

# **Living on the Margins: A Study of Domestic Workers in Chennai, India**

**By Dithhi Bhattacharya, Meghna Sukumar and Mohan Mani  
Centre for Workers' Management**

## **Abstract**

This study traces the changes in domestic work as a result of the transformation in class relations and family restructuring in India. It also delves into the caste dynamics and the reorganisation of residential colonies in urban areas that today define how domestic workers are viewed in society. It therefore opens up the discussion on how to organise domestic workers in the changed economic and social climate. The study is based in Chennai and draws on the experience of organising domestic workers of the Penn Thozhilalar Sangam.

## **Background**

As a result of the transformation in class relations and family restructuring, paid domestic work has become a necessity for a considerably large section of the urban population today. Employment of domestic workers is no longer restricted to the affluent but has become a necessity for the middle class, even lower middle-class families, given the disappearance of the social infrastructure of support in urban nuclear families. With the cost of living rising and educated women asserting their right to economic independence, many women from the middle and lower middle class families are choosing to seek employment either voluntarily or due to economic reasons, and the double burden of doing household chores is passed on to paid domestic workers without upsetting the patriarchal structure in any way. Despite the necessity of this work and the worker performing it, which allows the woman in the household, and even the man, to work outside their home to earn a considerably higher wage, domestic work, traditionally performed by the wife/mother, is undervalued and hence, when in the market, underpaid. Moreover, there is very low value attributed to this housework when performed by wives/ mothers/ sisters/ daughters but when this work is outsourced to a paid worker, the value attributed to it is even lower and hence the remuneration is very low. In addition, there is an underlying assumption that wages for domestic work can be kept low since power to strike of domestic workers is low. On the occasion of a strike, the women of the household are always available to perform the tasks to break the strike and find the next low paid worker. Thus, the movement of this work from the private domain to a paid service does not challenge the structure of patriarchy that undervalues women's work. The fact that paid domestic work, given its location and nature, also involves both physical and emotional labour is not reflected in its value determination.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), paid domestic work is an important source of employment, with an estimated 52.6 million workers in the sector across the world in 2010. The number represents an increase of more than 19 million since the mid-1990s. This number is probably an underestimation, as many more millions are unregistered, hidden and non-enumerated by labour force surveys and censuses. More strikingly, based

on the same survey, domestic work accounted for 7.5 percent of women's employment worldwide, with a far greater proportion in domestic work in some regions.<sup>1</sup> Given the fact that domestic work is often hidden and unregistered, the total number of domestic workers could be as high as 100 million. In developing countries, they make up at least 4 to 12 per cent of wage employment. Around 83 per cent of these workers are women or girls and many are migrant workers.<sup>2</sup>

The regional variations in the incidence of domestic work presented in the ILO report are of interest. While female domestic workers as a ratio of female paid employees in 2010 was 1.4 percent for developed countries, the corresponding ratio was 11.8 percent for the Asia-Pacific region excluding China; 13.6 percent for Africa; 26.6 percent for Latin America and the Caribbean; and 31.8 percent in the Middle East. We might assume that, on the one hand, the significant differences in the ratio of domestic workers point to high-income disparities across regions, and on the other, there are not enough employment opportunities for women in economies where there are more female domestic workers.

We see today that domestic work is increasingly becoming part of the global division of labour, and inextricably integrated with it. However, while this is an opportunity especially for women migrating for work given their lack of formal skilling, the absence of social protection also renders such workers more vulnerable.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the greater the income inequality in a country, the greater the likelihood of the proliferation of domestic workers. Chandrashekhar and Ghosh estimated that there were some 30.5 lakh women domestic workers in urban India in 2004-05, marking an increase of 222 percent in the decade of 1990-2000.<sup>4</sup> Further, of the total increase in the number of women workers in 2000-2010, "14.4 percent was accounted by domestic work."<sup>5</sup>

## Issues of domestic work

Understanding domestic work, both within the paid and unpaid sphere, and its role in the reproduction of labour within capitalism has been an important contribution of the women's movement. Questions such as What is domestic work? Is this work productive? What is its value and composition within the division of labour? have been discussed and debated upon repeatedly.<sup>6</sup>

### Unregulated and underpaid

The nature of domestic work – including it being unpaid in many cases, the overwhelming female participation rate in this work, its location in the private space of a household and the low level of participation of women in formal employment – all resulted in the work being largely unregulated and underpaid.

---

<sup>1</sup> Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection, ILO, Geneva, 2013.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS\\_157891/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/100thSession/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_157891/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Gothoskar, Sujata. (2013). EPW, Vol XLVIII No.22, June 1.

<sup>4</sup> Chandrashekhar CP, and Jayati Ghosh (2007). 'Women Workers in Urban India'.

<sup>5</sup> Chandrashekhar CP, and Jayati Ghosh, (2012). The Hindu Business Line.

<sup>6</sup> Gothoskar, Sujata. (2005). *New initiatives in organising strategy in the informal economy – Case study of domestic workers' organising*. Bangkok: Committee for Asian Women.

In the context, the 14.4 percent contribution of domestic employment to the increase in employment for women in the 2000-2010 is of interest. According to the National Sample Survey data for India, for 2004-05, only around 24 percent of the urban female working population (aged more than 15 years) was employed compared to 79 percent of men. By 2009-10, the proportion of urban female working population had declined to 19 percent.<sup>7</sup> Around 1 in every 7 addition to the female workforce is a domestic worker, which underscores the importance of domestic work as a means of livelihood for a large section of urban families. The rural-urban migration might be seen, in part, as being encouraged by this form of occupation. On the other hand, this would also point to the division of labour and the new opportunities for women in formal employment, particularly in the service industry like education, banking, finance and information technology.<sup>8</sup> The rising middle class population needs a large domestic workforce to sustain its needs of reproduction of labour. This is an interesting matrix, where the rise of a middle class with increased female participation in formal employment creates demand for domestic services, and where increasing migration and lack of opportunities for women drive many of them to seek employment in the domestic sector. The efforts to organise and fight for regulation in the domestic sector will have to be analysed in this context.

On 16 August 2011, the Domestic Workers Convention (C189)<sup>9</sup> was adopted by the ILO at the 100<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference. The ILO Convention (C189) was an important victory for organisations and advocacy groups that were campaigning for the rights of workers in the domestic sector. India did not ratify the Convention, which came into force on 5 September 2013. The Convention, among its other provisions, requires ratifying countries to ensure minimum wage protection for domestic workers. It also recommends regulations for occupational health and safety and the social security of workers in the sector.

In India, two draft bills, put forward by the National Commission for Women and the National Campaign Committee of Unorganised Sector Workers, to protect domestic workers have been in circulation since 2008,<sup>10</sup> but neither has been passed. Meanwhile, some states have passed legislation for minimum wage and social security for domestic workers. Tamil Nadu included domestic workers in their Manual Workers Act and in the Manual Workers Welfare Board, Maharashtra passed the Maharashtra Domestic Workers' Welfare Board Act in 2008 and the rules for it were framed in 2010. Further, under section 27 (A) of the Maharashtra State Public Service Conduct Act, 1997, government employees are now prohibited from employing children below 14 years as domestic workers.

The Government of India has also amended the Central Civil Service Conduct Rules to prohibit civil servants from employing children below the age of 14 years as domestic workers. The states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Bihar, Jharkhand and Rajasthan

---

<sup>7</sup> Chen, Martha. (2012) Urban Employment in India: Recent trends and future prospects, Workshop on Growth and Inclusion: Theoretical and Applied Perspectives, ICRIER, New Delhi, January 13, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> According to a study by the IT association NASSCOM and the HR consulting firm Mercer the number of women working in the IT-BPO sector in India grew by 60% during 2006-08. [www.nasscom.in](http://www.nasscom.in)

<sup>9</sup> [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---/wcms\\_208561.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---/wcms_208561.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Domestic Workers (Registration, Social Security and Welfare) Act, 2008 and the Draft National Policy on Domestic Workers as recommended by the Taskforce on Domestic Workers

have notified a minimum wage for domestic workers but there has been no attempt to enforce the legislation.<sup>11</sup>

In Tamil Nadu, domestic work was brought into the schedule of the Minimum Wages Act in 2007. An advisory committee was formed to study the minimum wage for domestic workers in 2009, which recommended that the state government set the minimum wage at Rs. 30 per hour.<sup>12</sup> The recommendation has yet to be implemented to date, and there remains no statutory minimum wage for the sector. Domestic work is included in around 64 categories of employment in Tamil Nadu covered for social security benefits. The various legislations toward regulation of domestic work, while suffering from either poor enforcement or a lack of will to be implemented, still serve the purpose of defining demands in the sector and helping workers organise around these common demands.

### Caste determined task division

In India, caste categories continue to determine the division of labour and tasks among domestic workers. Employers often arbitrarily decide on the workers' caste on the basis of the workers' skin colour. Women from 'backward' castes are largely employed in cleaning tasks, while upper-caste women are employed in the kitchen as cooks and/ or for washing dishes. However, these caste stereotypes are increasingly violated, especially in the case of migrant workers, who are able to hide their caste identity. Women migrants, who had not sought employment in their place of origin due to caste and social status, often seek work when they migrate to urban centres. Moreover, given the social transformation of urban centres, young professional nuclear middle-class and upper-middle-class households often employ workers without prejudice to caste. However, migrant workers still choose not to divulge their caste and even religious identities to better their chances of finding employment. The fact that caste determines task, and tasks that are traditionally performed by those from the higher castes command higher wages, such as cooking, also push workers to keep their caste identity undisclosed to be able to negotiate tasks with higher wages.<sup>13</sup>

### Non-recognition of skills

Domestic work is considered "unskilled" work, and hence is usually the first kind of employment for women, especially migrant and young women, entering the job market through local networks. The prevalence of the patriarchal notion that women's work is inherently unskilled underlies this assumption. Thus, a domestic worker cooking at home is considered 'unskilled' work and hence underpaid, but a chef working at a hotel is 'highly skilled' and earns a salary that is several times higher than that of the former. To put it simply, the same task may be considered skilled in location A but unskilled in location B, depending on whether it is a male-dominated or female-dominated employment sphere.

### Organising in the face of changing residential patterns

The ability of workers to organise in the context of changing patterns of housing and residential accommodation in cities needs to be explored. With the concentration of urban

---

<sup>11</sup> [www.paycheck.in](http://www.paycheck.in)

<sup>12</sup> US\$ 1 is equivalent to approximately Rs. 68, as of February 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Kasturi, Leela. (1990). 'Poverty, Migration and Women's Status' in Vina Mazumdar (ed) Women Workers in India: Studies on Employment Status; and Raghuram, Parvati, 2001, 'Caste and gender in the organisation of paid domestic work in India', in Work, Employment and Society

housing, especially in apartment complexes, domestic workers are also able to set their own wage norms, and in effect operate a “closed shop” system to enforce their own employment terms with employers. There has been anecdotal evidence of this from as early as the 1990s in cities like Delhi. However, with the collectivisation of employers through the Residential Welfare Organisations (RWAs), especially in the metropolitan cities, there has been a concerted attempt by the RWAs to ‘criminalise’ domestic workers. The RWAs insist upon the registration of domestic workers, not to regulate their working conditions and wages, but to ensure the safety and security of the employers. In many residential complexes, police verification is compulsory to register as a domestic worker in the complexes. Thus domestic workers today are not just underpaid and undervalued, they are considered a potential threat to their employers’ personal security. Organising domestic workers appears timelier than ever, as the threat to them is now greater than it was a decade ago, and there is a need to make them more aware of the importance of struggling for their collective rights.

### **Research methodology**

The research followed a participatory and iterative research method. A series of discussions was held with the Penn Thozhilalar Sangam (PTS) leadership and with the active members of Garment and Fashion Workers Union (GAFWU), to formulate research questions within the agreed framework. Some of the main issues for research were tested out first during the last workshop with PTS and GAFWU activists in Chennai in August 2014. The findings gave interesting insights among union activists.

Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with domestic workers from Ambattur, Chrompet, Thiruvallur-Kallakurai, the Old Mahabalipuram Road or the IT corridor, and Choolaimedu in the months of September and October 2014. Full-time activists from PTS were involved directly in conducting and leading the group discussions. An earlier CWM study of domestic workers in Chennai undertaken between May and June 2012, as well as interviews GAFWU members on issues of wage and monthly expenditure patterns, was used to kick off discussions during the FGDs, and in the analysis and completion of the present study.

The draft study report was discussed with PTS and GAFWU leadership, both for factual correctness and for their suggestions on the analyses and interpretations contained in the report. The suggestions were taken into account in finalising the report. The following sections carry the salient findings of the study.

### **Organising domestic workers by Women Workers’ Union (Penn Thozhilalar Sangam, PTS)**

Given the highly unstable nature of employment, the lack of a unique and formal employer-employee relationship, and the fact that most of the workers – as with women from socially and economically backward sections of society – are faced with the double burden of work at home and outside, unionisation in the domestic sector has always been difficult. Most formal sector unions did not focus on organising women in informal employment. Most of the early engagement with domestic workers was undertaken by various NGOs, including church-based organisations. It was in this context that the PTS was formed as a union for

women working in the informal sector. The union can trace its history to the Tamil Manila Kattida Thozhilalar Sangam (TMKTS), a state wide trade union of construction workers. This union engaged through the 1980s in a militant struggle for the regulation of employment in the construction industry. It was primarily as a result of the group's struggle that the Welfare Board was created to regulate social security for construction workers, and became the model for other Welfare Boards not only for the other sectors of informal employment in Tamil Nadu, but also for the informal sectors across the country.

PTS was formed in 2000 as a separate union for women workers, with the belief that issues specific to women workers do not get equal attention in unions with both men and women members, where men typically dominated the leadership. As such, it was one of the early organisations to take up the issue of patriarchy within the union movement. The union was registered in May 2001 and immediately began expanding and organising domestic workers, resulting in the membership of about 18,000 informal women workers. The demand for the creation of the Domestic Workers' Welfare Board was one of the first issues taken up by PTS. The Board was formally notified in Tamil Nadu on 22 January 2007, and the Minimum Wage Notification for Domestic Workers was passed in August 2007.

The creation of Welfare Boards in Tamil Nadu for workers in the informal sector made organising workers somewhat easier. Workers joined membership-based and non-membership-based organisations to gain access to the Welfare Boards and to social security schemes. The Tamil Nadu government figures listed a membership of 64,825 for the Domestic Workers' Welfare Board as at 31 December 2009.<sup>14</sup> We can assume that most of them are also members of some union or non-union organisation. Some estimates place the number of domestic workers in Tamil Nadu at 18 lakhs (1,800,000).<sup>15</sup> This would mean that only around 3 percent of all domestic workers are members of any union or non-union organisation, or have access to social security through the Welfare Board. This also indicates the immensity of the task to bring any form of effective regulation in the sector.

The organised domestic workers in PTS are all live-out, part-time workers. According to the union, it is very difficult to organise live-in workers due to the lack of access to them. Language barriers are often an issue for migrant workers from other states in India, as well as for those from within the state but originating from distant rural areas, given their lack of options in the city and thereby increased vulnerability. Membership to a union has helped workers to approach the Welfare Boards and government departments with the required documentation to access welfare schemes. According to the PTS leadership, most members became aware of the union from union activists and other union members in the neighbourhood. Workers reportedly felt that after joining unions, they no longer saw themselves as 'servants' in a feudal sense, and became aware of their rights as workers. Union membership thus gave them a sense of dignity and confidence in their collective strength.

The PTS leadership also said that in neighbourhoods where the union had been present for a longer period of time, organised workers were able to get comparatively higher wages. Some workers were even able to get a weekly rest day and some annual benefits. There were

---

<sup>14</sup> Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Welfare Board and 13 Other Boards, [www.tn.gov.in](http://www.tn.gov.in)

<sup>15</sup> The New Indian Express, August 19, 2010.

instances of workers demanding and getting one month's wages as annual bonus in place of the earlier system of getting "festival gifts" that were dependent on the whims of the employers. Unionised workers could also access educational assistance for their children from the Welfare Board. There were some instances of workers, however, who had been asked by their employers to quit because of their union membership. PTS communicated with its membership through area-wide meetings every month, and had a larger conference every three months. The monthly meetings helped address the workers' immediate local problems and disputes; while the quarterly conference served as a venue to discuss and decide on campaigns.

The union leadership also organised garment workers in Chennai through its sister organisation, the Garment and Fashion Workers Union (GAFWU). Both the PTS and the GAFWU are affiliates of the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), an all-India federation of politically independent trade unions. The work of the two unions complemented each other as both drew most of their membership from the same residential localities in Chennai, and because garments and domestic work, being low paid jobs mainly for women and with few entry barriers, attracted the same constituency of workers. It is not uncommon for workers to shift between domestic work and garment work. Garment workers could also take up part-time domestic work to augment their income and meet their families' needs.

PTS has been addressing the issue of regulation of employment in the domestic sector. It dealt with problems such as low wages, the lack of a proper job description, the lack of fixed working hours, and the absence of a weekly holiday. The presence of a union in the neighbourhood generally helped in ensuring better work regulation in the sector, particularly in addressing disputes around wages and work conditions. In the context of employment regulation, government directives in many cities for police verification of identity papers and residence of domestic workers were matters of concern. According to PTS president Sujata Mody, "It should be made mandatory for domestic workers to be registered with the labour department or the domestic workers' welfare board and consequently, employers should be compelled to employ only registered workers. Police verification criminalizes all domestic workers and therefore is not an acceptable practice."

With growing inequalities and the growth of informal employment, and with many of the workers being migrants from other cities, there has been a rise in urban violence, including violence at work. Any government effort that seeks to treat this issue as a law and order problem that can be resolved through police verification is not viable. Further, they do not address the question of violence of employers against employees, which is much more widespread and cannot be regulated through police verification. The objection raised by many countries, including India, to the ratification of the ILO Convention on Domestic Work centered on the problematic claim that the regulation of households as workplaces would be difficult, as it would violate the privacy and sanctity of the family, i.e. the employer. Hence, while workers can be pushed by the state to undergo police verification to ensure safety of employers, the state is unable to create a framework to regulate employers to ensure the safety of workers. While unions demand regulation, what they seek is a form of regulation that does not criminalize workers and rob them of their dignity, but one that binds both employer and employee in a formal employment contract.

## **Discussion with union activists**

A discussion meeting in Chennai on 7 August 2014 with active members of both PTS (domestic workers) and GAFWU (garment workers) led to the identification of several interesting issues. One of these was the issue on the significance of women's work and income to the family income. Most of the responses indicated that women themselves felt that their work was secondary or supplementary to the main family income. They said that the main family income was the one brought in by the men or should be earned by the men, and that they only worked because either the income of one male earner was insufficient for the family or they have no male earning family member. The fact that society, often including the workers themselves and their families, views women's work as supplementary and not primary provides a perverted justification for paying low wages to the women workers. In reality, however, husbands and other male members of the family often spent their earnings on themselves (alcohol, gambling etc.). Their incomes were therefore often supplementary given their irregularity and instability, while the incomes of the women actually supported the family. Many of the women workers consulted in the conduct of this research agreed that they ought to be paid wages equal to those of men.

The fact that employments have become essentially gender-segmented is borne of the prevailing situation where industries pay female employees lower wages compared to sectors that typically employ men. There is no formal inequality in the notified minimum wages between men and women in a particular sector. But the fact that very few men work in comparatively low paying jobs as domestic workers and garment workers and very few women work as better paid metal workers or skilled construction workers is an indication that employments are gender-segregated.

The union activists also perceived wages to be dependent on the level of formal skill or education. There was a perception that domestic work did not require any 'skill', leading to discussing the specific example of 'cooking' as a task. Why, for example, were wages for cooking in homes by domestic workers lower than those received by chefs in high-end hotels? Most activists believed this was because hotels made higher earnings and could hence pay higher wages, leading to the conclusion that wages were linked not to skill but to the capacity of the employers to pay. However, when posed with the question of why domestic workers do not find employment in hotels with higher wages, the response mostly returned to the question of skill. Most respondents thought it required more skill to work in these hotels and commercial eateries. The discussion also highlighted the need for flexibility for female domestic workers to keep their own homes functioning. A job as a cook in a commercial eatery, in contrast, would mean inflexible and longer hours and would hence not provide them the flexibility to attend to their children and other chores at home.

This discussion led to questions on whether wages should be linked to the level of responsibility that the worker has to take. For instance, how do you value caring for a child or for elderly parents, or even looking after a property? Some activists said that wages are linked in some ways to the responsibilities taken but are definitely not commensurate to the value of work done.

In this context, a hypothetical example was discussed of a domestic worker who worked in a household where the husband earned a monthly income of Rs. 100,000 and the wife earned a

monthly income of Rs. 80,000. The two were able to go to work because the domestic worker took care of the household chores. In such a situation, how should the domestic worker's time be valued, taking into account the fact that it enabled two people to earn a monthly income of Rs. 180,000? If we assume that the domestic worker only freed the wife of her domestic responsibilities - as would be the case in a very patriarchal structure, the latter was able to work and earn a monthly income of Rs. 80,000, how then should the former's work be valued? Here again, the domestic worker brought enormous value to the household through her work, and justice rightly dictates that this had to be reflected somewhere in the wages of domestic workers and the dignity with which they should be treated. In the context, it was important to understand that the prevailing economic system undervalued most work and created divisions between workers, even if the tasks they performed were similar and comparable.

In the discussion, comparisons were made on the conditions of work and the wages of domestic workers and garment workers, and the reasons why domestic workers choose to remain in this extremely precarious and unregulated employment instead of in more formal employment in the garment industry were discussed. The activists felt that even though garment work is formal employment and came with the possibility of benefits of Employees' State Insurance (ESI)<sup>16</sup> and statutory contributory Provident Fund, the monthly wage in the garment sector is less than what a domestic worker earns in many parts of the city. The minimum monthly wage of a garment worker in Chennai ranged between Rs. 4,000 and 6,000 for at least eight hours of work and often with long overtime hours. Further, with the factories located outside the city, garment workers often had to travel long distances to work involving up to two to four hours of travel time daily, making their workday longer and more expensive as well due to the attendant transportation costs. The level of supervision and the tasks associated with the work was also much more stressful in the case of garment workers. A domestic worker, on the other hand, earned about the same wage in six hours – with flexibility to attend to her and her family's needs.

### **Focus group discussion**

Focus group discussions were conducted in different locations of the city, including its outskirts with groups of domestic workers. The locations chosen were Choolaimedu and Kilpauk (9 September 2014), Thiruvallur Kallakurai (22 September 2014), Ambattur (23 September 2014), Chrompet (8 October 2014), and at the PTC quarters on Old Mahabalipuram Road (IT Corridor) (11 October 2014). PTS union activists directly participated in the discussions, which also served as a training opportunity for union activists in conducting similar activities. Some of the key findings on the profile of the workers are as follows:

---

<sup>16</sup> Employees' State Insurance is a self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for workers. For all employees earning Rs. 15,000 or less per month as wages, the employer contributes 4.75 percent and the employee contributes 1.75 percent, for a total share of 6.5 percent. This fund is managed by the ESI Corporation (ESIC) according to rules and regulations stipulated in the ESI Act 1948, which oversees the provision of medical and cash benefits to employees and their family through its large network of branch offices, dispensaries and hospitals throughout India. ESIC is an autonomous corporation by a statutory creation under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India.

1. Most live-out domestic workers have multiple employers, with some of them working for up to four or five households. The ability to work in multiple households, and the ability as well to earn higher wages, declines with age. Experience is not given much value.
2. Female workers under the age of 35 were educated up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Standard or even higher. Those above 35 years of age are mostly illiterate. This shows that regardless of their educational background, women find it easier to work as domestic workers than as garment workers, or even as retail workers.
3. The family size has declined considerably, with the average family size of the participants being 3.8 with children attending school at the proper ages.
4. All participants, and hence possibly most domestic workers, joined this sector after marriage. Many of them migrated to the city after their marriage and had to seek employment, and many sought employment as a domestic worker after their children were born, all to meet additional expenses.

## Wages

Kilpauk Garden is in central Chennai with mostly upper-middle-class households living in apartments and bungalows. Choolaimedu is a middle-class area, also in central Chennai, with a mix of apartment complexes and small bungalows. Ambattur is an older industrial area whose middle-class households usually live in individual houses.

The wages are significantly higher, with significantly lower hours of work, in Kilpauk and Choolaimedu compared with wages in Ambattur. In the latter, outdated employment arrangements might influence the wages. The PTS activists said that the young, middle-class employers, particularly those in apartment blocks in Kilpauk and Choolaimedu, were more likely to agree to more well-defined tasks, regulated work, and working hours.

The other areas where discussions were conducted showed similar trends. At the PTC Quarters, located on the Old Mahabalipuram-IT Corridor, domestic workers are employed in smaller apartment complexes and often in homes shared by groups of students or IT employees. Most of the workers here earn between Rs. 500 and 800 per month for one hour of work daily, which means an hourly rate ranging from Rs. 17 to 27. Workers aged between 30 and 45 years are employed to do sweeping, swabbing, dusting and washing dishes, while older workers are given tasks such as sweeping of compounds and fetching water for Rs. 200-300 per month.

At Chrompet, located off the GST Road close to the Madras Export Processing Zone (MEPZ), many of the female workers are employed as operators and helpers in the garment factories inside the zone. Older women or women with young children are employed as domestic workers, as they require flexible working hours to be able to take care of other responsibilities at home. Chrompet is a lower-middle-class to middle-class area, and wages are generally in the range of Rs. 500-1,000 per month for an hour of work, which means an hourly wage rate of Rs. 17-33.

Thiruvalluvar Nagar, Kalkuttai is a community inside a large working class settlement called Kalkuttai just behind the Perungudi MRTS railway station. It is about five kilometres away from the OMR IT corridor. Most of the domestic workers in this area are employed by single men who work in IT companies nearby and are sharing flats in apartment complexes, or by IT employees living with their families in apartment complexes close to the MRTS station. Women working in the flats are required to cook all three meals daily and clean the house, and are usually paid Rs. 3,000 for two to three hours of work (approximate hourly wage is Rs. 33). Workers who are employed in the larger apartment complexes are paid up to Rs. 1,500-2,000 per month for an hour of work every day (hourly wage between Rs. 50-66). Their tasks include sweeping, swabbing, washing dishes, and washing clothes using washing machines and drying them. According to the workers, wages here are generally higher than in the other areas, as they are able to negotiate with employers. It may also possibly be that employers here are typically young IT employees with higher incomes and less time to work at home, or that wages for domestic workers are shouldered by multiple employers living under the same roof. In a flat shared by five IT employees, for example, a domestic worker may earn Rs. 3,000 for two to three hours of work, but in a flat with just one employer, her wage may amount to only Rs. 600 for the same number of hours or an hourly wage of just Rs. 7.

The wage levels computed on an hourly basis indicated that in most households in Kilpauk and Choolaimedu, the hourly wage rate was higher than the recommended hourly minimum wage of Rs. 30 in 2009 for domestic work. Given the increase in the national Consumer Price Index (CPI) from 148 in January 2009 to 246.9 in December 2014, the minimum wage after inflation should be Rs. 50 per hour, which has the same purchasing power as the hourly wage of Rs. 30 in 2009. At this rate, all employers in the areas studied, even those in Kilpauk and Choolaimedu, paid workers an hourly wage rate that is less than the hourly minimum wage adjusted for inflation. The wages in Ambattur were even lower than the prescribed rates for 2009 for six out of the seven workers interviewed. This indicates that the ability of many employers to pay domestic workers largely determines the wage rates in a particular area. Once determined in a locality, however, the variation in wage rate is not significant. This, of course, provides an opportunity to organise workers in as much as bargaining can be done at a local level for higher wages and better working conditions. However, this also creates differences among workers from different localities in the same city. The proposal to fix a flat hourly minimum wage rate may, as some workers pointed out, compromise their capacity to negotiate with employers who may have the ability to pay higher wages.

| Comparative chart of wages of domestic workers from Kilpauk and Choolaimedu and from Ambattur |            |             |             |                      |            |             |              |
|---|------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Kilpauk and Choolaimedu (7 samples)   | Hrs/ day   | Wage/ month | Hourly wage | Ambattur (7 samples) | Hrs/ day   | Wage/ month | Hourly wage  |
|   | (hrs)      | (Rs)        | (Rs/hr)     |                      | (hrs)      | (Rs)        | (Rs/ hr)     |
| 1   | 2          | 2600        | 43.33       | 1                    | 4          | 4250        | 35.42        |
| 2   | 1.5        | 1800        | 40.00       | 2                    | 9          | 2500        | 9.26         |
| 3   | 2          | 2000        | 33.33       | 3                    | 4          | 1100        | 9.17         |
| 4   | 4.5        | 5000        | 37.04       | 4                    | 6          | 2600        | 14.44        |
| 5   | 4.5        | 3500        | 25.93       | 5                    | 3.5        | 1600        | 15.24        |
| 6   | 5          | 6300        | 42.00       | 6                    | 5          | 4000        | 26.67        |
| 7   | 3.5        | 4800        | 45.71       | 7                    | 6.5        | 3700        | 19.0         |
| <b>Average</b>  | <b>2.8</b> | <b>3250</b> | <b>33.4</b> | <b>Average</b>       | <b>5.4</b> | <b>2821</b> | <b>18.45</b> |

## **Working conditions**

### Hours of work and extra work

Most domestic workers in every area stated that they chose their work hours according to their family's needs. Thus, while younger domestic workers went out to work while their children were at school, they also had more employers. This meant they worked in more households for shorter periods, thus had to work more intensively. Older workers, on the other hand, usually worked longer hours but earned lower wages as they were unable to work with multiple employers.

Most of the workers stated that they received no extra remuneration for additional work, which employers, according to the workers, seemed to always find a reason not to pay for.

### Leaves and weekly rest days

Most workers claimed that they abstained from taking leaves of absence, and did so only for important occasions, for out-of-town trips or for instances of sickness as according to most of them, employers may not approve of their other planned absences.

Only one worker from Choolaimedu and another one from Ambattur got a weekly day off as a matter of right. All the other workers were surprised by this, as most domestic workers do not formally get any rest day. Some of those who managed to secure permission from employers to be absent in cases of emergency were made to do extra work upon getting back to compensate for their absence.

### Festival bonus and other social security benefits

Until recently, the common practice for most employers was to give a *saree* (clothing) and some money, usually up to Rs. 500, as an annual bonus. In Choolaimedu, workers said that they had showed their employers pamphlets with the union's demand for one month's wage as annual bonus. As a result, two of the workers now receive a bonus equal to a month's wage, an important step forward towards regulation in this sector of employment.

Only one worker said that she got an annual increment of Rs. 100. In all other cases, increments were arbitrary or, in some cases, refused even when asked for.

In two instances, workers had taken an advance from their employer. One worker suffered an accident when she went to her village to attend her mother's funeral, fracturing her leg and was unable to work for almost a year. She took an advance of Rs. 10,000 from her employer for this period and later paid it back. Another woman, whose husband does not earn any income, was also forced to take an advance of Rs. 8,000. This was being deducted from her salary at the time of the survey, with half her salary of Rs. 2000 going into loan repayment every month.

### Harassment at work, including sexual harassment

The participants stated that harassment at work, including sexual harassment, was rampant, even though none of the respondents admitted to having been sexually harassed in any way.

Many of the workers said that they were often scolded for coming to work late or taking a leave. "Sometimes they ask us to wash clothes that we have already washed. I am even

asked to wipe the floor with a cloth after mopping, if the employer feels that it is not clean enough". This sentiment is not uncommon, as revealed by workers at all the FGDs. Another complaint expressed was that "employers are always finding fault. You will never hear anything positive about our work".

Most of the respondents refuted any suggestion that male members of the households where they worked verbally abused them, commented on their physical appearance, or in any way attempted to physically harass them. However, they all reported that they only worked when the women were present at home. The sole out-of-state migrant worker in the sample, from West Bengal working in Chennai for 17 years now, said that when she was younger, she and a friend went to work in a house where the male employer would stare at them. They were forced to quit that job. In such cases, the workers said they usually told the employer off, and if the situation got out of hand, they quit and found work in another household. They also discussed that "becoming too friendly, using pet names, etc." were telltale signs of the male employers trying to act playful with them. One worker reported that in some cases, employers insisted on hiring younger rather than older women, on the pretext of wanting efficiency, but often only because of a veiled sexual interest.

When asked to elaborate on their contradictory statements, everyone stated that only women who talked too much with their male employers were susceptible to sexual violence, an opinion that implicitly places the blame on the victims. Workers also said that the character of the victim was always at risk if she raised a complaint against her employers. As such, even though all the respondents accepted that their workplaces were unsafe spaces, they did not want to accept that any of them had personally ever been abused or came close to being abused by their male employers. They even stated that no male employer had ever tried to even talk to them, instruct them about their work or even enter the spaces where they were working. Thus, for domestic workers working under extreme conditions of precariousness, any public acknowledgement of harassment, especially those sexual in nature, unduly blemishes not the employer's reputation, but the victim's. The notion enforced by patriarchy that the purity of the woman's physical body needs to be preserved appears pervasive even in a space that the woman considers safe, in this case, in the presence of co-workers and union activists. This explains the culture of silence that permits this kind of rampant violence against women.

### Health

Health problems reported included severe backache; aching limbs due to heavy work like hand-washing heavy bed linen, sitting on the floor to sweep and swab the floors or climbing several flights of stairs to fetch water; colds and fever from working even in extreme weather conditions; skin infections due to unsafe corrosive detergents used to wash dishes and clothes; instances of kidney stones from lack of adequate access to drinking water; and other health conditions such as early menopause, irregular menstrual cycles, and acute anaemia.

The health problems were not restricted to physical health issues alone—all workers reported severe mental stress as well. The double burden of working at their own homes on the one hand and the demands of the workplace on the other takes a heavy toll on their lives. The workers suffered from sleeplessness, fear (often leading to more absenteeism and

hence more stress and fear), severe headaches, and mental stress due to the financial consequences of frequent absences. Many of the workers expressed inability to seek access to public healthcare as out-patient schedules in the government hospitals were not convenient to them. Many workers were free only in the afternoon, while hospitals were open only in the morning. In the evening, when the hospitals reopened, the workers had to go home to tend to their own families.

### Supervision

Excessive supervision by female employers was, according to many, a constant source of harassment. The continuous demand for perfection in their tasks, often with the employer watching closely while domestic workers go about their work, was by itself extremely stressful.

### **Workers' perception of domestic work**

All the respondents viewed their work as secondary to their husbands': had their husbands been able to provide for the entire family, they would not have had to work to supplement the family income. Alcoholism, irregular work, and low wages of husbands were reasons given by women for seeking employment as well. The responses reflected the prevalent notion that men should be the sole provider in the family. Failure to provide for the family was considered to be a problem of the individual, i.e. the husband, and personal flaws such as alcoholism and unreliability were given as reasons for his failure. However more systemic reasons, such as lack of employment opportunities, low wages and even the increasing cost of living were not considered reasons for the inability of the husbands to sustain their families. Consequently, while workers felt that wages were low in this sector where work is predominantly done by women, they did not feel there was something inherently wrong with the system.

Domestic work is associated with social stigma. Neighbours and family members considered domestic work as degrading to a woman's dignity. Domestic workers reported being made to wash utensils with food remains, or hand-wash dirty clothes and linen. They were not allowed to use the utensils of the household for their eating or drinking, and in many cases were given separate, low-quality utensils, and mostly leftovers and stale food. They were in most instances not even allowed to draw water from the one used by the employers at home, and were required to use water from the kitchen taps that were not considered potable for the family members. They were not allowed to use the toilets, and they either had to use public toilets or wait until they got back home. They were also not allowed to touch certain objects in the house, or walk through certain areas considered holy. Their presence and their work, though integral to the running of the household, were considered unclean and impure. This treatment destroyed the self-esteem of the workers, ultimately resulting in their strong acceptance of patriarchy and caste hierarchies. The caste system and its rooted discriminatory and degrading structure, together with the wide economic divide between the employers and the workers, creates a framework of exploitation that is not just economic, but also social and cultural in nature. It persists even today, and even in households that otherwise work and engage socially with the new economy, in work environments that specifically prohibit caste and gender discrimination. Harassment at work, including sexual harassment, was the other reason given by respondents for

considering their work as degrading. This is doubly problematic given that domestic workers would also often find it impossible given their own socialisation to complain about the harassment and demand justice.

Despite the drudgery and indignity of domestic work, the participants felt that domestic work provided women workers the flexibility of setting their work schedule in accordance to their family's needs. This double burden was taken to be a given condition that could not be altered, and their employment thus had to be arranged such that the domestic worker could go out to work after she had attended to her responsibilities in her own house. The need for flexibility thus had nothing to do with the personal convenience of the worker herself, but was socially imposed and was articulated purely in terms of family commitments.

The lack of adequate education was also seen as a deterrent in seeking other employments, though many of the younger workers were able to study up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Standard.

The availability of domestic work in their own neighbourhood was also stated as an advantage in comparison to other employments. This allowed domestic workers to attend to their household needs on a regular basis, even during emergencies. Most of the younger workers stated that they worked only while their children were in school.

### **Workers' perception of unions**

The union was typically perceived as a deliverer of social benefits. Many participants stated that they could access social security benefits only if they became members of the union. This resulted in many union members viewing the union only as an instrument for getting benefits, and not as a body for building collective power or identity to facilitate negotiation with employers.

However, many respondents also stated that membership in a union provided them a certain degree of security and even instilled a sense of fear among their employers. This, in turn, resulted in reduced harassment at work and often, negotiating power for workers. One organiser of the union in the Ambattur area also stated that in cases of disputes, workers often approached them for resolution. When asked if the workers ever tried to resolve their disputes collectively in a particular area, they did not see that as a possibility. Though the workers would seek the support of the union in case of a work-related issue, they perceived the union to be identified only by its organiser or leader. The strength and power of the union was embodied more in the leader/union activists than in the union collective.

### **Response to migrant workers**

Many of the domestic workers were migrant workers from rural areas who migrated to Chennai after marriage. However, being Tamil-speaking and having migrated due to marriage and not in search of work, domestic workers under this category did not consider themselves as migrant workers. When asked about their view on migrant workers, they responded that there were no migrant workers in their areas.

However, union activists explained that in many of the areas, there were migrant workers mostly from West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and even Nepal working as domestic

workers. These workers were difficult to unionise due to the language barrier, and because they were mostly wives of migrant construction workers and hence lived in the construction sites. There was no visible anti-migrant sentiment among them. They did not view migrants as workers who dragged down the wages and conditions of work. However, one worker said that the large-scale migration of workers has resulted in increased house rents and other costs in the locality.

## Issues for discussion

### Economic issues

*Increase in wage:* The respondents in the study claimed that where the union was active, there was significant wage increase. This appears to be true when comparing wages from an earlier study of domestic workers in conducted by mid-2012.<sup>17</sup> From that study, for the Choolaimedu area, the average wage rate in 2012 for domestic workers was Rs. 23.75 per hour, as compared to the Rs. 36.19 average wage for Choolaimedu and Kilpauk in 2014. The real wage increase after accounting for inflation between 2012 and 2014 is a substantial 30 percent. This is significant, even after accounting for the small sample sizes. The active involvement of PTS in the area would have influenced this increase in real wages.

*Minimum wage:* From the example of Tamil Nadu, the implementation of the Minimum Wage Act appears to be a difficult task, for it did not automatically lead to enforcement and compliance. However, it is an important step towards employment regulation in the sector. Today, the same wage demand of Rs. 30 per hour in 2009 would amount to at least Rs. 50 per hour by merely neutralising for inflation.

*Overtime wage:* Most respondents in the discussions revealed that even in employments where there is a clear list of tasks to be performed, employers often ask workers to perform additional tasks, or the same tasks for more people in case of house guests, with no extra pay. The extra hours required to complete these tasks are also not taken into account and if workers raise concerns about this, in most cases, employers invent issues of underperformance of the workers to avoid payment. The point for discussion for unions organising domestic workers is to standardise work schedules, tasks, and wages. For extra work involving extra time, a commensurate hourly wage should be observed.

*Bonus:* It should once again be stressed that the ability of union members to negotiate a regulated bonus is an important step. PTS members and cadres have an advantage here, in that they work in close proximity with GAFWU, which deals with factory workers. They would therefore have some knowledge of what is available in the formal sector in terms of minimum bonus, dearness allowance (DA), inflation neutralisation, social security, and other benefits. They would therefore be able to more articulately put forward their demands to their employers for better regulation of employment conditions.

*Increments and real wage protection:* Workers reported that there were no regular increments in their wages. Only one worker reported a regular annual increment of Rs. 100. In fact, other respondents were surprised by this, indicating how uncommon regular increments are

---

<sup>17</sup> Centre for Workers Management, "Voices of the Invisible – A study of domestic workers in Chennai", September 2012.

in the sector. This is important as, there being no regulated minimum wage for the sector, the increment would serve to neutralise inflation. Therefore, in the absence of an annual wage increment as a practice, protection of real wages is left to the whims of the employer. There is no guarantee that real wages would get protected with any regular periodicity, and the extent of real wage protection would also vary. This is an issue that the union could possibly take up, given that it has had some success in regulating employment conditions, with some workers reporting having received bonuses that are equal to a month's wage.

### Workplaces issues

*Health and Social Security:* The discussions with each group of domestic workers revealed that every worker suffers from severe body aches due to physical strains and repetitive stress injuries, gynaecological problems due to heavy physical work, acute urinary problems due to lack of access to toilets, and recurring colds due to handling water continuously. Employers blame the workers for these problems, and workers also believe that it is their own weak physical constitution that causes their illness. While the latter may be true, especially given their lack of nutrition, it is also true that most of these illnesses are due to the conditions in which domestic workers are made to work. No provisions are made by employers to ensure their physical comfort. With no maternity benefits, domestic workers are likewise forced to work late into their pregnancies, thereby risking their own life and that of the child.

Entitlement to maternity leave is thus a major concern. The lack of coverage is due to the exclusion of domestic workers from existing legal provisions that establish the right to maternity leave for other types of workers. In addition to maternity leave entitlements, the provision of cash benefits during such leave is also of particular importance to domestic workers, as this allows women to suspend their economic activities around childbirth. Without income replacement, however, the provision of maternity leave is likely to lose its practical effect, especially among low-income populations that rely on wages, such as domestic workers. This, too, is thus an issue that has to do with the question of employer responsibility.

In addition, the lack of limits on the weekly hours of work is a critical issue that affects workers' health, both physical and mental. The determination of weekly rest periods is an important element in working time regulations. This ensures that workers enjoy at least one day off per week for both physical rest and a mental break from the work environment.

Some of the basic issues that workers' organisations need to raise beyond economic demands are access to drinking water, toilets, and equipment that reduce physical strain at work, protection from the weather (some workers in Ambattur area narrated that they are made to wash dishes and clothes outside the house without any protection even during heavy rains) and provision of leave in case of illness.

The fact that employers are not in any way held responsible for the health and social security needs of their workers also allows them to push the workers to work even when they are sick. When the workers are too sick to work, the employers' response, in most cases, is to terminate the workers. Organisations of informal workers have always sought health and social security benefits from the state as the premise has always been that employers are non-identifiable. This should not be the case, however, for domestic work. The employer-

employee relation is clearly defined as far as the worker is concerned, but it moves into a grey area when it comes to holding employers responsible. While it is almost mandatory for domestic workers today in most urban centres to register for police verification (which in itself pre-supposes that workers are potential criminals), there is no equivalent regulation or any mechanism for employers to have them registered and make them responsible for the safety and social security of the workers. However in the absence of such a mechanism for employers, registering domestic workers under ESI could be a possible way forward for them to access to quality public healthcare.

*Harassment at work:* Discussions on patriarchy and notions of 'shame' are elements that are crucial to develop an understanding of what constitutes harassment at work. Appropriate responses to such cases should be important issues for workers' organisations.

### Social issues

*Educated workforce and standardised employment norms:* It is significant that in all the areas covered by the study, younger workers had all completed at least 10 years of schooling. Even among domestic workers at the bottom of the hierarchy of informal employment, a significant number of literate employees are joining the sector. These workers would have greater flexibility to change work if they so desired. They would also be able to access better-written tracts and pamphlets. They would therefore be less vulnerable to abuses than the earlier generation of domestic workers. This might allow for better collective action, including collective bargaining replacing the present system of bargaining by individual workers. The low variations of wages within an area also suggest the possibility of collectively being able to impose standard wage and other employment norms in localities.

Most workers in all the localities, especially the younger, better educated ones, also expressed their unwillingness to allow their daughters to become domestic workers in the future, which translates into a desire to skill their daughters beyond schooling such that they can be employed in places that provide them dignity at work. However, even in this discussion, many workers expressed that they would ensure that their daughters are 'better' married than themselves, which implies that they still adhere to the patriarchal understanding that the husbands should provide for their families.

*Affordability of Housing:* The issue of high, unaffordable rents for houses in the city was one that was repeatedly raised in the discussion on wages and why these were not enough to support even a nuclear family. This was inextricably linked to the fact that wages in an area are linked to its inhabitants' affluence. If workers moved to a locality where rents were cheaper, finding employments nearby paying better wages would be harder, and these workers would have to travel longer distances to be able to earn the same wage, but spend a considerable amount of their wages on travel costs. For a worker living near a middle- or upper-class locality where wages are comparably higher, rents would be higher too and lower their disposable income. This is a paradoxical situation that affects domestic workers in particular.

*Migrant workers:* Domestic workers reported the presence of migrants among them. This competition with migrants for jobs does not seem to have caused any ill-will among the local workers, however. In fact, the only out-of-state migrant in the groups, a respondent from Choolaimedu who had migrated from Bengal and now speaks fluent Tamil, had done well

for herself in comparison with the rest of the group, while integrating herself with other workers. She had the highest monthly wage, and one of the highest hourly wage rates. This is another reason, in addition to increasing membership and unity, why migrants should be actively organised into the union.

## Conclusion

The domestic work sector is a growing employer of women in the city of Chennai. It has no regulation of employment, and there is an extremely low level of organisation of workers. The importance of organisation in the sector is critical. Without organisation, existing regulatory measures like the statutory minimum wage will remain an illusory victory for the sector, with no real impact on the actual conditions of employment. We have anecdotal evidence, for instance from wage data from Choolaimedu area, that the presence of a trade union can lead to substantial increases in real wages.

Organising in the sector, however, is a challenge. There is the issue of the perception of women that their wage in the family is secondary, while the reality for many female domestic workers is that their wage is critical to the survival of the family. Women also tend to devalue domestic labour, given that they have traditionally performed tasks in their own homes as unpaid labour. The presence of multiple employers and absence of a clear and unique employer-employee relationship also inhibit the development of a clear working class identity. Finally, organising female workers has its own challenges, given the restrictions on time and mobility of women.

Migration poses an important challenge to organising within the sector. Economic distress in the rural economy is pushing increasing numbers of women into cities in search of employment. Employment in domestic work is often the first choice for women migrants, given the relative ease of entry, the possibility of flexible work hours, and the scope for neighbourhood employment. Given their greater vulnerability and linguistic and social isolation, migrants form part of the sector that is more difficult to organise.

This is the context in which the experience of unions like the PTS is of immense importance, not only for organising and for better regulation in the sector, but also for the learning of trade unions of female workers in the informal sector. The union has made significant achievements in being able to bring a working class perspective among the most economically and socially disadvantaged sections of female workers. It has been able to push for important regulatory measures in the sector. It has, through a citywide organising network, been able to take forward attempts to improve conditions of employment. The union faces the challenges of expanding its membership and organisation base and reaching out to new sections of workers.

Finally, organising domestic workers is an important challenge to understanding the sexual division of labour, and the linkages of exploitation within capital. It faces the challenge of preparing its members to confront patriarchy, be it at the workplace, in society, or even within their own homes. To quote Selma James, *"...[a] woman's first job is to reproduce other people's labour power and her second is to reproduce and sell her own...[so] that her struggle in the family and the factory...is one whole. The very unity in one person of the two divided aspects of capitalist production presupposes not only a new scope of struggle but an entirely new evaluation of*

*the weight and crucially of women in that struggle.*<sup>18</sup> This is an important ideological perspective for the labour movement that unions like the PTS should continue bringing to the fore.

\*\*\*

The authors acknowledge the support and help of Sujata Mody, the President of Penn Thozhilalar Sangam, in conceptualising this study.

Dithhi Bhattacharya is the executive head of the Centre for Workers' Management, a trade union resource centre.

Meghna Sukumar is a labour researcher and the organising secretary of the Garment and Fashion Workers Union.

Mohan Mani is the research head of the Centre for Workers' Management.

The Centre for Workers' Management (CWM) is a trade union resource centre founded in 1991 by trade unionists and social activists with the mandate to advance workers' self management and industrial democracy. This mandate continues to guide CWM's engagement with trade unions and social movements.

---

<sup>18</sup> Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. (1975). *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press.