

# Organizing Informal Workers in Emerging Countries for Social Protection: A Systematic Review

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*The labor market in low-income countries is typically characterized by non-standard work, imprecise employers, uncertain income, and low labor market participation. This study elucidates the social protection of informal workers as a consequence of their associations, particularly in emerging countries. A systematic review was conducted, which included studies focusing on social security, socio-economic protection, informal workers, unorganized workers, organizing, and association in emerging economies. It is observed that various forms of association have significantly promoted livelihood and ensured the socio-economic rights of workers, but partially in different contexts. This study contributes to the informal workers' unionization and social protection discourse by highlighting the implications on research and practice.*

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## Introduction

Lack of socio-economic security is certainly an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly poverty alleviation, promoting well-being, and economic growth (United Nations, 2021). The International Labor Organization (ILO) often uses the term “social security” to describe the welfare that society delivers to its members by public or collective means to guarantee a minimum livelihood and protect them against a declining standard of living due to several risks and elementary needs. It secures income against contingencies such as maternity, unemployment, occupational injury, sickness, invalidity, old age, and the demise of a primary breadwinner (Yu & Li, 2021). Social protection can be understood from three perspectives: as a human right, as a basic need, and as a tool to encounter risks. It is a broad framework consisting of many instruments such as social assistance, social insurance, care services, and la-

bor market programs (ILO, 2018). The lack of social security is highlighted as a cause and consequence of informality; hence, nearly 71 percent of the global population remains unprotected (ILO, 2017).

**Informal workers hardly receive any attention from the trade unions.**

This paper is founded on the theoretical ground of the Power Resource Approach, which asserts collective mobilization of power resources can be helpful for the workforce to successfully defend its rights in an asymmetric and antagonistic relationship between capital and labor (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003). The new forms of unions by the working class, although impotent to apply the extent of power resources, are rather their specific combinations, which are crucial and contextual. As per the latest explanation, informal employment involves working outside of the formal sector and any other occupations (i.e., being employed informally in the formal sector and households) (ILO, 2018). Given the characteristics of non-standard work, imprecise employers, and uncertain income, informal workers hardly receive any attention from the trade unions. These workers have initiated new means of solidarity through diverse organizing methods that catalyze achieving a sustainable livelihood (Ahn, 2008; Aparcana, 2017). The trade unions have started involving several social actors, including stakeholders and international bodies, in the informal economy (ILO, 2007). Given the growing need for so-

cial protection in the informal sector (International Social Security Association, 2013) and the dynamics of trade unions' approach to reaching the unorganized section of the workforce (ILO, 2019), the embryonic connection between organizing informal workers and social protection has been realized. Drawing on the gaps in the extant literature, the present study emphasizes the need for unorganized workers' associations to extend employment and social security to the informal sector.

By amalgamating the literature focused on emerging economies, i.e., countries showing some aspects of developed countries but yet to meet the overall development standard. The relentless growth of non-standard jobs, workers' resistance, and the limitations of policy implications across the Global South have begun to gain scholarly attention as this heterogeneous scenario differs from the developed country landscape (Hammer & Ness, 2021). These regions are experiencing rapid informality and are moving towards a free marketplace to integrate the global market, increasing the standard of living, social stability, cooperation, and community movement (Kvint, 2010). The new modes of workers' solidarity amidst deregulation in developing countries and a lack of socioeconomic security globally as an adverse effect of the Great Recession were covered widely by academic and technical literature during the 2000s (Hensman, 2011; Munck, 2013; Blanchard et al., 2014). Hence, the effort in this paper was to include the developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century or the last two decades. Our

study encompasses but is not limited to research conducted in countries such as Argentina, China, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, and Thailand.

**Study Design**

This study approached a systematic literature review of the extant literature on the unionization of workers in the informal economy and social protection. While systematic reviews are classified as domain-based, theory-based, method-based and meta-analysis, the present study gives attention to domain-based literature. A content-based thematic review with a framework is more expedient for the researchers and practitioners as it presents the work in a structured manner (Paul & Criado, 2020). With Callahan’s (2014) 6W approach comprised who, when, where, how, what, and why, the studies from different regions

and contexts have been reviewed. Although scholars in economics have reviewed the theoretical underpinnings and methodological development of informality substantially, the nobility of this work is to highlight progress in the domain of informal workers’ unionization and social protection.

**Search Strategy**

With the support of a data expert, the search procedure has started to ensure optimal and precise sourcing. The keywords and electronic databases shown in Table 1 were employed to search between January 2001 and September 2022. Keywords were used together, such as a + b + c (i.e., “social security” or “socio-economic protection” or “welfare,” “informal worker” or “unorganized worker,” and “unionization” or “organizing initiative”).

**Table 1 Search Strategy**

Keywords	Databases	Indexed and Ranking
a. social security a. socio-economic protection a. welfare a. informal worker b. unorganised worker c. unionization b. organizing	SCOPUS, Web of Science	<i>Indexed by:</i> Social Science Citation Index, SCOPUS <i>Ranked by:</i> Australian Business Deans Council, SCImago

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**

The considered studies meet the following eligibility criteria:

1. Focused on the social security of informal workers through organizing initiatives in different emerging (i.e., middle-income) countries.
2. Studies that use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods and secondary and primary data.
3. Published between January 2001 and September 2022 and in English,
4. Inclusion of all types of published literature in the form of scholarly articles, chapters, and reports by dif-

ferent national and international bodies.

5. Notably, studies covering other dimensions of informality, namely, universal social security and increased productivity of the informal sector are beyond our scope.

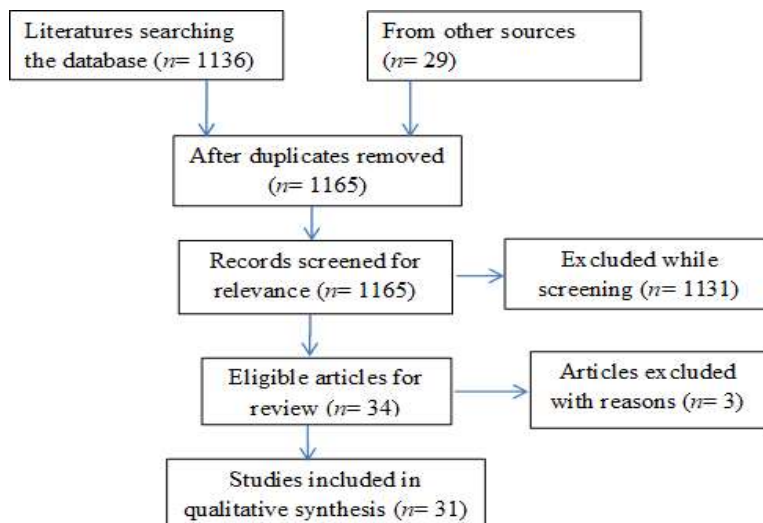
### Data Extraction

In a systematic review, data extraction is an iterative process of capturing the salient characteristics of all the studies covered in a standard format. Pre-designed data extraction forms were employed to list the results of different works, including their title, author, context, region, approach, study design, and materials used by the respective author(s). Further reference lists for the entire article were checked to ensure that no relevant work was overlooked.

### Search Results

Literature exploration using the scholarly databases found 1136 results. Further, 29 studies from the reference lists of articles were identified, making a total of 1165 articles after the removal of duplicates. In the initial screening process, 1131 studies were excluded, bearing in mind our inclusion criteria. Of these, three articles that did not exclusively focus on emerging countries but rather on a global scenario are removed (explanation in Fig. 1). Table 2 interprets the characteristics of a total of 31 papers included. In terms of thematic focus, eight studies focused on decent work through the collective struggle of informal workers, fifteen studies on alternative modes of mobilization, and nine studies on strategies for smoothing socio-economic protection. From a regional perspective, Latin America, South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and cross-country three, six-

Fig.1. Flow Chart of Studies on Informal Workers’ Organization and Social Protection



teen, seven, one, and four studies were considered, respectively.

### **History of Organizing**

There is a long debate over unionization in the informal economy, but systematic organizing efforts have a relatively recent history in the global arena. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a wing of the Textile Labor Association in Ahmedabad, India, recognized as a trade union in 1972. It is organized by women employed in different occupations. Later, SEWA affiliated with the International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotel, Catering, and Allied Workers in 1983. The Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Household Workers, founded in 1988, started providing a powerful voice to domestic workers and a platform for mutual bargaining. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) was established in 1997 to investigate the constraints, promote suitable policies, and collaborate with institutions to secure informal workers' livelihoods. The first international symposium on the informal sector and trade unions in 1999 emphasized the associations of informal workers attuned to their requirements and highlighted some recommendations for governments and international organizations (ILO, 1999). StreetNet is a South African-originated membership-based international alliance of street vendors, hawkers, and stray sellers that was set up in 2002 and aims to encounter the common problems in the market through practical organization and advocacy to strengthen their

members, thereby initiating a global campaign. HomeNet South Asia, founded in 2000, is a regional network of domestic workers, self-employed, subcontracted, and piece-rate workers, spread across eight countries that pursues a democratic and representative agenda of capacity building, cross-country learning, advocacy market linkage, and social security.

The International Labor Conference (ILC) adopted a Decent Work and Informal Economy resolution in 2002, which recognized both self-employed and wage workers in the informal economy and proposed equal employment rights. Following the ILC resolution, collective associations have been promoted at regional, national, and international levels by informal workers in different occupations. The ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, adopted in 2011, was a triumph of the International Domestic Workers Network's (IDWN) long-standing legitimate demand. In the Indian context, it was established after reform in the Trade Union Act that half of the office-bearers in the unorganized workers' union can be outsiders, compared to one-third in the formal sectors. A notable rise of independent labor NGOs in China has created a space for other social actors to empower vulnerable migrant workers encountering the political and structural constraints (Chan, 2012). The progress of informal workers organizing efforts and socio-economic protection as a result of the Global South's association is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Included Primary Studies**

Author (s)	Country/ region	Focus	Sector/ Occupation	Challenges	Intervention/ approach	Consequence
Vyas (2009)	Mumbai, India	Social action through community organization	Conservancy workers	Rapid privatization of solid waste management, conflict among standard workers, contractual workers, and stakeholders	Unionization of informal workers through the lens of classroom-field interface and awareness for their rights	Achieved secure livelihood and employment-based entitlements
Denis (2003)	Barbados	Collective resistance of women against socioeconomic disparities	Women in the Informal sector	Lack of state-sponsored health care and public services, adverse effect on women's reproductive work	Individual and mixed-group resistance work with women's forum, global agencies to lobby with bureaucrats	Social safety net meeting a clear community need while they compensate the state's disengagement with the preferred policies
Baruah (2004)	South Asia	Intervention by state and Civil Society Organizations to mobilize for a change in the current process	Women in Informal sector	Irregular employment, inadequate social support programs	Financial interventions (e.g. credit, saving accounts, investment instruments) and participatory approach (e.g. cooperative form of working)	Successful induction of women into the legal machinery of states through lobbying and influencing policy at the grassroots, national, and international levels
Atzeni (2016)	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Spatial and spontaneous organization of workers rather than prevailing trade union strategies	Delivery workers and stage technicians	Experience vulnerability, atomization, and competition struggling between self-employment and informally employed	Bottom-up approach of workers' self-mobilization, normative, political networking for recognition, and bargaining	Decent rise of wages with bargaining according to fair market price, Consolidating ideas of grass-roots organization with national level unions for changes in neo-liberal policies
Unni and Rani (2003)	India	Institutional mechanisms to address insecurities	All informal workers in income-generating	Lack of basic social justice including income, food, health and shelter, and economic insecurities	Innovative and implementable ways to mobilize resources for policies in social protection with	Empowerment of marginalized class encouraging their collective action and financial

		of informal workers	productive work		NGOs and participation of formal parties	reliance, Legal recognition, entitlement of producers group, and communities
Torm (2020)	Kenya and Tanzania	Comparative approach of social protection in two emerging Sub-Saharan economies	Informal workers	Lack of associational and legislative power to defend the legitimacy of informal workers	Workers' associations in Tanzania perform more of protective and promotional role while more promotional part in Kenya	Informal workers' associations have increased membership, loan disbursement, preventive health care, and defend the work based entitlements
Desai (2005)	Mumbai, India	Gender mainstreaming for social entitlement	Informal women workers	Gender and social diversity, challenges to scaling up grassroots action, and donor-led programs	Counseling and legal aid services, microfinance, and train on sensitivity	Increasing gender equality, social relation, and household income, Initiated campaign for legal rights and employment benefits
Boamong (2010)	Tema, Ghana	Ingenious ways of organizing fluid work relations between local and national trade unions agreement	Casual port worker	Altered employment relationships, indirect labor recruitment through agencies, dwindling incomes, and no grievance mechanism	The mandate of the local union negotiated with the agency for better working conditions and material support	Negotiation for improved wages and benefits comparable to permanent workers, Social security contributions and overtime allowances to casual workers
Chen (2008)	Gujarat, India	NGO-led unionization for entitlement and rights	Tobacco workers	Workers and enterprises face registration challenges and lack of legal remedies for non-standard work	Cooperation rather than competition among groups of informal workers and networking to leverage the collective tussle	Increased bargaining power, negotiation for regular wages, and even distribution of work
Ogando et al. (2017)	Horizonte, Brazil; Bogota,	Symbolic power and assets	Waste collector	Encounter discrimination, politics of recognition and dignity at work	Self-provision, claim-making followed by building a multi-level	Enhanced symbolic resources that serve as a catalyst for making

<p>Colombia; Nakuru, Kenya; Durban, South Africa</p>	<p>overhaul gender dynamics in informal waste-picking activities</p>	<p>Workers' association challenging state policies and demanding substantive changes</p>	<p>Domestic workers</p>	<p>Flaws in working condition and no provision to trace workers' exploitation, no substantive framework but only announcement of welfare provision</p>	<p>network relying on MBOs and NGOs to indorse dialogue with political and official actors</p>	<p>claims to remedy their economic and political injustices, Gender vulnerabilities and transformative impact on livelihood</p>
<p>Moghe (2013)</p>	<p>Pune, India</p>	<p>Workers' association challenging state policies and demanding substantive changes</p>	<p>Domestic workers</p>	<p>Flaws in working condition and no provision to trace workers' exploitation, no substantive framework but only announcement of welfare provision</p>	<p>Sustained struggle with collective identity and class consciousness to expand local and state-level political courtesy</p>	<p>Enactment of Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board, 2008 with the provision of minimum social security net, Joint insurance schemes and obligatory contracts between employers and workers</p>
<p>Wells and Jason (2010)</p>	<p>Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, and Cape Town, Sub-Saharan Africa</p>	<p>Implications of complexity for informal workers' collective organizing for social and employment security</p>	<p>Construction workers</p>	<p>Complicating employment relationship between principal employer and workers</p>	<p>Collaboration strategies among the intermediary agencies and workers to pressure the large contractors, Advocacy and impact policies via membership organizations</p>	<p>TAICO's experience has shown the workers and their intermediaries with government intervention lobbied for better terms, Reserve a of public sector work contract for informal workers, higher social social security, and licensing of labour contractors</p>
<p>Kabeer et al. (2013)</p>	<p>Thailand, and Pune, India</p>	<p>Experience of organisations' innovative strategies (i.e.KKPKP, MAP Foundation) to transcend the structural barriers</p>	<p>Marginalized workers (waste pickers, domestic workers and migrants in informal sector)</p>	<p>Lack of identity, workers' status, violence, and exploitation at workplace</p>	<p>Exercising soft power draws the resources offered by culture, discourse, information, communities mitigating social diversity, and for collaboration and distributive power</p>	<p>Greater livelihood security and fairer returns to labour, Immediate and visible benefits to members of the community with partial success in achievement of public services and legal support</p>

Dafuleya (2015)	Africa	Pathways of social protection extension to informal workers with informal collective approach	Informal workers associated with burial societies	Missed a link between the state formal system and informal social protection arrangement at the grassroots	Work-based, migration, ethnic-based and community-based burial societies in partnership with state measures	The state-informal collective model of extending social security has easy and wide reach compared to the state informal single model as some burial societies have demonstrated vital effect on promoting social security schemes
Agarwala and Saha (2018)	India	Different form of association among domestic workers lead fulfillment of citizenship and employment rights	Workers in domestic services	No recognition and regulation by the state, exploitative employment relationship in terms of time, work and dignity, Class and caste prejudice	Empower the members to articulate and confront employers (i.e. culture of servitude), bridge between solidarity and state policy	Facilitates reproduction needs (housing, education) from the organization corpus fund, Initial success in compelling government for pension on contributory basis, tripartite institution, and reproductive benefits through welfare boards
Fajana (2008)	Nigeria	Instigating decent work, employment market development through unionisation	Informal workers	Low industrial capacity utilization, barriers in organizing and fluctuations of productivity and employment	Registration of informal activities and monitoring of informal economy, associates international organizations	Unionisation facilitates decent work, fair pay, and poverty reduction in informal economy through enriched employment relations, stakeholders' participation
Dibben (2010)	Mozambique	Community organizing model to expand, engage the	Informal workers across government departments	Lack of access to basic amenities, financial constraint to represent at industry level, leadership struggle in informal	Liaising with broader community, municipal government, leadership, employment rights, and market efficacy training	Successful influencing political willingness and broader strategies to integrate with formal sector by the value

	informal sector and secure employment rights of the workers	associations	chain approach.
Kumar and Singh (2018)	India The journey of National Association of Street Vendors of India in terms of power resource struggle, success and consequence	Street vendors Experience humiliation, continual harassment, confiscations and sudden evictions	Managed to stretch associational force into institutional power through Street Vendors Act and different urban policies have been able to increase the visibility and voice in India.
Osiki (2020)	Nigeria The informal cooperative system is effective in extending social protection for informal workers	Esusu cooperatives for workers in the informal economy Indecent working conditions, no inclusive social security policy, administrative deficiency, misclassification of workers and narrow coverage via social assistance programs	Esusu cooperative has been partially effective to extend social protection to informal workers as citizens and other potential social partners trust the government facilitating role, Impact on erasing institutional and structural impediments for government programs implementation.
Wood et al. (2018)	South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa Freelancer organization among gig workers to enhance their	Workers in the Gig and platform economy Unilateral employment terms and policies by platforms, fragmentation of workers and diverse workplaces	Unions have started convincing the workers of the instrumental value of association, Members have per

Jenkins (2012)	Bangalore, India	Flexible approach of organizing at the micro level to enable workers in a competitive labor market	Female garment workers	Gender based stereotypes, poor working conditions, anti-union stance by employers, victimization and gross intimidation	Pre-union groups and grassroots organizations with the idea of solidarity variably succeed in countering social exclusion and asymmetric power relations	ceived the benefits of unions (e.g. monitoring labour standards, increased bargaining power, mutual style lending and demand social security) Incremental and hard-own processes of recognition in the value chain, Social activism leverages the enforcement of statutory rights, corporate codes for workers' welfare, and working conditions. Substantial wage premium to unionised workers and social insurance cost borne by employers, adoption of modern human resource management, worker awareness about their legal rights and higher compensation in case of employment injury.
Torm (2012)	Vietnam	Unionization of workers in small and medium-scale enterprises to curtail wage gaps avail social security benefits	Informal manufacturing enterprises	Lack of representation, subordination of trade unions to parties	Adversary attitude towards government with integrating institutional and ideological differences among unions,	Prompt continuously to ratify ILO conventions, Achieved partial success in extending greater employment-based (e.g. compensation, social security) and human rights protection (e.g.
Pangsapa (2015)	Thailand	Advocacy groups (NGOs, MBOs, CSOs) alongside the state enforce	Migrant workers	Low and irregular wage, harmful working and living conditions, lack of access to legal assistance, medical care and public services	Progressive support groups alliance with international agencies raise the problem and demand state's action, steer political, and public debate for policy discourse and	

Velayu dhan (2020)	Kerala, India	and monitor the ongoing struggle and mobilization of migrants	Innovative forms of mobilization linked with local government in the trajectory of social development	Women informal workers	Lack of collective rights and identity, degraded working conditions, deprived of institutional tools and legislative measures to protect them	Democracy decentralization movement, literacy, issue-based drive and youth movement, Gender and class mediated negotiation between state and employers	monitor the unlawful practices of employers	checking harassment, discrimination, deportation)
Ford and Honan (2019)	Jakarta, Indonesia	Mutual aid-based organizing to reach informal workers thereby challenge the power of pseudo-employers	App-based transport workers	Escalating conflicts with local authorities and conventional unions, legal bottlenecks for drivers in non-standard employment	Mutual and structurally focused tactics targeting the pseudo-employers and state, Horizontal and vertical network among different communities	Facilitates economic and moral support to deal with pressing needs like physical hardships, occupational injury, and job insecurity, Successfully bargained with some employers for policy change and pushed government to compel platform companies for tripartite agreement		
Manky (2018)	Chile	Impact of link between precarious workers and	Subcontracted Mine workers	Lack of employment relations and resources to emulate the unionisation strategies	Resource mobilization approach (combination of moral, material, informational and human	More than pledging political support and international allies the involvement of political		

<p>political activists to create a viable social movement</p>	<p>actors has significantly impacted workers' livelihood and social protection measures</p>
<p>Alcid (2006)</p> <p>Philippines</p> <p>Solidarity with other social movements through multi sectorial networks to protect and promote socio-economic rights of workers</p>	<p>resources) to use collective voice mechanisms, institutional protection rather than contentious direct action</p> <p>Influence government with instrument of social power (i.e. democratic movement), Partially succeed in implementing enterprise and sector specific development agenda for marginalized working class</p>
<p>Gurcan and Mete (2020)</p> <p>Turkey</p> <p>Bottom-up socio-union activism to address precarization under neo-liberalism</p>	<p>Association (e.g. membership based, church-based, non-profit and alliance) reunited on issue based objective, constructive and entrepreneurial effort for livelihood programs</p> <p>The call center workers' association has achieved significantly by claiming unpaid insurance deposits, reinstating unjustly dismissed workers, severance payments, and exposing the corporate unethical practices</p>
<p>Ofreneo and Hega (2016)</p> <p>Barbara and Rizal, Philippines</p> <p>Community -based and women-led association to strengthen livelihood and food security as a response to disaster</p>	<p>Discard gender-centered and caste-based critique of traditional unionism on the contrary using working-class solidarity as a tool to boost realization and organizational capacities</p> <p>Social Enterprise Capital Augmentation Program which sync livelihood initiatives with mutual patronage, Solidarity economic units</p> <p>Group benefited from government by subsidy and support on livelihood generation, Immediate increase in income and allocation of health expenditure, Processing and allied activities to self-sustain the employment opportunity</p>
<p>Workers in home based enterprises, agriculture, daycare, waste recycler</p>	<p>Lack of income, social and health protection, triple burden of productive, reproductive and community work, facing higher risk of food insecurity</p>

Balasubramanian and Sarkar (2020)	Alang, Gujarat, India	Organizing experience of informal workers thus overcome their invisibility in economic structure	Informal workers in ship breaking industry	Perception of gender, class injustice, aggrieved working conditions and exploitation	Distinctive and cohesive identity, Efficacy consideration building among workers through trade unions' continuous support	Tangible benefits due to union demanded work standardization, regulation of working hours, wages and accidental insurance compensation, Negotiation with local authorities for skill enhancement and affiliation
Schminke and Fridell (2021)	Uganda	Effectiveness of informal workers' organizing to address decent work deficits in the economy	Textile and transportation workers	Perceptual tension between business and community unionist strategies, lack of occupational health and safety measures, wage theft	Education and awareness campaign to exploit the formal-informal division and formal complaint against corrupt practices	Managed to compel enterprises to pay accidental compensation, written job contracts, reduce physical abuse for marginalized workers, and tangible gains for informal labour

### Access to Decent Work

The trade unions' approach to organizing informal workers has mostly been passive across the globe until elevated by the union agenda in the 21st century. Three kinds of power, namely, associational and organizational power, influence employers and the state, while collaborative power is achieved through networking with other organizations (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013). Brookes (2013) argued that structural, collective, and institutional powers contribute to the effectiveness of workers' voices in challenging employers. In developing countries, the informal economy absorbs more than 80 percent of the labor force, and there is immense potential for trade unions to increase their strength and collective bargaining power for invisible workers (Elembillasary, 2018). Learn Mahila Kamagaar Sangathan (LMKS) of Mumbai's success story in the garment sector, accompanied by activists, managed to claim coverage under various state-sponsored healthcare schemes while hospital and insurance administrations used to delay the procedures. Furthermore, LKMS pressured the state and local governments to form an implementation committee and actively monitor the smooth disbursement of pensions, respectively. In the case of casual port workers in Ghana, Boampong (2010) reported flexible labor practices that spur inventive ways of organizing that encompass

various actors to negotiate for better employment conditions and social protection. Studies in developing economies demonstrate a potentially imperative effect of organizational initiatives for informal workers in terms of social distress mitigation and enabling participation in social security schemes. Torm (2020) stated that workers' associations in Kenya regularly enable access to formal health insurance (preventive) and microcredit to informal workers (promotional), whereas the associations in Tanzania perform more of a protective and transformational role. An empirical study found decreased vulnerabilities through collective action and organizing among women waste pickers (Ogando et al., 2017). Stavropoulou et al. (2017) endorsed the idea that the informal support mechanisms of disadvantaged groups can strengthen the linkage with formal programming and broaden the risk-pooling capacity of informal workers. Previous studies have shown the implementation of long-term insurance for migrant workers with the alliance of political parties and social interest groups in Taiwan and structural changes negotiated with app-based transport companies and the government through a mutual-aid-based horizontal network in Indonesia (Chien, 2018; Ford, 2019).

### **Alternative Modes of Representation**

As the magnitude of union voice declines, global attention is being refocused on various forms of non-union representation. This resulted in a shift in researchers' emphasis on workplace-based unions

operated by employers (Dundon & Gallon, 2007) and outside of employers (Heery, 2004). Although there is contemporary literature dedicated to the non-union representation of workers in the form of community unions (Black, 2005), quasi-unions (Heckscher & Caree, 2006), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) (Williams et al., 2011), they have experienced moderate success mainly in the Global North. CSOs contribute to labor activism co-opted by state mechanisms, thereby addressing the challenges encountered by migrants in Malaysia and Singapore (Piper, 2006). Nikkhah & Redzuan (2010) conferred the role of NGOs in community progress through capacity building, self-reliant programs, and microfinance with the involvement of all stakeholders. Experience from the Global South also provides some positive results in the empowerment of informal traders for social dialogue in Kenya (Mitullah et al., 2010), the legal recognition of construction workers in Tanzania (Wells & Jason, 2010), and the evolving associational power of Indian street vendors (Kumar & Singh, 2018).

Member's vested personal growth guides social mobilization strategies, the perceived satisfaction of fighting injustice, and emotional connection (Weil, 2005). The National Center for Labor (NCL) is an unorganized workers' non-political federation in India that has pioneered promoting solidarity and security for the working poor (Unni & Rani, 2003). Vyas (2009) traced the long experience of conservancy workers' struggles in Mumbai to achieve secure livelihoods and entitlements at the inter-

face between an educational institution and the community. The self-mobilization experience of precarious workers in Buenos Aires has been crucial in initiating collective association rather than institutional facilities (Atzeni, 2016). Social assistance by local and international NGOs in African and Asian countries has been worthwhile through welfare programs in collaboration with government-sponsored labor market intervention (Desai, 2005) and imparting skill training (Gengaiah, 2016). However, a few studies have focused on organizations of workers and social security navigated by NGOs.

### Collective Strategies

The traditional form of unionization is losing favor in most parts of the world as workers seek personalized employment benefits, compelling them to embrace newer strategies for representation and negotiation as the labor process undergoes a paradigm shift. Community development in South Asian countries demonstrates that social capital as a risk-coping mechanism uses a bottom-up approach to prevent economic shock and has a long-term impact on social structure. The development shift from capital-centered to labor-led in low income countries emphasizes a community unionist approach that substantially addresses the decent work needs of informal workers (Schminke & Fridell, 2021). Although of minimal magnitude, workers' Self-Help Groups were found to accomplish the protective and promotive facets of social security through initiatives like health assistance, micro-credit and

medical insurance (Oware, 2020). The emerging digital network, particularly social media, facilitates workers effort to draw the attention of society and administration through digital mobilization and virtual activism; however, these forms of labor actions have been ineffective in extending socio-economic justice (Ullah, 2019). There is an identical scenario across the Global South as transport workers, taxi drivers, own-account stall owners, street vendors, and workers in the non-firm sector have attained their immediate goals. Still the long-term consequence (e.g., defending decent workspace in the informal economy) of organizing efforts is yet to be realized.

### Discussion

This is one of the few studies that have strived to analyze the data systematically on informal workers' organizing efforts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The intention was to establish an association between informal workers' organizations and social protection in emerging economies. It is acknowledged that in the 31 studies, diverse modes of association resulted in informal workers' employment security and socio-economic protection. Wright's (2000) framework is reflected in this review as the collective power is derived from the structural power of the workers such as, common economic status, location, and bargaining capacity. Yet sig-

**Significant collective action and success have not been achieved due to a lack of associational power in some institutional forms.**

nificant collective action and success have not been achieved due to a lack of associational power in some institutional forms (Hammer & Ness, 2021). Moreover, it is observed that demographics and macroeconomic factors in different regions determine the accomplishment of collective goals through diverse modes of workers' associations. The South Asian region witnessed informal workers' empowerment at the grassroots through microfinance, small credit, and participatory initiatives to bridge their solidarity with state policy (Unni & Rani, 2003; Moghe, 2013). Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa shows the efficacy of MBOs, mutual societies, and NGOs through a bottom-up approach (Osiki, 2020; Dafuleya, 2018), while in Latin America, collective voice mechanisms and socio-political networking through a resource mobilization approach have been expedient for informal workers to defend their socio-economic rights (Atzeni, 2016; Manky, 2018). Further, mutual relations between social protection initiatives and local economic development programs with the support of the administration and non-government actors have resulted in the effective socio-economic security of poor households in developing countries (Frota, 2008). In the market economy, formalizing and restraining the informal sector is challenging and unrealistic, while redistribution of power and resources through grassroots social movements has great potential to achieve comprehensive social protection (ILO, 2006; Tucker & Anantharaman, 2020). The role of the state is that of a catalyst, controller, and sometimes facilitator, while community organizations shall consciously attempt to

empower workers, challenge violations at workplaces, and ensure social protection in the informal economy (Walker & Pellissery, 2008). Hence, states should support this development approach from the bottom up through regulations, financing, and other assistance.

**It is recommended that the social security system in developing countries involves a tripartite approach to extend the risk coverage associated with informal employment.**

In the new frontier emerging economies, as a response to institutional fragility and supply-side constraints, many embedded approaches to governance have been observed in recent years. Since the 21st century, the approach that focuses on survival needs, interpersonal needs, collective objectives, and social security through the work-related group in low-income countries has manifested beyond the institution framework. In African countries, the customized form of market capitalism best suited for their socio-economic needs has been embedded in recent years with varying layers of multi-stakeholder engagement (Mbalyohere & Lawton, 2018). Drawing inferences from the literature, it is recommended that the social security system in developing countries involves a tripartite approach to extend the risk coverage associated with informal employment. One of the clear gaps in the literature is the lack of any theoretical underpinning of unionization and social protection, which would help tie the stud-

**Table 3 Existing Gaps & Future Scope**

Existing gaps and limitations in literature	Future scope and directions of research
Theoretical evolution	
Absence of theoretical grounding	More studies in the direction of cross level theory development and testing
Conceptual incongruity and lack of theoretic integration	Future research avenue can propose incorporation of theoretical foundation (social identity, solidarity and labour movement)
<i>Dimensions</i>	
Prior studies have enquired about standardization of insecure employment, decent work regulation, micro-insurance for occupational injury and basic health care etc. Literature mostly highlighted the community organizations, advocacy groups, mutual aid and informal cooperatives	Researchers shall study other dimensions of social security, namely, unemployment, maternity, pensions and family benefits separately and collectively Studies need to assess social security and welfare at an individual level and compare the effectiveness of different forms of unionization initiatives by informal workers
Context	
Dominated by studies conducted in developing countries (e.g. Turkey, South Africa, India, and Brazil) but lacks in other countries of the Global South Literature mostly focused on migrants and contract workers in waste recycling, textile, transport, and domestic work	Future research might compare the informal worker's organization and social security outcomes in the context of developed countries and emerging economies of Global South Researchers shall study a wide range of new types of jobs and self-employed in informal economy for a broader picture
Methods and Approaches	
Predominantly qualitative studies conducted comprising survey, ethnographic and case study So far, studies have applied descriptive and explanatory research design	Empirical studies in the future can incorporate a quantitative approach to assess the social security outcome of unionization Future research might explore the studies using experimental, mixed method research, bibliographic approach Studies in the future might adopt cross-sectional and longitudinal design

ies together. Another noticeable reflection from the studies is that researchers have not given enough thrust to occupation-specific socio-economic protection initiatives but to state-sponsored common welfare schemes. So far, studies have exhibited the mobilization and empowerment of informal workers through the virtue of solidarity, but different forms of social security fulfillment are yet to be explored. This study demonstrates that different ways of organizing in the informal sector enable the social protection needs of non-standard workers. This article sheds light on the trade unions and workers' organizations that may play a vital role in the informal sector too for membership and mobilization and socio-economic protection of the workers. Since organizing and social protection in the informal economy are steadily captivating scholarly attention, it is crucial to highlight present limitations and future directions for researchers and other stakeholders (Table 3).

### **Limitations & Future Scope**

Similar to other review articles, this study has some limitations with regard to context, methodology, and approach. Due to the inclusion criteria and keywords considered for the literature search, the present study may not have obtained the literature in its entirety. Another limitation could be due to the exclusion of supplementary literature (i.e., those studies that do not fit the defined scope) on informal economy, solidarity and social security. Further studies need a quantitative approach to compare the movement of informal workers' organizations in advanced

countries with the economies of the Global South empirically. Since global scholarship on informal workers' associations is at a nascent stage, future studies may include more regional, national, and transnational reports.

### **Conclusion**

As the notion of a basic social protection floor emerges globally, organizing the unorganized workers for employment protection and legitimate rights has recently gained scholarly attention. This systematic review demonstrated the advancement of organizing efforts by informal workers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a neo-liberal economy, while conventional trade unionism is gradually weakening, informal workers have taken considerable initiative for their association. The theoretical underpinnings of social identity, social exchange, and resource mobilization ideally apply to the working poor, who often take part in collective mobilization practices for the common good. Although informal workers' movements and self-regulated arrangements for socioeconomic protection have not been visibly integrated into government policy, there is budding interest in exploring the potential of workers' organizations to accomplish universal social security. Workers' organizations in different countries can learn from each other and incorporate the best practices of movements in contemporary economies.

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