

Political Organization in the Informal Economy

Organizing Street Vendors in Bogotá, Colombia



Abstract

Half of the workers in the world do not have access to social and legal security. As workers of a growing informal economy, they lack the protection that formal workers usually have, such as pension and sick pay and their income is varying and insecure. In the past, it was workers organizing in labor unions who achieved improved working conditions. But when the share of formal workers diminishes, so does the foundation for traditional worker struggles. While seldom researched, there are examples of worker organizations in the informal economy. This study explores how street vendors in Colombia organize collectively and the challenges and prospects that can be outlined in their struggle. The study is based on a qualitative field research conducted in the locality of Suba in Bogotá and data are analyzed in the light of how successful worker organizations have overcome the many challenges in other parts of the world. Findings show a well-developed organizational infrastructure but it is hampered by conflicts stemming from the conditions of the political economy of the street and a lacking collective responsibility. There is also a noticeable involvement of external actors, raising questions of whose priorities are to guide the struggle. Structural obstacles are significant but there are positive experiences and a strong will to take a step from the reactive struggle of defending the workplace to claiming rights. In this, women may have a central role to play for the vendor organizations in Suba.

Key words: Political Organization, Informal Economy, Street Vendors, Labor Unionism, Colombia

Words: 9999

Acknowledgements

My warmest gratitude is directed to the street vendors and leaders, Alirio Rubiano, Carmen Flor Valencia, Gerardo Bonilla, Pedro Luis Ramírez and Alfredo Manchola, as well as the vendors who do not appear by name, whose expertise on the subject I can barely hope to attain. César Giraldo, Catalina Giraldo and Yenny Ramírez were indispensable in opening the door to the vendors' spaces and in providing good advices. The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the patience of my dedicated supervisor Catia Gregoratti and the encouragement from my dear friends and family.

List of Acronyms and Colombian Terms

Asovel	Asociación Organizada de Vendedores de Lisboa (Organized Association of Vendors of Lisboa)
Asovencentro Siglo XXI	Asociación de Vendedores de Centro Suba Siglo XXI (Vendor Association of Suba Centre 21 st Century)
CUT	Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (Workers' United Centre of Colombia)
Economía Popular	People's Economy
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPES	Instituto para la Economía Social (Institute for the Social Economy – a Colombian state agency for the Informal Economy)
MOIR	Movimiento Obrero Independiente Revolucionario (Independent Revolutionary Workers' Movement)
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association of India
SINUCOM	Sindicato Unidad de Comerciantes Menores (Unity Labor Union of Small Merchants)
UGTI	Unión General de Trabajadores Informales (General Union of Informal Workers)
Wiego	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Aim and Significance	3
1.2.1	<i>Research Questions</i>	3
1.3	Delimitations	4
1.4	Outline of the Study	4
2	Methods	5
2.1	Research Design	5
2.2	Data Collection	6
2.2.1	<i>Selection of Case and Sampling</i>	6
2.2.2	<i>Interviews</i>	7
2.2.3	<i>Observations</i>	8
2.3	Data Analysis	8
2.4	Ethical considerations	8
2.4.1	<i>Devolution of Result</i>	9
3	Literature Review	10
4	Theory	12
4.1	Street Vending	12
4.2	Organizing Informal Workers	13
4.2.1	<i>Shared Interests and Identities</i>	14
4.2.2	<i>Labor Relations and Soft Power</i>	14
4.2.3	<i>Claims and the Role of Outsiders</i>	15
4.2.4	<i>Internal Compliance</i>	16
5	Material and Analysis	18
5.1	Street Vendor Organizations in Suba and Bogotá	19
5.1.1	<i>Asoventro</i>	20
5.1.2	<i>San Isidro Labrador</i>	21
5.1.3	<i>Asovel</i>	21
5.2	Challenges and Prospects	21
5.2.1	<i>Conflicts and the Political Economy of the Street</i>	22
5.2.2	<i>Claims</i>	24
5.2.3	<i>The Role of Outsiders</i>	25
5.2.4	<i>Collective Responsibility</i>	27
5.2.5	<i>The Salient Role of Women</i>	30
6	Discussion and Conclusions	32
7	References	34

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Between one half and two thirds of the world's working population is active in the informal economy¹ (ILO 2002). The share is rising steadily in the North and has for a long time represented the majority of the workforce in the South (Chen 2013). This economy consists of self-employed workers such as street vendors, shoe shiners, waste pickers, paid domestic workers and workers engaged in formal industry but with informal conditions (ILO 2002). It is a diverse category with a variety of economic standards (Chen 2013) but they share one important characteristic; they are not recognized by the law and have therefore little or no social protection (ILO 2002).

One of the most visible manifestations of the sector are the street vendors. In Colombia, there are about 100 000 street vendors only in the capital Bogotá. In Suba, one of the twenty city localities, at least 7000 families rely solely on their foldout suitcases or wooden carts with goods such as vegetables, fruit, fast food, umbrellas, shoelaces or chewing gum (Alcaldía local de Suba 2013). In their workplace, they are exposed to the sun, heavy rains, polluted air and both crime and police harassment (Mujeres y economía 2013). Like informal workers in general, the vendors are a heterogeneous group; income vary from below the minimum wage to its threefold. Some vendors are illiterate while others have university degrees, some seek shelter from the armed conflict in the countryside and have no option but to sell in the street while others reject the poor conditions of the formal labor market (Mujeres y Economía 2013).

However, they share the condition of not being recognized by the law and have therefore no social protection such as sick pay or pension and no legal protection, for example in case of work place accidents. Furthermore, whether or not they sell much, income is insecure and varying from day to day. As a female vendor in central Suba puts it: "The

¹ Authors like Roig (2013) suggest it should be called 'people's economy' (*economía popular*) instead of 'informal'. The word informal only indicates what it is not, while people's economy acknowledges that it is an economy with its own logics in need of exploration. I agree with Roig but use the mainstream vocabulary for practical reasons, given that all literature sources refer to it as 'informal economy'.

logic is simple. If you get sick and cannot work, there will be nothing to eat" (Interview 4).

Traditionally, workers acting collectively through labor unions in the formal economy have been the driving force for improved working conditions and for social change in the North as well as in parts of the South (Chen 2013; ILO 2002; Standing 2011). Now we see how working conditions are getting poorer for workers around the world at the same time as the share of formal workers is shrinking and subsequently the traditional foundation for collective struggle to negotiate working conditions. Thus, the questions emerge: *who should be engaged in these struggles and how should such struggles be organized?* With today's high share of the world's and Bogotá's population working in the informal economy, it seems highly relevant to look at the political organization of these workers. Is it possible to organize collectively within the logics of the informal economy and its particular labor relations?

There are different views on whether this is possible. Nelson (1992) in her study of Bogotá's street vendors argues that their way of protesting lies in the conscious act of not paying taxes and thus resisting the commodification of their labor. The challenges for informal workers to mobilize are many; they are dispersed, self-employed and often in direct competition with each other for work, customers and spaces to sell their goods (Kabeer et al. 2013).

Nevertheless, there *are* examples from all continents of workers in informality organizing collectively. In the scarce documentation on the subject, two researchers stand out. Martha Chen (2013) and Naila Kabeer et al. (2013) present examples of marginalized workers who have organized collectively despite the challenges and succeeded to improve their working conditions and gained a voice in policy debates. They explore what gives these workers in the informal economy the impetus to organize and what lessons can be drawn from their struggle, which will be further explored in the theoretical chapter of this study.

This kind of organizations are the focus of this study. The following section will develop on the purpose and intentions of carrying out a field work with the street vendors in Bogotá, studying their political organizations.

1.2 Aim and Significance

Given the large and growing number of workers in the world who lack social and legal security, it seems urgent to turn an eye to what is being done to face this situation. Workers acting collectively through labor unions in the formal economy were the drivers for improved working conditions and social change in the North as well as in Colombia during the 20th century (Archila 1998). But as the share of formal workers is shrinking and subsequently the influence of traditional labor unions, the questions emerge: *who should be engaged in these struggles and how should such struggles be organized?* I argue that it is therefore highly relevant to look at the political organizing of the informal workers. As Kabeer et al. (2013) underline, there are few attempts to synthesize the informal workers' own organizational processes, making it even more interesting.

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of one example of political organizing of workers in the informal economy, in order to better understand the challenges faced and the possibilities that may lie in their action. In order to do so, a field study has been carried out with the street vendors in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Three organizations in the city locality Suba constitute the case study.

The intention is to add a qualitative insight in a new case to the young area of scholarship on the political organization in the informal economy and explore if the case of vendor organizations in Suba provides an example of the kind of successful organized informal workers as outlined Kabeer et al. (2013). My research questions are therefore as stated below.

1.2.1 Research Questions

- » How do the street vendors organize together in Suba and Bogotá?
- » What challenges do they face as organizations?
- » What prospects are there for them to be the kind of successful organization as those outlined by Kabeer et al. (2013)?

1.3 Delimitations

For this study, I entered the field with a broad research interest in *how the street vendors in Suba are making sense of their participation in collective processes*, which was going to be delimited in accordance with what the street vendors considered relevant on the topic. The vendors' priorities then directed my focus specifically to the difficulties in the organizational process, which turned out to be many, but also to its possibilities since many vendors also expressed a will to find ways of making use of the existing organizations. I have emphasized the vendors' sense-making of their participation in collective organizing and how they relate to the context around them, while not focused on the perceptions of the other actors. While I was also given the offer to work with the vendor organizations in all the twenty districts of Bogotá, I opted for keeping the focus on Suba. It would have let me generalize much more, but lost the in-depth perspective.

1.4 Outline of the Study

In the following chapter the methodology will be described together with reflections upon the ethical concerns of a field study. Chapter three will provide a literature review of what is written within the field. In chapter four, the analytical framework will be outlined together with a conceptual discussion. In chapter five, the empirical material will be presented and analyzed in light of the theoretical frame and lastly, chapter six will provide the conclusions of the study.

2 Methods

In this section, the methodological aspects of this qualitative field study are discussed together with a reflection on the ethical concerns of the method. Given the emphasized role of the researcher and her consciousness in the generation and interpretation of qualitative data, Punch argues that it is improbable that other researchers generate exactly the same knowledge (2005). Therefore the intention with this chapter is to carefully account for how the study was undertaken, so that the reader can judge if the conclusions are justifiable.

2.1 Research Design

In order to answer my research questions, I have carried out 11 weeks of qualitative field study in Bogotá, Colombia, between January and April 2014, with the vendor organizations in the locality Suba as my case study. It has taken an explorative form, which Bryman (2012) describes as suitable when the aim is to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. I opted for a qualitative approach, since qualitative research is a matter of trying to see the world from the perspective of the participants (Bryman 2012). While it might not generate the generalizable and replicable knowledge as claimed by quantitative methods, I argue that this is more suitable since it allows a recognition of how knowledge is situated and dependent on its creators (England 1994). A case study was suitable as it gives a holistic in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, maintaining the sensitivity to its context (Punch 2005). I have lived in Colombia for many years, meaning that I am not only a fluent Spanish speaker but also familiar with some cultural codes and culture specific nuances of many words, yet still sufficiently an outsider to not be seen as a possible infiltrator. Nevertheless, undertaking a field study presents various ethical concerns, which will be discussed by the end of this chapter.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Selection of Case and Sampling

The research topic emerged when I participated as a research assistant in a socioeconomic study with Suba's vendors in 2013 (Mujeres y Economía 2013). The important factor of trust was already established and the vendors' socioeconomic standards were already mapped, meaning that I had the foundation that allowed me to immerse directly in the political questions.

I wanted to understand the organizational activity of the street vendors, so I had to cover as many aspects of it as possible. Therefore I worked with three organizations in Suba, all at very different phases in their organizational processes. One has leadership with high legitimacy, one struggles with their leadership and the third is just initiating the process to formalize as an organization. I also explored their relationship to the local committee of Suba which consists of these three organizations and six more, and the district committee of Bogotá, which consists of the nineteen local committees and at the same time is a national labor union.

The sample of interviewees has been purposive in the sense that I wanted to cover certain categories of vendors and partly a snowball sample (Bryman 2012), as I asked vendors to introduce me to vendors they knew participated or not participated. This also helped me to reduce suspiciousness. I also based the sample on the raw material of Mujeres y Economía's surveys (2013). I wanted to talk to the leaders to understand how they organize, to members to explore the reasons for participation and to non-affiliated vendors to understand their reasoning. I interviewed the representatives for the local and central committees and the leaders of the National Labor Union of Informal Workers (UGTI) who represent the vendors in the international vendor network StreetNet. It also turned out that a considerable part of the present organizational activity is catalyzed by the left-wing local mayor and students from the National University of Colombia, wherefore I also interviewed them.

It was also important for me to have a gender awareness in my sample, so that at least half of the interviewees would be women. This was problematic concerning the leaders, since only one of the ten was female and this woman declined participating due to a conflict between her and another leader. The figure below gives an overview of the participating organizations.

Organization	City District	Leadership	Members	Founded
Asovencentro	Suba centre	Alirio Rubiano	400	2001
San Isidro Labrador	Suba Rincón	Gerardo Bonilla p.t. ²	200	2002
Asovel	Suba Lisboa	Not yet ³	72	2014
Local vendor committee of Suba	Suba	Alirio Rubiano ⁴	9 org.	2004
Vendors committee of Bogotá	Bogotá	Alfredo Manchola and Pedro Luis Ramírez	19 districts	2003
Labor Union of Informal Workers (UGTI)	Colombia	Alfredo Manchola and Pedro Luis Ramírez	116 org.	2009

Figure 1: Sampled Organizations

2.2.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews fit my research questions, as "qualitative interviewing is meant to be flexible and to seek out the world views of research participants" (Bryman 2012:498). Interviews were carried out in Spanish and my flexible interview guide had abundant space to follow up what the interviewees considered important (Bryman 2012). The interviews have been recorded, transcribed and analyzed continuously. The leaders wished to appear with name, all other vendors are given coded names to guarantee the anonymity of those who wished so.

² Pro tempore as the previous leader passed away and the organization is waiting to chose a new leader.

³ This organization was still in process of formalizing as an association in March 2014.

⁴ The committees have no formal presidents but Alirio Rubiano represents Suba in the district committee.

2.2.3 Observations

Bryman describes participant observation as "data collection for some time in order to observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group" (2012:383). I have attended the organizations' meetings, public policy meetings with the mayor and spent hours in the street with the vendors, observing the daily interaction and having informal conversations, which have been documented as field notes.

2.3 Data Analysis

The study has taken an inductive form where some data collection preceded the formulation of the analytical framework. As May (2011) argues, the theoretical framework should be based on what the participants believe is important, not what theory says they are to believe. This allowed me to be sensitive to the participants' priorities and avoided limiting my categories to the books. After the first interviews and observations, a thematic and narrative analysis was conducted in order to identify recurring themes related to the research questions maintaining a sensitivity to their context (Punch 2005). This gave an indication of what analytical framing to look for. A table of the themes is presented in chapter 5. The following analysis then modified the themes back and forth in a constant interplay between data and literature, so that my data could be located within the current debate on organization in the informal economy.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

When entering the field, I inevitably became part of power structures stemming from global economic inequalities as well as the history of colonialism (Sultana 2007). I have let a reflexive account on ethical concerns and my positionality permeate the process of research, but as Rose (1997) argues, challenges of positionality might actually not be overcome. As she states, the most suitable strategy for handling these issues is to limit one's generalizations. It is evident that the street vendors and I have different economic and social opportunities. I reduced the obviousness in this through what clothes I wore and my

vocabulary, as suggested by Sultana (2007). But as the vendors know, the difference is still materialized in my flight ticket back to Sweden. An open dialogue with the vendors about it has been fruitful and I have tried to underline that the vendors are the experts and I am there to learn from them. I also argue that it is important to establish an exchange of information to legitimize that I come and ask them all my questions; it seems only fair that I also answer their questions. This introduced the challenge to temporarily set my own ideological positions aside. I have received the question "What do you think we should do to ameliorate our organization?" However, I was there to listen to what *they* think and talking from my own viewpoint might impact their narration as well as future trust.

2.4.1 Devolution of result

What I can do is to create a result devolution document in Spanish to hand out to interested participants at the end of the study. However, a Bachelor's thesis is of limited character and I don't want to pretend that it is bigger than it is. It is clear that the vendors are the experts and, as an outsider, I can only attempt to understand their realities.

3 Literature Review

The aim with this section is to outline the existing writings on organization of informal workers in general and street vendors in particular. While literature on vendors' and informal workers' own organizations is limited, other aspects of informality are more explored.

At the center of the policy debate is the question of whether and how to formalize the informal economy. The leading voice in the formalization debate, de Soto (2003), focusses on the registering and taxing of informal workers. From China to Colombia, street vendors have been associated with conflicts about public space. Out of that, a conceptual debate has grown around what public space is and should be (See Bromley 2000; Donovan 2008; Huang 2013; Mujeres y Economía 2013).

Concerning the study of the political organization in the informal economy, as Kabeer et al. (2013) state, there is experience but "few attempts to synthesize these experiences and draw on their lessons" (2013:7). Better explored is how formal labor unions have approached informal workers, mostly focussing on African countries (See Adu-Amankwah 1999; Chinguno 2011; Fischer 2013).

While the marriage between formal unions and informal workers appears to often end in divorce, there are examples of how informal workers create their own unions and organizations. The most well-known is Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA), covered by for example Chen (2013), Kapoor (2007) and Webster (2011). Formed in 1972, it is a labor union bringing together organizations of women workers in the informal economy "to undertake struggles and to jointly advocate and bargain for their rights..." (Chen 2013:71). Among the scarce writings, Chen (2013), Kabeer et al. (2013) and Roever (2007) provide the most substantial conceptualizations of these experiences and offer an analytical framework for studies of organizations in the informal economy, which will be used in next chapter.

Previous studies of informal workers in Colombia concern the debate on public space (Donovan 2008; Mujeres y Economía 2013). However, two studies of descriptive

character on political organizing are well worth excavating from the archives of Bogotá's city library⁵. In 1996, Noé-Cely undertook characterizing the organizations of informal workers that existed in Bogotá. While there were hundreds of organizations, many were inactive and had few members (Noé-Cely 1996). Londoño (1999) provides information on selected labor unions of informal workers in Bogotá, arguing that formal labor unions should engage more with informal workers' organizations in order to gain mutual strength.

Concerning street vendors, Nelson (1992) somewhat looks into the political activity of Bogotá's vendors. With references to the Resistance Theoretician Scott (1985), she argues that vendors' way of contesting inequalities lies in the conscious act of not paying taxes and thus resisting others' appropriation of their labor. She argues that organized labor has been wakened and "under these circumstances people with little economic/political power can only rely on personal self-help. Bogotá's street vendors are among these people" (Nelson 1992:336).

However, there *are* vendor organizations. The study by Mujeres y Economía (2013) which preceded this research showed that there is an organizational process among the street vendors in Suba, which should be furthered explored. There is one published study from Peru to be found on street vendor organizations by Roever (2007). It provides some additional categories to the studies in Kabeer et al. (2013), taking the vendors' particular conditions into account. Having said that so little is explored, it seems of high relevance to look at the political organization of the street vendors in Bogotá.

⁵ Biblioteca del Banco de la República Luis Ángel Arango.

4 Theory

Since the aim of this thesis is to explore how street vendors in the informal economy organize together and the challenges and possibilities that can be found in their struggle, the analytical framework draws on cases presented by Kabeer et al. (2013) and Roever (2007) in order to build a theoretical understanding of different organizations, their challenges and how these have been overcome. Given that it is a largely unexplored terrain, the optimistic views of Kabeer et al. (2013) and Roever (2007) stand uncontested. That is what my empirical findings will do in the following chapter. First of all, the concept underpinning the thesis, street vending, will be discussed.

4.1 Street Vending

The network *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing* (Wiego) define street vendors as those who sell goods or services in public space, like sidewalks, alleyways and outside sport arenas. They may have fixed stalls, semi-fixed stalls or be ambulating vendors who flexibly 'follow the crowds' (Wiego 2014). As with the informal economy in general, income levels vary but most vendors have no social or legal security. This reflects well the situation in Suba and Bogotá where the study by *Mujeres y Economía* (2013) showed that only 65% of the vendors had access to health service - and rarely time to attend it - and 95% were not affiliated to any pension system. When asked about their biggest fears, answers were unison: falling ill and getting old. More than half had no plan for what to do when that day eventually comes (*Mujeres y Economía* 2013:103).

The driving forces behind street vending are diverse. On one hand, the low entry barriers allow a subsistence income for those who cannot find formal jobs. Vendors of low-end goods like vegetables are usually part of this group. On the other hand, some see it as a way of avoiding operation costs and taxes of a formal business. In Colombia, many prefer street vending to the often abusive conditions of the formal labor market. It is also a more

viable option for many women, even when wage work is available, as the flexibility lets them fulfill their family needs (Wiego 2014; Mujeres y Economía 2013).

Street vendors face unique risks in their work. Along with falling ill and not being able to work, being forcibly removed from the workplace is the most pressing risk and vendors are left out to the fluctuating attitudes of policy makers. They are also exposed to aggressive attitudes by shop owners, traffic accidents and theft as well as violent fights with other vendors. Physical injuries are common as many haul heavy loads, the workplace often lacks running water and toilets, air can be heavily polluted and the sound level in the street leads to loss of hearing (Wiego 2014). The vendors in Suba identify the same problems, along with the lack of organization (Mujeres y Economía 2013).

4.2 Organizing Informal Workers

Given that informal workers often are found in temporal activities, often self-employed and in direct competition with each other for work, customers and space to sell their goods, Kabeer et al. (2013) state that little in their working conditions lends itself to self-recognition of their status as workers but still they do organize.

There are numbers of ways of organizing as workers in the informal economy despite the difficulties, from savings-credit groups to labor unions, depending on the legal environment (Chen 2013). Wiego provides the following definition of vendor organizations:

”Street vending organizations can be found in cities worldwide. Some vendors are organized according to the urban space where they work, such as a particular street, block, market, or area. Other vendors are organized according to the product they sell. Most organizations play a dual role: internally, they assist their members in securing a space on the street, accessing credit and savings mechanisms, and upgrading their skills; and externally, they help mediate vendors’ relationship with local authorities. (Wiego 2014).

But while vendor organizations are large in numbers, they are usually small and therefore often invisible (Wiego 2014). Given the limited literature on political organization of street vendors, the general experiences of organizing as *informal workers* will be outlined below based on the case studies of organized domestic workers, rural workers, sex workers and waste pickers from India, Thailand, South Africa and Brazil recompiled by Kabeer et al. (2013). The case of street vendor organizations presented by Roever (2007) will add a sector-specific category to the discussion.

4.2.1 Shared Interests and Identities

First of all, Kabeer et al. (2013) argue that it is essential to *build a shared sense of identity and interests* for the continuity of the organizations and their effectiveness. However, many informal workers are not considered workers by policy makers, trade unions or even by themselves (Chen 2013). Many see themselves as businessmen and businesswomen rather than workers and make an important distinction between a ‘worker’ and a person doing whatever it takes to earn a living for their families (Kabeer et al. 2013). The *diversity* among the workers is also presented as a challenge. Economic disparities, different regional provenance and how long one has worked create divisions (Kabeer et al 2013). Although it might be alien for vendors to recognize themselves as workers, Kabeer argue that this is most viable option if to shift focus from division to unity. Most often this identity has to be built, but starting from any point of shared interest, like a savings and credit group or even around religious affiliation, can allow them to eventually grow to become a union or worker associations (Kabeer et al. 2013).

4.2.2 Labor relations and Soft Power

Another central theme is the lack of *traditional labor relations* in the informal economy. Globally, the “employment relationship between a recognized employer and employee has historically represented the central legal concept around which labor law and collective bargaining agreements have sought to recognize and protect the rights of workers” (Chen

2013:69). Informal workers, on the other hand, often have to negotiate with multiple dominant actors, like the police, authorities and formal workers (Chen 2013). Instead of confrontational tactics as used by traditional worker movements, Kabeer et al. (2013) argue that organizations of informal workers should use *soft power*, such as discourse, information and legal activism. All organizations presented by Kabeer et al. (2013) underline the importance of informing their members about their legal rights and how they can be claimed. In the absence of a direct employer-employee relationship, the state is held as duty-bearer in countries where informal workers can claim constitutional rights as citizens.

4.2.3 Claims and the Role of Outsiders

"It is striking – but not surprising – that most of the organizations discussed in this book have their origins in the efforts of actors who come from a different class background to the women workers being organized" (Kabeer et al. 2013:8).

As Chen states, informal workers often need to bargain even to be allowed to pursue their livelihoods without being evicted or having their goods confiscated (Chen 2013). This immediate struggle for work and the fear of losing the only workplace they have limit the will to risk-taking and as Kabeer et al. state, “the likelihood of spontaneous self-organization among these workers is extremely low” (2013:8). They also argue that external influence is not something bad but that it raises issues of dealing with power inequalities between the often middle class organizers and the marginalized workers.

This relation to external actors raises questions of how *success* should be interpreted. In a case where middle-class women with left-oriented ideology tried to organize informal domestic workers, their intentions of structural transformations stood in contrast to the women they sought to unionize who wanted support in negotiating with their employers (Kabeer et al. 2013). The fact that the struggle against capital appears to be less relevant might be interpreted as a defeat for the larger political issues, like the ongoing informalization of work, but it could also be understood as reflecting the priorities of

these workers, often overlooked in the classic trade union confrontations (Kabeer et al. 2013).

Nevertheless, Kabeer et al. (2013) observe that this can change over time. Highly politicized demands are unlikely to bring informal workers together in the first instance but coming together around practical concerns of their daily lives, as the collective identity strengthens, "they appear to become more willing to take on these political issues /.../ engage in open conflict, to take legal action against those in power who violate their rights, and to use their organization's clout to influence political and policy processes and to assert themselves as citizens" (Kabeer et al. 2013:42). As Kabeer states:

"it takes time to build social acknowledgement and self-recognition of the value of the work /.../ to organize them and retain their loyalty; to build common identities and interests across women otherwise divided by their location in the economic structure and the social hierarchy; to become a collective force able to win the smaller or larger gains that would give the members a stake in the organization and the commitment to further change" (2013:41-42)

4.2.4 Internal Compliance

Roever (2007), in her study of street vendor organizations in Peru, concludes that the outcome of their struggle is uneven. She adds a category to the challenges of organizing as workers in the informal economy by saying that they only reach mixed success because the organizations are *run in an informal manner*. There are three aspects of this. The first is the material foundation like documentation, an office, budget, bank account and member lists. Secondly, external political recognition helps to sustain projects over time and to influence policy makers. But for Roever, the most important aspect is *internal compliance* - the extent to which leaders and members comply with the organizations' internal rules. Members should have the right and responsibility to contribute to the life of the organization; to vote and elect leaders, run for office, participate in discussions and oversee the leaders' compliance.

“The lack of compliance with these regulations fosters a great deal of discontent and mistrust between leaders and members of these organizations. A common complaint among members is that their leaders take action without consulting with the membership, and a common complaint among leaders is that members are apathetic and do not participate in or help with associational activities” (Roever 2007:272-273).

Roever argues that there are successful cases showing that it is possible to overcome this. When internal compliance is increased, leadership becomes more credible and retain members in the organization. Subsequently, the larger member base lets the organization become more credible in the eyes of policy makers (Roever 2007).

In the following chapter, my findings will be discussed with the purpose of identifying similarities with these studies and revealing possible disjunctures with theory.

5 Material and Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical material will be presented and analyzed in the light of organizational experiences in other parts of the world. After a descriptive section of the organizations, based on the accounts of Alfredo Manchola (interview 13), Alirio Rubiano (interview 16) and own observations, I will develop on the challenges and prospects observed in Suba. There are many aspects of the organization of the street vendors in Suba and they are closely intertwined. Acknowledging the often-raised critique against qualitative analysis, that other researchers might come up with other categories (Bryman 2012), the themes and sub-themes are presented in the figure below.

Themes	Sub-themes
The Political Economy of the Street:	Conflict, Competition, Mistrust, Disunity, Capitalism, Labor Relations, New vendors, Identities
Claims:	Rights, Political awareness, Immediate and Long-term causes, Structural transformation, Dignity
External Actors and Politicization:	Labor unions, Universities, the Colombian Left, Non-vendor leaders, Politicization, Weariness, Power relations
Internal Compliance:	Leadership, Membership, Responsibilities, Representation vs Collective action, Previous experience, Corruption, Dues, Attendance, Usefulness, Communication
Women:	Initiative, Activity, Leadership, Claims, Generational break
Colombia specific issues:	Armed conflict, Stigmatization of the Left, Internalized fear, Generalized mistrust, Irritability, Clientelism

Figure 2: Themes and sub-themes

5.1 Street Vendor Organizations in Suba and Bogotá

Vendors in Colombia have faced different levels of persecution depending on the attitude of sitting mayors. While citizens' right to public space is constitutionalized since 1991, so is the right to work. Therefore, vendors have both been evicted with reference to the constitution and able to legally appeal the decisions with reference to the same constitution. In difference to many other countries, Colombian informal workers have the legal possibility to register as formal labor organizations in the Chamber of Commerce (Londoño 1999).

The long time existing street vending in Bogotá became a policy issue in the 1950s when public space got scarcer as the population grew. Mayors either practiced full persecution or ignored the vendors, but by the 1970s the Colombian Left approached the vendors. They introduced the concept of a worker identity and the party Independent Revolutionary Workers' Movement (MOIR) founded a labor union for street vendors – Unity Labor Union of Small Merchants (SINUCOM). But they were left adrift during the 1990s and when mayor Peñalosa came into office in 1998, vendors were systematically persecuted and SINUCOM practically disappeared. However, with the support of lawyer Alfredo Manchola, vendors took legal charge against the mayor and won with reference to their constitutionalized right to work. In 2003, another mayor, Mockus, took up the aggressive approach and here vendors took to the street in spontaneous mobilizations to defend their workplace. Alfredo Manchola, together with Pedro Luis Ramirez, a sociologist, gathered vendor leaders from around Bogotá to form a district committee. In 2004, the new mayor Garzón, a former labor unionist, facilitated the formation of local vendor committees.

Today there are over 350 street vendor organizations in Bogotá but only around 30% of the 100'000 street vendors are affiliated (IPES 2004). In Suba, 2000 out of the 7000 vendors belong to an association and these are often territory-based (Alcaldía local de Suba 2013). These different organizations coordinate in nineteen local committees and representatives from each locality meet weekly in the district committee of Bogotá. The committee works with legal activism, negotiate with policy makers and seek to unify the

unarticulated vendor organizations. The leaders who are not vendors work on a voluntary basis. The district committee is at the same time a labor union, General Union of Informal Workers (UGTI), supporting vendors in cities around Colombia. Being a labor union allows affiliation to the labor union federation Workers' United Center (CUT), applying for international funding and participating in the international network for vendors StreetNet. Thus, there is a well developed organizational infrastructure but significant challenges hamper its proper use. Below, the three organizations in focus and their different characteristics will be outlined before moving to a discussion on their shared challenges and prospects.

Worth noting is also that during 2013 and 2014, the left-wing local mayor of Suba, Marisol Perilla, is carrying out a project with the local vendor committee, attempting to create a contract that would let vendors who are part of an organization work legally in exchange of certain self-regulation conditions, such as homogenizing the cart size, keeping the street clean and establishing working hours. The intention is to allow those in most need to work and support them to claim their rights and dignity. However, there is no clear plan of what will happen with new vendors who arrive.

5.1.1 Asoventro

Asociación de vendedores de Centro Suba siglo XXI (Vendor association in Suba Center 21st Century) was founded in 2001 by Alirio Rubiano, who is still the president. His leadership is a central part of the organization and he represents Suba at district level. Asoventro comprises 400 vendors in central Suba, of which around 70 pay the dues and assist meetings actively. Apart from assemblies, the day-to-day communication is mediated by two coordinators in each block. The leader negotiates with the police and mayor to defend the vendors and organizes street demonstrations when necessary and has been successful in stopping police raids. New vendors are welcome if they fulfill the rules and requirements. If the project with the mayor succeeds, Alirio Rubiano plans on claiming child care and a health system.

5.1.2 San Isidro Labrador

The San Isidro Labrador association founded in 2002 has 200 members in Suba Rincón. Since the former leader passed away in 2012, Gerardo Bonilla has taken on the temporary leadership while waiting to hold elections. The former president took the organization's documentation with him and Gerardo needs to re-establish the organization's legal status. At present the objectives are limited to getting vendors engaged. Students from the National University on behalf of the mayor hold capacity building workshops. The attendance is low and vendors express weariness of attending meetings every week. Five previous organizations with corrupt leadership has reduced trust and belief in the meaning of organizing in Rincón.

5.1.3 Asovel

Asociación Organizada de Vendedores de Lisboa (Organized Association of Vendors in Lisboa) consists of vendors in the newest settlement in the very outskirts of Suba. They began the organizational process in 2013 on initiative by the mayor, facilitated by students from the National University who have held weekly workshops during one year. The organization is only about to legalize and choose its president and board in 2014. All 72 vendors in the addressed street participate in the process and attendance at meetings is nearly 100%. They claim that new vendors are approaching the association as they witness the benefits, but these are not welcomed by the organization. Armed fights between the vendors are said to have decreased and the square looks more in order which is said to have had good impact on vending.

5.2 Challenges and Prospects

The challenges faced by the vendor organizations in Suba appear to be many. The most accentuated issues will be discussed in the following sections. It is worth highlighting that while one could expect to find fear as a salient issue in Colombia where labor unionists

are violently persecuted (Archila 1998), vendors dismissed this factor. Central factors were instead conflict, claims, external influence and collective responsibility. These will be discussed below before concluding the chapter with a reflection on women's participation.

5.2.1 Conflicts and the Political Economy of the Street

The meeting is delayed, just like the previous meetings. Flor and Francisco are upset because the mayor is not here so they refuse to go inside. Voices and comments are loud and harsh. Eventually mayor Marisol arrives and asks for an update telling Alirio to start since he is the leader of the committee. Flor explodes. 'Alirio is not the president! He was never elected because we did not agree on that within the committee' (Field notes, public policy meeting 30 January 2014, mayor's office, Suba).

As showed by the field note extract above, instead of shared interests and identities (Kabeer et al. 2013), the most frequent themes are conflict, mistrust and disunity both in Suba and at district level. These conflicts appear to inhibit the use of the organizational infrastructure described above. It creates an unwillingness among vendors to get involved in organizations and makes meetings unfruitful as time is lost on conflicts. A picture emerges of a sector that is divided precisely because of the individualism and competition of the political economy in which vendors operate. As Chen (2013) states, traditional unionized workers came from workplaces such as factories where competition between workers was insignificant. It is surprising that Kabeer et al. (2013) as well as Roever (2007) only mention that informal workers may be in direct competition with each other. The Suba case invites us to pay more attention to this:

“Instead of unity there is often like resentment or egoism between neighboring vendors. It's because of the very street itself. The street causes it. When you start competing with the same product, rivalry begins. In this sense we are quite unorganized” (Gerardo Bonilla, Interview 1).

Kabeer et al. (2013) are indeed right that there are sectors where competition has been overcome. However, it appears that street vendors face specific challenges. They are consequently treated with aggression by their surroundings, creating generalized aggression in many vendors. The quote below also describes what desperation does to the vendor:

“Why is there so much conflict between vendors in the meetings? If you ask me, there are exceptions but the majority of us enter the street because of necessity. When you need to get food, survive, provide for your children, you become very disrespectful. It is like entering a jungle. You enter and look 'is that a lion that will eat me?' It creates a defensive shell. Like your body with the virus attacks - you become harder. And you get used to the weather too. The rain and the sun are tremendous, you have to become tough to put up with it” (Carlos Soacha, interview 17).

However, it has to be stressed that these findings are not meant to be unreflectingly generalized. The Colombian case calls for context sensitivity, where social relations have been torn apart for over fifty years of ongoing internal armed conflict. Pedro Luis Ramírez who represents the vendors internationally says:

“We have a serious problem with the drug traffic and violence. Do you see the paramilitaries? They quarter human beings just to spread terror among the population. Our reality is hard, so there is a major irritability in people /.../ Comparing with other places that I have had the chance to see, I think there is more generosity in people in other places” (Interview 15).

In order to overcome disunity, Kabeer et al. (2013) suggest forging a shared identity as workers. It does not just seem unlikely in Suba - the research participants firmly answer that they are entrepreneurs - but we might also want to consider what the vendors want:

“Worker? Hm. No idea... I do whatever it takes for my children. I am here because I think of them” (Female non-affiliated vendor in Rincón, interview 6).

The quote above confirms what Kabeer states, that these identities are not usually there but need to be forged. However, I want to raise the question if it is desirable to impose identities rejected by the vendors. Vladimir Garzón from the National University who works closely to the vendors says:

“I like the term 'proletarianization' – when you acquire class consciousness. But the vendors already have consciousness. Not as salaried workers, but as *owners* of their work. They don't want to get formalized to get better conditions. They want *more* freedom” (Interview 8).

Nevertheless, there are cases like in Suba Lisboa where conflicts have diminished along with the development of a new vendor organization and capacity building meetings with the National University students. A female member who has been active since the start says:

“Oh, yes, we have made huge progress. There are no fights anymore. Before people here pulled out a knife for anything. Now, the majority of us agree about the activities of the organization” (Interview 3).

To conclude, one can say that large conflicts inhibit the use of the existing organizational structure. The vendors explain that conflicts depend on the logics of their workplace: the competition, their vulnerability and the aggressive treatment by surrounding actors. The Colombian armed conflict also calls for context sensitivity. Nevertheless, there are recent initiatives where these challenges seem to be overcome.

5.2.2 Claims

The claims of the organizations are defined as defense from the police and struggle to stay in the public space. But leaders and vendors, especially women, also express hope to move beyond these immediate causes. In the interviews, all vendors have ideas of what they would want the organization to do: credits to start a business, childcare, a fund for savings and to unite in order to claim better education for the children. Allowing herself to dream of future goals, a female vendor in Lisboa states:

“To make them see that we are equal. How should I say... Sometimes just for working in the street, they look at you as if you were less than they are” (Interview 2).

For Kabeer et al (2013), it is normal that workers unite around the more immediate needs initially and that higher causes come eventually. Leaders like Alirio Rubiano exemplifies that they have intentions to do more:

“My first commitment was to stop the police raids. You can't drink beer if you don't have a table. The right to work is our table. When that gets secured, what follows? Claims of social benefits for the families. Claims of childcare for the vendors' children. For free! And health. Instead of going to the hospital and standing in line until you die, we will work for a 'health day' when we can bring the ambulance with a doctor here to attend vendors in the street” (Interview 16).

To conclude, the outspoken claims of the organizations are relatively low: to stay in the street and keep it nice-looking. But in the interviews, both leaders and vendors dream of using the organizations to claim childcare, access to health care and of being looked upon as citizens with dignity. This leads us to questions of politicization and the noticeable role of outsiders in the political organization of street vendors in Bogotá.

5.2.3 The Role of Outsiders

Kabeer et al. argue that it is “striking – but not surprising” that worker organizations in the informal economy have their origin in efforts of actors of a different class background (2013:8). A search for 'genuine' organizations of the vendors in Suba would be in vain. The studied organizations all had external influence; MOIR who mobilized the vendors in the 1970s, Garzón who created the local committees in 2004, the local left-wing mayor of Suba who works to strengthen the organizations in Suba. Asovel is entirely her initiative, facilitated by students from the National University, and various other organizations were

initiated by students from the Military University Nueva Granada⁶. Equally, the district committee and the labor union UGTI are led by a sociologist and a lawyer.

Kabeer argues that it is not necessarily bad with external support. The vendors' struggle for survival leaves little time to develop strategies and organizational skills. However, it raises questions of power relations and of whose priorities guide the process. Vladimir from the National University states:

“You heard my friends from the University the other day, I think they want the Great Transformation of society. I feel like the vendors don't. They want the minimum. Rain protection, saving system, waste management – and they will be happy. Except for the women (Interview 8).

This raises a sensitive question. Should vendors not be trusted to know what is best for them or can outsiders claim that vendors are victims of propaganda and ignorance of their lawful rights? Kabeer et al. (2013) argue that highly politicized demands did not bring workers together in the first instance but if starting by coming together around practical concerns, eventually workers became more willing to take on political issues. Someone from the outside can indeed help to bring a wider perspective into the immediate struggle but it is a clear cut from-above statement. The mayor and university students often use the word depoliticized about the vendors in Suba and are carrying out workshops in rights and rights claiming. At the same time, informal conversations with vendors in the street often evolve around current political events and include politicized words like 'free trade agreements', 'marginalized', 'oligarchy' and 'inequality'. The vendor leader Gerardo Bonilla argues:

”Yes, we are politicized. I mean, because we know more or less who likes us and who doesn't. Street vendors have to negotiate with the police, the mayor, the councilmen... and that is politics” (Interview 1).

While vendors in Rincón show prevention towards anyone who approaches them with more capacitations, stating that they are tired of too many meetings and of how actors

⁶ For example the organizations Asovenorte and Asoexis in Suba.

come and go before processes are consolidated, in Lisboa, where there are no organizational antecedents, the cooperation seem to be fruitful.

”I have worked here for eighteen years and there has never been any organizing. Why? Because as vendors we don't care about working together. It's everyone on his own. Without the initiative from the guys [from the university], we wouldn't have done this. Because none of us would have gotten the idea. It's like they came and gave us that little push to get started and to do all this. So here we go” (Female member, interview 2).

To conclude, these findings confirm that all organizations have had external influence. As Kabeer et al. (2013) argue, this might not be a bad thing but rather necessary, given vendors struggle for survival. There are positive experiences but it raises questions of whose priorities guide the work and the question of who claims to know what is best for the vendors. But not only external factors have impact; the following section deals with internal mechanisms of the organizations.

5.2.4 Collective Responsibility

Roever (2007) speaks of rights and responsibilities of leaders and members and names this 'internal compliance'. In the researched organizations in Suba, leaders fulfill responsibilities in the sense that they organize regular assemblies, elections and inform members when meetings are held. However, it appears that organizations around Bogotá function differently in this aspect. In Suba, there appears to be little corruption but as members do not pay their dues, there are no resources to embezzle. Among the vendors, on the other hand, there is limited will to take on responsibilities. Leaders like Alirio complain:

“Vendors say 'I have four carts so I don't have time to participate'. But when the police comes, oh, then they remember their poor leader Alirio. 'Please, sir Alirio...’” (Interview 16).

On the other hand, meetings are often delayed, cancelled, changed with short notice and there are no agendas or minutes in any of the sampled organizations. Vendors argue that they are disappointed since this causes unnecessary losses in income and that the lack of meeting minutes risks to distort information like in the 'broken telephone' game.

Initially, lack of time and money is provided as reasons for not participating. But a picture also appears of vendors who have the necessary resources but do not see a meaning in participating. A male vendor in Rincón says:

“I don't believe in this. I used to go to the meetings. Lately I don't. I will be sincere to you. It's always the same. They talk and nothing happens” (Interview 12).

In Rincón, there are experiences of corrupt leadership in the past, reducing trust in the organizational forms. As Roever (2007) argues, this is facilitated by members' lack of engagement in following up on leaders. While Roever (2007) claims that improving internal compliance makes organizations more successful, she does not explore the causes of such problems. These findings suggest that the concept of participation calls for further exploration. Among the interviewed vendors the view on participating is strikingly limited to representative democracy. Participation is understood as paying the dues and attending meetings while it is the leaders who should take action. Few people ask themselves what *they* want to improve and how they should contribute in achieving it.

“A lot of people don't do it, but I always pay. Two thousand pesos. Ten thousand, when the leader asks for it. But he should solve my problem with the shop owner behind me. I give [the leader] money that I assume goes to the mayor or government or something. So he should take action. When I tell him this, he only laughs. So I don't really know what will happen” (Female vendor in Rincón, interview 7).

The following quotes gives a similar indication:

“Propositions? They are made in the meetings. This year in January there was a meeting. They haven't told us when but I think that there soon will be a meeting like that. It's the people of the steering board who make the propositions and I express if I agree or disagree” (Female vendor Suba Centro interview 4).

According to Pedro Luis Ramírez, the sociologist, this is explained also by the Colombian clientelism. In his view, this is a copy of the national politics or even the influence of Catholicism's in Latin American politics where expectations commonly are enormous on a leader to be 'the Salvator'.

How to approach these difficulties is an issue raised by tired leaders. Roever (2007) provides little guidance of how. Leaders talk about starting with small gains to establish confidence, similar to Kabeer et al. (2013) who state that it takes winning smaller and larger gains to give members the commitment to engage for further change.

”For sure, the ways to change this is by carrying things through little by little and showing that this can be done seriously. Like having a short term plan and accomplishing it, and middle term plans and accomplishing them. People will get the idea and notice that we're really doing something” (Gerardo Bonilla, interview 1).

Pedro Luis Ramírez adds the importance of good communication:

“We really have to improve the levels of communication – so that the community knows what is being done and how. It is only with well-informed comrades that we can create consensus” (Interview 15).

To conclude, it is clear that what Roever (2007) calls internal compliance is an issue in Suba. Meetings are delayed and unstructured. Leaders complain that members do not participate and members ask 'what for?' Instead of just stating that this needs to be improved, we might need to ask why it is so. In Suba, there is a generalized idea that participation means paying the dues and attending meetings and not taking responsibility for making propositions and carrying them out. In a Latin American context this might be linked to the wider political culture. And as Roig (2013) would argue, we might not want to analyze informality by applying norms from the formal economy but it should be understood within its own logics.

5.2.5 The Salient Role of Women

In the accentuated male-dominated culture in Colombia, one thing stands out among the street vendors. Female vendors are more in number than male vendors (Mujeres y Economía 2013), in all organization meetings attended during the study, there were more women than men and women speak up as much as men (own observation). When talking to the vendors, women have more ideas, take the time and have more will to ameliorate their situation. Various men also raised this topic even before being asked:

“Here, we find a gender perspective. Men are passive. Women with children is something different. They want a generational break. They have a long-term perspective and they want to claim their rights”
(Vladimir Garzón, interview 8).

Also, the large international networks like StreetNet are led by women (Kabeer et al. 2013) and interestingly, most literature on informal workers' political organization appears to be written by women (see Chen 2013; Kabeer et al. 2013, Roever 2007; Nelson 1992; Londoño 1999; Mujeres y Economía 2013). It was not the scope of this study to answer why this is so but it is certainly a finding worth highlighting.

Yet, women are not found on leader positions. Out of ten organizations, one has female leadership. Therefore few women participate in public policy meetings where only

leaders attend. I argue that this is a critical issue since female vendors show more initiative and responsibility. Before moving to the concluding chapter, a female non-affiliated vendor in Rincón concludes the section:

“What I would like from this organization? Well, that they were more attentive to the vendors, asking what we need. And to let us know how we can contribute, because it is not only that we should receive and receive and do nothing. They help – and then we should contribute too” (Interview 6).

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore how street vendors organize together in the informal economy in Bogotá and the challenges and prospects that can be outlined in their collective action. In order to answer the research questions, data was gathered through a qualitative field study in Colombia from January to March 2014 with three vendor organizations in the locality of Suba in Bogotá. Observations and interviews were carried out with members and leaders at local, district, national and international levels, as well as non-affiliated vendors. Data have been analyzed in relation to studies by Kabeer et al. (2013) and Roever (2007) who have provided cases of how successful organizations of informal workers have organized in other sectors and parts of the world.

In order to conclude, the research questions will be answered in turn. Because of the scarce literature on the topic, the first research question was of a descriptive character: “How do the street vendors organize together in Suba and Bogotá?” The Colombian law allows unionism of informal workers and the vendors in Suba have a well-developed organizational infrastructure of neighborhood-based associations linked to district, national and international vendor organizations. Until now, focus has been on negotiating with police and mayors to defend vendors and their workplace, but leaders as well as vendors in general express intentions to transcend to further causes. There is a strikingly high involvement of external actors as all the organizations are or have been influenced either by university students, left-oriented mayors or non-vendor leaders.

The second question was: “What challenges do they face as organizations?” The analysis shows that the challenges indeed are many – and more significant than what Kabeer et al. (2013) invite us to think. There are substantial conflicts hindering the use of the existing structures, depending on the very characteristics of the street: vendors are in competition with one another and the high vulnerability impulses individualism. Another salient issue is the central role of external actors. It raises questions of power relations and of whose priorities should guide the organization. While the outsiders argue that the vendors are depoliticized, vendors in fact show high political awareness. Kabeer et al. (2013) state that more political claims come eventually as shared identities of workers are forged.

However, I want to raise the question of whether external actors really should claim to know what is best for the vendors. Another important observation is the lack of will from the members to participate actively in the organization. This corresponds to what Roever (2007) calls a lack of internal compliance. In order to overcome this challenge, I argue that it is necessary to understand its antecedents. Underneath lies a lack of belief in the usefulness of organizing, based on previous experiences of corrupt leadership. But it also turned out that there is a cultural understanding of participation as limited to paying dues and attending meetings instead of taking collective responsibility for presenting propositions and carrying them out.

The last research question calls for a critical reflection on the prospects of the vendor organizations. “What prospects are there for them to be the kind of successful organization as those outlined by Kabeer et al. (2013)?” Kabeer's optimism might need to be nuanced in the case of Suba. The structural features of the street economy are causing substantial conflicts and mistrust between vendors, putting obstacles in the way of organizing. My data also call for sensitivity to the unique Colombian context. The organizations in Suba have managed to stop the systematic police persecution and leaders defend members by negotiating with the police and mayor when necessary. They have also partly reduced conflicts in the street and together made their workplace tidier, which in length improve incomes. However, a large number of vendors are not affiliated and it is unclear how they should be integrated into the organizations. Even though the road to heaven is not paved only by good intentions, as the prospect to stay in the street increases, leaders as well as members and non-affiliated vendors express strong will to work for further causes such as childcare, savings and credit systems and to change the pejorative public perception about them.

As an outsider with three months in the field I cannot provide solutions and this is not the purpose of the thesis. But by highlighting the principal difficulties observed, I may suggest in which direction to search for solutions. While this study did not take a specific focus on female vendors, the salient role of women in street vending is striking in Suba. If I am to recommend something for future research, it is to look closer at the role of women and their possible leadership in organizations of workers in the informal economy.

7 References

- Adu-Amankwah, Kwasi (1999) "Trade unions in the informal sector". *Labour Education* No 116, International Labor Office
- Alcaldía local de Suba (2013) *Propuesta Localidad de Suba. Economía popular y espacio público: El vendedor de la calle*. Bogotá: Alcaldía local de Suba (*Proposal Locality of Suba: Popular economy and public space*)
- Archila Neira, Mauricio (1998) "Poderes y contestación". *Colombia Controversia*. CINEP. Vol 173 pp 29-56, 1998 (Power and Contestation)
- Bromley, Ray (2000) "Street Vending and Public Policy: A Global Review". *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. Vol 20 (1) pp 1-29, 2000
- Bryman, Alan (2012) *Social research methods*. 4th edition. New York: Oxford University Press
- Chen, Martha, Jhabvala, Renana, Kanbur, Ravi and Richards Carol (2007) *Membership-Based Organizations of the Poor*. New York: Routledge
- Chen, Martha (2013) "Informal Workers in the Developing World: Organizing in the Global Economy." *New Labor Forum*. Vol 22 (1) pp 67-73, 2013
- Chinguno, Crispen (2011) "Trade Unions and Workers in the Periphery: Forging New Forms of Solidarity?" *J. Workplace Rights*. Vol 15 (3-4) pp 367-386, 2010-2011
- Cornwall, Andrea, Oliveira, Creuza Maria & Gonçalves, Terezinha (2013) "If you don't see a light in the darkness, you must light a fire: Brazilian Domestic Workers' struggle for rights" in Kabeer et al. (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. [Book chapter] pp 149-180. London: Zed Books
- de Soto, Hernando (2003) *The mystery of capital: why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. Oxford: Oxford Publicity Partnership
- Donovan, Michael G. (2008) "Informal Cities and the Contestation of Public Space: The Case of Bogotá's street vendors, 1988-2003". *Urban Studies* Vol 45 (1) pp 29-51, 2008
- Fischer, Gundula (2013) "Revisiting Abandoned Ground: Tanzanian Trade Unions' Engagement with Informal Workers". *Labor Studies Journal* Vol 38 (2) pp 139-160, 2013
- Holliday, Adrian (2007) *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications Ltd
- Huang, Gengzhi, Xue, Desheng & Li, Zhigang (2013) "From revanchism to ambivalence: The changing politics of street vending in Guangzhou". *Antipode* Vol 46 (1) pp 170-189, 2013

ILO (2002) "Report VI: Decent work and the informal economy" International Labour Conference 90th session 2002. Geneva: International Labour Office

IPES (2004) *Informe Encuesta sobre la Venta Ambulante*. Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, Instituto para la Economía Social (*Survey Report on Street Vending*)

Kabeer, Naila, Sudarshan, Ratna & Milward, Kirsty (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. London: Zed Books

Kapoor, Alan (2007) "The SEWA way: Shaping another future for informal labour", *Futures*. Vol 29 (5) pp 554-568, 2007

Londoño Urrego, Ofelia (1999) "Colombia" in Velasco, Manuel Simón (1999) *Trade unions in the informal sector: Finding the bearings, nine country papers*, pp 117-134. International Labor Organization

May, Tim, (2011) *Social research – issues, methods and process*. Glasgow: Open University Press

Mujeres y economía (2013) *Diagnóstico de vendedores en la calle y propuesta de política pública en la localida de Suba: Plazas de Rincón y Lisboa y Zonas de Autopista Norte y Suba Centro*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional (*Diagnostic of street vendors and proposal for public policy in the locality of Suba: Rincón plaza, Lisboa plaza, Northern highway zone and Suba centre*)

Narayan, Lakshmi & Chikarmane, Poornima (2013) "Power at the Bottom of the Heap: Organizing Waste Pickers in Pune" in Kabeer et al. (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. [Book chapter] pp. 205-231. London: Zed Books

Nelson, Nancy Lee (1992) *Public order and private entrepreneurs: The pocket economy of street vending in Bogotá, Colombia*. Doctorate dissertation in anthropology, University New Mexico. Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services

Noé Cely, Julio (1996) *Organizaciones del sector informal en Bogotá: perfil y diagnóstico*. Bogotá: International Labor Office (*Organizations in the informal sector in Bogotá: profile and diagnostics*)

Pollack, Jackie (2013) "Gender, Ethnicity and the legal 'Other': Women from Burma, Organizing Women across Borders" in Kabeer et al. (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. [Book chapter] pp 252-275. London: Zed Books

Punch, Keith F. (2005) *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Roever, Sally (2007) "Informal governance and organizational success: the effects of noncompliance among Lima's street vending organizations" in Chen et al. (2007)

Membership-Based Organizations of the Poor. [Book chapter] pp 261-278. New York: Routledge

Roig, Alexandre (2013) "La economía política de lo popular como fuente de derechos sobre lo público". Conference paper National University of Colombia 17 November 2013 (The political economy of the popular as a source of rights to the public)

Rose, Gillian (1997) 'Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivity and Other Tactics', *Progress in Human Geography*. Vol 21 (3) pp 305-320, 1997

Scott, James C. (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press

Selwyn, Ben (2013) "Women and Rural Trade Unions in North-East Brazil" in Kabeer et al. (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. [Book chapter] pp 49-72. London: Zed Books

Seshu, Meenu (2013) "Sex, Work and Citizenship: The VAMP Sex Workers' collective in Maharashtra" [Book chapter] in Kabeer et al. (2013) *Organizing Women Workers in the Informal Economy: Beyond the Weapons of the Weak*. [Book chapter] pp 232-251. London: Zed Books.

Standing, Guy (2011) *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. London: Bloomsbury Academic

Sultana, Farhana (2007) 'Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research', *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*. Vol 6 (3) pp 374-385, 2007

Webster, Edward (2011) "Organizing in the Informal Economy: Ela Bhatt and the Self-Employed Women's Association of India". *Labour, Capital and Society*. Vol 44 (1) pp 99-125, 2011

Wiego (2014) "Street Vendors" [online]. Available at: <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/occupational-groups/street-vendors>. Accessed 27 May 2014)

Images

Hermansson, Åsa Maria (2014) Street Vendor in Bogotá. [Front page photograph]

Interview List

Interview 1: Bonilla, Gerardo, p.t. leader San Isidro Labrador and member of the local vendor committee of Suba. Interview 6 March 2014, Suba Rincón

Interview 2: Female member of Asovel 1. Interview 18 March 2014, Suba Lisboa

Interview 3: Female member of Asovel 2. Interview 5 March 2014. Suba centro

Interview 4: Female non-affiliated vendor in Suba Centro. Informal conversation 30 January, Suba Centro

Interview 5: Female member of Asoventro. Interview 10 March 2014, Suba Centro

Interview 6: Female non-affiliated vendor in Rincón. Interview 5 March 2014, Suba Rincón

Interview 7: Female member of San Isidro Labrador. Interview 5 March 2014, Suba Rincón

Interview 8: Garzón, Vladimir, workshop holder from the National University of Colombia. Interview 13 March 2014, Bogotá

Interview 9: Male member of Asovel. Interview 3 March 2014, Suba Lisboa

Interview 10: Male member of San Isidro Labrador. Interview 5 March 2014, Suba Rincón

Interview 11: Male non-affiliated vendor in Suba Centro. Interview 10 March 2014, Suba Centro

Interview 12: Male non-affiliated vendor in Rincón. Interview 6 March 2014, Suba Rincón.

Interview 13: Manchola, Alfredo, leader of the district committee and UGTI. Interview 12 February 2014, Bogotá

Interview 14: Perilla, Marisol, local mayor of Suba. Interview 4 April 2014, Suba

Interview 15: Ramírez Pedro Luis, sociologist and leader of the district committee and UGTI. Interview 13 March 2014, Bogotá

Interview 16: Rubiano, Alirio, Leader of Asoventro. Interviews 30 January 2014 and 5 March 2014, Suba Centro

Interview 17: Soacha, Carlos, member of the district committee representing the locality Engativá. Interviews 11 February 2014 and 2 April 2014, Bogotá

Interview 18: Valencia, Carmen Flor, leader of Asovenorte and member of the local vendor committee of Suba. Interview 13 February 2014, Suba