

ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED: TRADE UNION RESPONSE VIS- À-VIS THE UNORGANIZED SECTOR IN INDIA

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1. Introduction

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Indian economy is that there is preponderance of a strong unorganized sector comprising nearly 370 million workers engaged in different kinds of activities organized across several categories¹. Although the unorganized sector is dominant, the inherent contradiction lies in the fact that largely, workers are deprived of some of the basic rights for livelihood and quality of work life. Hence, there is need to provide an appropriate platform through which the unprivileged workers can express their “voice” (Armstrong, 2004) on issues concerning their work and livelihood. It is in this context that the role of trade union comes into sharper focus since it can integrate the two dimensions of voice i.e. individual dimension involving the workers and collective dimension involving the union representation (Marchington *et al*, 2001). It can however be argued that the trade union movement in a developing country like India is largely oriented towards the organized workers whose interests are protected through a large number of labour legislations. Furthermore, arguably, there is a lag response from the government as well the trade union organizations vis-à-vis the workers in the unorganized sector. However, it can safely be argued that the trade unions have a definite role to play in organizing the workers in the unorganized sector in India. Although efforts are being taken in undertaking this activity in right earnest, there is still a large gap in this regard. In this perspective, the present paper tries to highlight the issues involved in organizing the unorganized workers in the Indian state of West Bengal which has a strong presence of trade union culture and the district of Burdwan is the focus of our study. The approach of the trade union organizations in organizing the workers in the unorganized sector has been critically analyzed. The trade union structure, functioning, pattern of membership, and response with respect to the unorganized sector has been studied in details on the basis of the inputs from trade union leaders and activists, workers and from secondary data sources. Special emphasis has been given in incorporating workers’ view with respect to the assessment of trade union response.

2. Understanding the Work and Workers in the Unorganized Sector: Contextualizing the Need for Organizing the Workers

The need for organizing the workers in the unorganized sector has to be understood in the light of the nature of work and workers in this sector. The workforce in the unorganized sector in a developing country like India comprises “workers who are engaged in a variety of occupations or employments...are victims of invisibility” (NCL, 2002: 594). Some of the important categories of the workers in the unorganized sector are rice mill including husking mill, *beedi* making, iron factory, small scale chemical units, garments making, brick/tile manufacturing, motor vehicles, security agencies, boatman services, stone breaking/stone crushing, shops, tailoring industry, printing press, handloom, sericulture, rubber and rubber products, etc². One of the unique aspects of the workforce in the unorganized sector is that a large proportion of women workers are

¹ http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-20/varanasi/28378263_1_informal-sector-unorganised-sector-handloom-units/2

² Detailed list available at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/events/sis/download/paper14.pdf>

employed in certain categories (Jaitly, 1997). Furthermore, lack of job security and social security benefits is another aspect of workers' deprivation in this category (NCL, 2002). The basic distinction between the organized and unorganized sector pertains to the protection of workers of the former through different legal enactments. Nevertheless, in India, there are certain Central Acts for the specific categories of the unorganized sector, like the Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment), 1966; Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961; The Building & Other Construction Workers (Regulation of employment & Condition of Service) Act, 1996; Shops and Establishment Act etc (GoWB, 2010). Moreover, some of the generic labour legislations are also applicable to the unorganized sector as well. However, it appears that the effectiveness of these few legal enactments gets reduced due to institutional bottleneck, lack of infrastructure and skewed trade union activities. In India, by and large, trade union activities are largely oriented towards organizing the organized workers rather than the unorganized. In this context the need for organizing the unorganized has to be understood and analyzed. There is need to identify the trade union initiative aimed at generating awareness among the workers regarding the existing legal provisions that are available for their protection and for providing an appropriate platform and structure for exercising their "voice".

The different aspects of the unfavourable working condition and deprivation vis-à-vis work and working conditions have been highlighted in existing literature (Natarajaseenivasan et al., 2002; NCEUS, 2009). Some of the issues that have been highlighted in the context of the unorganized sector pertain to low wages, indecent working condition, non-availability of appointment letter to the workers, etc (Sarkar and Jafar, 2011). In West Bengal, which is one of the leading states in India in terms of industrialization and economic development, the basic institutional support system for the unorganized sector has been developed just a couple of years back. Majority of the activities are in the area of social security for workers and special protection for workers in the unorganized sector. Recently, the Labour Department, Government of West Bengal (GoWB), has taken some effort in undertaking activities aimed at regulation of work and workers in the unorganized sector (GoWB, 2010). The inability and delay on the part of the trade unions to exert pressure on the government to formulate policies aimed at addressing the hardship of the workers in the unorganized sector can be considered as a major weakness of the trade unions. This in other way indicates slackness, or so to say, the lag response on their part in the context of organizing the unorganized. According to the NCL (2002), one of the distinguishing characteristics of the workforce in the unorganized sector as against the organized sector is the incapability to "organise themselves in unions" and hence there is need to make them "conscious of the laws". It is in this perspective that the trade union response vis-à-vis the need for organizing the workers in the unorganized sector has to be understood. Some literatures highlight the negligence on the part of organized trade union to organize the workers in unorganized sector. However, in general the major central union organizations in India have taken some effort to organize workers in the unorganized sector.

Although the need for organizing the unorganized sector in a developing country like India has been highlighted in existing literature (Jaitly, 1997; Deshpande, 1999), there seems to be a gap between what needs to be done and what has been achieved so far. Literature in this aspect seems to be scanty, more oriented towards specific case studies and doesn't emphasize on the unorganized sector as a whole. It would therefore be interesting to analyze the response of trade

unions with respect to the general categories of the unorganized sector. In this perspective, some of the research questions that may be addressed are:

- *How have the trade unions in India responded to the emerging need for organizing the workers in the unorganized sector? What has been their basic approach in this regard?*
- *Whether there is any basic difference in organizing the organized versus the unorganized?*
- *What has been the preferred union structure for the unorganized sector in India?*
- *How do the unions establish and develop the network among the different organizations in the unorganized sector in India?*
- *How do workers in the unorganized sector perceive the role trade unions?*
- *Have trade unions been effective enough in addressing the needs of workers?*

3. Methodology for identification of trade union response

On the basis of the research questions identified above, an effort has been taken to explore some of the aspects of trade union response vis-à-vis the unorganized sector in India. The study has been carried out in the Indian state of West Bengal which has a strong presence of trade union culture and the district of Burdwan is the focus of our study. Four categories of the unorganized workers have been considered in this study namely rice-mill workers, *beedi* workers, transport workers and shops and establishment workers. A two-pronged approach has been adopted in this research work. First, the leaders and activists of some important trade unions functioning in the unorganized sectors have been interviewed in order to address some of the research questions identified in the last section. Open-ended questions based on the different aspects of trade union response relating to organizing the workers in the unorganized sector in general have been emphasized in the interviews conducted. Some inputs have also been obtained from the employers' association and government officials in order to understand the trade union response in a better way. Furthermore, the documents available with the trade union activists like conference reports, pamphlets and organizational papers circulated among members have been used to understand and to analyze the perspective in a better way. Secondly, effort has been taken to assess trade union response on the basis of the opinion of employees. The authors believe that in order to assess trade union response, the workers' views on the identified issue need to be considered. Hence, the opinion of workers in the unorganized has been obtained through a questionnaire survey and follow-up interviews have been conducted with a view to identify the issues that would provide an insight into the trade union response. 7 items signifying the workers' perception vis-à-vis trade union response have been included in the questionnaire. Further more some background variables like category, union membership, length of service and monthly income have also been included in the questionnaire. Items in the questionnaire have been structured in order to obtain response on a Likert-type scale (Kerlinger, 1973). The responses to the questionnaire have been entered and statistical analysis has been carried out with the help of SPSS software. First, mean score and standard deviation of the different items have been determined. For ease of getting response and to minimize the time requirement, a sample

size of 30 employees per category of the unorganized sector has been decided. Thus a total sample size of 120 employees has been considered. On the basis of the study carried out in this research work, item-wise analysis has been carried out for the different items of the questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire survey have been corroborated by the discussions with the workers. Finally, effort has been taken to determine statistically significant difference in workers' opinion on the basis of a couple of background variables. Here, non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis) have been employed on the basis of number of groups corresponding to each background variable.

4. Trade union response vis-à-vis the different categories of unorganized sector: Overall Analysis

4.1 Introduction

On the basis of the discussion with the trade union leaders and activists some aspects of trade union response can be identified. In all 15 trade union organizers from different categories have been interviewed. There are some aspects which are common across categories, while there are others which are unique to a particular category primarily resulting out of the nature of work, organization and employer-employee relation prevailing in that category. As already stated in the previous section, the problems of the workers in the unorganized sector attracted the attention of the state government very recently when several schemes for their benefits were announced. This has also been reflected in the views of the trade union activists. However, this can also be considered as a negative aspect of the trade union response vis-à-vis unorganized sector which signifies lag response from the side of trade unions. In the opinion of the trade union activists in the unorganized sector, there is a clear-cut distinction between organizing workers in the organized sector and workers in the unorganized sector. In their opinion, it is quite difficult to organize the unorganized worker because of a variety of reasons. Lack of understanding of the workers' need, ineffective institutional support mechanism, lack of organizing capabilities among the organizers, non-availability of ready demands which can be realized easily, etc. are some of the issues which differentiate the organized and unorganized sector. Within the broad domain of this distinction, there are category-wise differences within the unorganized sector which make the study more interesting. These have been identified in this section. Finally, this section ends with the identification of commonalities and differences observed across the categories.

4.2 Category-wise Analysis

a. Rice mill workers

There are nearly 430 rice mills in Burdwan district employing nearly 30000 workers of different categories comprising skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. There are some who earn monthly wages and some others who earn daily wages. Some contractual workers are also involved in loading and unloading and other activities in rice mills. There are many female workers in this category and modernization exercise has significantly affected these workers. Lack of income and social security is a genuine problem for the workers in this category and this appears to be an important issue in respect of organizing the workers in this category. The union that has been considered in this category has been successful in making nearly 50% of the

workers its organizational members. Although this can be considered as an achievement, it is also true that half of the workforce remain outside the ambit of the union. A bi-partite agreement has been signed between Burdwan District Rice Mills Association and Burdwan District Rice Mill Workers' Union in the year 2009 relating to wage settlement. However, the union had given a call for a strike for wage increase some months back in view of escalating prices of essential items. This demand has been placed before the expiry of the date of the previous settlement in view of the wage increase initiatives undertaken in other categories of the unorganized sector. Further, the other issues relevant in this category are implementation of minimum wages and provision for provident fund for all categories of workers. In the case of the rice mill category, the condition of daily wage-earners and the contractual workers is more severe since there is very little social security coverage for these workers. These workers are deprived of the social security coverage and some other benefits which are provided to the permanent workers. They remain unorganized within the unorganized. Trade union needs to respond appropriately for addressing their issue. Furthermore, the question of providing social security rests at the mercy of the owners and sometimes the union. However, some workers repent that union leaders do not visit the rice-mill while some others believe that the union is influenced by the owner and sometimes, instead of serving the interest of the workers, the union serves the interest of the owner. A shift in union membership has been observed in this category. At the same time, inter-union coordination has been observed in case of implementation of bonus and wage agreements.

a. *Beedi* manufacturing workers

A number of *beedi* manufacturing units are present in the district of Burdwan. *Beedi* means a thin Indian cigarette "filled with tobacco flake and wrapped in a tendu leaf tied with a string at one end"³. The uniqueness of this category is that majority of the workers work from their home and nearly 80% of these workers are women. Thus, the issue of trade union response vis-à-vis organizing the unorganized in the *beedi* manufacturing category has to be addressed from somewhat a different perspective. Possibly because of the prevalence of 'homestead workers', even the dominant trade union in this category has been successful in making only 20-25% of the total workers its organizational members. Although many women workers are engaged in this category, the trade union has to place a long term demand of providing some basic health and welfare provisions for women workers like provision for crèche for their children, rest room etc. Furthermore, in some cases workers have been organized against gender discrimination. There is prevalence of West Bengal Beedi Workers' Welfare Scheme and the trade union has to play the role of making the workers aware of this scheme. Furthermore, as per the data available from the publication of GoWB(2010), identity card has not been issued to nearly 50% of the workers. Presently, the trade union has to play a leading role in making workers aware with respect to effective implementation of the scheme and issuance of identity cards.

b. Motor Transport workers

A large number of workers are engaged in the motor transport services in West Bengal in general and in the district of Burdwan in particular. In the year 1989 a charter of demands was placed by the union before the owners. Subsequently, workshops on addressing the problems of workers have been organized in the year 2005 and 2008 in the presence of owners and representatives

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beedi>

from the district administration. Although effort has been taken, the union has not been successful in organizing workers on issues regarding implementation of fair wages, issuance of appointment letters and implementation of decent timing of work. Possibly for this reason, the unions have not been successful in organizing a large number of workers under their respective banners. In the opinion of the organizers of a particular union, many owners pressurize workers for working for 14-18 hours a day at a meager wage. Arguably, some organizers believe that intimacy with the owners instead of the workers has neglected the spirit of organizing the workers. There is need for the trade union to look at the interest of *badli* (substitute) workers who are facing greater hardship compared to other workers in this category. The union in this category has planned to make the workers aware of the political environment affecting their respective category so that the reasons behind the problems of this sector can be understood clearly by the workers. A scheme named as West Bengal Transport Workers Social Security Scheme has been introduced in the year 2010 for workers engaged in bus, trucks, lorries, auto-rickshaw, cars, etc. As per the data available from the GoWB (2010), there are 45697 registered beneficiaries of which 3631 are from the district of Burdwan. The unions need to pressurize the respective agencies for effective implementation of the scheme. An interesting observation in this category is that although wage structure has not been implemented in the district of Burdwan, the same has been implemented in the Durgapur region district which may be because of the indirect influence and presence of strong unions in the organized sector in the region which is an industrial belt in the state of West Bengal. Furthermore, the union is also facing a problem in organizing the unorganized due to the absence of a uniform approach for the workers. Presence of multiple unions has been observed in this category.

c. Shops and Establishment workers

Workers in different shops and establishments are spread across the district as well as the state covering both urban and rural areas. Small shops which are run by two to three employees and aggregate of such number of shops and employees engaged by those shops cover a large number of workers in the unorganized sector. Organizing these workers is somewhat difficult since the shops and establishments are geographically dispersed. Possibly for this reason one dominant union reported that less than 10% of the workers have opted for union membership. Thus from this perspective, majority of workers still remain unorganized which is a matter of concern for the trade unions. A clear-cut urban-rural divide has been observed with respect to organizing the unorganized workers in this category. One of the unions in this category opines that it is easier to reach the workers in the urban areas since many workers are available within a small geographic area as against the rural areas where the worker-density is quite low. This may be a reason behind the lesser number of union members in this category. Furthermore, workers' indifferent attitude towards union membership may arise out of the fact that proximity to unions may be construed by the owners with a skeptical eye. Personalized employer-employee relationship being more relevant in this category may also be a reason explaining lesser number of union membership. There is legal provision for providing appointment letters, timely payment of wages, statutory leave, working hours etc as stated in the West Bengal Shops and Establishments Act, 1963. However, like other categories, the basic direction of trade union action pertains to the demand for effective implementation of the legal provisions. Activists of one of the unions reported that they have been successful in fulfilling demands like holidays and leave with pay, specific working hour, bonus, prevention of sudden termination of workers etc. Several bipartite

agreements have been signed between the union and employers' association which started in the year 1987 and has been continuing at an interval of 2-3 years. However, the union needs to emphasize specific issues concerning the workers in general. Presence of multiple unions has been observed in this category as well. However, there has been occasional inter-union coordination for organizing some joint movements in the interest of workers.

4.3 Identifying commonalities and differences among the categories vis-à-vis trade union response

Contrary to the organized sector, the basic approach of organizing the unorganized has been directed towards the fulfillment of the demand for implementation of a wage structure. An important commonality among the different categories is that either there is no wage structure at all or if it exists at all, in the opinion of the union, it has not been fully implemented by the owners. The wages that the workers get in the unorganized sector are very less and vary across different categories. Among the different categories considered in this study, some workers get maximum wage of Rs. (Indian rupee) 4000 per month equivalent to 81 US dollars. This amount is nearly one-fifth of the amount required to run a lower middle class family in India. The wages of many workers revolve around the figure of Rs 2000/- per month. Some *beedi* workers get wages less than Rs 1000/- per month and many work on a part-time basis. Thus, a fundamental issue with respect to organizing the unorganized pertains to the basic demand for wage increase with provision for a living wage and implementation of a proper wage structure. This aspect differentiates the organized from the unorganized. Another common aspect is the absence of written job contract. In almost all categories, absence of a formal appointment letter is a major problem of workers in the unorganized sector and this has therefore been an important issue for the trade unions. The absence of a formal appointment letter reduces the job security and enhances the vulnerability of workers who are left at the mercy of employers and they face the chance of dismissal at any moment. Although the unions have opined that effort has been taken from their side in this regard, no significant outcome could be observed. The other issues that are largely common among the agenda of the unions are implementation of social security and welfare measures announced by the GoWB, demand for improving the working condition (since some of the basic facilities relating to health and welfare seem to be missing in the workplace), etc. These are issues on which the unions claim to have organized the workers. Whatever might be the case, the unions need to organize them with greater intensity and with right earnest in future. The workers in the unorganized sector look forward to the union for getting their benefits, fulfilling their basic demands and redressing their grievance. In absence of a formal mechanism, the unions have a definite role to play.

Existence of multiple unions has been observed in certain cases in the present study. Inter union contention may be a perennial problem in the context of organizing workers in the unorganized sector. Inter union contention and specifically division of unions on political line is detrimental to the larger interests of workers in general and workers in the unorganized sector in particular. Workers' inclination with respect to shift in union membership has been observed in certain categories as well. This has therefore becomes a challenge for the dominant unions to sustain their positions in the respective categories. Furthermore, when inter-union contention increases, sometimes there is a direct impact on workers in terms of threat of termination, indifferent attitude of the employers' in addressing the basic problem of workers etc. These ultimately

enhance workers' deprivation and uncertainty. Hence, the government as a regulatory body and other non-governmental bodies may be required to play a definite role. Provision for dual membership could be a solution to address this problem and should come under the consideration of the trade unions. Although inter-union contention is common in some categories, inter-union coordination in addressing some basic problems of workers has also been observed in certain cases. For example, it has been observed that in a particular case a joint action committee has been formed at the state level to organize joint movements to address some of the basic demands of *beedi* workers. The need for a united movement of workers is more relevant to the workers in the unorganized sector and the trade unions need to respond appropriately in this regard.

Another interesting observation as already discussed, is the positive impact that the presence of strong union in the organized sector has on the organizing aspect of the unorganized workers. As previously discussed, because of the presence of an organized union, wage structure has been implemented in a particular region of the district although the same has not been implemented elsewhere. Furthermore, the unions are also facing a problem in organizing the unorganized due to the absence of a uniform approach in organizing the workers. Thus inter-union networking needs to be strengthened across unions in different categories and among the unions in a particular category in different geographical locations.

In the context of membership subscription fees, it has been observed that the fees are low but different for different categories and unions. In the rice mill category, for a particular union, the membership fee is Rs 12/- per year. For the *Beedi* workers it is Rs 6/- per employee per year. For two of the unions in the motor transport category the membership fees are Rs. 36/- and Rs. 60/- per month respectively. For one dominant union in the shops and establishments category, the union membership fee is Rs 25/-. Interestingly, it has been observed that workers are sometimes unaware of union membership fee which is required to be paid by them. Very small amount of union fee may be a positive step in organizing the unorganized. Although the membership fees are low, yet by and large, the unions have not been successful in roping-in a large proportion of the workers under their respective organizations. From this point of view, it may be averred that workers in the unorganized sector continue to be unorganized and sometime they have no other option but to remain unorganized possibly because of the indifferent attitude of trade union. This is something that the unions need to address in future.

A specific pattern of organizational structure has been observed for the unions covered under the present study. It has been observed that each of the unions is affiliated to their respective central trade union and is required to follow the provisions of the Trade Union Act applicable in this regard. Hierarchically, some unions have their apex body at the state level which moves down to the district level. Below the district levels, union-wise variation in levels/committees has been observed. In the rice-mill category, existence of mill-level committees has been observed. The variation in structure may be because of the nature of work and business corresponding to the concerned union. Interestingly, it has been observed that one union in the *beedi* manufacturing category has developed its organizational structure in line with the administrative structure of the district. In the opinion of the union leadership, this has been deliberately developed in order to maintain parity with the administrative set-up through which the question of addressing the workers needs can be addressed properly by placing demand to the appropriate administrative body. In case of shops and establishments category, the union structure is largely district-based

with a presence of a state level coordination board. This structure has been preferred in order to organize the activities based on local issues and socio-economic environment of regions. Since the last year, the union in the rice mill category moved away from a state-level structure and preferred to operate with a district level structure. In case of certain categories, the formation of federations with respect to different aspects of a particular trade has been observed. In view of the advantage of the federal structure in the light of the advantage of organizing movements, the unions in rice-mill and shops and establishments category have plans to go for a federal structure.

Winding up

A definite pattern of union functioning can be observed with respect to organizing the unorganized workers. What has been previously stated, may once again be reiterated that there is much more that need to be done for the workers in the unorganized sector in India. Although the trade unions have responded, the response is a delayed one and inadequate as well. Furthermore, the reliability of the trade union response as identified in this section needs to be verified with the opinion of the workers. This is the subject matter of the next section of this paper.

5. Trade union response vis-à-vis the different categories of unorganized sector: Workers' View

As already discussed, a sample size of 30 employees per category has been used for incorporating workers' views from each category. Responses have been received from 90 workers from the four identified categories. The details of the reliability statistics for the specific 7 items of the questionnaire have been shown in table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.861	7

From the above table a high degree of internal consistency of items used in the questionnaire has been observed (George and Mallery, 2006). Thus the overall reliability of the basic research instrument is established and this provides a solid foundation to the research construct. On the basis of the response received from the workers, a number of conclusions have been drawn which have been analyzed in the subsequent discussion in this section.

The different categories of workers who have responded to the questionnaire are as follows:

Table 2: Profile of Responding Employees: Category and Union membership			
Rice mill workers	<i>Beedi</i> manufacturing workers	Motor Transport workers	Shops and Establishment workers

20		18		26		26	
Member of union	Not a member of union	Member of union	Not a member of union	Member of union	Not a member of union	Member of union	Not a member of union
14	6	16	2	26	0	8	18

It is evident from table 2 that geographical proximity possibly has relationship with union membership and it is clear that all responding workers of the motor transport category are members of the trade union since it is easier to reach them in a major bus-stand which happens to be their work place. Contrary to this, 8 out of 26 responding workers of the shops and establishment category are union members, which in other way indicates the difficulty in organizing them because of geographical dispersion. Although the issue of geographical dispersion is also applicable to the *beedi* manufacturing category wherein large number of workers work from their home, these workers have to visit the work place for collecting raw materials and for depositing the finished products. The average length of service for the workers surveyed is 18 years and there are many workers who have been engaged in the different categories of unorganized sector for more than 30 years. Non-availability of alternative employment in other sectors paying higher wages is the basic reason for which many workers are forced to remain attached with the unorganized sector.

On the basis of the response to the questionnaire the mean and standard deviation of the different items have been computed. The results have been exhibited in table 3 below:

Table 3: Employees' discernment of trade union response		
	Mean	Standard Deviation
Open discussion with union regarding workers' problem	3.2778	1.51419
Important role of trade unions in organizing the workers	3.0556	1.60309
Perceived difference in the union activities between organized and organized sector	3.0111	1.88128
Union provides help in solving problems	2.9556	1.49088
Union organizers maintain contact	2.9111	1.66689
Union's earnestness in executing its role	2.8556	1.64598

Perceived benefits from attending union meeting and conference	2.3556	1.42459
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The overall response to the different items signifying trade union response is quite low which is evident from the highest mean value of 3.2778 for one of the items. It appears from the table that workers have somewhat a positive perception with respect to open discussion with unions regarding their problems. Thus unions provide necessary space to the workers in this regard. Furthermore, workers also perceive the important role of trade unions in organizing the workers. Lower mean values in other areas indicate that there is a gap between what the workers expect from the unions and what they receive from them. Thus, it is evident from the table that there is much more that the workers expect from the union since there are some items where low mean values have been observed. Although workers believe that they can openly discuss their problems with unions, they do not perceive enough seriousness in unions. Thus the earnestness of unions, as viewed by the workers needs to be enhanced. There is much scope for the unions to enhance their daily contact with workers. Finally, it is evident from the table that workers perceive little benefits from attending union meetings and conferences. This is quite disappointing for the unions and they need to reformulate their agenda of meetings and conferences for making them useful for the workers.

As already discussed in the methodology section, an effort has been taken in this paper to identify the significant difference in opinion of workers on the basis of background variables. In this context the background variables considered are union-member vs. non-members and the four categories of the unorganized sector where the study has been carried out. Results of Mann-Whitney Test reveal that statistically significant difference in opinion of workers exists between the union members and non-members in case of 6 out of the 7 items (at 10% level of significance). Thus, significant difference in opinion exists among the members and non-members of unions. In all cases, the mean values of different items corresponding to union members are greater than the non-members' responses. These have been exhibited in the table in the appendix. It is clear from the table that workers who are members of trade unions are more oriented towards the different issues concerning trade union response. Thus, the trade unions need to spread out their activities and reach towards the non-members so as to make them aware of the relevant issues. This would legitimize the existence and relevance of unions in the eye of the workers. Lowest mean score (1.57) has been obtained in case of the item signifying benefits from attending union meetings and conferences among the non-members. Hence unions need to reformulate their agenda in order to attract the attention of non-members. Furthermore, it has also been observed from the results of Kruskal-Wallis test that statistically significant difference exists in all the items of the questionnaire (at 10% level of significance). Thus there is variety and difference in orientation of workers in different categories with respect to different aspects of trade union response. This perceived disparity makes the unorganized sector truly heterogeneous in terms of trade union response. These results are also interesting from a research perspective and make the present research more significant as well. It has been observed that trade-union penetration is also different in different categories leading to difference in orientation. There is therefore the need to identify gaps in this regard by the central trade unions. The item-wise mean values for the different categories have been exhibited in the table in the appendix. Low mean values have been obtained in several items in case of rice mill and *beedi* manufacturing workers. Thus, trade union needs to be more responsive to the needs of workers in these two categories.

On the basis of the identified difference in opinion of workers in different categories, it can safely be said that the trade unions need to be uniformly responsive in organizing workers across the various categories of the unorganized sector.

6. Conclusion

The various aspects of trade union response with respect to the different categories of unorganized sector have been highlighted in this paper. The paper has largely been successful in analyzing the trade union response vis-à-vis the unorganized sector on the basis of an integrated approach. Furthermore, it has been observed from the study that sometimes, even the union organizers are unaware of the different labour legislations that are available for workers in the organized sectors in India. Some workers have opined that they are deprived of some basic rights like non-availability of compensation in any form and pension. Some workers also repent that they have none to stand by their side. These are contrary to what the unions claim. However, there is a genuine constraint of appropriate organizers within the trade unions. On the otherhand there is also the need to restrict functioning of trade unions on the basis of political considerations. The point that can be raised in this regard is whether the unorganized sector needs non-political unions with educated organizers or political unions with committed organizers for organizing the workers. Possibly, the workers would be the able to provide the right answer. Whatever might be the case, the need for organizing the unorganized is genuine. As evident from the above discussion, there seems to be a lack of concerted union efforts, though practically, workers are organized and governed by affiliated political unions and there are sometime allegations that some union activists are in hands in gloves with the owners. Low level of education among the workforce and poor effort of any awareness programme to educate the workers of their rights in the different categories, coupled with discontinuities in union effort are responsible for non accomplishment of the desired results in terms of improvement of working condition and statutory benefits for unorganized workforce. Apart from the union, the GoWB may explore the feasibility of forming a separate wing for unorganized workers as majority of the existing enforcements and governance are aimed at the organized sectors only. Union now has to raise their voice for the proper utilization of the Labour Welfare Fund accumulation for building up basic amenities for unorganized workforce. There is need to establish a coordination mechanism between the government and the trade union in the question of addressing the problems of the workers in the unorganized sector. A dyadic relationship between the trade unions and government would be effective in providing the workers their required “voice”. If this is achieved the effort aimed at organizing the unorganized would yield fruitful results in future.

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Appendix

Table 4: Mean values of different items of trade union response based on background variables					
Items of the questionnaire	Background variable		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Important role of trade unions in organizing the	Union membership	Union members	64	3.09	1.71
		Non-members	26	2.96	1.31

workers	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.75	.716
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	1.83	1.29
		Motor Transport	26	4.19	1.29
		Shops and Establishments	26	3.76	1.27
Union's earnestness in executing its role	Union membership	Union members	64	3.18	1.65
		Non-members	26	2.03	1.34
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.65	.875
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	1.83	1.29
		Motor Transport	26	4.34	1.01
Shops and Establishments		26	3.00	1.62	
Union organizers maintain contact	Union membership	Union members	64	3.39	1.65
		Non-members	26	1.73	0.96
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.90	0.91
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	1.83	1.09
		Motor Transport	26	4.76	0.58
Shops and Establishments		26	2.57	1.65	
Perceived benefits from	Union membership	Union members	64	2.67	1.46

attending union meeting and conference		Non-members	26	1.57	.94
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.55	0.75
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	1.72	1.07
		Motor Transport	26	3.61	1.23
		Shops and Establishments	26	2.15	1.40
Open discussion with union regarding workers' problem	Union membership	Union members	64	3.42	1.60
		Non-members	26	2.92	1.23
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	2.00	1.07
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	2.27	1.40
		Motor Transport	26	4.53	0.90
		Shops and Establishments	26	3.69	1.12
Union provides help in solving problems	Union membership	Union members	64	3.17	1.53
		Non-members	26	2.42	1.23
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.75	0.63
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	1.83	1.20
		Motor Transport	26	4.46	0.70
		Shops and Establishments	26	3.15	1.28
Perceived difference in the	Union Membership	Union members	64	3.32	1.84

union activities between organized and organized sector		Non-members	26	2.23	1.77
	Category of workers	Rice mill workers	20	1.25	0.55
		Beedi manufacturing workers	18	4.88	0.47
		Motor Transport	26	3.57	1.74
		Shops and Establishments	26	2.50	1.88