, human rights organisations and other allies. For the CGT, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) was a key ally. This student labour organization mobilised public opinion in the US against union repression in Fruit of the Loom's factories in Honduras. Besides, they pressurised Fruit of the Loom by using their bulk purchasing power as institutional garments consumers. This led to the abovementioned contract terminations. Brookes (2013: 192) calls this workers' 'coalitional power' as workers' capacity "[...] to expand the scope of conflict by involving other, nonlabor actors willing and able to

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<sup>5</sup> The sub-heading refers to Tattersall's (2010) book title.

influence an employer's behavior". While precarious workers who use their structural power to stall production risk losing their job, coalitional power enables them to shift the locus of struggles from the place of production to the place of consumption (Siegmann et al. 2016: 114).

Physical proximity has an important role to play in coalition-building. The CGT's campaign was a case in point here. For its success it was important that union representatives toured several US universities to get in touch with and mobilise students and student organisations as allies.

Evangelina Argueta stressed that, for coalitions to be effective for worker-driven innovation, allies' agendas need to be aligned (Argueta 2016). The FoA Protocol in the Indonesian sportswear industry, too, exemplifies this. The coordination between Indonesian trade unions and their allies in Europe and Australia increased pressure on sportswear producers and brands who had a less united and clear agenda (Siegmann et al. 2014b).

In these cases, as well as in PILER's MoU with KiK Textilien, alliances with labour solidarity groups enabled workers' campaigns to 'jump scale' and target brands and retailers. The spatial distance between workers and these 'indirect employers' was being bridged by allies, which often represented critical citizen and consumer groups in main consumer markets. 'Coalitional power' enables workers to pressurise in spaces of consumption alongside the workplace in some form of 'pincer movement' (Siegmann et al. 2016: 122).

PILER's background note on the agreement between the German discount clothing retailer, KiK Textilien, and PILER pointed out that the linkages and trust with garment workers that PILER had built up through collaboration with a women workers' union and generally through trade union bodies were crucial. In an exchange between him and Evangelina Argueta, Karamat Ali highlighted PILER's role as organiser of the 2006 World Social Forum in Karachi for trust building among various social groups within and outside Pakistan. Based on that trust, in the negotiations of the agreement, PILER played the role of an interlocutor "[...] who inspire[s] and knit[s] together the needed network of actors to synergize the change process" (Biekart et al. 2016: 9).

Thierry Schaffauser pointed to a similar dynamic when he described coalition-building through sex workers' solidarity actions in France. Sex workers would join demonstrations against the new labour law in France, despite the fact that their occupation is not covered by the labour law anyway. Their message is both: "This is the type of insecurity that you get when you do away with labour protection", but also: "We are part of the labour movement - and we support your struggles!"

Lamine Niang highlighted a different role that allies can play in supporting worker-driven innovation in the case of the Italian agricultural cooperative *Mani e Terra*. In *Mani e Terra's* experience,

innovation takes the route of establishing an alternative economic model from below. To achieve this, workers united in the cooperative rely on the support of progressive farmers and critical consumers with whom they share values of “sustainability, equity and conviviality” (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016). Jointly, they form the association SOS Rosarno. Farmers experience an income squeeze as a result of their marginal role in mainstream buyer-driven food chains. In search of an alternative, they subcontract the management of the harvest of olives of oranges and commercialisation of their products to the cooperative. In return, workers see their incomes increase and obtain a fairer remuneration of their own work. As regards critical consumers, their role in the establishment of this alternative chain is equally crucial. On the one hand, by purchasing oranges and other products from producers at a ‘fair price’, higher than the one imposed by big retailers, they enable workers and farmers to receive a fair remuneration. On the other hand, the sales to solidarity groups are currently the only source of funding for the cooperative (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016).

For the collaboration in alliances that Lucas Benitez compared to the different roles of players in a football team, it is crucial that the representation of workers’ interest is worker-driven, too. Myrtle Witbooi, first President of the IDWF summarised this succinctly: “The ILO decided to do something for us. Unions tried to talk on our behalf. We said no, you don’t know our work. We speak for ourselves.”

Shared norms provides a coalition with what Chun (2008: 446) terms ‘symbolic leverage’ as “[...] the ways in which structurally marginal groups of workers invoke notions of collective morality to cultivate a ‘positional advantage’ over more powerful social actors and institutions”. In a first step, such shared norms help to extend the range of possible coalition partners. The CIW’s synonymous use of the term ‘human rights’ and ‘labour rights’ illustrates this. It has allowed the Coalition to rope in allies, such as various groups of faith, which are unlikely to rally behind labour rights, but do show practical solidarity when human rights are at stake. It is clear from this example that the shared norms that support coalition-building involve a certain degree of construction. In the case of the AFW Alliance, this construction is based on a certain methodology to establish and agree upon what can be considered a living wage (Bhattacharjee 2016). This agreement, subsequently, strengthens the coherence of the coalition’s agenda.

*Brand visibility facilitates mobilisation*

The visibility of the direct employer or brands against which workers struggle came out as another external catalytic factor for various mobilisations represented during the Forum. For instance, the CIW's successes in empowering and protecting some of the most precarious workers in the USA have emerged in a context in which the buyers of the tomatoes they pick, such as McDonald's and Walmart, are highly visible to consumers. The Indonesian FoA Protocol was negotiated in a situation, in which sportswear brands like Nike and Adidas were keen to protect their reputation as corporations that are 'playing fair' regarding trade union rights (Siegmann et al. 2016: 113).

Especially in sectors with a strong consumer orientation, brands' reputation is an important factor for their ability to create and capture value (Franz 2010: 289). TNCs selling goods and services with a greater visibility to consumers are, therefore, more likely to be concerned about their 'reputational capital'. As a result, they are more eager to sit around the negotiating table. The CGT's campaign against union repression in garment company Fruit of the Loom's Honduran subsidiary is a case in point. Fruit of the Loom started to approach CGT after an avalanche of threats and contract terminations from US-American universities that were part of CGT's coalition (Argueta 2016).

Besides, companies' visibility also attracts media attention. If media are supporting workers' struggles, this can lead to positive feedback loops for a campaign. Indonesian workers' struggles during the Suharto dictatorship, for example, had an impact beyond the local and national level when Western media began to cover these events, highlighting sweatshop conditions at famous brands like Nike, Adidas etc. (Siegmann et al. 2014b).

### **How can worker-driven innovation be made effective in the long-term?**

Once workers' mobilisation for change has been successful, how can the effectiveness of their initiatives be ensured in the long-term? Given the variety of initiatives, the answers to this question provided during the Forum are naturally diverse. Keeping this qualifier in mind, our discussions highlighted the importance of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, flanked by the threat with market and/or state sanctions.

#### *Effective enforcement through educated workers*

Forum participants underlined the importance of enforcement mechanisms, especially for those initiatives that involve some type of agreement with workers' direct or indirect employers. Enforcement typically includes monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms. Evangelina Argueta (2016) warned that in the absence of monitoring, powerful companies are unlikely to comply with

agreements they have signed to reduce public pressure on their reputation. As a result, workers do not feel that they have achieved greater justice. To address these risks, the CGT's CBA with Fruit of the Loom includes, among others, the setting up of a supervisory committee to monitor and enforce all aspects of the agreement (Argueta 2016).

In order to be effective, enforcement, too, needs to be driven by workers. The FFP's effectiveness has much to do with the Coalition's presence on the ground with a two decades-long history of organising and struggle. According to Lucas Benitez, the whole point of the FFP is that it is led by workers. Therefore, it places the job of monitoring labour rights squarely in the hands of those who work in the fields (CIW 2016a). A 24 hour complaint line that they can contact is an example of farmworkers' central role in the FFP's enforcement. It is being answered live by the monitoring organization, the Fair Food Standards Council (FFSC). The FFSC investigates the complaints, ensures that workers' input is not ignored and helps identify and eliminate the sources of code violations (CIW 2016a). Besides being more effective, worker-driven enforcement of the FFP is also more efficient. Otherwise, it would be difficult to impossible to marshal sufficient resources to monitor violations in the fields (CIW 2016b).

Annanya Bhattacharjee reinforced this point when she argued that the only way to enforce the AFW is through unions, rather than seeing the establishment of a living wage benchmark as an alternative for unionisation. That is why 'strategic unionisation' remains one of the main goals of the unions involved in the AFW Alliance (Bhattacharjee 2016).

Workers can drive the enforcement of new initiatives to improve their labour conditions only if they are aware of their rights and entitlements. Against the backdrop of East Asian labour movements, Chris Chan (2016) argued that labour education and the promotion of workers' self-organisation are the most important steps towards long-term effectiveness of worker-driven innovation. In the FFP, worker-to-worker education is carried out regularly by teams of CIW members on farms around the state. The CIW (2016a) argues that: "The education program — combined with the distribution (at the time of hire) of a rights booklet and the viewing of a video produced by the CIW explaining the rights under the Fair Food code of conduct — is designed to ensure that each and every worker knows his or her rights and how to enforce them".

Following this logic, Karamat Ali proposed systematic training of shop stewards in Pakistan's industry about labour rights. This would ensure that the labour-related stipulations of Pakistan's preferential trade access to the EU under the GSP+ could become an effective lever for decent work. The presence of aware and empowered workers in Pakistani workplaces could revert a situation in which many ILO conventions have been ratified without any implementation. To achieve this, he saw

support by unions abroad as necessary in a context of a weak trade union movement and government priorities in which social development ranks low.

### *Workers' institutional power enhances initiatives' effectiveness*

The Forum discussions also brought to the fore that some form of state backing of worker-driven innovations can be an important factor enhancing these initiatives' effectiveness. Brookes (2013: 188) labels such state backing 'institutional power'. She defines it as: "[...] the capacity of workers to influence the behavior of an employer by invoking the formal or informal rules that structure their relationship and interactions". These public rules can be rooted in various spaces: in national or international legislation, in the country in which workplaces are located or in those in which companies are headquartered.

A key role of institutional power is evident in the case of the domestic worker movement's campaign for an international Domestic Workers Convention. Myrtle Witbooi pointed out that now, after ratification of the Convention, domestic workers need to mobilise so that states will translate and apply the international rules enshrined in the convention into effective national legislation.

US farmworkers are not covered – and hence not strengthened and protected - by national labour legislation, as Lucas Benitez explained during the Forum. This void and the resulting precarity of farmworkers, in fact, motivated the CIW's Campaign for Fair Food and the emergence of the FFP. Still, institutional power might have a role to play for the effectiveness of the FFP. Contract law enforceable through private litigation underpins the CIW's agreements with buyers and tomato growers. This sanctioning mechanism has worked - so far, it has not been necessary to act on the threat to stop a contract. This success can be related to the corporate sector's internalisation of the legal norms embodied in contract law. It makes them effective in preventing violations of the Fair Food Code of Conduct (Siegmann et al. 2016: 123-4).

There are other cases, in which state law underpins initiatives, signalling that institutional power could be leveraged, if necessary. The AFW Alliance highlights that their floor wage concept is based on widely accepted norms that are institutionalized in existing policies, laws, and practices in Asian countries (Bhattacharjee 2016). Furthermore, one can argue that the composition of the tripartite committee that oversees the implementation of the CGT's CBA with Fruit of the Loom's subsidiary Russell involves some form of institutional power, too. Besides representation of the CGT and Fruit of the Loom, this committee also includes a public lawyer (Argueta 2016). This representation can be

related to existing legal sanctions, both based on Honduran and US law. It can be considered an invocation of the state, which has been absent in this process otherwise.

The flipside of this role of institutional power is that the absence of flanking legal enforcement mechanisms casts doubt on the effectiveness of some of the initiatives we engaged with. For instance, Karamat Ali observed that, to date, the German retailer KiK Textilien has not fulfilled two of the three commitments it agreed to in the MoU with PILER. The Government of the Sindh province of Pakistan announced a flanking 'Joint Action Plan for Promoting Workplace Safety and Health in Sindh' in 2013 (Government of Sindh et al. 2013), but this plan, too, still remains to be implemented.

The lack of legal enforcement mechanisms was also brought up as an important critique of the Dutch covenants for supply chain responsibility that we discussed at the FNV. Fred Polhout, manager FNV Finance and Commercial Services, introduced FNV's role in the development of sector-based covenants and zoomed in on the negotiations of a covenant for the banking sector<sup>6</sup>. Several Forum participants flagged that they did not perceive differences between the covenants' approach and – largely ineffective - CSR initiatives. Chris Chan concluded this discussion by summarising that: "We know that the best tools for workers are state laws."

Market incentives can offer an alternative or complementary mechanism to enforce labour rights enshrined in the agreements workers have made. For instance, in the absence of state power enforcing (undocumented migrants') labour rights, the FFP standards are backed by market consequences. This involves that participating buyers commit to buy their produce only from growers in good standing with the FFP, to cease purchases from growers who fail or refuse to comply with the program (CIW 2016).

### **How can worker-driven innovation be brought to scale?**

One of the guiding questions for the Forum was how to bring worker-driven innovation to scale. With this, we aimed at identifying ways for making improvements in labour conditions effective for as many workers as possible. *Mani e Terra* formulates this objective beautifully as going beyond 'happy islands' (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016). The question had also been motivated by a possible trade-off between effectiveness and scale that had been perceived in other analyses of civic innovation (Biekart et al. 2016: 12). Our discussions led to surprising answers both to the question about the forms that upscaling of worker-driven innovation takes and regarding factors enabling it.

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<sup>6</sup> This covenant was signed in October 2016. The full text can be found [here](#).

Seeing such initiatives as strategic responses to a specific economic and political context of working poverty and precarity implies that there are no blue-prints available for upscaling. Instead, adapted replication and trans-local collaboration were identified as alternative ways to make worker-driven initiatives relevant for more than the 'happy few' workers.

Several Forum participants proposed adapted replication instead of initiatives' economic growth in order to ensure that worker-driven innovations do play more than a symbolic role. *Mani e Terra*, for instance, is engaged in the building of a nation-wide network of other worker-driven innovations inspired by the same values and political vision – the network *FuoriMercato* (Outside the market). The CIW has collaborated with the dairy worker organization Migrant Justice in Vermont in an effort to replicate the FFP within their Milk with Dignity Program (CIW 2016). Based on their experience, the CIW turns the trade-off perceived in Biekart et al. (2016) upside down when it argues that *because* the FFP can be brought to scale, it is effective (CIW 2016). Lucas Benitez therefore confidently asked: "Upscaling to the level of Walmart should be a risk? So far, nobody changed the operations of big corporations. We did."

Organising workers along the garment value chain in Pakistan as suggested by Karamat Ali indicates another way to expand initiatives horizontally. This form of upscaling addresses the risk that workers' organisations get complacent when they have achieved the organisation of one sector, a possibility that Annanya Bhattacharjee highlighted during our discussions.

Horizontal expansion paves the way to change dominant norms that govern a particular industry. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 895) argue that broad norm acceptance or 'norm cascading' by 'norm leaders', such as states or companies, leads to an institutionalisation of new norms. Such change is the result of 'norm entrepreneurs' lobbying. Annanya Bhattacharjee described such a process of 'norm cascading' as a result of the AFW campaign. She pointed out that, when the campaign was initiated, garment brands would deny their responsibility for wages and working conditions along their supply chain. Now, she argued, brands are ashamed to say that they are not paying a living wage. Now they state: "We are trying." Evangelina Argueta described that industrial relations in other garment companies in Honduras have changed, too, as a ripple effect of the CGT's innovative agreement with Fruit of the Loom. Today, large social housing projects for workers are being developed, projects such as child care centres, health programmes at work, trade union training and wage negotiations all take place (Argueta 2016). These dynamics are indicative of a similar process of norm cascading as a result of the CGT's campaign.

For Myrtle Witbooi, upscaling to the international level was the way through which the domestic workers' movement became successful in the first place. Looking back at the Forum, she argued

(Witbooi and Siegmann 2016): “If we look at domestic workers’ struggle at the local level, we find that they have little power. But if domestic workers at the local level can connect to form a national organization, they are much stronger to speak out for themselves and take the voice of domestic workers’ rights further. [...] You have much more power and much more voice in a national or international setting.” This ‘boomerang pattern’ allowed domestic workers to put pressure on national governments based on the discursive, rather than material power of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention.

Proximity was identified as an important factor catalysing different forms of upscaling. *Mani e Terra* emphasises that connections between subalterns must be based on real and material ties (SOS Rosarno and *Mani e Terra* 2016). Chris Chan's suggested that opportunities to meet and exchange with other workers outside their own context can stimulate new ideas (Chan 2016). In this light, the experience of international networking at the Forum itself might have an important role to stimulate worker-driven innovation.

#### 4. Towards worker-driven trade unions

Trade unions have had a key, yet, ambiguous role in the worker-driven innovations represented during the Forum.

Several initiatives emerged from local unions’ struggles, such as the CGT’s Fruit of the Loom campaign in Honduras and the FoA Protocol in Indonesia. How to counter union oppression and guarantee freedom of association were key concerns of both campaigns. The demand for a living wage in the Asian garment industry, too, emerged from a process of consultation and convergence among an alliance led by unions.

The AFW Alliance’s campaign for a regional floor wage is an example for how trade unions’ regional networking enabled by moves from competition to collaboration among workers in different countries. While the structures of garment GVCs promote an intense level of competition between workers, and by extension also of national economies in attracting foreign investors, the AFW is a case of a strategic shift of unions’ strategies towards regional and international solidarity.

The strategy of the AFW matches and counters the ability of footloose corporations to relocate relatively easily - enabled by low sunk costs and the ability to move across national borders - by

transnational networking with other worker organisations and allies. Evangelina Argueta was fascinated by this approach to disable producers and buyers to blackmail worker organisations. It responded to her question: “If you are working to improve conditions in Honduras, the problem is that corporations relocate to other countries. How can we make sure that there is geographical extension?”

Yet, trade unions’ limited presence in workplaces and the fact that coverage of initiatives is sometimes limited to the upper tier of complex value chains, raises the question in how far innovation is union- rather than worker-driven: How much does it come from cadres and leadership rather than from the workers themselves, the rank and file of unions? In this regard, the German IG Metall’s campaign for union renewal embodies an interesting contradiction: While aimed at reaching out to the vast group of metalworkers not represented in the organisation, the strategy for the IG Metall’s comeback was designed in a top-down fashion.

The dynamic in Germany’s largest and most powerful trade union exemplifies a widespread crisis of representation in the global labour movement, which has been slow to acknowledge that the ranks of the working class are filled with a more diverse crowd than permanent, male, industrial employees. For instance, during the Forum, Thierry Schaffauser highlighted that precarity more and more comes in the shape of self-employment rather than wage labour, while Sandra Claassen pointed to the absence of migrant workers’ voice in union campaigns in the Netherlands.

Paradoxically, the more precarious the work, the less likely workers are to be unionised. Representing sex workers as the ‘ultimate precarious labour’ (Sanders and Hardy 2013), Thierry Schaffauser (2015) therefore urged trade unions to welcome *all* workers to join labour organisations. He argued that: “[...] trade unions must understand industrial changes, and accept that workers are the way they are and not the way unions wish them to be.” Both he and Myrtle Witbooi rejected the classical argument that reproductive labour, such as that provided by sex and domestic workers, is not part of the productive economy. Myrtle Witbooi countered: “Unions argued: you are not part of the economy. Try and see what happens to the economy if millions of domestic workers do not go to work!”



*Myrtle Witbooi teaches us a song about domestic workers as part of the working class*

## 5. Research that works for workers

Academics and academic institutions emerge as key allies in what Chris Chan labelled ‘pro-labour civil society networks’ (Chan 2016). Our discussions brought to the fore, however, that the type of knowledge that scholars contribute and the way they generate it matters for the role of research in worker-driven innovation: Forum participants insisted on knowledge generation *with* workers rather than about them.

### **Academics as allies in worker-driven innovation**

Generating evidence on workers’ needs and violations of their rights has been an important step in the design of many of the initiatives introduced during the Forum. For instance, in case of the AFW Alliance, need-based surveys in India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Indonesia were used to develop the formula to estimate adequate levels of a living wage for Asian garment workers

(Bhattacharjee 2016). Similarly, in the process of union renewal of the IG Metall, systematic worker surveys became participation instruments that offered feedback possibilities (Schmalz 2016). The process leading to the MoU with KiK Textilien after the 2012 Karachi factory fire started with a fact-finding investigation. This included a survey of factory workers on occupational safety and health in the factories (PILER 2016).

Research has also been instrumental as a campaign or monitoring tool. In the case of the Fruit of the Loom campaign, e.g., the documentation of violations of workers' freedom of association in the company's Honduran factories by the Worker Rights Consortium and the University of Michigan was key to inform the public and put pressure on the company (Argueta 2016). During our discussion of the Dutch covenants for supply chain responsibility at FNV, Fred Polhout emphasised the significance of information on how companies fare on labour rights compliance in the covenants' implementation process. When he called onto the participants to keep working together with both worker representatives and researchers to fill the knowledge gap on labour rights compliance in supply chains, Evangelina Argueta pointed out that consultation about investment decisions with relevant local organisations is required to prevent that rights violations take place in the first place.

### **Doing research *with* rather than about workers**

Evangelina Argueta's response indicates that the terms on which workers are involved in knowledge production and the broader agenda for action are key (Sethia 2016). Ex post consultation with workers might just be a tool to legitimate corporations' decisions. Forum participants criticised that data collection for research has often been a top-down process, with academics defining the scope and method for collecting information (Sethia 2016). Thierry Schaffauser, in particular, expressed a deep distrust towards research that extracts knowledge from activists without contributing to their movement. He declared: "We don't want to be researched. Researchers come with questionnaires, which are useless for us. Sometimes, they are even used against us. They study people, from the questions you see that this is not going very far." Lucas Benitez emphasised how the most important thing in collaboration with academics is that they do not impose their ideas on workers' initiatives. Rather, workers' should be in the driver's seat.

Such worker-driven research does research *with* workers instead of about them. Instead of attempting to be 'neutral' observers, for Thierry Schaffauser, respect and support for the labour movement should form starting points for collaborating researchers. Examples for such alternative forms of collaboration mentioned during the Forum included the complementary role of Lucas Benitez' own testimony and supportive research findings presented by journalist and author Eric

Schlosser during a US Senate hearing on farmworker exploitation. Karin Astrid Siegmann shared how her ISS colleague Helen Hintjens and herself trained undocumented migrant workers to conduct a study on undocumented people's access to healthcare in The Netherlands. Through that approach, the 'researched' became researchers through all stages of the process (Biekart and Siegmann 2016: 239). In hindsight, for Myrtle Witbooi, the Forum itself embodied a moment of an alternative university: one in which there is dialogue with and extensive learning from the experiences of informal workers as well as joint reflection how workers' strategies could be more effective (Witbooi and Siegmann 2016). More generally, however, in her reflections on the Forum, Shikha Sethia (2016), raises critical questions about the possibility of academic spaces that are more inclusive of workers' movements: "To what extent does academia allow workers themselves to set the terms, e.g. identify the research questions and methods and validate the findings?"

One of the working groups on the Forum's concluding day brainstormed on research gaps that informal workers' movements perceive. The gaps they identified include, e.g., studies about the needs of workers who want to join unions, that investigate the possibilities of social security provisions - such as pensions, social insurance, maternity benefits - for informal workers or which identify the practical relevance of the Domestic Work Convention C189. ISS students who participated in the Forum were keen to ensure that the research they undertake as part of their training have a real impact for workers and labour movements. They suggested to also communicate identified gaps to future generations of ISS students.

## 6. Learning about worker-driven innovation

There are many and different learnings from three exciting days of the Forum. Any summary will therefore remain partial. Having said that, for us, some key lessons included:

- Worker-driven innovation happens both within *and* outside capitalist labour relations. Yet, it always aims to transform the structures marginalising workers, based on workers first-hand understanding of these structures.
- Organising is the basis for workers' initiatives for change. Building workers' confidence that they are someone, that they have rights, that they can achieve change is a starting point for organising.

- Forging coalitions is key in worker-driven innovation. This is important especially in the context of a globalised economy, where workers’ struggles connect otherwise separate spaces of production and consumption. Coalition partners play a specific role – often exerting pressure as critical citizens and consumers -, aiming for the same goal while ceding ‘team captainship’ to workers themselves – to stay in Lucas Benitez’ metaphor of a football match.
- Enforcement mechanisms guarantee the effectiveness of worker-driven innovation. While workers should be the primary watchdogs in monitoring, state backing, e.g. through different types of legal norms can amplify the threat with sanctions, should workers’ rights be violated.
- Upscaling might be a solution rather than a risk for the effectiveness of worker-driven innovation: When initiatives that counter workers’ poverty and precarity are no longer ‘happy islands’, they can change the way society sees and recognises workers’ claims for rights and respect.
- Finally, upscaling worker-driven innovation through adapted replication requires physical proximity. Meeting spaces like the Forum therefore have an important role. Karamat Ali concluded his evaluation of the Forum with thanks to the ISS, yet: “The next Forum should go to the global South!”.

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## Annexure

### Annex 1: List of external invitees, speakers and organisers

<b>External Invitees</b>			
<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>E-mail address</i>
Anannya Bhattacharjee	Asia Floor Wage Alliance	India	anannya48@gmail.com
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Mohamed Rassoulou (Lamine) Niang	<i>Mani e Terra</i>	Italy	lamineniang@gmail.com
Myrtle Witbooi	International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF)	South Africa	myrtlewitbooi@gmail.com
Natali Rodriguez	Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)	USA	natali@sfalliance.org

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>E-mail address</i>
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Thierry Schaffauser	International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE)	France	sexworkeractivist@gmail.com
<b>Speakers</b>			
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## Annex 2: Forum programme

### 13 June: Learning from examples – dialogues about worker-driven innovations

#### Objectives:

1. *mutual introductions participants & introduction CIRI*
2. *introduction & discussion worker-driven innovations & analytical approaches to them, focussing on key questions listed above, in order to*
3. *inspire mutual learning on the ‘how’ of worker-driven innovation*

#### Location: ISS Attic

8.30hrs Registration (Shikha Sethia)

9.00hrs Welcome (Karin Astrid Siegmann)

9.15hrs Opening (Peter Knorringa)

9.30hrs Ice-breaker (Giulio Iocco)

10.00hrs ‘Worker-driven’ experiment in participatory videotaping (Dorotea Pace)

10.15hrs Introductions innovations through World Café (round 1) (Karin Astrid Siegmann)

11.00hrs Coffee/tea break

11.15hrs Introductions innovations through World Café (rounds 2 & 3) (Giulio Iocco & Karin Astrid Siegmann)

12.45hrs Lunch

13.45hrs Connecting participants with ISS students (Shikha Sethia)

14.00hrs Logistics (Sanne Huesken)

14.15hrs ‘Fishbowl’ discussion: How can upscaling of worker-driven innovation be achieved?

15.45hrs Coffee/tea break

#### Location: ISS Atrium

16.30hrs CIRI book celebration “Exploring Civic Innovation for Social and Economic Transformation” (Wendy Harcourt)

18.00hrs drinks in ISS Butterfly Bar

19.15hrs Departure for the beach

20.00hrs Dinner at the beach (De Kwartel, Zuiderstrand 7 - Slag 9, 2566 SB Den Haag)

#### **14 June: Learning from experiences – field visits**

*Objectives:*

1. *Learning about worker-driven innovation by discussing concrete examples*
2. *Bonding*

9.00hrs Departure for field visit (FNV, Naritaweg 10, 1043 BX Amsterdam)

10.30hrs FNV on sector-wide covenants (Fred Polhout)

12.30hrs Lunch

14.00hrs Introduction Mondiaal FNV (Karen Brouwer)

14.30hrs Campaign 'Young & United' for abolition of youth minimum wage in the Netherlands (Anne Wijers)

15.30hrs Schiphol airport campaign (Naïma el Moussati)

16.30hrs Departure for The Hague

19.30hrs Dinner

#### **15 June: Learning from encounters – ways forward regarding worker-driven innovation**

*Objectives:*

1. *discussing & planning forms of future collaboration in different ways (whole group/sub-groups)*

*Location: ISS Attic*

9.00hrs De-briefing: What have we taken from the field visit at FNV?

9.45hrs Participatory agenda-setting (Karin Astrid Siegmann & Giulio Iocco)

10.45hrs Coffee/tea break

11.00 Groups around priorities identified during agenda-setting

12.00 'Harvest' groups

13.00hrs Lunch

14.00hrs Meet & Greet Tree connecting participants with ISS students (Shikha Sethia)

15.00hrs Ideas for way forward (Karin Astrid Siegmann & Giulio Iocco)

16.00hrs Evaluation (Freek Schiphorst)

17.00hrs Closure (Karin Astrid Siegmann & Giulio Iocco)

17.30hrs Farewell drinks in ISS Butterfly Bar