In Bangkok, the top three industries that informal workers engage in are wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food service, and manufacturing.

In Bangkok, the number of informal workers is significant. Using the definition that informal workers are “the population who are out of the coverage and have no social security as well as not covered by the labour law” as its framework, 2012’s Informal Employment Survey, conducted by the NSO, revealed that the number of informal workers in Bangkok is 1.3 million out of Bangkok’s total labour force of 3.9 million.1

Bangkok’s informal workers also account for 5.1 per cent of the total number of informal workers reported in Thailand, which is 24.8 million people. Although the formal economy in Bangkok is bigger than the informal one, this is not the case in the northern, northeastern, and southern regions of the country, rendering the combined number of informal workers of the whole country higher than that of the formal sector. By percentage, informal workers account for 62.6 per cent of the nation’s total labour force of 39.6 million.

1 “Informal workers” is defined differently in Thailand by various organizations: the Ministry of Labour’s definition is workers who get wages from their work but are not protected by labour law; The Social Security Office’s definition is workers who have income but are not protected by the Social Security Act B.E 2533. These workers can be classified into two groups: 1) Employees with income (i.e., home-based workers, employees in agriculture, fishery, forestry and animal husbandry, workers who are employed occasionally and domestic workers); and 2) own-account businesses with no workers. Source: The Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion.
The survey also demonstrates the many significant characteristics of informal workers in Bangkok, including the following:

- The number of males (17.7 per cent) engaging in the informal sector is slightly higher than the number of females (14.9 per cent).
- The highest proportion of informal workers falls into the age range of 45-49, with the figure of slightly more than 100,000 for both males and females.
- 24 per cent of informal workers have university education while the other 76 per cent have different lower levels of education ranging from high school to illiteracy.
- In terms of work hours per week, the highest number of informal workers work for 50 hours or more per week while the second tier are those who work 1-9 hours per week.
- Own account workers characterize the majority of informal workers and account for 64 per cent of all informal workers.
- While 62.5 per cent of informal workers work in the agriculture sector at the country level, in Bangkok, the top three industries that informal workers engage in are wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and food service, and manufacturing.

Overview of Nongchok District

Out of Bangkok’s 50 districts, Nongchok is the largest district in terms of area, yet it has the lowest population density; in December 2012, it was recorded to have 665 persons/km². While most districts in inner Bangkok recorded a decline of population during the period of 2006-2012, Nongchok demonstrated an increase of around 24,000 people during the same period (FLEP 2010). Located 40 km away from inner Bangkok, Nongchok district is considered an outskirt of the city where a large amount of the district areas exhibit a combination of urban and rural characteristics. Some areas of the district remain underdeveloped; accessibility to basic utilities, such as tap water and public street lighting, is still an issue of concern for some residents. Public transportation is undersupplied and inefficient, and roads lack proper maintenance. In 2012, up to 325 complaints about roads were submitted to the Nongchok district office. While such complaints are reported to be at the range of 10-40 times as those in other districts, it is important to note that Nongchok is one of the remote districts used to accommodate relocated urban poor out of inner Bangkok. At the same time, despite its underdeveloped condition, the availability of cheap housing also made it the destination of some economically aspiring migrants from upcountry, most of which either become workers in manufacturing factories or are employed in the informal sector.

Membership-Based Organization

Established in 1992, HomeNet Thailand (HNT) seeks to empower home-based workers through a variety of strategies, including organizing, networking, capacity building, researching, information dissemination, and advocacy for policies that enhance the social protection of informal workers. Under the facilitation and coordination of the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion, HNT has

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2 The greatest density is recorded at 26,375/ km² in Pomprab Sattru Pai district. Out of 50 districts, 7 districts are home to a population density of more than 10,000 persons/ km², all of whom are located in the inner zone of Bangkok. Only the Nongchok district is reported to have a density of lower than 1,000 persons/ km².

3 Bangkok is also characterized by zones (inner, middle, and outer). While the inner and middle zones are business and the extension of business areas, respectively, the outer zone covers areas away from the inner zones for at least 20 km.

Relocations were conducted with little regard to the impacts on the affected people and deprived them of their livelihoods.

Chalong Krung Housing Estate, which was established in 1996, were relocated from a number of slums in central Bangkok, while those in Lam Pa-ung used to live in the area that has since been converted to the Suvarnabhumi airport (FLEP 2013). The relocations were conducted with little regard to the impacts on the affected people. Before relocation, the National Housing Authority (NHA) convinced these residents that basic utilities and public transport, and thus accessibility to the marketplace, would be provided. However, the forced relocation turned out to deprive these people of their livelihoods since Nongchok district, particularly the areas outside its town, were in many ways underserviced in terms of public transport.

Such impacts were particularly felt among Chalong Krung residents, who had been slum dwellers and earned substantial income owing to the accessibility of affordable and convenient means of public transport and marketplaces in city’s inner areas. Consequently, many of them, once relocated, had initially invested efforts to commute a long way via more expensive transport options, such as taxi and motorcycle taxi, so as to keep up the amount of income they used to earn. However, they eventually had to give up because of the high expense of travelling.

Many of these people, if they did not permanently move out of the remote area, resorted to other viable livelihoods in such poor conditions. A lot of men became taxi drivers while many women became home-based workers. In Chalong Krung alone, 60 per cent of its total population of about 12,000 is estimated to engage in the informal sector. In Lam Pa-ung, the majority of home-based workers out of the total population of approximately 1,000 home-based workers engage in sorting waste and recycled materials. Home-based worker HomeNet members living in these two communities belong to sewing groups in Chalong Krung zones 1 and 6. HomeNet’s waste sorting group is located in Lam Pa-ung.

The majority of HomeNet’s members are women (Chen 2014). The average income for home-based workers is well below 300 baht, which is the minimum daily wage of workers in the formal economy; the income from recycling is in the range of 50-200 baht per day. The majority of the HNT members in Chalong Krung earn approximately 4,000-8,000/month. Only around 10 per cent earn more than that.

Although they are home-based, the workers are not home bound. Occasionally, they need to commute to central Bangkok to buy materials, take orders, and deliver their finished works, not to mention access basic services such as hospitals, markets, banks, and the district office, none of which are available within walking distance (Chen 2014). Therefore, the poor public bus service poses two major problems...
Public Bus Service and Travel Expenses: The Case of Chalong Krung

Advocating for Bus Service

For people living in the Chalong Krung Housing Estate, there are two major points for connecting to major destinations in Bangkok: the centres of Nongjok district and Minburi district, which are around 15 km and 20 km away from the community respectively.²

Until 2010’s big flood, which inundated the community, there used to be a public bus service provided by a private company. The service was not well regulated and fell short on quality. After the flood, the company found the business was no longer profitable and thus arbitrarily stopped its service, creating hardship for the whole community. As a result, some community members collected signatories to petition, through local politicians, for public bus service. Subsequently, the BMTA provided the temporary service of Bus no. 143 to alleviate people’s grievances during the flood. However, it is still operational. While passengers were originally required to pay 8 baht for a ticket, free bus service was in place a few months after that.

Bus no. 143 remains the only public bus service available to the community. Although it is free, its irregular, non-scheduled service and indirect route, which it takes to Minburi town (30 km), makes travelling by the bus considerably time-consuming.

To travel to Minburi Centre by other means of transport costs around 40-50 baht, depending on the means of transportation. Apart from being a major point for public transport, Minburi is also a big marketplace and home to a variety of business and trade.

Estimated Cost to Major Destinations

- To nearest hospital: 120 baht round trip;
- To district office: more than 200 baht round trip;
- To main road by motorcycle taxi in order to connect with public transport: 20-25 baht.
Legal and Policy Framework

Major policies related to informal workers can be discussed at the national and city levels. At the national level, there are several policies that have benefited and made significant contribution to the social protection of informal economy workers, including the following:

- **The Fund for Homeworkers**, which was founded in 1996, made it possible for homeworkers to get access to a low interest fund in order to promote their production on the condition that they apply for the fund as a small group (FLEP 2010).

- **The Universal Health Care Scheme** was introduced in 2001 and aimed to ensure full population coverage in health care. The particular target of this scheme was the majority of the population, which was not covered by existing public health protection schemes.

- **The Home Worker Protection Act** was enacted in 2010 and had been the focus of a HomeNet campaign since 2003. The law provides for the protection of wages, occupational health and safety, and the responsibility of employers toward homeworkers.

- **Article 40 of the Social Security Act**, enforced in 2011, extends coverage to informal workers. The voluntary social insurance scheme enables informal workers to benefit from contributory schemes managed by the Social Security Office, which covers sickness, invalidity, death, and old age (optional).

- Most importantly, in 2012, cabinet approved the Action Plan on Promotion, Protection and Development of informal workers, 2012-2016. Involving nine ministries, the plan is aimed at comprehensively improving and uplifting informal workers’ wellbeing. The three implementing strategies are: 1. Extension of social protection; 2. Capacity building for employment opportunities; and 3. Enhancement of government administration to engage with informal workers. Strategy 3 entails the establishment of the first national committee on informal workers, on which civil society is allowed to play a role. Up to 18.18 million informal workers are expected to benefit from this action plan (Ministry of Labour 2012).

At the city level, the BMA focuses on capacity building by providing vocational and skills training. However, there is an emerging commitment to improve social protection for informal workers. In the current 20-year plan of the city, titled “Vision 2032; Bangkok: Vibrant of Asia”, one of the key visions is “A city for all”. To achieve this vision, the city will register and improve social security for informal workers by the year 2022 (BMA 2013).

Related Policies Informing the City Dialogue

Bangkok has developed a variety of public transport modes including buses, boats, sky trains, and subways. While some areas, in particular inner Bangkok, had been extensively developed in terms of public transport, some remote areas with a relatively low density of population remained underdeveloped; even public bus service is hardly accessible. In fact, even if some public transport modes (i.e., sky trains and subways) had been developed to reach the outskirts of the city, the fares for such are usually not affordable for the urban poor. It is widely recognized that public buses remain the major way of transportation for this group of people.

Public transport in Bangkok is under the control of both the BMA and the Ministry of Transport. Under the BMA, the Traffic and Transportation Department is in charge of studying, exploring, designing, analysing and planning transport-related works as well as running the mass transportation system (BMA 2014). At the same time, the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA), under the control of the Ministry of Transport, is responsible for providing public transport service to Bangkok and its neighbouring provinces. Major policy frameworks related to the two agencies are as follows:

- The vision and mission of the BMTA is to establish extensive public bus service in Bangkok and neighbouring provinces that is integrated with other modes of public transport. The service should be affordable, convenient, and environment-friendly (BMTA 2014).

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8. Part of the vision states that “It (Bangkok) will be a city where everyone has equal rights, opportunity, and can enjoy social welfare programs” (p.34).

9. As a state enterprise, the BMTA is a parastatal organization.
Case Study of Affected Home-Based Worker

Samlion Jintapo, age 47, Chalong Krung Zone 1

Samlion runs a small grocery shop, which provides her a gross monthly income of 10,000 baht to supplement her husband’s income. She used to be a part-time door-to-door cosmetics salesperson, which generated an income of around 5,000 baht a month and a lucrative bonus at the end of the year if she could meet the sales target. However, she had to shift to home-based cosmetic selling last year when rising gas prices dramatically increased her transportation expenses (via motorcycle taxi), which had always been her alternative to poor public bus service. But working out of her home has decreased her cosmetics income to around 1,000 baht a month.

The poor public bus service has not only affected her livelihood, but it has also affected also her son’s education opportunities. When he was offered scholarship by a high school in the Klong Sam Wa district, he had to decline because without regular public bus, he had to opt for another high school closer to home he could reach on his motorbike—even though the family has to pay for the tuition fee.

If there was a regular and reliable public bus service, Samlion would be able to boost her income from the cosmetic direct sales and from the grocery shop. She would then be able to go to the town and buy cheaper stock products from a wholesale supplier rather than buying from a big shop located not too far from her community.

Diagram shows the locations of production and the markets of home-based workers in Chalong Krung, Zone 6 (Source: Document recording focus group interview (No.9) with female home-based workers in Chalong Krung, Zone 6. Conducted by the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion).

Samlion Jintapo is folding paper bags to supplement her income from the grocery business. Photo: HNT

- The Free Public Bus Scheme, subsidized by the government and implemented by the BMTA, was first implemented in Bangkok in 2008 to temporarily mitigate the impacts of economic recession on the urban poor. Due to its popularity, however, the scheme has been extended to the present day. The scheme uses non-air conditioned buses, which have the lowest fare rates.

- The BMA’s “Vision 2032” uses accessibility to public transportation as an implementation strategy for a “city for all”. The Vision states that “public services will be improved and available for all—roads, pavements, public parks, traffic lights, public transportation, and public buildings—so that everyone can live their lives and do their jobs” (BMA 2014 p.34).

It’s also important to consider that the BMA's main income is from taxes. Every year, a substantial budget is allocated to public transport and infrastructure. In 2013, out of the total income of 60 billion, 9.9 billion was allocated for public transport and infrastructure. It is important that home-based workers and other informal workers are included as beneficiaries to the investment in public transport to the same relative extent that other groups of Bangkok residents enjoy. Informal workers make significant contributions to the city socially, economically, and environmentally. For example, they pay taxes through buying supplies for their home-based livelihoods, they offer affordable products for city residents, and their environmental footprint is much smaller than those of other groups of urban dwellers (Chen 2014). Therefore, it is crucial that the BMA recognizes informal workers’ interests and concerns by addressing the problems undermining their livelihoods, such as their lack of affordable public bus service.

Model of Intervention or Theory of Change

Taking into account local conflicts, HomeNet adopted the City Dialogue model to address the issue of poor public transportation. Realizing that it would be hard to address the concept of “public” service for home-based workers alone, HomeNet sought to mobilize the support of other affected community members as the improvement of the public bus service would benefit their communities as a whole.

10 In 2013, out of the total income of 60 billion, 9.9 billion was allocated for public transport and infrastructure. (BMA 2012).
A City Dialogue provides a platform where affected people can gather to mutually learn more about problems from one another’s perspective. Realizing that they are in the same difficult situation can effectively unite people from different groups and communities to collectively fight for a shared cause. In addition, with the chance to directly have two-way communication with the responsible authorities, they can become more informed about the problem and the local administration, which in turn can empower them to work together in order to address local problems instead of submissively relying on the assistance of local politicians.

**Details of Intervention**

Thus far, there have been two rounds of City Dialogue and one round of community discussion.

The first dialogue took place on 12 March 2012, with the objective to identify and address community problems related to public services. The issues central to the dialogue were water supply, public health care, and public transportation. Twenty-six participants represented communities in Nongchok district. Some of these participants were leaders of community groups, representatives of the Nongchok District Office and the National Housing Authority (NHA), representatives of the Metropolitan Waterworks Authority (MWA), and representatives of the BMA’s Health Department. The result for the first two issues was promising as the representatives from the concerned authorities made a commitment to improve the communities’ access to water supply and health care. On the issue of public transportation, however, there was no fruitful result. Participants from the communities concluded that it was due to the absence of the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) from the dialogue—the BMTA had asserted that more participation from communities was required because the issue of public transport service is not exclusive to any particular group. In order to achieve a satisfactory result for a dialogue on public transport, more community members needed to be mobilized.

In order to identify and mobilize communities that had been affected by the poor provision of public bus service and to find a most appropriate solution to put forward at the next City Dialogue, a community discussion was held 20 October 2013. There were 43 participants at the community discussion, including 34 representatives from Chalong Krung, Lam Pa-ung and nearby communities (Wattana and Ku Phang Nua), all of whom were affected by poor public bus service. Attendees also included four HomeNet committee members and three Foundation staff.

The discussion was divided into two sessions: one session on mobilizing support and another session preparing for next City Dialogue. Participants were divided into smaller groups to share their experiences about the poor bus service, the difficulties they had encountered, and recommendations for solutions to the problem. The results were then shared with the whole group of participants. Finally, the participants mutually agreed on three resolutions to be put forth in the next round of city dialogue with authorities:
1) the regularity of the public bus service, especially during rush hour and a proposed route to the district office; 2) road maintenance and provision of bike lanes; and 3) more street lighting and a pedestrian bridge to improve community safety.

While HomeNet/Foundation staff proposed the next dialogue should be conducted as a “public” City Dialogue for which Bangkok governor and media would be invited, the community participants collectively decided to keep the dialogue local. They thought the presence of many community members could be mistaken as pressure and intimidation, and they preferred to have a dialogue where rational discussion could be had about the communities’ problems. However, if their concerns were not heard and responded to, then they would organize the next dialogue so that a large group of people could participate.

In order to keep the discussion rational, they decided to place a small group of community representatives in charge of collectively presenting the problems to the responsible government agencies in the next dialogue. Nine people were thus selected for the role.

This led to a second City Dialogue, this time focusing on public transportation and transport infrastructure, on 20 December 2013. From a worker’s perspective, the dialogue objective was to provide a platform where communities could...
present their problems, put forward appropriate resolutions, and seek responses and commitments from the authorities.

There were altogether 21 participants: four from related government agencies, namely the National Housing Authority (NHA), the Nongchok District Office, the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) and BMTA’s Labour Union; the nine selected communities’ representatives; other interested communities’ members; and Foundation staff.

The dialogue went well. The authorities expressed their recognition and understanding of the problems. They were eager to contribute to finding appropriate solutions. The community’s confusion over the overlapping mandates between authorities was to some extent resolved by clarification of the representatives of each authority. The result of the dialogue can be divided into three issues as follows:

1. For the improvement of the public bus service, the BMTA explained that, despite its willingness, it did not have the authority to respond to what the people requested. The existing public bus service is obligated to terminate once the private company granted concession on the route resumed its service, which was set to be in January of 2014. A request to the BMTA could be filed if the service remains operational given that its service overlaps with the route granted to the private company. However, recognizing that the communities have lost their confidence in the service provided by the company, the BMTA suggested that another round of dialogues should be conducted and should include the Department of Land Transportation (DLT). Given its authority to grant concessions related to land transportation and regulating service, the DLT should respond to the people’s problems.

2. Regarding road maintenance and bike lanes, the BMA had already allocated some of its budget to improve the road conditions before this dialogue.

3. On street lighting and the pedestrian bridge, the Nongchok District Office agreed to cooperate with the Metropolitan Electricity Authority in order to install streetlights. Also, the District Office agreed to take up the issue of the pedestrian bridge on the condition that a community leader must submit an official petition to the office (FLEP 2013).

Achievements and Outcomes

It is important to note that the City Dialogues are not yet complete. At least one more round of City Dialogue has to be conducted, which means that the final expected outcome of a significantly improved public bus service in the affected communities is still being pursued. Nevertheless, certain achievements and positive outcomes have already been observed. There are two broad aspects to the achievements:

First, affected people have been empowered. The process of the City Dialogues empowered home-based workers and local communities in many ways. Some of the most significant ones include the following:

- City Dialogues provided platforms for home-based workers and community members to articulate their realities and problems. In particular, home-based workers, whose realities are prone to be marginalized, were made visible and recognized by the authorities.
- The sharing of information and diverse perspectives to the same problem in the dialogues made the people more informed about their own problems. People also learned much about local administration and the roles of the different authorities related to their well-being and their communities.
- Recognizing that poor bus service is a serious problem shared by the majority of members in different communities, the affected people, thus far, have overcome their political divisions in order to work together in pursuit of addressing their local problems.

For example, most communities in Bangkok are directly under the administration of the district office. But for communities developed by the NHA, such as Chalong Krung Zone 1-5, some of their local conditions are subject to NHA authority rather than that of the district office so it can be quite confusing to identify which authority is responsible for which particular issue.

Up until the time that this case study was written (the beginning of March 2014), the private company has not resumed its service.

Top to bottom: City Dialogue on 19 December 2013. A representative from Chalong Krung, Zone 5, presenting the problem at the Dialogue. Delegates from the BMTA. Photo: HNT
The Dialogue allowed two-way communication, ensuring greater understanding between the community and the authorities.

All in all, these empowering aspects of the City Dialogues, which cultivate the community’s independence from local politicians, are expected to eventually facilitate the autonomy of home-based and informal workers as well as the communities at large with the ability to collectively address their local problems and improve their local conditions by utilizing the official channels legally available to them.

Second, the Dialogue has already yielded tangible outcomes related to the public bus service. After the Dialogue, the BMTA approved another two buses to add to the existing three buses in service for this route (no.143), significantly improving the regularity of the service during rush hour. After the New Year (the start of 2014), according to those who regularly use public transportation, the bus now comes every half hour in the morning and after three in the afternoon, which is very convenient for those working outside the communities and for students. For the time in between, the bus arrives approximately every hour on the hour. Before that, community members said the bus came every hour, and during the rush hour, they sometimes had to wait up to almost three hours. This change makes a difference for people in the community, many of whom said that, with so much time spent on waiting for a bus in the past, they oftentimes had to either give up plans to go out or resort to motorcycle taxi or taxi instead.

There is also some progress on the pedestrian bridge requested in the December dialogue. As mentioned earlier, the representative from the Nongchok district office was committed to take up the issue. At the end of January, the Chalong Krung community was notified that the petition for the bridge has been forwarded to the agency with the authority to approve its construction, the BMA’s Traffic and Transportation Department.

These practical outcomes show that community efforts have paid off and boosted the people’s confidence. They have been strongly motivated to move forward with and participate in further Dialogues. Along with this positive result, HomeNet, as the facilitator of the intervention, has also gained the trust of the communities’ members. Several non-members of HomeNet have expressed their intention to acquire membership with the MBO.

In an interview, the bus driver for the bus no. 143 said that the improved regularity of the bus service is subject to the availability of the extra two buses, which are temporarily taken from other bus routes. He said that there is a fixed number of buses in service in Bangkok. More routes are not accompanied by new buses. Instead, the BMTA needs to reallocate from the existing buses, meaning that passengers of some bus routes need to wait longer for the service if some of the buses from those routes are taken to serve other routes. If needed, buses can be taken back to the original bus route. Consistent with this explanation are the statistics provided on the BMTA’s website, which show that over a three year period (2011-2013), the BMTA increased seven bus routes while the number of buses in service declined from 4,016 to 3,869, of which only 1,659 buses are non-air conditioned. Available at http://www.bmta.co.th/th/services.php).

The Benefit to City

Responding to Community and City Needs

The Dialogue allowed two-way communication, ensuring greater understanding between the community and the authorities. To allow communities to have a say ensures development that genuinely responds to people’s needs at the same time it addresses city problems. For example, the communities’ proposed site to build a pedestrian bridge might previously have been dismissed as unnecessary by the concerned authority given that the road is quite narrow. Yet, based on the communities’ observation, cars drive at high speed along the road, and the road is also full of trucks, leading to frequent accidents, thus making crossing the road a life-threatening activity.

13 In an interview, the bus driver for the bus no. 143 said that the improved regularity of the bus service is subject to the availability of the extra two buses, which are temporarily taken from other bus routes. He said that there is a fixed number of buses in service in Bangkok. More routes are not accompanied by new buses. Instead, the BMTA needs to reallocate from the existing buses, meaning that passengers of some bus routes need to wait longer for the service if some of the buses from those routes are taken to serve other routes. If needed, buses can be taken back to the original bus route. Consistent with this explanation are the statistics provided on the BMTA’s website, which show that over a three year period (2011-2013), the BMTA increased seven bus routes while the number of buses in service declined from 4,016 to 3,869, of which only 1,659 buses are non-air conditioned. Available at http://www.bmta.co.th/th/services.php).
Ensuring Equity

Bangkok is one of the most unequal cities in the developing world. Inclusive development initiatives such as the provision of affordable public transport are crucial for people who tend to be disregarded in planning process – like informal workers. This will steer the city towards social and economic equity, which, in turn, will help the city attain its vision of being a “City for All”.

Boosting the Local Economy

Access to affordable and convenient public transport would encourage informal workers to participate more often in economic activities. As informal workers indirectly pay tax in many ways, particularly when buying their inputs, their economic activities would contribute to the betterment of the local economy.

Critical Success Factors

There are many elements contributing to the abovementioned achievements, the most significant of which are as follows:

- **Participation of engaged, knowledgeable, and sympathetic representatives from concerned authorities** made it possible for a fruitful dialogue where input – information, limitations and suggestions – from the authorities contribute to the most viable and appropriate solution. Representatives from the BMTA and BMTA’s Labour Union in particular made significant contributions to the dialogue. Representatives from the Union had worked and collaborated with HomeNet before. Their sympathy was expected to help shape a dialogue that favoured the communities’ concerns. Fortunately, the representative from the BMTA also turned out to be sympathetic with the cause. He not only clarified the limitations of the BMTA, but also shed light on how these communities can move forward. At the same time he was receptive and understanding to the communities’ problem, the representative encouraged the communities by sharing a similar case in a different district where the people’s mobilization successfully secured a public bus service that was provided by the BMTA despite overlapping private concession. Similarly, a representative from the Nongchok district also took on the responsibility of passing the petition on the pedestrian bridge to the responsible authority even though it was not directly related to the district office.

- **Committed leaders with essential organizing assets.** Many of the committee members who are also members of HomeNet are experienced local leaders with good connections to other leaders and community members. These leaders have experience either in managing development projects through community committees or organizing community groups such as savings groups, vocational groups and self-help groups. Some of these leaders have both types of experience. For example, a HomeNet committee member from Lam-Pa-ung previously played a major role in successfully managing the Village Fund (a village-managed fund for microcredits) for the Lam Pa-ung community, which was awarded the best managed fund award by the district office. Another leader in Chalong Krung, Zone 5, was approached by a HomeNet committee member to get involved in the dialogue. He has considerable experience in organizing community groups, and currently he holds crucial positions in a number of community groups like the Herbal Drink Production group, a savings group (170 members), and a volunteer group (around 300 members). These well-recognized leaders can serve as powerful hubs for effective networking. Likewise, community-organized groups, in turn, can become a significant source of mobilization if further action is needed to address the issue of public transportation.

Challenges and Their Root Causes

1. Deep-seated political conflict has had profound impacts on communities. The conflict, if heightened, can impede the cooperation of the people, which, in turn, will weaken the potential of the organized networks of home-based and other informal workers in the area. For public transport services in remote areas with low population density, such as in the Nongchok district, it is important that the existence of sufficient demand is demonstrated to the BMTA. In addition, it is likely that actions to push for a policy change may be needed to encourage the improvement of the public services. If
Inclusive Cities Project

In the case, then a strong position for negotiation can only be achieved through the creation of organized networks of affected communities.

2. The chronic political unrest in Thailand, which has taken people to the streets and led to frequent shifts in the government over the past decade, has made it hard to maintain continuous work on policy change.

3. The private company granted concession of the public bus service on that route is owned by an influential politician. The provision of a public bus service by the BMTA in the area could undermine the profitability of the company. This could potentially become the major obstacle that would be hard to overcome because of the politician’s vested interest.

Lessons Learned

Reflecting on the past dialogues reveals some crucial strategies as well as shortcomings that either enhanced or undermined the outcomes. The major lessons learned include the following:

- **Engaging a wide group of affected people and mobilizing “community” support in the City Dialogue was necessary.** As discussed earlier, the issue was originally raised by groups of home-based workers in Chalong Krung and Lam Pa-ung. Yet poor public bus service was not a problem exclusively inflicted on home-based workers; rather, it could be considered a “community problem.” This widely shared problem made it possible for people within the same community and from different communities to unite and work together despite their internal conflicts, resulting in the “community voice” necessary for a City Dialogue.

- **A bottom-up and democratic process is central.** To ensure people’s autonomy in dealing with the problem, people’s participation was central to the whole process of the City Dialogue, where their collective decision was fully incorporated. Originally, HomeNet/Foundation staff proposed a “public” City Dialogue to which the Bangkok governor and media would be invited. Yet, the local collective decision was that at the initial stage, they were keen to enter into a small dialogue with local authorities and to see what they had to say so as to learn about the limitations of the authorities at the local level first.

- **Keep the key issue and message focused.** The first dialogue aimed to address a couple of public service issues at the same time, diluting the whole dialogue even though there was some degree of success from the dialogue (the Metropolitan Water Work Authority made some commitments to address the water supply issue).

- **Accurate identification of the responsible authority requires in-depth research.** To identify the right authority is not a simple and straightforward matter. Thorough research is needed to handle the complexity of the government agencies’ mandates and roles, which at times overlapped with one another. In this case, the authority that obviously assumes responsibility in providing public transport service in Bangkok is the BMTA. However, it turned out that when it comes to private concession on public bus service, it is not the BMTA that has the authority to make decisions. The DLT is the agency responsible for dealing with private concession for public bus service, including monitoring and regulating the service so as to keep it consistent with the concession requirements. The initial failure to identify the right authority unnecessarily prolonged the process, thus delaying the expected outcomes.

- **Sufficient skill and dialogue preparation is needed for community representatives.** Successful dialogue requires that those designated to voice the people’s problems and to put forward collectively agreed solutions have the skills and experience. In this case, being new to “dialogue” and not having sufficient time for preparation made it hard for the nine representatives to make their dialogue more “strategic” so that they could effectively draw on what the authorities have to say in response to the communities’ problems. While their problems were discussed, concerns voiced, resolutions put forward...
and some commitments from the authorities made, the expected robust dialogue where clear and concise messages would bring out good responses from some of the authorities did not go as planned.

- **One round of dialogue is insufficient to achieve the expected outcomes.** Although a well-thought-out working plan can prevent an unnecessarily prolonged course of dialogues, it is necessary, when addressing an issue as big as public services, to involve a number of actors and factors. While some shortcomings might be anticipated, others are virtually impossible to anticipate. Getting people involved ready for unintended extra rounds of dialogue is very essential.

**Conclusion**

Affordable public transport is crucial to home-based and other informal workers as well as to the urban poor in general. Living in a remote area of Nongchok district, the home-based workers in Chalong Krung who were originally forcibly relocated from inner Bangkok and Lam Pa-ung have long suffered from a lack of efficient public bus service, which critically undermines their livelihoods.

To achieve improvement for this “public” transport service required a strong collective voice from the communities at large rather than that of a limited group. HomeNet thus employed the “City Dialogues” in order to bring together the affected people in Chalong Krung, Lam Pa-ung and other nearby communities — be they home-based workers, other informal workers or other groups of community members — to collectively make their problems heard and concerns addressed by the responsible authorities.

Thus far, the City Dialogues have resulted into tangible and positive outcomes including a more regular bus service. It also empowered the affected people, including home-based workers, in a way that cultivates a sense of autonomy. The intervention allowed them to define and articulate their problems, as well as to propose solutions that were the most appropriate to their realities, thus enhancing their visibility to authorities. Such empowerment is expected to lead to a decline of the communities’ dependence on local politicians in addressing their local problems, something that has only exacerbated the political divide in their communities. However, the chronic political conflict in Thailand is indeed a major challenge to empowerment and the dialogues in general. Instability has already disrupted the plan to conduct the next dialogue. If it intensifies, the political conflict can undermine future cooperation within and between communities. This is integral to their collective power in addressing shared communities problems.

In regard to lessons learned from the past dialogues, there were some critical strategies and shortcomings that should be either adopted or taken into account if the same intervention is to be replicated. In particular, the strategy to involve the wider communities’ people to engage in collectively pushing for the improvement of the public bus service made it possible to organize a dialogue with the participation of the concerned authorities. However, due to insufficient research and misunderstandings about who the responsible authorities were, the need to spend more time and resources to organize another round of dialogue that included the right authority.

In sum, the final result expected from the City Dialogue is the adequate provision of a public bus service to these remote communities, which would simultaneously address the home-based workers’ problems by means of ensuring their access to more employment opportunities and reducing time and expense spent on travelling. More importantly, given their contribution to the city, they are supposed to be entitled to access to public services to the same extent enjoyed by other groups of dwellers in Bangkok. Achieving this aim would not only improve the well-being of home-based workers but that of the communities’ as a whole, which in turn would facilitate Bangkok’s development direction towards an inclusive and equitable city.
References


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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. We believe all workers should have equal economic opportunities and rights. WIEGO creates change by building capacity among informal worker organizations, expanding the knowledge base about the informal economy and influencing local, national and international policies. Visit www.wiego.org.