WHEN WE ALL CLAP TOGETHER:
LABOUR UNIONS AS AGENTS OF DEVELOPMENT
FOR INFORMAL CREMATION WORKERS IN TAMIL
NADU

Michael Christopher Naylor

2017

A thesis submitted to Victoria University of Wellington in partial
fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of
Development Studies

School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences
Victoria University of Wellington

Abstract

While labour unions have a history of helping lift working people out of poverty in Western countries, their place in development is unclear. Mainstream development literature typically sees their potential contribution to development to be limited and waning as they are replaced by new, more dynamic actors. This dismissal of labour unions from the development sphere appears to stem largely from their inability to effectively support workers in the informal economy of developing countries, whom are the most likely to face injustice and poverty.

In order to address the question of whether labour unions can be agents for development of informal workers this thesis examines a case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam, a labour union of informal cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, India. Through semi-structured interviews with 39 members and supporters of the labour union, this thesis explores both the mechanics of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and what it has achieved for its cremation worker members.

It sets out to understand what strategies can be employed for informal workers to undertake collective bargaining and how effective these have been at delivering livelihood improvements for the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu. It also assesses both the functions of the Sangam and what it has achieved, against three principles of 'good development' – participation, sustainability and equity.

The findings show that through a mixture of innovative strategies the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu have been able to achieve some livelihood improvements and do so in a manner which is both participatory and equitable. It suggests that despite challenges, labour unions can be agents of development for informal workers and their potential contribution to development should not be overlooked.

Acknowledgements

I could not have produced this thesis without the support and inspiration of some wonderful people. I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge their role in the research.

First of all, to my supervisor Polly, thank you for thoughtful and diligent feedback that kept me on track throughout these two years. Your constant reminders about the proper use of apostrophes has also been greatly appreciated!

To Manohari, Pandey and all the staff at the Tamil Nadu Labour Union, thank you for welcoming me so warmly and accommodating my research into your busy days. The work you do is amazing and I hope you are proud of what you've achieved. To Joshua my translator, thank you for your incredible patience and genuine interest in the research. Our discussions added much depth to this research and your friendship made my time in Madurai a cherished memory.

To Helen and Ross Wilson and all the UnionAID Trustees, thank you for trusting me and giving me the freedom to undertake this research. Thank you also, for understanding when I struggled under the dual workload!

To Gina, thank you for always encouraging me to keep going. Our union discussions never cease to inspire me and a little bit of your passion for a better world shows through in these pages.

A special thanks to mum and dad and Jane, who together, set me off on my first day at school and have kept supporting me right up till now. I feel so lucky to have been brought up in a family so keen to learn and see the world and who have always been proud of me.

Finally, I feel deeply indebted to all of the men and women of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam who gave their time and energy to talk to me about their lives and what being in the Sangam meant to them. I hope this research can in some way help in your struggle to get the decent work and dignity that you so deserve.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Labour unions in the literature	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 Unions in development literature	5
2.3 Critiques of labour unions from the development sector	9
2.4 Informal workers and unions	11
2.5 Strategies for informal workers to organise	16
2.6 Strategies for informal workers to collectively bargain	18
2.7 Cremation Workers in India	21
Chapter 3 – Methodology	24
3.1 Introduction	24
3.2 Subtle realist foundations	24
3.3 A social constructivism approach	26
3.4 Putting philosophy into practise – a qualitative case study	27
3.5 Carrying out the research	29
3.6 Data Analysis	33
3.7 Positioning myself within the research	34
3.7.1 Insider knowledge and bias	34
3.7.2 A white researcher in India	36
3.8 Ethics	37
3.9 Conclusion	38
Chapter 4: How did the cremation workers form the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and what were their aims?	40
4.1 Introduction	40
4.2 Making contact	41
4.3 Building consciousness	44
4.4 Motives for joining	47
4.5 Conclusion	50
Chapter 5: Collective bargaining: strategies and outcomes	52
5.1 Introduction	52
5.2 Collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities	53
5.2.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities	53

5.2.2 Outcomes of collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities.....	61
5.3 Collective bargaining with village Panchayats	65
5.3.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with village Panchayats.....	65
5.3.2 Outcomes of collective bargaining with village Panchayats	67
5.4 Collective bargaining directly with families	69
5.4.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with families.....	69
5.4.2 Outcomes of individual bargaining.....	72
5.5 Conclusion.....	73
Chapter 6: Can labour unions fulfil the principles of good development?	75
6.1 Introduction.....	75
6.2 Principles of Development	76
6.3 Participatory development	78
6.3.1 Introduction	78
6.3.2 Participation in organising the union.....	81
6.3.3 Participation in the Sangam's decision-making and activities	82
6.3.4 Participation in public discourse and policy making in Tamil Nadu	85
6.3.5 Conclusion.....	86
6.4 Sustainable development	89
6.4.1 Introduction	89
6.4.2 Financial sustainability	90
6.4.3 Developing skills and knowledge to run a labour union	92
6.4.4 Impact on Sangam's ability to sustain collective bargaining	93
6.4.5 Conclusion.....	96
6.5 Equitable development	97
6.5.1 Introduction	97
6.5.2 Tackling caste based discrimination in Tamil Nadu society	100
6.5.3 Equal opportunity for women?	103
6.5.4 Promoting equity in public services to meet basic needs	104
6.5.5 Bargaining for a more equitable economy	106
6.5.6 Conclusion.....	109
6.6 Discussion summary	110
Chapter 7: Conclusion	112
References	117

Figures

1. Composition of interviewees..... 31
2. Primary reason for joining the Sangam..... 48

Tables

1. Types of participation..... 80
2. Types of participation exhibited by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam..... 88

Images

1. A Rural Cremation Site in Tamil Nadu..... 63
2. A cremation site in Madurai..... 64

Chapter One: Introduction

Meena (not real name) and her husband sit outside their small house made of loosely pulled together plastic sheets, cardboard and wooden poles and explain to me in rapid fire bursts, the ins and outs of their daily lives. They talk of working day and night to cremate bodies, their meagre income and the fear of abuse from those more powerful in their township. Life has been harsh for them at times and it shows in the deep creases on Meena's face, but they also talk with great pride about their eldest son who is now working part-time as a teacher at a local school.

Meena's story of hardship and hope is not unique – she is just one of the 700 million working people who live today in poverty. But her response to the poverty and injustice that she has faced in her life may surprise many people working in the development sector. Meena, did not join a self-help group, micro-enterprise or co-operative to improve her livelihood, instead she, along with tens of thousands of others in Tamil Nadu, joined a labour union

Labour unions occupy an important place in the history of economic and social development in many Western countries, including New Zealand, however they are often conspicuous by their absence in contemporary development literature and strategies. Throughout my undergraduate and post-graduate studies I have never seen or heard the formation of labour unions suggested as a response to the issues associated with the spectres of globalisation, inequality and exploitation that stalk the developing world. Where labour unions are recognised they are typically framed as organisations with waning influence and limited claim to represent those that are poor and vulnerable (Eade & Leather, 2005; Peet & Hartwick, 2009; Rugendyke, 2007).

The lack of consideration given by the development sector to the potential contribution of labour unionism to improving the lives of people in developing countries seems like an egregious oversight. The task of eliminating poverty and creating a more just and equal world is huge, and development donors and policy makers should not dismiss potential agents and allies for good development without proper deliberation. As such it is the overarching aim of

this thesis to question why labour unions are overlooked as agents for development and to initiate some debate about what possible contribution to development they may be able to make.

To address the overarching research question of whether labour unions can be considered good development actors this thesis will endeavour to answer several relevant sub-questions. In doing so I will draw on the existing literature but also heavily on a case study of Meena's labour union of cremation workers in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. The experiences of Meena and other cremation workers of the process of forming the union and undertaking collective bargaining provide an important insight into the possible strategies, benefits and limitations for labour unions trying to support the poorest and most vulnerable workers in developing countries.

The key research questions to be addressed in this thesis are:

- Why are labour unions overlooked as development actors by mainstream development literature and strategies?
- How were the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu organised into a labour union – the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam?
- What strategies did the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam employ to collectively bargain and how successful was collective bargaining in improving the livelihoods of the cremation workers and their families?
- Have the processes and outcomes of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam met the following principles of good development – participation, sustainability and equity?

Through gaining a greater understanding of the challenges to labour unions in developing countries (in particular the informal economy within developing countries) and how the cremation workers union has attempted to overcome them, it is hoped that this thesis will be able to provide some critical analysis to inform debate about the wider place of labour unions in development.

These research questions will each be tackled in different sections of the thesis.

Chapter Two will review mainstream development literature to appraise the place of labour unions in development thinking and understand some of the criticisms levelled at labour unions by development NGOs. In particular, it will focus on labour unions' struggle to engage with informal workers, which is generally agreed to be a key barrier to them being seen as development actors.

At the end of the chapter I will introduce the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, India, as a group of informal workers that have managed to form a labour union and whom are the focus of my case study.

In **Chapter Three** I will outline the philosophy behind my approach to this research and the methodologies I have chosen to use. It will include some reflections on my research in the field and some of the limitations and challenges faced.

Chapter Four uses the information I gained in the field to address my second research question. It will describe the strategies used to organise the cremation workers into the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and outline some of the hopes and desires that motivated the workers to join together.

The literature review identifies serious barriers to informal worker unions undertaking effective collective bargaining. **Chapter Five** explores the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's various strategies for undertaking collective bargaining to better understand what strategies can and can't be successfully employed by informal workers. The relative success or otherwise of the Sangam's collective bargaining efforts will be assessed through the cremation workers own views on the impact it has had on their livelihoods.

I argue that good development is about more than just improving material well-being, it must empower people, promote greater equity and be sustainable. **Chapter Six** discusses the challenges labour unions face in realising these three important principles. It then seeks to test these critiques by assessing how participatory, sustainable and equitable the Mayana Vettiyanal's processes and outcomes have been to date.

Together the findings and discussion in this thesis will explore the arguments surrounding labour unions as development actors that have been raised, but rarely investigated. It will delve into the mechanics of how labour unions can function in the informal economy, and what the limitations of labour unions in this space may be. It also seeks to provide some critical analysis of how the processes and outcomes of labour unions fit within the framework of development practice and in what ways labour unions should be considered development actors.

Chapter Two: Labour unions in the literature

2.1 Introduction

Throughout five years of undergraduate and postgraduate development studies I have had lecturers and text books espouse the virtues and shortcomings of a range of development actors, from international institutions like the World Bank to small scale co-operatives and micro-credit schemes. However, I do not recall labour unions ever being mentioned as important actors in the field of development. In this chapter I seek to expand on this anecdotal experience by undertaking a review of the place of labour unions (or lack thereof) in mainstream development literature. This initial review of labour unions in development literature will be followed by a more detailed exploration of some of the critiques of labour unions working in a development context, in particular the most salient critique that labour unions fail to engage with working people in the informal economy.

Sections four and five will continue to explore the issue of labour unions in the informal economy by reviewing some of the strategies employed by informal workers to overcome the unique challenges they face to union organising and collective bargaining. However, this remains a relatively nascent area of research and it is clear that gaps remain in our understanding of how these strategies can be effectively implemented, especially by different groups of informal workers.

In reviewing the literature in these two areas – unions as development actors and strategies for unionising informal workers – I hope to contextualise the key research aims I pursue in this thesis. The first is to add to the existing knowledge of how informal workers can organise and undertake collective bargaining by exploring the strategies and experiences of cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, India. The second, higher level research aim, is to consider whether labour unions can function and deliver results in accordance with the principles of good development.

2.2 Unions in development literature

In this section I explore the ways in which labour unions have been represented in mainstream development discourse over the past 50 years. Labour unions appear to share a number of the goals and values of development. They are fundamentally motivated to achieve better conditions and wages for their members and also to ensure that all people can work in conditions characterised by equality, dignity and justice (International Trade Union Congress, 2016). This mission is strikingly similar to the goals of the rights based approach to development that aims to redress the discriminatory practises and unjust distributions of power that are the underlying causes of poverty (Sengupta, 2000). However, the role of labour unions in development practice is not clear and appears to have received limited attention from scholars in the development field.

I use the term labour unions to refer to an organisation of workers that have come together to collectively pursue the goal of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment. The term labour union is commonly used in developing countries and, as the developing world is where this research is situated, I have elected to use this instead of trade union, the term more commonly used in New Zealand and other Western countries. The focus will be on development literature originating from Anglo-Saxon countries and India, as such it may not be representative of the development discourse in other regions.¹

Modernisation theory was the dominant development discourse in the 1950s and 1960s. It claimed that development aid and policies could help traditional societies with economies dominated by agriculture to develop in a linear fashion to modern societies with high industrial output and high levels of consumption. Development interventions were to be focussed on assisting the process of urbanisation, industrial growth and international trade. Prominent modernisation literature in from the 1950s and 1960s does not mention a role for labour unions in the modernisation process (Apter, 1965; Rostow, 1960) with the exception of

¹ For practical reasons only literature published in English has been included in this review. While this encompasses a wide range of publications from a number of different countries it may mean that some literature relevant to the topic but written in a different language is excluded. As a result development literature and ideas from Anglo-Saxon countries is potentially privileged.

Lipset (1959) who acknowledges labour unions as actors in the process of building a culture of democratic decision-making.

While the literature concerned with modernisation fails to fully address the question of unions as development actors, the dependency literature (that responded to critiques of modernisation) saw a clear role for them. At its core dependency theory argued that the trade and economic relationship between the periphery (developing countries such as those in Latin America) and the centre (developed countries such as those in Europe) was unequal and exploitative (Frank, 1967). Dependency theory proposed periphery countries cut trade with the centre and focus on developing their own higher value industries.

Labour unions were seen as having a role to play in the process of development as espoused by dependency theorists. According to dependency theorist Victor Urquidí “unions play an important role in economic development” (1962, p. 72) because they support the even distribution of development gains. As such he argues unions should be fully involved in economic policy making

This view of labour unions as significant actors in the development process is echoed by high profile dependency theorist Raul Prebisch. Under his leadership the Economic Commission for Latin America made a persuasive argument that stronger labour unions in periphery countries would improve the ability of periphery workers to demand wage increase and, in doing so, help reduce the terms of trade gap between periphery and centre countries that drives underdevelopment (United Nations, 1963).

However, the shift to a neoliberal policy climate in the 1980s and 1990s saw mention of unions in development literature and policy recede significantly. In fact, where labour unions did feature, they were commonly framed as problematic to the pursuit of free market policies by governments (Fields & Jr., 1989). Fields & Jr’s analysis of economic growth policies in East Asian countries concludes that ‘militant labour unions’ and government-mandated minimum wages: “impede growth of employment and output and hence do little to help country-wide poverty” (1989, p. 1481). This effectively situates labour unions as anti-development actors as their pursuit of higher wages for workers

reduces the growth of employment and thus opportunities for people to work and gain income.

The view of labour unions as anti-development actors seems to have been widely shared by the global financial institutions that were major players in development policy during this period. According to Preston (1996) the curbing of labour union power was a central tenet of neoliberal development policy in the 1980s and a common proposal put forward by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank at the time. In line with a softening of its approach and growing recognition of the importance of pro-poor policies the World Bank appears to have refined its position on labour unions in the 1990s and it began to offer a more nuanced but nonetheless sceptical view of the role for unions in development (development here being viewed primarily as economic growth and material wellbeing). A 1995 World Bank report notes the positive impact unions often have on income equality but is highly critical of labour unions' resistance to structural adjustment reforms in developing countries (World Bank, 1995).

Labour unions do not appear to occupy the same negative space in contemporary development discourse as they did during the height of the neoliberal period in the 1980s, however neither are they seen as important actors for development. The role of labour unions as agents for poverty alleviation and development is generally viewed as insignificant and declining by recent mainstream development literature (Black, 1999; V. Desai & Potter, 2014; Peet & Hartwick, 2009; Rugendyke, 2007).

Some of the literature recognises the important role labour unions have played in the development sphere but emphasises they are now being replaced by other actors (Eade & Leather, 2005; Peet & Hartwick, 2009; Rugendyke, 2007). Rugendyke (2007) refers to the 'historic role' of labour unions in social responsibility and corporate accountability while outlining the new 'dynamic' role of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in creating ethical trade. Similarly *Theories of Development* (Peet & Hartwick, 2009) describes labour unions as having an increasingly limited role in development with other actors taking their place. Peet and Hartwick (2009) refer to labour unions only once and do so to

argue that their role as agents for social change and ethical development is being usurped by other organisations and movements.

“Recent social movement theory, often focused on the Third World, stresses the rise to prominence of new movements independent of traditional trade unions or organized political parties – for example, squatter movements [...] indigenous associations, women’s associations, human rights committees, youth assemblages,” (2009, p. 286).

The position of labour unions as minor development actors is reinforced by their broad omission from a number of academic text books that are commonly used to introduce students to the concepts, practises and actors in development studies. Both *Theories and Practices of Development* (Willis, 2011) and *Introduction to International Development* (Schafer, Haslam, & Beaudet, 2009) provide a strong case for the importance and global reach of specific large NGOs such as Oxfam and World Vision, but labour unions are not mentioned as development actors. This is particularly notable as both text books provide coverage of campaigns for the living wage and fair trade, two movements which labour unions have either helped instigate or facilitate (Fairtrade International, 2015; Living Wage Foundation, 2016).

Some development literature does briefly mention labour unions, but focuses on ancillary aspects of their work rather than the core function of collective bargaining. *The Companion to Development Studies* (V. Desai & Potter, 2014) and *Poverty Reduction that Works* (Steele, Fenrando, & Weddikkara, 2008) refer to labour unions four times in total. However, neither of these two texts mention the role of labour unions as collective bodies able to bargain for better wages and conditions for their members. Instead V. Desai and Potter (2014) detail the role labour unions can play in educating citizens in the ‘global north’ about development issues, by providing their members and the wider public with information about the economic and social injustices faced by workers in the ‘global south’. Both Steele et al. (2008) and V. Desai and Potter (2014) refer to the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India as a labour union and development actor. However, both books focus on SEWA’s support for small cooperative businesses rather than any efforts by SEWA to undertake the more traditional union activities of collective bargaining, advocacy and legal support for workers.

Labour unions are not only seen as minor development actors in development literature, they appear to also be viewed as peripheral actors in the major international and national development forums and strategies. The IMF and World Bank backed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) have formed the framework for development policy in over sixty developing countries. The strategies are intended to be 'country owned' and be developed and implemented in consultation with civil society, including labour unions (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 1999; Klugman, 2002). However Egulu (2004) provides persuasive research from the World Bank's own review of the PRSP process, suggesting that consultation with labour unions has been ad hoc and, in some countries, unions have been totally left out of the process. In countries where labour unions were involved in the formulation of PRSPs there is strong evidence that their influence was limited, for example: "Sri Lanka's PRSP proposes privatization and labour law reforms despite opposition of trade unions" (Egulu, 2004, p. 53). The marginalisation of labour unions in the PRSP process is not necessarily unique, the process' engagement with civil society actors in general has been criticised as shallow (Stewart & Wang, 2003).

The exclusion of labour unions from the PRSPs is consistent with the New Zealand Aid Programme's strategies that also appear to give little priority to labour rights and labour unions. The International Development Policy Statement refers to "strengthening labour standards" but only in the context of aiming to provide a "business enabling environment" (NZAID, 2011, p. 36). The New Zealand Aid Programme's Investment Priorities 2015-19 doesn't refer to developing labour unions however it does state the Aid Programme should support development partners to implement standards in accordance with international labour treaties (New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade Aid Programme, 2015). This suggests that the Aid Programme recognises the right of workers in developing countries to organise labour unions and collectively bargain but stops short of actively facilitating such activities.

2.3 Critiques of labour unions from the development sector

While the recent development literature reviewed above marginalises or neglects the role of labour unions, a small number of contemporary

development books go against this general theme and give substantial space to discussing the contribution of labour unions to development (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engerg-Perderson, 2003; Eade & Leather, 2005). However, this does not refute the proposition that labour unions aren't seen as development actors because both mention labour unions in the context of their uneasy relationship with the development field. Indeed Eade and Leather (2005) were motivated by one of the authors personal experience that "many NGOs basically ignore labour unions altogether as civil society organizations," (Eade & Leather, 2005, p. 10). The critiques of labour unions meted out by NGOs, academics and others in the development field provide some useful insight into why unions are marginalised in the other literature reviewed.

The strongest criticism levelled at labour unions by official aid agencies and development NGOs is that they narrowly serve the interests of their members and these may not be the same interests as those of the poor. Instead, they argue that labour unions represent the relatively well paid and secure workers in developing countries' industrial and public sectors (Eade & Leather, 2005; John Degnbol-Martinussen, 2003; Kambhampati, 2004). The poorest workers in developing countries, those in the informal economy and agricultural sector, are generally seen to be beyond the reach of labour unions (Eade & Leather, 2005). By supporting relatively well-off formal workers and doing little to progress the incomes and conditions of poorer informal workers, labour unions are seen by some as perpetuating existing economic inequities within developing countries and contributing to growing income inequality (World Bank, 2013).

The development credentials of labour unions have also been undermined by certain instances where they have failed to fully embody the principle of participation which is an integral part of the development ethos. While theoretically democratic bodies, labour unions in developing countries (as well as developed) have on occasion coerced workers to become members or cut members out of the decision-making process (Eade & Leather, 2005; John Degnbol-Martinussen, 2003). This may take the form of autocratic control by an individual union leader, or cliques, whom manipulate funds, procedures and elections to ensure a monopoly of power (Eade & Leather, 2005). On the other hand, Gallin (2000) also notes that cases of undemocratic and corrupt labour

unions exist but stresses they are few, and similar instances of poor practice can be found in the NGO sector too.

Tensions also exist between development NGOs and labour unions because of a supposed lack of equity in the internal processes of labour unions. In particular, labour unions' record of promoting gender equity, an important tenet of good development, has been regularly called into question. Development NGOs suggest that in many instances unions have failed to both recruit woman members and promote women to leadership positions (Gallin, 2000). Eade and Leather (2005) strongly agree with this analysis, stating that labour unions' "poor record on gender and ethnic equity" (2005, p. 10) has been a barrier to greater cooperation between labour unions and development NGOs.

Despite these critiques of labour unions by other development actors, Eade and Leather (2005) and John Degenbol-Martinussen (2003) both advocate a role for labour unions in development. Eade and Leather (2005) state that criticisms levelled at labour unions hold some merit but they also make a compelling case for increased cooperation between labour unions and development NGOs in order to achieve better development outcomes and to keep the rights of vulnerable people on the international agenda.

This brief review of development literature reveals the changing position of labour unions in development discourse over the past 50 years. Labour unions have shifted from being viewed as positive agents for development during the dependency theory era to more of an impediment to development during the neoliberal period of the 1980s and 1990s. At present, it appears labour unions are largely absent from development discourse as other civil society organisations have emerged to meet the needs of the developing world's poor workers.

2.4 Informal workers and unions

It is argued that labour unions' failure to successfully engage with workers from the informal economy at a significant scale is the primary factor underlying their lack of recognition as development actors (Eade & Leather, 2005). Some authors suggest that labour unions have neglected informal workers because they mistakenly view informal work as a transitory economic phenomenon or

don't truly value the work and rights of women whom make up the majority of the informal economy (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Gallin, 2001; Horn, 2002). However, as the union movement internationally has made organising the informal economy a greater priority (Burrow, 2016), it is clear that there are also substantial practical challenges that are limiting the ability of labour unions to successfully engage with and organise informal workers. Indeed, there is debate as to whether it is even feasible for informal workers in developing countries to organise into unions and undertake effective collective bargaining. This section provides some context to the informal economy and its significance to development studies. It goes on to explore the barriers to union organising and collective bargaining in the informal economy that prevent labour unions from playing a greater role in improving the livelihoods of informal workers in developing countries.

The informal economy comprises half to three-quarters of all non-agricultural employment in developing countries (ILO, 2016). The basic description of informal work is work that is not recognised or protected under legal and regulatory frameworks (Gallin, 2002). While types of informal work vary, it is generally associated with poor employment conditions and greater likelihood of poverty. The informal economy is comprised of a broad range of occupations and types of work. These include informal employers such as small shop owners; the informal self-employed such as street vendors; informal wage earners such as domestic workers; and some factory workers and sub-contracted workers linked to formal enterprises (for example home tailors supplying a garment factory) (Chen, 2012). Some common features of informal work include a lack of protection in the event of non-payment of wages, compulsory overtime or extra shifts, lay-offs without notice or compensation, unsafe working conditions and the absence of social benefits such as pensions, sick pay and health insurance (ILO, 2016).

The informal economy is heterogeneous and a number of informal workers have relatively high incomes and may have willingly chosen informality, however, in general informal workers exist in conditions of survival and are typically the poorest and most vulnerable workers in developing countries (ILO, 2010). On average incomes in the informal economy are lower than in the formal economy (WIEGO, 2015). Furthermore, incomes tend to decline as one

moves across the following types of informal employment: from employer to self-employed to informal wage workers and homeworkers (WIEGO, 2015). It is this association with poverty and vulnerability that makes informal workers a priority for development practitioners and academics; addressing the issues of informal work can contribute to poverty alleviation and development for millions of people.

Some literature suggests that the scarcity of labour unions and collective bargaining in the informal economy may be due in part to the reluctance of established formal sector labour unions to engage with informal workers (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Gallin, 2001; Mather, 2012). Some labour unions wrongly saw the informal economy as a transitory phenomenon which would disappear as developing country's economies modernised² (Gallin, 2001). Furthermore, some traditional unionists view self-employed informal workers more as self-employed entrepreneurs than workers (someone employed and paid solely for their labour) and thus believe they fall outside the labour union ambit (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Mather, 2012). However, this view is unlikely to still be widespread and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has emphasised the importance of labour unions organising informal workers (Burrow, 2016). A possible reason for continued reluctance on the part of some formal sector labour unions is that their leadership is predominantly male, whereas the informal sector has a significant proportion of women workers (Eade & Leather, 2005; Gallin, 2002). However, neither factor adequately explains why informal workers themselves haven't acted to form their own unions in any great number.

A more convincing explanation is that labour unions lack the resources to organise informal workers (Eade & Leather, 2005; Gallin, 2001). This argument is consistent with Bonner and Spooner (2011) and Chant and Pedwell (2008) who note that informal workers typically have scattered workplaces such as individual homes and streets, making the physical task of contacting informal

² The forces of neoliberalism and globalisation have slowed or reversed the transition towards formalisation of work in a number of developing and developed countries. Privatisation of public sector roles dismantled many formal jobs, particularly in the former Soviet states. Globalisation has enabled multi-national corporations to sub-contract out more of the work in their supply chains. Work that was once done 'in-house' by formally employed workers is now undertaken by cascading sub-contracting outfits with wages and conditions generally deteriorating as one moves from the centre to the periphery (Gallin, 2001).

workers and arranging meetings a resource intensive and time consuming process for union organisers. Gallin (2002) extrapolates on this argument by noting the spending restrictions on existing labour unions. Labour unions already established in the formal workforce are primarily tasked with improving the wages and conditions of their existing fee paying members and may not feel able to justify the risk and expense of expanding their membership to include informal workers (Gallin, 2002).

A lack of resources is an ongoing challenge. Because informal workers are often poor and their employment is frequently temporary and highly mobile, there is an added challenge of getting and retaining membership fees even after informal workers have been organised into a union (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Devenish & Skinner, 2004; Schurman & Eaton, 2013; Spooner, 2012). This appears to be a significant challenge to the sustainability of informal workers' unions, whether formed through the organising efforts of a pre-existing 'formal' union or by the organising efforts of the informal workers themselves. A lack of resources is likely to be a particularly salient barrier to the ability of informal workers to organise their own unions and goes some way to explaining why self-organised unions of informal workers are not active in any great number, at least in India (Ahn, 2013).

Finally, there are substantial legal challenges to both organising informal workers into unions and achieving gains through collective bargaining. Informal workers generally fall outside the legal framework that affords formal workers with rights and protection around which to organise, including right of union access to workplaces (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; ILO, 2002). For instance, some countries exclude domestic workers from coverage of freedom of association laws (ILO, 2002). Even where legal coverage exists for informal workers, enforcement in the informal economy may be weak. Because of the precarious nature of their employment – no formal contract – informal workers may be reluctant to join a labour union for fear of reprisal (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; ILO, 2002; Kabeer, Milward, & Sudarshan, 2013).

Where informal workers have been organised, or organised themselves into a union, their ability to achieve livelihood improvements through bargaining is by no means certain. This is a concern raised by Ratnam (1999) and Datta (2003)

who warn that the lack of legal protection for informal workers coupled with the large number of people unemployed or underemployed in India has meant that employers can easily replace workers instead of ceding to their demands. This places informal workers in a weak bargaining position and Ratnam (1999) states that “collective agreements in the informal sector meant, in many cases, workers agreeing to less than the minimum wages in order to protect their jobs” (p. 34). These concerns are well-founded and the political and economic context of developing countries like India makes unionising not only difficult for informal workers but risky. However, Ratnam (1999) also noted that lack of compliance with minimum wages was widespread in India at this time so it is not clear whether collective bargaining actually made workers worse off.

The lack of a legally recognised employer-employee relationship, even where a disguised relationship exists, poses particular challenges to informal workers undertaking collective bargaining (Gallin, 2001). The ILO states that “a major problem faced by informal economy workers is their lack of defined interface with whom they need dialogue.” (2002, p. 75) This is consistent with Bonner and Spooner (2011) and Horn (2005) who argue that without traditional collective bargaining forums informal workers struggle to bring employers and authorities to the bargaining table and to enforce agreements.

There is one final factor undermining the potential for successful collective bargaining by informal workers that is rarely noted in the literature. That is that informal workers are sometimes too poor to undertake strike action as the foregone income is vital to their daily survival. This was viewed as an important factor undermining the bargaining efforts of home-based quilt workers in Ahmedabad (Hill, 2010). Collective bargaining (which potentially includes strike action) is a central tenet of labour unionism and one of the primary means of instigating and achieving livelihood improvements for union members. If informal workers cannot successfully engage in collective bargaining, their ability to achieve the changes they want in their lives through the mode of labour unionism is substantially reduced.

It is clear that there are significant challenges to organising a union of informal workers and undertaking successful collective bargaining for better wages and conditions. The extent of these obstacles provides an explanation of why

unionism is not more prevalent amongst informal workers even though they clearly could benefit from the legal support and collective action that unions can provide. If labour unions are to be seen as important development actors they will need to overcome some or all of these challenges to take a greater role in supporting the aspirations of poor informal workers in developing countries.

2.5 Strategies for informal workers to organise

The previous section canvassed a range of obstacles to the organising of informal workers into unions and to successful collective bargaining by informal worker unions. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that there are no successful examples of informal worker unions. In particular, a number of labour unions have been established in the informal economy in India, including most famously the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) that has 1.3 million members (Budlender, 2013). This section of the literature review explores what strategies can be employed to first organise informal workers into a union and then to undertake successful collective bargaining for better wages and conditions. It gives particular reference to case studies from India as this is the research location for this thesis. While understanding the strategies for organising informal workers is valuable, the core focus of this thesis is on collective bargaining strategies of informal worker unions and as such this section will remain relatively brief.

There is debate as to whether informal workers are best organised into unions by existing formal sector unions and/or NGOs or by themselves. Gallin (2002) and Kapoor (2007) provide several examples of formal sector unions from within and outside of developing countries successfully organising their informal economy counterparts, including Unite the textile union in Canada which has organised informal home garment workers in developing countries.

Furthermore, Ratnam (1999) suggests informal workers should be organised by established and respected unions as informal workers face a high risk of dismissal if organising themselves. However, the dominate position in the literature is that informal workers are likely to be best placed to organise themselves. This is because they have the trust of other workers and understand the daily challenges they face (Hill, 2010; Kapoor, 2007; Spooner,

2012), although some advice and financial support from formal sector unions and NGOs can be of assistance (Ahn, 2013; Sundaram, 2000).

Education is commonly seen as a vital early step in the process of organising informal workers. Educating informal workers is important to help them understand what rights they have, the nature of the injustice they experience, their shared identity as workers and the power of collective action (Castillo, Frohlich, & Orsatti, 2002; Delvaux, 2002; Kabeer et al., 2013). Education typically takes place during meetings, but other innovative approaches exist such as using radio to get messages into workers' homes (Kabeer et al., 2013), creating study circles (Ahn, 2013) and street theatre (ILO, 2002).

Contacting and educating informal workers may be insufficient to convince them to organise into a union. One strategy for overcoming this inertia is to wait and organise around a 'lightning rod' issue when it arises (Ahn, 2013; Nayak, 2013). Issues that can catalyse informal workers to organise include employer or police brutality, decreases in income and severe workplace accidents (Ahn, 2013; Kabeer et al., 2013).

An important strategy to assist the organising of informal workers is for labour unions to offer collective social and financial services in addition to traditional collective bargaining and advocacy actions. Informal workers have diffuse needs that are often unmet by their employers and the state. Needs such as childcare while at work, basic education, access to health insurance, housing support, and credit and savings services are commonly raised as concerns equal to if not greater than income, job security and workplace safety (ILO, 2002; Smith, 2006). A number of authors emphasise that a 'trade union plus activities' model that offers collective services such as childcare, credit and savings unions, and access to health insurance and social housing helps attract informal workers to join unions (Delvaux, 2002; Kabeer et al., 2013; Kapoor, 2007; Nayak, 2013).

The literature provides some clear strategies for overcoming the obstacles to organising informal workers into unions despite the many difficulties already discussed. There is clear evidence that strategies such as direct contact, education, catalysing on 'lightening rod' issues and offering additional social services can be successful in organising workers into a union in which they are

active participants. The success of such strategies can be seen in the small but growing list of organised unions in the informal sector, including SEWA.

2.6 Strategies for informal workers to collectively bargain

Organising into a union is not the end goal of workers but a means through which they can start achieving better incomes, safety, social security and livelihoods. When the success stories of informal economy labour unions are looked at closely, it is evident that they often combine, or even favour, cooperative style activities with the conventional role of collective bargaining (Horn, 2005; Levin, 2002). This is best exemplified by SEWA which takes a dual approach to 'struggle' (collective bargaining and advocacy) and 'development' (cooperatives and collective services) (Kapoor, 2007). An exploration of how cooperative development and labour union development can be combined to meet the needs of workers in the informal economy is worthy of further research but is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Collective bargaining or 'struggle' remains a core vehicle through which union members can gain better work conditions, income and welfare access (Bonner, 2013). This is particularly true for informal workers that are directly employed but without formal contracts or security, and for workers that are nominally self-employed but with a dependent employee-employer type relationship such as home tailors selling direct to a single larger factory. For these workers, collective bargaining can be a feasible option for achieving better incomes and other livelihood improvements (Sen, 2012). For other workers, such as street vendors, that have a less clear or non-existent employer-employee relationship, the collective 'struggle' is more likely to take the shape of advocacy with government, municipal authorities and other entities on issues that affect all workers within that informal occupation but bargaining around wages is less likely to be on the agenda (Bonner, 2013).

Some of the challenges to collective bargaining were outlined in section 2.4 of the literature review including: lack of recognition, absence of bargaining mechanisms, a lack of leverage due to insecure employment. This section of the literature review will explore what strategies can be employed by unions of informal workers to address these challenges and undertake successful

collective bargaining to improve their incomes as well as working and living conditions.

The most compelling and seemingly common strategy is for informal labour unions in India to defer attempts to bargain directly with employers and instead focus their demands towards municipal and state governments (Agarwala, 2007; Budlender, 2013; Kabeer et al., 2013; Nayak, 2013; Ratnam, 1999; Wells & Jason, 2010; Women, 2012). The argument for this strategy rests on the principle that while employers can often avoid engaging in bargaining with labour unions or replace their workers, elected municipal and state governments cannot. By collectively bargaining for recognition by state and municipal authorities as workers, and using that as a platform to bargain for improved access to healthcare, education for children, pensions and a range of other state welfare provisions informal labour unions can gain significant improvements to the livelihoods of their members (Agarwala, 2007).

Agarwala (2007) claims that informal workers hold leverage over municipal and state authorities that are pursuing a liberal economic agenda as their continued cheap and flexible labour is a vital part of this policy. Agarwala (2007) cites the more generous extension of welfare benefits in the economically liberal state of Tamil Nadu than Communist Party ruled West Bengal as evidence of the added bargaining leverage informal labour unions have in liberal economic settings, but provides little analysis of the numerous other factors that could have influenced this outcome. Bargaining with state and municipal authorities for recognition and welfare may be the most common strategy, but it does not appear to be the only option. Ahn (2013) and Horn (2005) argue that collective bargaining with private employers remains an option, and in some cases a necessity, to achieving informal workers aims (Horn, 2005). Where increases in wages are the key demand of informal workers, the focus of bargaining often must be on the employer. Identifying and engaging the appropriate employer where the employment relationship is hidden – such as women working from home sewing parts of garments on a contract basis for large factories - is often the first challenge that must be overcome.

Indian Academy for Self Employed Women (2012) draws upon the collective bargaining efforts of home based bidi (cigarette) workers as a powerful example

of successful bargaining with private employers. The bidi workers' union in Rajasthan state, formed by SEWA, bargained directly with the factory owners they supply to gain an increase in the rates they received. Between 2009 and 2010 several bargaining rounds resulted in the rate workers received increasing from 45 rupees per 1,000 bidis to 80 rupees (Indian Academy for Self Employed Women, 2012).

A further tactic that may support successful collective bargaining for informal workers is to start with only small demands. Small demands such as to be paid on time or to be provided with basic safety equipment improves the chances of initial success (Bonner, 2013; Indian Academy for Self Employed Women, 2012; Kapoor, 2007). Initial successes can help build the confidence of union members for further bargaining and may also help develop trust and understanding with the employer or government bargaining counter-parts (Bonner, 2013; Horn, 2005). Starting small may, however, run counter to Nayak (2013) and Ahn (2013)'s suggestion that informal workers organise to respond to a serious and immediate 'lightening rod issue'.

For successful collective bargaining, labour unions typically require some form of leverage over their counter-part, however there is debate as to whether the traditional union strategy of withdrawing labour – strike action – can also be a successful strategy for informal worker unions. Both Bonner (2013) and Sundar (2011) suggest that informal workers can indeed employ strike action as a bargaining strategy, particularly if they work in strategically important roles such as maintenance of the electricity grid (Sundar, 2011). Others argue that the vulnerable employment position of informal workers means that strike action is likely to be a costly and ineffective strategy (Ahn, 2013; Horn, 2005). Because informal workers can be replaced with relative ease and with no legal ramifications, strike action does not hold the same leverage over employers as it does in the formal sector and places great risk on the workers. As an alternative, it is suggested that unions representing informal workers could pursue a strategy of protests and media support to put pressure on their bargaining counterparts (Horn, 2005).

With or without strike action there is broad consensus that seeking support from allies is an important strategy to assist the collective bargaining efforts of

informal workers. Solidarity actions such as the joining of protests by other organisations such as churches, NGOs and formal sector unions can increase pressure on bargaining counterparts (Horn, 2005). The importance of labour union and development NGO relations can be seen here as the aims of informal workers such as living wages, safe conditions and access to social welfare, are likely to be held in common. Furthermore, cultivating allies within the media and government can help informal worker unions create greater public awareness and support for their demands (Bonner, 2013). Allies can also offer advice and technical support such as the advice SEWA offers smaller unions of informal workers (Kapoor, 2007).

The collective bargaining strategies explored in this section are drawn from a variety of informal economy occupations including but not limited to: street vending, domestic work, home-based work, construction, waste picking, brick making and bidi making. It is unclear whether these same strategies can be successful in other occupations with different employment and economic conditions. The need for further research is raised by Mather (2012) who states that there is little known about collective bargaining for informal workers in different sectors “where the successes have been, where not, and why” (p. 6).

2.7 Cremation Workers in India

One occupation in India that appears to have a large proportion of informally employed workers, but for which there is currently no detailed study of union organising and collective bargaining strategies, is the cremation (or occasionally burial) of dead bodies. Cremation workers are typically amongst some of the poorest members of Indian society, with some workers earning as less than NZ\$2 a day to support their family (Wilson, 2007) and many lacking access to social welfare and health services ("Cremation workers' conference", 2005). In other cases the informal nature of their employment relationships means they can go unpaid for periods of time with little ability to seek recourse ("Crematorium workers", 2014). Furthermore, cremation has significant associated health and safety risks that are often inadequately addressed for the workers (Karthikeyan, 2008).

There appears to be no accurate figure for the total number of cremation workers in India as the government does not include it as an occupation in its labour surveys. However, the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India has an estimated 200,000 workers involved in cremation out of a total population of 72 million ("Cremation workers' conference", 2005; Census Organization of India, 2011). This figure was also quoted by the Tamil Nadu Labour Union during my own field research, though it is important to note that outside of urban areas few of these men and women were engaged in cremation work full time. Whatever the actual figure it is reasonable to suggest that there are hundreds of thousands of cremation workers in India whom are working informally and experiencing conditions of poverty and injustice.

Cremation work is part of the informal economy. Most of the workers do not have permanent employment or wages, but rely largely on one-off payments for service from the families of the dead. They are men and women with low incomes and vulnerable employment that, theoretically could benefit from the collective power of a labour union but for whom the process of organising into a union and undertaking collective bargaining is very challenging. It is the inability to successfully support the aspirations of informal workers, like cremation workers, to improve their livelihoods that is one of the core reasons why labour unions are viewed as peripheral actors in development rather than a powerful force for justice and poverty alleviation.

The literature review has canvassed a range of challenges to organising unions in the informal economy and undertaking collective bargaining as well as potential strategies to overcome these. However, the informal economy is highly heterogeneous and there is still a paucity of information about what collective bargaining strategies and tactics informal workers in different work contexts can effectively implement. My research seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring the activities, strategies and achievements of a cremation workers' labour union in Tamil Nadu – the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. The cremation workers are a highly vulnerable group, without any clear employer-employee relationship, and are scattered geographically. As such, they provide an interesting and important case study through which the ability of informal workers to improve their livelihoods through collective

bargaining can be assessed, and the impact of particular strategies can be better understood.

The larger debate this research is seeking to contribute to is whether or not labour unions should be considered as agents for development. Assessing the ability and limitations of informal workers to collectively bargain for better incomes and livelihoods is an important part of this debate, as labour unions' historical failure to support informal workers is a key barrier to them being seen as development actors. However, there are other criticisms raised of labour unions in the development literature: that labour unions are not participatory in practise, that they do not deliver sustainable change and that they do not promote equity. These are important criticisms for, along with delivering material improvements in people's livelihoods, the promotion of participation, sustainability and equity are all, in my view, pillars of 'good development' as discussed in chapter five.

Despite the seriousness of these critiques, they do not appear to have been analysed in any great depth. My research aims to address this gap by assessing how participatory, sustainable and equitable the processes and outcomes of the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam have been. In doing so it hopes to inform and spark future debate around the role of labour unions as agents for good development.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Any Master's student undertaking research for the first time is required to navigate a range of decisions that ultimately effect the end results of the research. The aim of this chapter is to detail my philosophical approach to research and explain how this shaped the methodology I pursued and my interactions and interpretations in the field. It explores some of the personal factors that shaped my research in the field and also discusses the ethical challenges I faced in carrying out the research.

In the first section I explain how my research was informed by a subtle realist philosophy (Hammersley, 1991). In particular I argue that while an objective reality may exist our ability to accurately view and describe it is curbed by various social influences. Flowing from this subtle realist world view is a belief that knowledge is socially constructed, formed through social interaction and the cultural and historical norms that guide each individual's life. As such, the goal of my research is to understand, as best possible, the cremation workers' lived experience and their view of the union and its impact on their livelihoods.

In the second section of the chapter I detail the qualitative methodology that I employed to carry out the research. From the choice of a case study method through to the selection of semi-structured interview techniques and the use of secondary data sources, my methodological approach shaped the research findings and subsequent discussion.

The third section of the chapter reflects on my positionality and how it influenced my relationships and interpretations in the field. In doing so I hope to provide the reader with some transparency in regard to the research process and possible biases.

3.2 Subtle realist foundations

As an emerging researcher in the field of development studies one is encouraged to explore a bewildering array of philosophical positions from which to choose a foundation for your research. As a somewhat pragmatic thinker, the

process of aligning with an ontological and epistemological stance was a challenging one for me. Neither of the core ontological positions – realism and relativism – that characterise the philosophical debate in Development Studies and the social sciences as a whole are satisfying positions for me.

The realist end of the spectrum contends that one true reality exists and it exists apart from human influence or understanding. However, this ignores the impact that cultural and social norms as well as personal attributes may have in shaping the way in which the researcher observes ‘reality’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). By discounting the viewpoints of others as illegitimate, a realist approach to development research can be close-minded and intolerant, values which are at odds with Development Studies core motivation to empower the poor and vulnerable (Baghramian & Carter, 2015).

In its most absolute conception, relativism theorises that multiple realities exist, all constructed by the human mind and our social interactions, and that each person’s version of reality is no more valid than any other (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, if there are multiple realities, none having precedence over the other, then findings cannot claim to be the basis for action or social change (Bury, 1986). It is my belief that Development Studies has a moral obligation to inform and inspire change for a better world. As such, an extreme relativist approach that refrains from offering ideas and possible solutions is, in my opinion, not only of questionable value, but opposed to the very purpose that I, as a development researcher, wish to serve.

There are elements of both realism and relativism that I believe are valuable, and as such, rather than aligning with either of these extreme ends of the realist and relativist spectrum, I have opted for an approach that draws together aspects of both – subtle realism. The term was coined by Mark Hammersley who provides the following explanation.

“We can maintain a belief in the existence of phenomena independent of our claims about them, and in their knowability, without assuming that we can have unmediated contact with them and therefore that we can know with certainty whether our knowledge of them is valid or invalid. The most promising strategy for resolving the problem ... is to adopt a more subtle form of realism.” (1991, p. 50)

Subtle realism acknowledges the existence of an objective reality but argues that social, cultural and other factors obscure our ability to observe it. Subtle realism posits that the researcher is endeavouring to represent reality but from their perspective and as such any claims must be made cautiously. The emphasis on representation rather than reproduction of reality implicitly acknowledges the researcher's influence on the research process and findings (Andrews, 2012).

By blending aspects of realism and relativism, subtle realism frees the social researcher to choose from a range of epistemological positions. It is thus this choice that is likely to have the greater impact on the research design and outcomes.

3.3 A social constructivism approach

Social constructivism is the epistemological approach on which I have based my research and methodological choices. Social constructivism maintains that knowledge is constructed through social interactions rather than discovered solely by the inquiry of the mind. While social constructivism is an epistemology most often associated with relativism it is not incompatible with the subtle realist ontological position. One can believe that knowledge and concepts are constructed yet maintain that they correspond to something in the real world (Andrews, 2012).

My previous concern about the limited value of research if all findings are relative is echoed in some realist critiques of social constructivism (Boghossian, 2006; Hacking, 1999). However, these critiques are typically levelled at extreme versions of the epistemology. In practice the majority of studies that use social constructivism adopt a mild social constructionist approach. This entails exploring and giving precedence to what participants believe about the social world but also checking participants' views against what is already 'factually' known about the world based on other forms of evidence (Maxwell, 2013; Sismondo, 1993).

While research stemming from the social constructivism epistemology may be cautious about making definitive and universal claims, it can aspire to have reasonable confidence in its validity by judging its logic and testing it against

what is already known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hammersley, 1991).

Triangulation can also strengthen the validity of theories derived from a social constructionist perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

3.4 Putting philosophy into practise – a qualitative case study

Emanating from my social constructivism stance was a decision to undertake qualitative research, as this best enables me as a researcher to understand the lived experience of the cremation workers from their own perspective (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Qualitative research seeks not only to understand the relations between cause and effect, but to go deeper and explore what processes contributed to causation. By generating a better understanding of the processes that lead to outcomes, qualitative research offers far more potential for informing and assisting practitioners to develop better interventions in the field (Maxwell, 2013), and that is one of my objectives .

The qualitative research method I deemed to be most appropriate given my philosophical view and research aims was a case study. Gray (2004) argues that case studies are “particularly useful when the researcher is trying to uncover a relationship between a phenomenon and the context in which it is occurring” (p. 124). A case study is thus well suited to supporting my research aim of understanding how the cremation workers formed their union and what impact it has had on their livelihoods.

In one sense all research is a case study as it inevitably involves some unit or units of investigation. However, a case study is usually defined by having a focus on a very small number of cases or a single case (Silverman, 2005). For this research my focus will be on a single labour union operating in the informal economy in India, the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. This union of cremation workers in the state of Tamil Nadu was formed around 2005 and continues to function with approximately 20,000 members.

Mayana Vettiyanal is the Tamil term for the particular subset of the Dalit caste that do cremation work. Dalit is the term used to describe the lower castes in the Hindu caste system who are oppressed, forced to do dirty and demeaning work and denied the same rights as people in higher castes (Hunashimarad, 2014). Sangam is a Tamil term for union or group and is often associated with

women's groups. For ease of reading the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam will often be referred to simply as the Sangam in this thesis.

I selected this particular labour union because I had prior knowledge of it through my work with UnionAID (discussed below) but also because I believe, based on the contextual knowledge of labour unions in India's informal economy gathered in the literature review, that it represents the challenges and opportunities for labour unions in the informal economy well.

A common criticism of case study research is that it is not valid to make generalisations about theory, society and the field based on a single case (Gray, 2004; Silverman, 2005). This is a reasonable concern and in line with my subtle realist belief that it is wise to take a cautious approach to making definitive claims. However, scientific enquiries using other methods also need to be repeated numerous times before sound generalisations and theories can be made (Yin, 2009). A case study can provide a valuable starting point for further investigation and debate within the field and I would be wholly satisfied if this particular case study achieves just that.

The purposeful selection of an extreme case, or a case that is particularly illustrative of some important feature, may also help yield findings that are more likely to hold true for the wider population (Silverman, 2005). Selecting Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam as my case study was partially motivated by convenience, but it is also a case that provides a particularly meaningful example of the operation of labour unions in India's informal economy. The barriers to informal workers' organising and bargaining were noted in Chapter One as including: scattered work places, no obvious employer, low income (and thus fear of losing income) and lack of self-recognition as a worker. The Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam³ is a notable case because it illustrates a group of workers whom overcome all of these challenges to form a union. Furthermore Dalit cremation workers occupy one of the lowest positions in India's caste system and this presents additional social barriers to their organising and bargaining (Human Rights Watch & Center for Human Rights & Global Justice, 2007). Generalisations drawn from research of the Sangam are thus more liable to hold true for workers and labour unions in other informal occupations in India as

few groups of workers are likely to face greater barriers to organising or bargaining.

Case study research must be careful to ensure that internal generalisations are also valid. Gray (2004) states that internal validity can be compromised when a sample is too small in relation to the overall size of the organisation or community, or the sample is not representative, for example women's or elderly voices are not included. Establishing internal validity was a real challenge for my case study as the Sangam has over 20,000 members and I had only 3 weeks in the field so was restricted to interviewing no more than 40 people. However, I did endeavour to ensure that the sample of interviews undertaken during my field work was representative of the wider social make-up of the Sangam's membership. The selection of interviewees is described in detail in section 3.5 'Carrying out the research'.

The case study method encourages a researcher to draw on multiple data sources, an approach that supports the social constructivism epistemology (Yin, 2009). Secondary data sources such as media stories and government reports can be used to triangulate the claims and beliefs of the people whom are the primary source of research information. While triangulation cannot ascertain the certainty of findings nor invalidate the accounts of interviewees, it can help augment findings or give the researcher a better understanding of the limitations of the data and generalisations arising from it (Mason, 2002). My case study research drew on several data sources including interviews with the union members, archived newspaper articles and written reports from the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. These are discussed in more detail below.

3.5 Carrying out the research

In this section I will describe how I carried out the research, this includes an explanation of the sources of data I used, who I interacted with in the field and how we interacted. I briefly outline some of the most important factors and decisions that may have impacted on the research and the construction of knowledge there-in.

My primary means of data collection was semi-structured interviews with members of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. Semi-structured interviews were

chosen for both practical and ethical reasons. Given that the aim of my research was to explore how the union has impacted the livelihood of its members, I needed an approach that would encourage participants to provide descriptions of how their lives had changed and also how they viewed this change. This required that the method provide space for the interviewee to give examples of livelihood changes and for me to question and explore new issues that were introduced. This could not have been done through the use of questionnaires or structured interviews because their strict format would not have allowed me to follow up on new issues that emerged. As such a semi-structured interview approach was used.

Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to undertake the research in a more ethical manner. Research has the potential to create hierarchies between the interviewer and interviewee (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Therefore I wanted an interview approach that would challenge this division between the 'object' and the 'subject' by creating relationships based on "mutuality and respect" (England, 2006). I attempted to develop a rapport with interviewees before starting by asking about their day or other aspects of their life and sharing some of my own challenges with the local climate and travel. Furthermore all of the interviewees with the cremation workers were conducted in their local setting (often at the cremation grounds) where they were more likely to feel comfortable. I was also careful to ensure we always sat at the same level to reduce any impression of hierarchies. Through these efforts I hoped the interviewees felt their lives, experiences and knowledge were genuinely valued and the extent to which they may put me on a pedestal would be reduced (Scheyvens, Scheyvens, & Murray, 2014).

In total I interviewed 37 members of the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam. The majority of these interviews were set up with the help of Pandey, a senior staff member at the Tamil Nadu Labour Union (TNLU), who had helped organise and provide some training to the Sangam members during the union's formative years. He contacted the union members, informed them of the purpose of the research and arranged the meeting times and places. Each of the interviews were conducted with the assistance of a translator, Joshua Pradeep, who I had employed for this role and who had no direct involvement with the union or government. It is important to note that it is Joshua's translated words that are

the basis of the subsequent quotations in this thesis for all of the interviewees except Manohari Doss, whose interview was undertaken by me in English. Some of the quotations have had the pronouns edited so that the reader can easily attribute the quote to the correct interviewee.

With Pandey's assistance I selected interviewees that represented, as best as possible, the wider Sangam membership. This included a mix of members from urban cremation sites and rural cremation sites as illustrated in Figure 1 below. Five of the interviewees were women; this reflects the higher proportion of men in cremation work and the support role that women generally play in cremation work. There was a bias towards selecting members that occupied district or state-level leadership positions within the Sangam, including the president, deputy president and treasurer. This was intentional as these people were likely to have a greater understanding of the activities and strategies employed by the Sangam in its organising and bargaining.

Figure 1: Composition of Interviewees. Source: The author, based on interviews with cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, 2015)

All of these interviews took place in or near the community in which the cremation workers lived. Most of the interviews took place on the cremation sites themselves, while others were held at the worker's house or in a public space such as field or village square. Conducting the interviews at the cremation sites not only allowed me to observe the workplace context but also

helped the interviewees feel comfortable as I was not intruding on their personal space nor attracting too much public attention.

Finally, near the completion of my fieldwork, I interviewed Manohari Doss, president of the TNLU, and Pandey. Both Pandey and Manohari had played important roles in the formation of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and its early bargaining efforts. Their professional involvement with the union, coupled with their expert knowledge of development, labour rights, Dalit rights and unions in Tamil Nadu meant they had valuable insight into the Sangam and its impact.

It is also important to note those whom I did not interview and the impact of their omission on my research (Norris, 1997). Due to time constraints and ethical considerations I did not interview anyone from the village panchayats⁴, Madurai Corporation (municipal government) or families of the deceased all of whom, had at some time been the opposing party to the Sangam's bargaining efforts. This excluded voices whom may have had views on the impact of the cremation workers' union on the rest of the community. While this was outside of the scope of my research questions, an investigation on the wider social and economic impacts of the union is an important question and an area for potential future investigation.

Triangulation of data is important to building sound theories from case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989). To help verify and add depth to the data gathered through semi-structured interviews I accessed the TNLU's archive of printed newspaper articles relating to the actions and demands of the Sangam between 2006 and 2010. These articles provide a third party account of the union's public activities such as rallies and strikes.

A third data source I drew on for my research was reports written by Ross Wilson, President of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) based on meetings he had with TNLU staff and members of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam in 2007 and 2009. The NZCTU was funding the TNLU between 2007 and 2009 to organise and train the cremation workers and Ross Wilson made two visits to Tamil Nadu during this period to monitor and assess the activities

⁴ Village panchayats are elected committees of people in a village. They are legally recognised bodies tasked with self-governance of the community. The key role they play is administering some economic development and welfare programmes offered by the Indian government. Their powers vary from state to state and in Tamil Nadu they have some powers of taxation.

and outcomes of this project. His reports were written to inform NZCTU affiliate unions and members of its international committee about activities being run by the TNLU and what impact they were having on the livelihood of the cremation workers. Written at a different point in time and by a different person, these reports offer a useful secondary source to help augment or challenge the data gathered through my own semi-structured interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis

Analysing the data I collected from the interviews was a three step process. The initial step involved transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews, this included transcription of my questions and Joshua's translation of the interviewee's answers, along with any notes and observations such as interruptions. The process of transcription, while time consuming, allowed me to get familiar with the material and note some of the general themes that emerged (Lampard & Pole, 2015).

To get a more detailed analysis of the key themes from the interview data I used the NVivo qualitative data analysis software to code all of the transcriptions. This enabled me to group together the contributions of each interviewee that aligned with my key research questions and other important themes that emerged. When coding the interview data under each theme I was careful to ensure that I included both positive and negative examples as well as any qualifications (Woods, 2011). With these themes established I also read through the secondary data sources to identify and note material within them that was relevant to these themes.

The final step of my data analysis was to go back to the notes that I had taken in my diary during the interviews. These diary entries contained a range of observations and contextual information about the interviewees and also my own actions during the field interviews. Re-reading this contextual information helped ensure that the influence of factors such as time, place and interruptions by outsiders on the data I collected could be taken into account in my findings.

3.7 Positioning myself within the research

In this section I discuss some of the ways my positionality affected how the research process was carried out. I argue that the research process cannot be conducted in a “fully objective and value-free” manner (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16) and acknowledge that my own background, attributes and emotions played a role in shaping my research decisions, data collection and findings.

Through conscious self-reflection researchers can make explicit their potential influence on the research process and subject these to critical scrutiny, so that the reader may be able to peel back the layers of subjectivity and reveal something closer to the truth (Funder, 2005). However, I share the concerns of (Finlay, 2002) that reflexivity can be overly self-indulgent and a distraction from the participant’s voices: “the researcher’s position can become unduly privileged, blocking out the participant’s voice. Clearly we need to strike a balance, striving for enhanced self-awareness but eschewing navel gazing” (2002, p. 451). In order to strike a balance I have focussed this reflection on my positionality to just two aspects that I believe had a significant influence on the research process; my position as an employee of UnionAID and my position as an educated white man undertaking research in India with members of the Dalit caste.

3.7.1 Insider knowledge and bias

My background as a part-time employee of UnionAID was an element of my positionality that was evident as an influence throughout the research process. UnionAID is a small charity organisation founded in 2009 by the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions to fund international development projects with a focus on improving the livelihoods and rights of workers in the Asia-Pacific region. Between 2007 and 2010 the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions funded the TNLU to organise and educate cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, ultimately resulting in the formation of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. While UnionAID has not had direct contact with the Sangam, it has maintained the relationship with TNLU and has funded them to run several projects since 2010.

My position as an employee of UnionAID since 2014 means I already had a relationship with the subject of unions and some of the key actors (e.g. the

TNLU) and this has undoubtedly shaped my research. Holian and Coghlan (2013)'s recommendations to researchers with an existing 'insider' relationship with the subject of their research provide a useful starting point for reflecting on the influence of my UnionAID role throughout the research process. They suggest the insider researcher should consider "how what they already know impacts on what they can do, how they interpret observations and events, what they learn and what they can report, and the potential positive or negative impact on their ongoing work role," (2013, p. 403).

My role with UnionAID shaped the initial choice of topic both by sparking my interest in the role of unions in development and by making me aware of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam as a potential case study. Throughout the research process I reflected upon my dual roles as researcher and UnionAID employee in order to be conscious of how my pre-existing subject knowledge and generally positive view of unions may be influencing the research. I did so by frequently questioning whether someone else would ask the same questions, what questions I might be avoiding, and whether my judgements were fair and could withstand the scrutiny of others.

My position as a UnionAID employee also partially shaped my relationship with others during the data collection process, particularly TNLU staff. While my connection with the TNLU through UnionAID enabled me to gain access to the Sangam members that many other researchers may not have achieved, it also created potential tensions. The TNLU may have been inclined to use their position as 'gatekeepers' to select interviewees that were more likely to provide positive responses and thereby project a good image to me, if they saw me as a donor rather than researcher. I was aware of this risk associated with my positionality and stressed to the TNLU that my research would have no bearing on future funding, a promise which they appeared to take in good faith as a number of interviewees provided critical views of the union. Furthermore, I took the opportunity on several occasions to interview people at the cremation sites who hadn't been handpicked by the TNLU staffer assisting me.

Not only did my UnionAID position have a bearing on my own conduct but, through the close relationship it gave me with the TNLU, it potentially affected the relationship between myself and the interview participants. Chacko (2004)

states that how a researcher enters the field, the ways in which their contacts are made, and under whose auspices they work, impacts the way in which they are perceived by their research participants.

In the case of my research, I was reliant on the TNLU for access to the cremation workers and was accompanied by TNLU staff member Pandey to most of the interviews. While my position at UnionAID and the funding relationship with TNLU was not mentioned to the interviewees, I felt on some occasions that this connection was assumed given the TNLU's close role in facilitating the interviews. In one case, where the interviewee asked what I would be doing to help them, this view of me as a donor foremost and researcher second was certainly present.

3.7.2 A white researcher in India

In addition to my employment at UnionAID, my position as a 'Western' and white researcher in India was an obvious influence on my research. Chacko (2004) argues that attributes such as gender, ethnicity and class are markers that position us within deeply unequal social structures and thus inform the type and quality of relationships we have with research participants. The history of white colonialism and exploitation in India raises the likelihood of a white man like myself being viewed as an outsider and possibly an outsider to be feared or disliked (Thapar-Bjorkert & Henry, 2004).

I was very aware of my Western and white background when entering the field and of its potential to influence the way in which the interviewees saw me and the power dynamics between us. However when I actually conducted the interviews I felt that most of the cremation workers were willing to talk openly and honestly about their experiences with me and did not seem apprehensive or guarded. Indeed upon the completion of one interview the cremation worker told me "Thank you for coming all this way to do this research, no one has ever asked my story before". (CW6).

While cremation work in Tamil Nadu is typically a task for men, women also play a role and I wanted to ensure their views were taken into account in the research. I was aware before entering the field that my position as a man may present challenges in interviewing women workers as power relations between men and women are often unequal and in some countries women are not used

to being asked questions gender (Momsen, 2006). However with the five women I spoke to my male positionality did not present obvious challenges and the women appeared comfortable when speaking to me. Indeed on two occasions the women workers I spoke to also interrupted to add information to the interviews I conducted with their husbands.

While some of the interviews did reveal elements of unequal power between myself as Western male researcher and them as the poor developing country research participant, these were rare. One interviewee that appeared particularly nervous and overwhelmed by the interview chose to stop it after a few questions and, in doing so, showed that while he may have felt intimidated by me, he still retained a degree of power and control over the interview. My experience of being genuinely engaged by the cremation workers despite my race positioning me as an outsider is consistent with the contention of Thapar-Bjorkert and Henry (2004) that “neither insider nor outsider status endows upon researchers any essential form of power” (p. 365).

3.8 Ethics

The process of applying for research approval from the university Human Ethics Committee pushed some ethical questions into the spotlight which I had been oblivious to when selecting my topic and case study. Of the myriad ethical questions raised, the one that I grappled with most often while in the field was the question of informed consent. The potential power imbalances between myself and the cremation workers that are described above made this a particularly pertinent concern in my research.

With few exceptions it is a core ethical responsibility of a researcher to inform participants of the nature of the study and what purpose it serves (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). In an effort to fulfil this responsibility, Joshua (the translator) explained to each participant prior to the interview what the purpose and scope of the interview was and each participant was asked to sign or verbally agree to the consent form. However, as it is well noted, the utility of consent forms at the outset of a semi-structured interview has its limits (Haggerty, 2004; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007) and a researcher cannot fully

predict and inform the participant as to what subjects and experiences the interview may traverse.

To ensure participants' consent is maintained throughout the research process it is important that consent is treated as a live matter and open to renegotiation at any point (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi). The importance of practising this was something of which I became very aware during my time in the field. I was particularly concerned that for some of the interviewees my questions might raise memories of abuse or hardship that may have been distressing or embarrassing and which could potentially re-victimise them (Haggerty, 2004; Lee & Renzetti, 1990).

To mitigate this risk, both Joshua and I endeavoured to be conscious of the interviewees' reactions and feelings, and reiterate when appropriate, that questions could be passed on if they did not wish to answer. As discussed in the section above, I felt the relatively equal power relationship between myself and the interviewees enabled them to exercise their right to refuse to answer my questions. On the other hand, the interviews were arranged by Pandy of the TNLU and I could not be fully aware of the power relationship between him and the cremation worker participants and whether it had any bearing on their freedom to consent (Brydon, 2011).

While it is impossible to be certain whether or not the steps I took to ensure proper informed consent of the participants were adequate, it was reassuring to have some of the interviewees exercise their right to refuse answers or cease the interview. On two occasions the cremation worker ceased the interview and several others elected not to answer a question. These instances of the interviewees withdrawing their consent, coupled with the generally positive engagement of the others, suggests to me that informed consent was present in all of the interviews.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to detail my philosophical approach to research and explain how this shaped the methodology selected and my interactions in the field. My subtle realist philosophy and the choices about my approach and methodologies that flowed from that clearly shaped the manner of my research

and in turn the findings. Furthermore I have reflected on my own position as a white, male researcher as well as my existing knowledge and biases and how this may have impacted my approach to the field research and the interactions I had in the field.

The process of considering my philosophical approach and reflecting on my own positionality has been challenging. However, it provides important context to how I carried out the research and ultimately to the findings that follow.

Chapter Four: How did the cremation workers form the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and what were their aims?

4.1 Introduction

In the third week of my fieldwork in Tamil Nadu I travelled to the Palani Hills in the far west of the state to interview cremation workers from a number of small villages there. As we bumped along broken dirt roads past remote villages, fields and forests I was struck by just how vast and scattered the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's members were. My research had already seen me travel by bus, motorbike, scooter, jeep and foot to various suburbs of Madurai city and to remote rural villages hundreds of kilometres away. It had been exhausting, yet I met just a handful of the union's reported 22,000 members. Furthermore, across all of the cities, towns and villages in Tamil Nadu, an estimated 200,000 people are engaged in cremation or burial work. These figures and my own travails in the field brought in to stark clarity what an immense challenge it is to reach out to such a widely dispersed group of workers and organise them into a coherent and effective union.

These challenges are not unique to organising cremation workers but are common across many occupations in the informal economy. The literature on organising in the informal economy recognises that scattered work places, as well as hidden workplaces (such as homes), are prime obstacles to organising informal workers (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Chant & Pedwell, 2008). With cremation workers present in seemingly every small village in Tamil Nadu, the Sangam is likely to be one of the more extreme examples of organising scattered workers and, as such, a particularly interesting case study.

A core focus of this thesis is on the collective bargaining strategies of cremation workers and how they may be able to achieve their development goals. However, a natural precondition for collective bargaining is having an organised group of workers with a shared purpose, clear structure and the motivation to participate. This chapter provides a brief description and analysis of the approach taken in organising the cremation workers of Tamil Nadu into the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. It explores some of the strategies that were

employed, and what motivated the cremation workers to join the union and participate in its bargaining activities.

4.2 Making contact

The term 'organising' is common within the labour union but perhaps not widely understood by the general public or those in the development sector.

Organising by unions is taken in this thesis to have two meanings. Firstly, it is a method to raise the consciousness of informal workers, through education, facilitation, advocacy and training, so they identify as a collective and feel empowered to take action in their interests. Secondly, it is a method of increasing the structural strength of the union by recruiting new members (Ahn, 2013). Both elements of organising (consciousness raising, and recruitment) are important and in fact the relationship between the two is fairly symbiotic.

Organising cremation workers in Tamil Nadu into a labour union was instigated and primarily driven by the Tamil Nadu Labour Union (TNLU). Despite its name the TNLU is not a labour union but an NGO that supports labour rights and assists workers in the state of Tamil Nadu to organise unions and cooperatives (WEIGO, 2015). Manohari Doss who, along with her husband Edward Arockia Doss, has led the TNLU, described to me how it was through her first-hand encounters with cremation workers that she learnt about their daily hardships and became motivated to organise them in the hope it would lead to some improvement in their livelihoods. She stated:

“For two or three days they stay there and they do the work and they are not paid because actually the social thing they are treated as traditional workers so there is no need to pay for. Why are these people treated like this? So we would like to organise these people,” (Doss Interview, 2015)

The leadership of an external NGO in the organising effort runs somewhat counter to the 'best practice' most commonly stated in the literature. A number of authors suggest that informal workers themselves are best placed to organise their own union, as they have the trust of other workers and understand the daily challenges they face (Ahn, 2013; Hill, 2010; Kapoor, 2007). Distrust of outsiders can be particularly pronounced amongst informal

workers, that have frequently experienced the exploitative behaviours of outside organisations and individuals (Ahn, 2013).

The TNLU appeared to be aware of these potential issues associated with being an 'outsider' when commencing its efforts to organise workers and acted to address them. A key strategy was not to rush the organising process and it had a timeframe of several years for the organising process to take place (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Pandy was the TNLU staff member tasked with primary responsibility for organising the cremation workers was also aware of the trust barrier. He emphasised that his first step towards organising the cremation workers was to get to know them and for them to get to trust him. To achieve this, he spent several months working alongside the cremation workers, helping them carry logs and water, while talking with them about their lives and their work (Pandy Interview, 2015).

The initial focus of the TNLU's organising efforts was on cremation worksites in Madurai City. Cremation sites such as Thathaneri in Madurai have a number of workers (around a dozen when I visited) whom are all based there full-time and this made direct contact easier. In this urban context there appeared to be fewer barriers to organising cremation workers than for some other informal worker occupations: challenges such as a highly dispersed workforce and threatening employers that don't allow site access (Mather, 2012) were not mentioned by the TNLU in these cases.

However, the challenges faced by the TNLU in organising cremation workers on the fringes of Madurai City and in the rural villages, in particular the dispersion of workers, were similar to the common obstacles to organising informal workers that are mentioned in Chant and Pedwell (2008) and (Mather, 2012). To overcome these challenges the TNLU pursued a number of strategies similar to those used in other examples of organising in the informal economy. After going "door to door" to make initial contact with some village cremation workers, the TNLU brought together workers from three or four close villages to a single meeting spot to discuss their problems and educate them about their rights and collective action (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). According to Mather (2012), choosing public meeting spots such as this that are away from

other villagers can help make the workers feel more comfortable, as those in the community that might oppose them organising were not nearby.

As the organising process progressed and cremation workers came forward to join and be active in the union the issues associated with 'outsider' organising reduced, as the workers themselves took on a greater role in organising their colleagues. Manohari Doss described how cremation workers began to involve themselves in recruiting other union members, spreading the message about meetings to other workers so they would attend too. "Then they automatically voluntarily came forward [...] they came forward and they brought these people to form meetings in the village [sic]. A village meeting there and a union level meeting they bring together, they organise themselves." (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015).

Some of the cremation workers I interviewed stated they joined as a direct result of being approached by the TNLU (CW6 and CW10). Other workers described learning about the union through their colleagues and relatives, and going together to meet with the TNLU staff to learn more and join: "this village and the other village around this place they formed together and they went to the union together so this is when he joined the union" (CW9).

As the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam began to take shape as a union in its own right, the TNLU sought to formally transfer more of the organising role to its members. This was motivated in large part by the financial constraints on the TNLU. Training was provided to selected local leaders of the Sangam so they had the skills and knowledge to continue to reach out to unorganised cremation workers and encourage them to join the union (Wilson, 2010).

The highly scattered nature of the cremation workforce, their limited financial resources and lack of pre-existing knowledge about organising strategies suggests that the ideal of informal workers organising themselves is perhaps unrealistic in this case. By taking time to slowly gain the trust of the cremation workers and understand their lives, the TNLU appears to have had some success in overcoming the challenges to external organising of informal workers. Notably the cremation workers seem to have a high level of trust in the TNLU and none seemed to begrudge the TNLU for initiating the organising effort, despite its outsider status.

3.3 Building consciousness

The important role of education in organising informal workers is emphasised throughout the literature reviewed in Chapter One. Educating informal workers is important to help them understand what rights they have, the nature of the injustice they experience, their shared identity as workers and the power of collective action (Castillo et al., 2002; Delvaux, 2002; Kabeer et al., 2013). Educating informal workers about these issues and principles not only helps lay the groundwork for recruiting workers into the union, it also contributes to the other aspect of organising — developing workers who are active in the union, that put forward their ideas, and join strikes and other collective actions.

The TNLU's organising strategy also appears to have placed a high importance on the education of the cremation workers. The TNLU gathered workers together in small meetings in their communities, as well as some larger meetings in Madurai, to talk to them about their rights and help them understand the issues they faced. A particular emphasis appears to have been put on educating the workers at these meetings about the nature of the injustice they face, their rights, and the power of collective action. Manohari Doss stated that when the TNLU first engaged with the cremation workers many did not see their work as being valuable and worthy of higher pay. Some were fatalistically resigned to receiving abuse and discriminatory treatment on account of their caste and occupation.

“They also not realise that thing the value of their work the value of the time they are spending for in performing their service so we educated them to realise this, these are the work to be calculated in the money. So we organise them and try to educate them to raise awareness about their livelihood, because there is no source of livelihood for them.” (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

The value of this initial education was echoed by some of the workers themselves. One worker claimed that it was thanks to Edward Arockia Doss that she and others had “knowledge of how they should be”, referring both to how they should be treated by others in the community and also how they should conduct their own lives (CW31).

The Hindu caste system, with its belief in a strict hierarchy in society, has played an important role in creating and perpetuating the workers' feelings of inferiority and resignation to exploitation (S. Desai & Dubey, 2012; Doss Interview, 2015). Dalits (a self-designated term meaning literally 'the broken people') occupy the lowest position within the caste hierarchy and cremation work is one of the 'dirty' roles traditionally assigned to them (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Shinde, 2005). While I did not ask the cremation workers I interviewed what caste they belonged to, from informal discussions with Manohari Doss I ascertained, to the best of my knowledge, that all of those interviewed identified as being Dalit.

The caste system is complex and it is not the role of this thesis to deeply explore its role in the lives of cremation workers and the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. However, it is important to note that part of the education provided by the TNLU involved encouraging the cremation workers to identify themselves primarily as workers within an economic system, rather than as servants within a caste system. Manohari Doss described why this mind shift was important to helping them realise that they have the right to expect decent pay and decent treatment from the families bringing bodies in the following comments.

"The top caste people the dominant caste people they will call them in their caste name only they are not calling them in a respective manner, so they taught themselves that God has created like that. So we would like to create a scientific outlook as a human being what are his basic rights [...] the constitution has given us a basic human rights, seven fundamental rights, like that we have explained to them." (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

"So we motivated them as a human being you are having such rights you are not born in that low caste like that. So you have to have the identity as a labourers, not identity as a caste." (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

This emphasis on first developing a 'worker' identity amongst a group who traditionally did not see themselves as such is also espoused by Kabeer et al. (2013) in regards to organising women workers in the informal economy. Informal workers, like most people, are likely to hold a range of identities: work, ethnicity, gender, religion and age. Peet and Hartwick (2009) noted in the literature review that it is often these other identities that have come to the fore as the vehicle for people in developing countries to pursue their rights. While

this need not be a choice of one or the other, Manohari's statements provide a compelling case for developing a 'worker' identity and making their collective struggle under the banner of a labour union.

In addition to creating awareness amongst the cremation workers of their right to better treatment and income, the TNLU explained to the workers how working together as a union could help deliver the livelihood improvements and respect they wanted to achieve. For many of the cremation workers this was their first introduction to the concepts of unionism and collective action. One worker recalled that beforehand they "didn't have any idea of a union" and it was Edward Arockia Doss who explained to him "how the union will help them and that is the reason they joined [...] it educated them" (CW10).

One particular technique employed by the TNLU to help explain the principles and operation of unions as well as displaying their potential effectiveness was to provide examples of other similarly marginalised groups of workers in Tamil Nadu that had unionised and bargained to achieve better work conditions and incomes. One such example was the personal assistants to the state's various Village Administration Officers whom, according to Pandy, had similar characteristics of being geographically scattered and having a low income, and had managed to unionise in 1997.

"Before that this particular personal assistant of the Village Administrative Officer gets paid so less. They get paid like 15 or 20 rupees so that's the salary that they get paid per day [...] even these workers were able to form a union and they were able to fight the government and they were able to achieve that. So they got better payment and they are employed as a fulltime worker."
(Pandy Interview, 2015).

Another technique that the TNLU appears to have used to help convey the principle of collective action was using evocative proverbs. To illustrate the power of a collective group of people compared to an individual the TNLU staff used a proverb similar to "when one hand claps, no sound is made, only when 10 hands clap together will it make a sound" (CW15). This proverb was repeated back to me, unprompted, by two of the cremation workers when I asked why they chose to make demands through a union rather than as an individual (CW15 and CW24). This suggests that this proverb was an effective

means of conveying the core principle of collective action in a way which could be easily remembered and repeated.

The use of meetings and talking to educate the workers is typical of the organising and education techniques used for other groups of informal workers. Some of the more innovative techniques such as creating study circles, and radio and street theatre were not used by the TNLU (Ahn, 2013; ILO, 2002). These techniques may have been less attractive to the TNLU in this case due to distance between groups of workers in the rural areas.

3.4 Motives for joining

The section above provides a brief description of some of the main ways the TNLU went about contacting and educating the cremation workers. This laid the groundwork for future activism by the workers and created the opportunity to recruit them into the union that was later to become the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam. This section explores what motivated the workers themselves to join the union. It asks why the workers choose to invest their time, energy and, in some cases money, into joining and participating in the union? What improvements in their work and wider livelihoods did they hope to achieve through their union membership? Understanding what motivated the workers to join the union, may offer some lessons for organising workers in other occupations in the informal economy in India or elsewhere in the developing world. A common theme within the literature on organising informal workers is an emphasis on the need to offer a wider range of services beyond traditional collective bargaining, legal aid and political lobbying. Collectively-based services such as healthcare, crèches, credit unions and social housing are all suggested as providing extra motivation for informal workers to join a union (Delvaux, 2002; Kabeer et al., 2013; Kapoor, 2007; Nayak, 2013).

During my field interviews I asked all of the cremation workers why they chose to join the Sangam and how they hoped to personally benefit from it. While a few of the workers did mention services similar to those outlined in the literature above, the majority were focused on what could be seen as the more traditional functions and benefits of a labour union. Better pay, income security, advocacy for social welfare access and legal aid, were all benefits that were commonly

put forward by the cremation workers as being at forefront of their motivation for joining the union. The primary motive of each of the cremation workers interviewed is illustrated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Primary Reason for Joining the Sangam. Source: The author, based on interviews with cremation workers, 2015

For many of the cremation workers interviewed the prospect of achieving formal government employment was the primary benefit they wished to achieve when they joined the union. This was encapsulated most clearly by one of the senior union leaders who said he believed that, “the union can fight for them to have a government employment” (CW8). Twelve of the workers interviewed directly stated government employment was their goal, including some workers from rural villages. It appears that the stability of income that comes with a monthly salary was the most attractive aspect of government employment for the workers. For some of the workers a monthly salary also offered the prospect of an increase in their income.

A further nine workers stated that they primarily hoped joining the union would help increase their income, but not necessarily through government employment. A number of those hoping to see their income increase stated that they believed their income could be increased because being part of a

union would give them the skill, collective security and power to bargain with families of the dead or with the village Panchayat.⁵

In addition to income, the other commonly sought benefit that emerged from the interviews was protection. Many of the cremation workers stated they joined the Sangam with the hope it would help give them protection from customers and others in the community whom were abusive, intimidating and discriminatory. Twelve workers identified this as their primary motivation for joining and some others noted it indirectly. One worker stated he joined the union because, “I am just an individual so when problem arises or people just try to hit me or something when doing the cremation, no one will stand for me. So that belief that the union will stand for me if there is any problem is why I joined”. (CW14)

It appears the cremation workers saw that being part of a union could improve their protection through two modes. The first mode was through legal support and advice that the TNLU, as the umbrella organisation, could offer them (Wilson, 2010). This was articulated by one worker who said that he joined the union with the belief that it would support him if he wished to make a complaint to the police or other authorities. He claimed that, before the union, if he made a complaint to the authorities, it would be ignored (CW7).

The second, and more greatly emphasised mode through which union membership could offer protection was the collective strength to stand against abuse and intimidation. A number of the workers believed that when people in the community (including families bringing dead bodies and the police) recognised that they were part of a union and that the union “stand behind them” then they would be accorded greater respect (CW20). To ensure that people recognised they were members of the union, membership cards, complete with photo ID were designed by the cremation workers and printed and distributed by the TNLU (Wilson, 2010).

It has already been established that labour unions and other membership based organisations such as cooperatives and associations can help protect informal workers from harassment by authorities, employers and other members of the public and this is an important benefit that informal workers seek (Ahn, 2013;

⁵ In some locations village Panchayat’s could direct families to pay cremation workers at a certain rate.

Eaton, 2015; Spooner, 2012; UN Women, 2014). That this was also true for the cremation workers whom I interviewed is not a particularly surprising finding. Their low status in society and the prevalence of caste discrimination means that gaining protection through a mixture of respect and legal support was one of the primary motivations for them to join the union.

The cremation workers interviewed were predominantly motivated to join the union in order to improve their incomes and reduce harassment from customers and others in the community. Whether these responses reflect their long running concerns or were influenced by what the TNLU put forward as the potential benefits during the early organising meetings cannot be discerned from my field interviews. However, given the low and insecure incomes of most of the workers and the widely recognised caste discrimination, it is reasonable to believe that these were pressing concerns of the workers that they hoped to be able to address by joining the union.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked briefly at the methods employed by the Tamil Nadu Labour Union in organising the cremation workers into a labour union that became known as the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. As noted in the literature review, instances of informal workers successfully organising or being organised into a labour union are not uncommon and there is a relatively wide range of literature regarding organising informal workers with some generally agreed methods. It is not clear how aware the TNLU staff were of this wider body of information when they began their mission to organise the cremation workers, however it is notable that they pursued a number of the same organising strategies laid out in the literature.

The TNLU, as an external actor taking on the organising task, may have been somewhat in conflict with the 'self-organising' model many authors espouse but, given the circumstances, it seems to have been both appropriate and relatively successful. The TNLU's strategies of face to face contact with the cremation workers and taking time to slowly build their trust were both helpful in overcoming some of the disadvantages associated with being an external actor leading the organising process.

The TNLU placed great emphasis on educating the cremation workers about injustice and their collective power as part of its organising effort. This is firmly in line with the recommendations of much of the literature. Feedback from some of the cremation workers also suggests that this education was important to raise their awareness and desire to take collective action to improve their lives.

Finally, the workers were primarily motivated to become union members in order to improve their incomes and reduce harassment from customers and others in the community. Better incomes through bargaining and legal aid are core labour union functions, yet none of the ancillary services that can sometimes help in organising informal workers were significant motivations for the workers interviewed. Whether this is because the TNLU did not emphasise these ancillary services or because they were unattractive to the cremation workers is unclear.

The Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam's 22,000 members may seem modest in comparison to the 200,000 total estimated cremation workers in Tamil Nadu. However, given the highly dispersed nature of the workforce, it is a significant achievement by the Tamil Nadu Labour Union (which is a small organisation) and those workers whom were also involved in the organising effort. Whether the methods employed in this organising effort meet the principles of good development and how they have contributed to or inhibited to actually achieving the goals of the cremation workers will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Collective bargaining: strategies and outcomes

5.1 Introduction

Informal workers who organise into a union generally do so with the desire of achieving better incomes, better working conditions and access to social security. While a number of obstacles make collective bargaining difficult for informal workers, it remains one of the core means through which informal workers that are part of a union can attempt to realise these goals. If, through collective bargaining and other means, labour unions are able to achieve better incomes, working and living conditions for poor informal workers like the cremation workers, they should have a stronger claim to being good development actors.

The literature reviewed in the first chapter of this thesis outlined several challenges to collective bargaining by informal workers, notably the lack of a direct employment relationship, lack of legal rights and low incomes that make prolonged strike action unfeasible. There appears to be limited published research that provides clear strategies and techniques for how informal workers can overcome these challenges. This chapter seeks to help address that gap by exploring the collective bargaining strategies and techniques of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. It also looks at what the cremation workers achieved through collective bargaining and what their experience of the bargaining process was.

The term collective bargaining typically refers to a labour union, representing employees in a workplace, negotiating a collective agreement with that workplace employer. Collective agreements can cover a range of issues but wages, hours of work and workplace safety are common elements (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). However, informal workers often don't have a direct employer to negotiate with and may instead negotiate with parties such as government and police on a range of demands broader than those which traditional labour unions might cover. Nevertheless, the core principle remains the same: workers are using their collective power to demand and negotiate better work, wages and livelihoods for themselves. As such this thesis

embraces a broader definition of the term collective bargaining as: “negotiations by representatives of collective organisations” (Spooner, 2012, p. 112). While ‘collective organisations’ are commonly labour unions, Spooner (2012) notes that, under this broader understanding of collective bargaining, it is also an action that can be undertaken by other membership-based organisations such as cooperatives and associations.

The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam appears to have adopted three different approaches to collective bargaining to suit the different contexts and needs of the cremation workers. The first form, which bears the most resemblance to collective bargaining as it is typically known, involved the Sangam engaging in bargaining with the Madurai Corporation (the municipal authority) and the Tamil Nadu state government. The second method of collective bargaining was cremation workers in a village, or cluster of villages, joining together to bargain with a village panchayat in an effort to have the panchayat dictate payment norms for cremation work. The third form of bargaining revolved around cremation workers bargaining directly with individual families when they brought bodies to be cremated.

This chapter will explore each of these three different approaches to collective bargaining by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. It will examine the rationale behind them and attempt to describe and assess the relative success and achievements of each approach. Further analysis of the outcomes of the Sangam’s collective bargaining, including its sustainability and impact on equity, will be discussed in Chapter Five.

5.2 Collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities

5.2.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities

When I asked the cremation workers what they hoped to achieve when they joined the union many of them replied that they wished to get a ‘government job’. The steady income, access to welfare benefits and recognition as being a ‘real worker’ that come with being a formal government employee were, not surprisingly, attractive to the cremation workers. As such, one of the principal aims of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam was to get formal government

employment for its members. The Sangam also had a number of other demands that were focussed towards the Tamil Nadu state government or Madurai Corporation, including: upgrading facilities on cremation grounds, provision of health and safety equipment, and establishment of a welfare board to support the workers and their families (Pandy Interview, 2015). This suite of objectives meant that many of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's collective bargaining demands were directed towards the Tamil Nadu State Government and the Madurai Corporation.

According to Manohari Doss of the TNLU, the cremation workers lack of an obvious single employer was the driving force behind the Sangam's emphasis on bargaining with government authorities: "Even the unorganised workers in some organised industries, they can get through to the management, but here there is no owner, specific owners, only they can put the demand to the government." (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015) Collective bargaining with a state government or city corporation may seem unusual to a formal sector labour union that would typically engage in bargaining with an employer, yet Agarwala (2007) claims it is a common strategy for informal workers because they often lack a clearly identifiable employer to whom they can put their demands.

The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's approach to collective bargaining with the state government and municipal authorities appears to have consisted of the following three key steps: holding mass demonstrations to gain attention for their demands; securing media coverage and sympathy for their cause; and putting their demands to government officials and leaders in face to face meetings. Through each of these steps in the collective bargaining process the Sangam was closely supported by the TNLU. The presence of the TNLU as a supportive partner is not without precedent. Experience from SEWA in India suggests that having an external 'expert' organisation to guide informal workers in collective bargaining is valuable due to the often technical nature of the process (Indian Academy for Self Employed Women, 2012).

It is important to note, here, that activities such as demonstrations, media campaigns and bargaining with government are not the sole domain of labour unions. Activities such as these would likely be recognisable to people working

in development NGOs and considered by them to be aspects of 'advocacy'. However, it is helpful for the purpose of this thesis to note that there is a distinction between 'collective bargaining' and 'advocacy'. Collective bargaining is done by representatives of the workers themselves, answerable to the workers, on issues raised by the workers; whereas advocacy is something that can be undertaken by people or other organisations on behalf of workers that do not have the power to speak for themselves (Spooner, 2012).

A core tenet of traditional collective bargaining in the formal sector is the ability of workers to withdraw their labour and go on strike as a means of pressuring the bargaining counterparts to concede to demands (Brandl, 2013). However, much of the literature suggests that this strategy is unavailable to informal workers due to their low income and lack of legal protection (Hill, 2010; Horn, 2005). Manohari also believed that refusing to work was not an option for the cremation workers (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Subsequently the Sangam pursued a dual strategy of public demonstrations and media attention to pressure the government to respond to their collective bargaining demand.

The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's collective bargaining began in 2006 with mass demonstrations (Pandy, 2015). This was around the same time that the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions began funding the TNLU to support the development of the cremation workers' union (Wilson, 2010). Manohari stated that in 2006 the TNLU hosted a big rally and conference in Madurai to highlight the issues of cremation workers. According to her, this was the first time that political parties, government ministers and the media were made aware of the hardships faced by cremation workers (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam held a number of demonstrations over the following three years, all with the objective of raising awareness of the cremation workers' issues and their demands for government employment, social welfare, health and safety.

Large numbers of workers participated in some of these demonstrations. According to Wilson (2010), 10,000 cremation workers participated in a rally in Madurai City, and a newspaper article covering a conference and demonstration held by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam in 2008 refers to cremation workers gathered in 'large numbers' ("Create social security

schemes", 2008). The large scale of these demonstrations is further supported by an image published in another local newspaper showing demonstrators filling a street for over one hundred metres ("Crematorium workers recognised", 2008).

Twenty-six of the 37 cremation workers interviewed stated they had participated in one or more demonstrations (sometimes referred to as a strike or rally) targeted at the state government or Madurai Corporation. Only one worker explicitly stated he had not participated in any demonstration organised by the union, while the other ten were never directly asked about their participation in demonstrations, so it is uncertain whether or not they had. Despite the distance and difficulty of travel, responses to my interviews suggest that cremation workers from the rural villages appear to have participated in the demonstrations in Madurai with a similar frequency as those workers based in Madurai itself. This effort to include the rural workers conceivably reflects a strategy to have large numbers at demonstrations in order to gain greater attention and project strength.

The main purpose of the demonstrations appears to have been to highlight the issues of cremation workers and make the state government and Madurai Corporation officials aware of their demands to be recognised as workers, to be granted government employment and social welfare provisions. According to Pandy of the TNLU, this was a vital first step to engaging the state government and Madurai Corporation in what could later become face to face bargaining:

"When we started approaching the government regarding the cremation workers, when we kept the demands, the government didn't really want to hear. They were like... don't you have any other thing better to do than this? And after having such a lot of demonstrations and having a lot of public view and the media opportunity... the government started listening to our calls but not like they didn't start acting on it, but they started to have a view of the cremation workers and so the workers started meeting the government employees."
(Pandy Interview, 2015)

As well as sheer numbers, the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam and TNLU pursued several other techniques to heighten awareness of the cremation workers' issues through the demonstrations. One method was to invite leaders from formal sector unions to attend as well as political party leaders and sympathetic

academics. These invitees were given prominent roles in the demonstrations as Manohari states: “at the time we will make them address the meeting. So we would like to make a wider level linkage to support and extend their solidarity” (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Bringing in allies from formal sector unions and elsewhere is a tactic supported by Bonner (2013) and Horn (2005) in order to increase the reach of demonstrations, bolster their legitimacy and strengthen bargaining power.

Elements of theatre appear to have been employed during the demonstrations to help draw attention and to clearly convey the cremation workers’ issues and demands. One worker spoke of how he participated in a rally by playing drums, a traditional activity of Dalit cremation workers during the cremation process (CW14), while another stated he sang a traditional cremation song through the microphone (CW20). In this situation drums and song seem to have played a dual role of amplifying and energising the demonstration as well as clearly identifying the demonstration as being about cremation workers. An additional theatrical technique to identify the workers’ cause was the carrying of an effigy. According to CW14 this helped convey the nature of their work: “we’ll rally and chanting and stating how the burial will be taken, we’ll carry the body and stating we are demonstrating” (CW14). While some of the literature suggests informal workers must adopt innovative means of highlighting their issues and placing pressure on their bargaining adversaries, few examples can be readily found. The use of cremation drums, traditional songs and an effigy are exemplars of small innovative ideas used by the Sangam to help draw attention to their particular cause.

Closely interlinked with the demonstrations in Madurai was a strategy focussed on gaining media exposure and sympathy. The TNLU as the ‘expert’ partner of the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam appears to have taken the lead in cultivating support in the local and state newspapers for the cremation workers’ issues and collective bargaining demands. Journalists from two newspapers, the *Hindu* and *Indian Express*, were sent a written invitation to meet some of the cremation workers prior to a demonstration. Pandey stated that these two newspapers were selected because: “these two papers reach all the government officials; like people in high stages like judges, highest offices, people in higher departments would read these kind of papers” (Pandey Interview, 2015). An

Indian Express reporter, who accepted the invitation and spoke with the cremation workers, was moved to write an article after hearing about their hardships and, according to Pandey, this article was an “opening for them so that society had an idea about cremation workers” (Pandey Interview, 2015).

In addition to this initial targeted invitation for a face to face discussion with the cremation workers the TNLU ensured that local newspaper journalists were invited to cover all of the major demonstrations held in Madurai. Manohari explained the process and potential impact of this media coverage.

“We invited all the people, telling them ‘such and such agitation will be happening on this day’ [...] then they will send their cameraman and reporter on the day [...] and take photographs but no news will flash, only in some media they will flash [...] At the time they will take the interview with some leaders and they will give a big coverage in the media.” (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

The dual strategies of demonstrations and media exposure were employed to pressure the government to engage with the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and seem to have been fairly successful in doing so. They opened the way for the final step in the collective bargaining process, face to face negotiations with officials and leaders of the Tamil Nadu state government and Madurai Corporation. A detailed and nuanced description of the negotiating process is beyond the bounds of this research, however a couple of key techniques used by the Sangam and TNLU can be clearly identified, the first being written demands, and the second using the workers themselves to lead the negotiations.

Pre-negotiation meetings were held amongst the Sangam’s members allowing them to identify their issues and turn these into demands to be put to the state government and Corporation. These demands were written down and sent to the corporation and government officials and leaders with whom they wished to negotiate. Manohari described this process: “during their meeting only they [the workers] are prioritising the resolution, they will first write all of the resolutions and what are the resolutions to be represented in the state level” (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Writing down demands as well as any final agreements is seen by Bonner (2013) as an important technique. It lends a small degree of

formality to negotiations that often lack a formal bargaining forum or legal recognition.

It is widely agreed that the workers themselves should be the key negotiators in face to face bargaining meetings (Bonner, 2013; Horn, 2005; Women, 2012). Worker-led negotiations are important to the sustainability of collective bargaining (Indian Academy for Self Employed Women, 2012); they presumably also carry greater credibility and thus may have a greater impact on negotiating counterparts. In line with this thinking the cremation workers played a leading role in the face to face negotiations with government officials, albeit closely assisted by the TNLU staff. This was evident in one worker's description of delivering a written petition to the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, "when she went and she said the grievances to the authorities she was feeling like happy that she represented her village and she represented the cremation workers" (CW26).

To enable the cremation workers to be active participants in the negotiations, the TNLU invested time into educating a selected group of leaders within the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam on the process of negotiating and some specific techniques. Manohari described this process:

"For one or two days we will teach them the legal procedure, what are the government programmes, how the bureaucrats are functioning, how we can take the issues and the lobby and advocacy level interfacing with the government. We have taught them the various techniques in representing and how to lobby in consolidating their whole issue in the form of resolution or memorandum. Because in a certain way they have to explain, so the leaders they have to be educated." (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

Again, this mentoring role of the TNLU closely aligns with the experience of SEWA which has provided a number of women's unions and associations with training to develop leaders 'from the grassroots level workers' to enable them to gradually take full control of negotiations (Indian Academy for Self Employed Women, 2012).

Finally, it is important to note the role that external funding played in facilitating two of the key collective bargaining strategies: mass demonstrations and face to face negotiations. Over the period 2006 to 2010 the New Zealand Council of

Trade Unions (with some support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade KOHA-PICD fund) provided a total of \$113,000 in funding to the Tamil Nadu Labour Union to organise, educate and support collective bargaining and other activities of informal workers in Tamil Nadu (Doss, 2010; Gideon, 2010; Kelly, 2008a; Paul, 2007). The cremation workers were one of six different occupations engaged by the TNLU with this funding and the exact proportion of the funding channelled to their activities alone is unknown.

According to Pandey, this external funding enabled the TNLU and Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam to organise mass demonstrations and travel to negotiations much quicker than would have been possible if the Sangam was entirely funded from members' fees. He stated, "without the funding from overseas we can't just be able to do a rally or demonstration suddenly. Because of the funding we were able to do like (clicks fingers)." (Pandey Interview, 2015) Since external funding for activities relating to the cremation workers largely ceased in 2010 the Sangam has continued to hold demonstrations and tried to engage in face to face bargaining. However, these more recent meetings were not often referenced by the workers I interviewed, suggesting they have had a lower profile.

As noted in the introduction to this section, the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's collective bargaining with the state government and Madurai Corporation was undertaken with the objective of gaining real benefits for its cremation worker members. The Sangam's list of demands included: recognition of cremation workers as workers; government paid salaries for the workers; creation of a welfare board for cremation workers and their families; better facilities on cremation sites; health and safety equipment; housing for cremation workers and special education allowances for their children (Pandey Interview, 2015). These demands were largely focussed on improving the livelihood of the cremation workers and their families. The following section will look at how successful collective bargaining with the state government and Madurai Corporation was at achieving these demands and delivering livelihood improvements for the members of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam.

5.2.2 Outcomes of collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities

The cremation workers who spoke about the demonstrations and collective bargaining approaches to the state government and municipal corporation held mixed views on the success of these efforts. Several workers highlighted the positive feelings of empowerment they gained from partaking in the demonstrations and negotiations. These are encapsulated by one worker's comment that "when we went for the demonstrations and things I felt happy because we represented ourselves... we felt like we are taking this step in asking them so we will attain soon" (CW18). However, the extent to which the cremation workers received material improvements in their livelihoods as a result of this collective bargaining strategy is less clear.

Government employment was clearly one of the cremation worker's priority demands and the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's collective bargaining efforts had some success in achieving this. NZCTU reports state that 80 of the Sangam's members working at cremation sites in Madurai were employed by the Madurai Corporation as 'cremation assistants' on a full-time and permanent basis with a monthly salary (Kelly, 2008b). This represents nearly a third of the estimated 300 cremation workers in the city (Karthikeyan, 2008). Five of the cremation workers I interviewed were Madurai Corporation employees and they spoke of gaining benefits such as access to social welfare provisions like medical insurance and pensions as a result of being employed by the Corporation. They also felt the steady monthly income was an improvement for them and their family (CW4 and CW36).

Not all of these five workers felt that formal employment had provided an improvement in their livelihoods. For some the monthly salary was not a big increase or no increase at all on what they had previously earned through payments from families that were now foregone, with the exception of some small tips (CW4 and CW6). The salaries ranged from 8,000 to 13,000 rupees a month after deductions for pension payments and medical allowances (CW5 and CW35). While this is much more than the rural cremation workers earned from cremations, it is similar to what some of the rural workers said they could earn from doing manual labour jobs.

However, formal employment had conveyed some benefits that the workers themselves perhaps were not able to immediately recognise. For example, as Madurai Corporation employees, the workers were largely protected from a potential drop in income that would likely have accompanied the introduction of a gas cremation furnace for burning bodies in Madurai's main cemetery in 2009 (Manohari Doss email communication, 2016). Some of the workers noted that their workload was significantly reduced since the electric crematorium was installed but did not mention that their incomes had dropped. Finally, while none of the workers employed by the corporation considered themselves to be 'well off', I observed that several of them displayed signs of having a standard of living that was substantially better than their rural, self-employed counterparts. This included motor scooters owned by two workers, and children attending university.

An achievement of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's collective bargaining that appears to have been shared more widely is the Tamil Nadu state government's recognition of the cremation workers as workers, allowing them to formally register their union under the Trade Union Act 1926 (Karthikeyan, 2008). This formal recognition also enabled the cremation workers to have identity cards with their name and occupation. As discussed in the following sections, this recognition as being proper workers helped build the cremation workers' respect in their communities and subsequently their ability to bargain over pay and conditions (Pandy Interview, 2015).

The provision of health and safety equipment is another successful collective bargaining demand that seems to have benefitted a wider spread of workers, though not all. The Tamil Nadu state government agreed to the union's demand to provide many of the cremation workers with masks, gloves and shoes to use during their work (Pandy Interview, 2015; CW4) and (Karthikeyan, 2008). However, based on the comments from the few workers I asked about this, it appears to have been a low priority for the workers (CW19).

According to Pandy, the state government funded the building of new facilities at many of the cremation grounds, both in Madurai and in the rural areas in response to the Sangam's collective bargaining demands. This was corroborated by a number of the workers who spoke of how their

demonstrations had helped convince the government to provide funding for these facilities. One worker stated, “Before the protest this was all open there was no concrete walls all around and this particular shelter wasn’t here and the water tank over there wasn’t here” (CW2). Examples of these facilities in a rural location and in Madurai are shown below in Image 1 and Image 2 respectively.

Image 1. A Rural Cremation Site in Tamil Nadu. Source: The author, taken during interviews with cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, 2015

Image 2. A Cremation Site in Madurai. Source: The author, taken during interviews with cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, 2015

The building of these facilities appears to have been a significant achievement for the workers, both lifting their esteem and improving their safety at work. According to the workers, walls and well managed grounds protected against dangers, such as unseen snakes in the grass and the hardship of working to keep cremation fires burning in the rain. A critical view might be that the state government chose to fund these facilities because they also provided benefits to the wider community. The water tanks allow the bereaved families to wash after the ceremony and the shelters provide shade during ceremonies. However, it is clear the cremation workers feel these were achievements won by them, through the collective bargaining process and there is a degree of pride attached to this. This was exemplified in the words of one worker who stated:

“We didn’t have any establishment over the cremation it was just a shed so then we got a pathway. The pathway, the road to the cremation place wasn’t good, so then they laid the pathway and they got the tank the water tank and they have the shelter over there and they got the cremation compound. This was achieved after they... and light facilities for them... this was achieved after we went and saw the government” (CW26)

The above findings show that the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam has been able to achieve some of its demands from the state government and Madurai Corporation through its collective bargaining efforts, though their reach and impact on the livelihoods of the cremation workers has been mixed. The majority of the workers themselves seemed to be underwhelmed by what had been gained from the state government and Madurai Corporation. This was conveyed by CW19 who felt that “The demonstration will always be good, they’ll do it in a good way and after that the outcome of it won’t be such. They haven’t attained anything that they’ve pleaded for so it’s hard for them.” Similarly Manohari believed that what the cremation workers had gained from their bargaining with the state government and Madurai Corporation was disappointing in comparison with what had been achieved by other occupations of workers the TNLU had helped organise. She stated:

“Only they converted a few urban workers as a government workers. Nothing happened. There is no protection. There is no basic amenities provided. There is no free education. There is no fixation of wage. There is no protection of any sort, so there is no social security measures out there. For example they are not ready to announce a workers welfare board for these workers.” (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015)

5.3 Collective bargaining with village Panchayats

5.3.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with village Panchayats

While much of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam’s energy and resources went into collective bargaining with state government and municipal authorities, it was not the only focus of the cremation workers’ bargaining efforts. Collective bargaining has also taken place at a more local level, with village panchayats. This approach to collective bargaining appears to have been especially relevant to those cremation workers living in rural areas, for whom government employment was a less likely prospect. This section describes the cremation workers’ approach to collective bargaining with village panchayats and some of their experiences and achievements.

Village panchayats (from here on called panchayats) are an elected body charged with decision making in village affairs. Panchayats are legally

recognised bodies in India and are often charged with distributing government grants for infrastructure and training, and they may also collect taxes (My Agriculture Information Bank, 2015). While panchayats don't appear to have any formal responsibility to dictate the terms of pay and treatment of cremation workers by individuals in their locality, it is evident from a number of my interviews that this is also a function they sometimes exercise.

One of the collective bargaining strategies pursued by the Sangam members was to collectively attend monthly panchayats' public meetings and put forward a demand that the panchayat stipulate a higher rate of pay that families should give cremation workers for each body burnt. This strategy shows an understanding by the cremation workers that acting collectively they have greater power and influence in negotiating with panchayats than they do as individuals. The power of acting collectively was explicitly recognised by one such worker who stated:

"If I take the matters individually to the panchayat, I have some fears taking to them, any problem may arise if I go along. But when we go as a union people take collectively and as a group we will go we'll represent as one so I'll feel a little bit safe and also protected when we tell the leaders what they want."

(CW17)

Another cremation worker, who was a leader of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam in his district, provided a detailed description of the process and challenges of collective bargaining with his panchayat. He explained that he would "have a regular meeting with the cremation workers so that's when they provide their grievances to me so after keeping the grievances we will take it to the particular districts panchayat leader" (CW16). If through negotiation the workers can agree a pay rate then the panchayat is expected to relay this new pay rate to people living in the village:

"I'll talk to the panchayat leader and the panchayat leader will go to the village and they'll just have a talk what we're given so it'll be like little bit of modification... Like they'll pay like 50 rupees extra or sometimes 100 rupees extra that will be the change." (CW16)

While an increase of 50 or 100 rupees per body is modest, it is still an achievement in the context of a panchayat that is typically reluctant to listen and

agree to their demands. CW16 stated that “when we talk to the panchayat of the village they won’t be like open heartedly welcome us, they’ll be having some dilemma, say that why are you always complaining about stuff?” Confronted with resistance such as this, he described how the local union members had relied on demonstrations to place pressure on the panchayat to agree to support their claims for government welfare schemes.

“We will ask the panchayat leaders for the benefits especially for our children’s education but they won’t take any steps. When we go and meet these panchayat leaders and village leaders at their offices they won’t even sign a something called a development form, there is a development department, it is like a welfare department [...] we haven’t been part of that so we have protested strikes and demonstrated rallies and so on stating that we have to be considered at least for the welfare department... we want a recognition for us to be a part of the welfare department so that we can avail the welfare.” (CW16)

While this collective bargaining by cremation workers with their panchayats might seem independent of the broader Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and its centralised activities, it is clear that the workers’ membership in the union was an integral part of enabling them to undertake their own bargaining at this local level. Manohari Doss suggested that it was the Sangam’s initial struggle to have the cremation workers recognised by the government as workers and the existence of TNLU’s legal case work that made panchayats more likely to respect them and their desire to engage in collective bargaining (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). This belief was supported by several of the cremation workers. One worker said that “because of the union we can go talk to the panchayat, there’ll be a chance, there’ll be a platform of bargaining with the panchayat” (CW22). Another stated that “individually speaking the panchayat or the village won’t listen but only after we have the union a little bit of recognition it was able to bargain, we were able to speak what we want.” (CW18).

5.3.2 Outcomes of collective bargaining with village Panchayats

Seven of the cremation workers interviewed described how they had attempted to engage in collective bargaining with their village panchayat with varying levels of success. One worker described how bargaining had seen his village panchayat increase the stipulated payment for the burning of a body from 161 rupees to 800 over a seven year period: “the village did remind 161 rupees

before and now it has to remind 800, so every villager has to pay 800... after the meetings I'll be able to come and speak with the panchayat so it gradually increased like 250, 350, 450 and now it has come up to 800 rupees" (CW20).

Few of the other workers noted significant rises in income as a result of collective bargaining with panchayats. Instead, in their responses to my question about what changes had occurred as a result of the bargaining, they focused on improved respect, a reduction in violence and a reduction in verbal abuse (CW7, CW16, CW18). These are valuable improvements in their lives, though the extent to which they were solely derived from the collective bargaining or other aspects of their union membership and activities is uncertain.

Collective bargaining with panchayats was not always a successful strategy. One worker described how attempts by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam members in his village to bargain with the panchayat had failed to change the attitudes of people in the village, or achieve any benefits.

"Even after the union, when we stated to our village that we are in the union, people of the dominant community are more so they treat us as a slave community... if we do a protest or a protest a pretend strike it won't help. They'll themselves take the body and do other processes." (CW9)

This experience highlights that the heterogeneity of village contexts means a strategy of collective bargaining with village panchayats is not possible in all locations, especially where strict caste customs and hierarchy are observed.

Examples of informal worker union's collective bargaining with village panchayats or similar organisations was not evident in any of the literature I reviewed for this research. Based on the modest livelihood gains and improved social respect achieved by some of the workers, it is a strategy that may have some merit for informal workers in rural villagers that don't have a direct employee-employer relationship or the likelihood of being able to bargain directly with state or federal governments. An exploration of other informal worker unions that have pursued a similar strategy would be useful to build a body of knowledge about the wider effectiveness of this approach. An additional benefit, hypothesised here but not stated by any of the workers interviewed, is that bargaining with panchayats to set pay rates instead of with

the bereaved families of the dead may reduce antagonism and the abuse that some workers experience from families during the cremation process.

5.4 Collective bargaining directly with families

5.4.1 Strategies for collective bargaining with families

The final mode of bargaining that was mentioned by the cremation workers and TNLU staff interviewed was bargaining with each individual family when they brought a body to be cremated. This form of bargaining existed prior to the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam being formed and has the loosest connection to what we know of as 'collective bargaining' because in many cases it is undertaken by just one or two individuals. However, the workers' ability to engage in this bargaining and achieve good outcomes was tied to their membership in the Sangam, and in this section I will explore these connections and the workers' experience of bargaining with families before and after joining the union. The section will also describe some of the livelihood improvements the cremation workers achieved through this mode of bargaining, as well as some of the challenges and shortcomings of this approach. The actual process of bargaining with individuals was not discussed in detail during my interviews and will only be touched on briefly.

Fifteen of the cremation workers interviewed spoke of bargaining with families in relation to the payment for burning a body. It does not appear that this type of 'family bargaining' was used to determine any conditions or benefits other than pay. This type of bargaining was done by workers in rural villages as well as those in the townships on the fringes of Madurai. To a lesser extent it was done by urban cremation workers, including those paid a salary by the Madurai Corporation, that were still able to discretely bargain with families for small tips.

Some of the comments from the cremation workers suggest that this mode of 'family bargaining' was practised prior to the formation of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. Unfortunately, the degree to which that occurred prior was not thoroughly explored during the interviews. However, it appears that the frequency and intensity of family bargaining increased following the formation of the Sangam and the TNLU's organising and education activities encouraged the

workers to undertake this type of bargaining. Several workers spoke of how they simply accepted the payment offered by families prior to joining the union, but felt empowered to engage in bargaining with these families afterwards. This was summed up in the words of one worker:

“Before the union, when I bargain the people will just say no this is your limit this is what we pay and this is what you should receive. This is what they say and this is what they pay and I won’t bargain after what they provided, now I have a chance to bargain.” (CW19)

Organising into a labour union appears to have played two roles in enabling family bargaining: offering legal and collective moral support for workers that face abuse during bargaining and education in how to justify and word pay demands.

The provision of legal support by the TNLU to members of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam is an example of collectivism supporting this type of bargaining. The workers individually would be unlikely to be able to afford the cost of a lawyer to represent them in a situation where they were abused as a result of trying to bargain with a bereaved family. However their membership in the Sangam gave them a degree of access to legal advice and assistance from the TNLU. This legal support from the union appeared to be coupled with the feeling of security afforded by having ‘strength in numbers’ to make the workers feel empowered to engage in bargaining with families. The impact of the union’s legal backing is captured in this statement by one of the cremation workers:

“Before the union if a person comes with a dead body and refuses to pay us, we can’t do anything, we can’t even claim what is right for us. So when the union comes people think about the union so if I have been brutally assaulted or if I have been hit by somebody I can go to the police station I can complain with the support of the union.” (CW3)

In labour unions this kind of legal support would typically be paid for out of the collective union membership fees of the workers. In this case it is not clear whether the annual membership fees paid by some of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam members contributed to the provision of legal services by the TNLU or if these costs were met by outside donors.

The TNLU's organising of meetings and activities helped educate the cremation workers in how they could better word negotiations with families and build good arguments to justify the pay they were demanding. This education was seen as valuable by several of the cremation workers including CW16 who stated; "the union came, they educated [us] how to face a situation, how to behave and how to bargain and if problems came how to face that."

One technique used was to get the workers to tally all their daily living costs and then use this as the basis for pay claims when bargaining with families. Another technique was to encourage the workers to ask families to pay them at the same daily rate as they would receive for doing the agricultural or construction labouring jobs they had forgone to do the cremation (Pandy Interview, 2015). This education seems to have had a real impact in the manner in which the cremation workers undertake bargaining with families as several of the workers referred to using these techniques. One of those workers who took on this approach described how he worded his bargaining with families: "when I ask the villagers, I say, see if I go for a construction works I'll be able to earn 500 so you also give us 500" (CW10).

In theory, a possible weakness of bargaining on a more individual basis with families as opposed to collective bargaining with a panchayat or with the state government, is that it raises the potential for families to 'shop around' to find the lowest price, forcing competing cremation workers to lower their pay demands. However, this does not appear to have been an issue for the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu as there is a strong tradition that people burn the bodies of their deceased family members in the village, township or immediate suburb in which they grew up. One worker described how, that day, a body was being brought from Chennai, several hundred kilometres away, for cremation in the cemetery near where that person was raised (CW2).

One limitation of the cremation workers' bargaining demands was that in some locations the families of the dead were willing to burn the bodies themselves if they felt the cremation workers were demanding a payment that was too high. CW9 explained; "when people bring a body to be burned I cannot ask them for money if I bargain for this amount or that amount people will say we don't want you to do the process we ourselves will take care of it." However, this was not

the case in all villages and some of the workers stated that families were unlikely to do the cremation work themselves or find someone else to do it as it was a role that belonged to them for generations under the caste system. In these cases where substitution is less likely, the cremation workers are theoretically in a better position to bargain for higher pay.

While my interview sample was small, all three of the workers who stated that families would not substitute them for their own labour had experienced modest to medium increases in income as a result of bargaining (CW17, CW18 and CW31). Of the two workers who had experienced families willing to burn bodies themselves, one had achieved pay increases through bargaining, while the other stated attempts to bargain with families had been unsuccessful (CW7 and CW9).

5.4.2 Outcomes of individual bargaining

As noted already in this section the strategy of bargaining with families achieved mixed results for the cremation workers and outcomes are strongly influenced by the unique context of each village or township in which they were living. Ten of the workers interviewed said they had achieved an increase in the average payment they receive for burning a body and attributed this to their bargaining with families. The pay increases achieved were typically modest, especially when, as one worker noted, inflation and the increased cost of raw materials like logs are factored in (CW13). Nevertheless, they are notable achievements against a backdrop of strong social discrimination and some of the workers appeared proud to have made these gains. One worker spoke of tripling the amount he received for burning a body through bargaining: “before the union and all the people will be paying them between 50 rupees or 100 rupees and it wasn’t enough but after the union came we had the chance of bargaining for about like 200 rupees to 250 rupees” (CW29). Another worker stated the amount they typically received for burning a body had increased from 150 rupees to 700 rupees (CW31).

On the other hand three workers stated they had not achieved any increase in their income through efforts to bargain with the bereaved families (CW9, CW11 and CW29). One of these workers identified families’ willingness to do the cremation work themselves as the primary reasons for this. The other two

workers provided no clear explanation as to why bargaining with families had not been a successful strategy for them.

5.5 Conclusion

The Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam employed a diverse range of collective bargaining strategies to meet the needs of the different contexts the cremation workers faced and different demands they had. The Sangam, with support from the TNLU put considerable effort into collective bargaining with state government and municipal authorities with the main aim of gaining government employment and access to social welfare provisions for the cremation workers. In some locations the Sangam members themselves undertook collective bargaining with village panchayats in an attempt to get higher pay rates set for burning bodies. Finally, many of the cremation workers bargained for better pay from the families bringing bodies for burning, and the legal backing and training from the union helped them do this.

The challenges faced by the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam in these attempts to collectively bargain for better incomes and conditions were broadly similar to those of other informal workers groups covered in the literature. They lacked an obvious single employer with whom they could bargain and thus had to identify other organisations – Tamil Nadu state government, Madurai Corporation and panchayats – that had the potential to address some of their demands. Convincing these counterparts to engage in collective bargaining was often a struggle. Without the ability to take strike action, the cremation workers had to rely on other means such as demonstrations and media coverage to pressure their counterparts into engaging in collective bargaining and ceding to their demands.

The Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam's collective bargaining efforts at the state, panchayat and family levels won some changes for the cremations workers. A handful of the urban workers had gained formal employment and a steady salary; many more had achieved increases in their income; and most had seen the facilities at the cremation grounds improved. However, by the cremation workers' own measure these have been only modest livelihood improvements. Most of the workers still spoke of facing significant hardship in their daily lives

and a struggle to support themselves and their families in the manner they wished to. The most positive outcome of the collective bargaining process for a number of the workers was not a material improvement in their lives but increased agency and a sense of pride in having voiced their demands in public and to those in power.

While the livelihood improvements achieved through collective bargaining may not have been as great as the cremation workers would have liked, they should be considered relative to the challenging context in which the bargaining took place. When factors such as the informal nature of the cremation work, the highly scattered workforce and extremely poor social and economic standing of the cremation workers are taken into account, the fact they were able to achieve any livelihood gains at all seems significant. As noted in the methodology chapter, the Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam was selected as a case study for this research because it represented a group of widely scattered and highly exploited informal workers. It reasoned that if they could undertake successful collective bargaining then it is not beyond the capability of other informal workers. The modest achievements of the union suggest there is some scope for collective bargaining to be a pathway towards better work and a better life for informal workers, but it is by no means an easy path or a certain outcome.

Chapter 6: Can labour unions fulfil the principles of good development?

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have explored the challenges labour unions face in engaging with informal workers and examined the strategies employed to organise a union of informal cremation workers and undertake collective bargaining. The overarching motivation has been to provide an account of informal workers' unionising and collective bargaining to achieve their objectives for better livelihoods, justice and dignity. In doing so, it is hoped this thesis can both instigate and inform discussion about the potential of labour unions to support the needs and aspirations of the growing number of men and women that make up the informal economy of developing countries.

The literature review in Chapter 2 established that labour unions are not typically part of the mainstream development discourse. They are rarely mentioned in contemporary development literature, do not feature in development aid strategies and are treated with distrust by some development NGOs. Such indifference and opposition to the potential contribution of labour unions to development was surprising to me. When many of the core issues in development today relate not to an absolute lack of resources, but to income inequality and human rights, labour unions seem like a logical part of the solution alongside other development initiatives such as co-operatives, fair trade and living wage campaigns.

The criticism that labour unions have failed to represent the aspirations of informal workers is one of the core reasons why unions are often not considered to be development actors. The findings of my field research, outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, have gone some way towards addressing the questions of how informal workers can organise into a union and what strategies they can employ to collectively bargain. Those chapters described the steps taken to organise cremation workers in Tamil Nadu into a union and the strategies subsequently employed by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam to bargain for better incomes, work conditions and access to welfare.

A full discussion of whether labour unions have the ability to make a valuable contribution to development requires more than just an understanding of the technical strategies for organising and collective bargaining in the informal economy. The function and outcomes of labour unions working in the context of the informal economy must also be assessed against principles of good development. Some of the development literature suggests that labour unions working in developing countries may not always live up to the principles that development should be participatory, sustainable and equitable. In particular labour unions have been criticised as being unable to sustain themselves, entrenching inequitable socio-economic relationships, and failing to promote gender equity.

These are serious critiques of labour unions' development credentials but they do not appear to have been met with much debate or analysis. This chapter aims to test these critiques and instigate discussion as to whether or not labour unions can be considered good development actors. Both the outcomes of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and the process through which these outcomes were achieved will be critically discussed and assessed against three principles of good development. These principles are that development should be participatory, sustainable and equitable.

6.2 Principles of Development

Outlining a clear set of principles which constitute 'good development' is not a simple task as the aims and principles of development approaches from Dependency Theory to Neoliberalism are vastly different and contested. What good development looks like is ultimately subjective and in this section I will outline my own view of what good development entails. This viewpoint is greatly shaped by the rights-based approach to development.

The rights-based approach to development is founded on the concept that all people have basic economic, social and cultural rights, and there is a duty to support and enable all people to realise these rights (Willis, 2011). Rather than focussing development interventions on providing more goods and services, the rights-based approach to development advocates for interventions that address inequities and social injustices that prevent people from realising their

economic, social and cultural rights (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Schafer et al., 2009) . This belief that the aim of development is to address the root causes of poverty and oppression is one of the ‘good development’ principles which I believe development actors and development interventions should be assessed against.

The rights-based approach to development also provides some guiding principles for the way in which development interventions are pursued so that the process of delivering development assistance is itself helpful to the fulfilment of human-rights. The rights-based approach to development argues that development assistance should be ‘participatory, accountable, and transparent, with equity in decision-making and sharing of the fruits or outcome of the process’ (Sengupta, 2000; Uvin, 2007). Of these principles I place particular emphasis on participation as a key principle of good development practice. A participatory approach to development can empower those involved so they have greater control over the development process and this empowerment can potentially grow to be greater agency in their wider lives (Pettit, 2012).

The principle of equity in decision-making and in the sharing of outcomes is also an important principle that guides good development interventions. Equity in decision-making helps ensure that all those with a stake get to participate in the development process, including those who are often marginalised, such as women, the disabled and ethnic minorities (Jones, 2009). Furthermore, given economic and social inequity is one of the core reasons that millions of people around the world lack certain basic rights such as shelter, food and healthcare, it is important that development interventions distribute their benefits in way which doesn’t exacerbate existing inequalities and lifts up those most in need.

A final principle that helps define what I believe to be ‘good development’ is sustainability.⁶ While sustainable development is often associated with environmental concerns, in this thesis I wish to refer to sustainability in relation to the ability of donor interventions to be self-sustaining. Donor interventions

⁶ Sustainable development refers primarily to development that meets the needs of the world’s poor without sacrificing the environment’s ability to meet future needs (Brundtland et al., 1987). With climate change and other environmental challenges threatening to undo the development gains of the last few decades the position of environmental sustainability as a key principle of ‘good development’ is also incredibly important.

typically endeavour to create some change for a community or country, and an important principle of development is that, once donor assistance and expertise is withdrawn, the change it has effected or institutions and infrastructure that have been established can continue to function (Tango International, 2009).

In summary the three principles of good development against which I will be assessing the efforts and outcomes of the cremation workers union in Tamil Nadu are:

- Development interventions should be participatory and empowering for those who they seek to assist.
- Development interventions should be sustainable for the environment and institutions or infrastructure that are set up should be self-sustaining in the long term.
- Development interventions should promote equity and the benefits of interventions should be equitably shared.

These principles are interrelated in a number of ways. Participation in decision-making is an aspect of equitable development as allows all people an equal chance to have their say. Furthermore, sustainability is unlikely to be achieved if communities do not participate in and have ownership of the development process or if the outcomes are inequitable (Langhelle, 2000). These connections are evident in the following discussion regarding the cremation workers' union, and where relevant, I will acknowledge these crossovers.

6.3 Participatory development

6.3.1 Introduction

Participation is widely recognised as an important principle in development. It stems from a growing understanding that interventions which reflect the actual priorities of local people and involve their expertise and labour are more likely to be effective, empowering and sustainable (Black, 1999; Crocker, 2008; Degnbol-Martinussen & Engerg-Perderson, 2003). For some, participation is more than just a means to achieve effective outcomes, but an important goal in and of itself. The intrinsic importance of participation and empowerment to the development process is powerfully conveyed by Crocker (2008) who argues “authentic development occurs when groups at whatever level become subjects

who deliberate, decide and act in the world rather than being victims of circumstance or objects of someone else's decisions, the tools of someone else's designs." (p.339)

While the term participatory development is a near universally used buzzword in development (Leal, 2010), in practice it can mean many different things; from the deliberate decision making by participants described by Crocker above, to mere token efforts by donors and experts to 'consult' with local people. While both token consultation and deliberate decision-making may both be considered forms of participation, it is not to say they should be treated as equal. Crocker (2008) provides a useful definition of 7 different types of participation: nominal, passive, consultative, petitionary, participatory implementation, bargaining, deliberative that are based on Arnstein's (1969) original ladder of citizen participation. He argues that the further down the list the 'thicker' the level of participation and thus the greater the likelihood of authentic development. A brief description of each of these types of participation, as outlined by (Crocker, 2008) is shown in table 1 below.

These definitions provide a useful measuring stick for analysing the participatory practices of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. In this discussion I will look at the type of participation displayed in three different facets of the Sangam's formation and continued activity. First, I will look at how participatory the TNLU's approach to organising the Sangam was, then I will look at how participatory the Sangam's activities and internal decision-making has been. Finally, I will consider the Sangam's level of participation in policy and debate in the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

Table 1. The Seven Types of Participation. Source: The author, based on the typology of Crocker (2008)

Nominal participation	A person is a member of a group but does not attend its meetings. Some people, are not even members, others are members but are unable to attend, because of other responsibilities, or unwilling to attend, for instance, because they are harassed.
Passive participation	People are group members and attend the group's or officials' decision-making meetings, but passively listen to reports about the decisions that others already have made. The elite tells the non-elite what the elite is going to do, and non-elite persons participate, at best, by asking questions or making comments.
Consultative participation	Non-elites participate by giving information and their opinions to the elite. The non-elite neither deliberate among themselves nor make decisions. It is the elite who are the 'deciders,' and while they may deign to listen to the non-elite, they have no obligation to do so.
Petitionary participation	Non-elites petition authorities to make certain decisions and do certain things, usually to remedy grievances. Although it is the prerogative of the elite to decide, the non-elite have a right to be heard and the elite have the duty to receive, listen, and consider.
Participatory implementation	Elites determine the goals and main means, while non-elites can decide on tactics to achieve the goals and implement the tactics. In this mode non-elites do more than listen and comment, they also make and enact decisions.
Bargaining	On the basis of whatever individual or collective power they have, non-elites bargain with elites. Self-interest largely motivates each side, and non-elite influence on the final 'deal' depends on what non-elites are willing to give up and what concessions they are able to extract.
Deliberative participation	Non-elites (sometimes among themselves and sometimes with elites) deliberate together, engage in practical reasoning, and scrutinise proposals and reasons in order to forge agreements on policies for the common good, ones which at least a majority can accept.

6.3.2 Participation in organising the union

As noted in Chapter 3, the effort to organise the cremation workers was instigated by the TNLU, not by the cremation workers themselves. However, the TNLU did not impose unionisation on the cremation workers. Organising of the cremation workers into a union only began after approximately 5 years consultation by the TNLU, and the building of mutual understanding between the TNLU staff and the cremation workers (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). The cremation workers were active in the organising process, attending the meetings in person, learning about the purpose and principles and in some cases recruiting other colleagues. Importantly, it appears that the workers I spoke to all made a conscious decision to join the Sangam rather than being passively enrolled or coerced to join. This is shown in the comments of one cremation worker who said he “had my own liking towards joining the union” and “was not pressurised or intimidated by others” (CW11).

This brief overview of the process of organising the cremation workers into their union suggests passive participation was the prevalent style of participation employed. It was not a process started by the workers themselves based on their own understanding of what needed to be done to improve their lives. Rather, the TNLU acting as the ‘elite’ lead the organising activities and reported to the cremation workers regarding what they would be doing. The cremation workers were able to ask questions, make suggestions and could chose not to join, though in the early stages they do not appear to have had much power and say over strategy and activities. However, as the organising progressed, the style of participation employed evolved to resemble a consultative approach, whereby the cremation workers were given space to develop their own thoughts and provide their opinions to the TNLU.

Finally, as the organising work proceeded, it became ‘thicker’ again by taking the shape of participatory implementation. In this style of participation the goals and means of organising were largely set by the TNLU but the actual task of organising and the day to day decisions that it requires were undertaken by the cremation workers.

6.3.3 Participation in the Sangam's decision-making and activities

In theory, the manner in which labour unions make internal decisions and conduct their activities should align strongly with the 'bargaining' or 'deliberative' styles of participation. Labour unions are membership-based organisations in which the members have voting rights and the power to make major decisions. Furthermore, labour unions that are structured in the 'organising model' seek to downplay the role of paid staff, and instead focus on facilitating the union members to make decisions, lead collective bargaining and identify issues.

Despite labour unions' theoretical commitment to the principles of democracy, member participation, and member ownership, some do fail to live up to these ideals. In certain instances, unions, particularly those in developing countries, are autocratically controlled by individual union leaders or cliques who manipulate funds, procedures and elections to ensure a monopoly of power (Leather 2005). According to Leather (2005) the breakdown of democracy, accountability and genuine participation by members in some unions is one of the reasons that development NGOs are sceptical of labour unions' commitment to development and true empowerment of the working poor.

Once the initial organising effort by the TNLU subsided and the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam began to take shape as its own entity, it began to form its own internal processes for decision-making, leadership elections and collective bargaining activities. Nonetheless, it continued to maintain a close relationship with the TNLU which acts as a guiding body and provider of technical advice and legal support services. This section will explore the internal decision-making practices of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam, as well as its implementation of activities, and consider whether they live up to the 'bargaining' or 'deliberative' styles of participation labour unions should theoretically aspire to.

The area of decision-making that was most frequently referred to by the interviewees was the setting of collective bargaining demands. Given collective bargaining is one of the most important functions of a labour union, this is not surprising. To formulate bargaining demands the Sangam leaders in each district, along with TNLU staff in some instances (particularly in the Sangam's early years), would call meetings which the cremation worker members could

attend, and at these meetings the members were asked to state their 'grievances'. These grievances were then formed in to collective bargaining demands or, if appropriate, taken up as legal cases by the TNLU.

This process of stating grievances and formulating bargaining demands appears to have been managed in accordance with the petitionary participation style. Of the 37 Sangam members interviewed, 22 said they had stated their grievances at meetings either themselves or through a proxy. This includes four of the six women interviewed. Only one worker suggested he did not feel comfortable speaking up at meetings he attended (CW20); the other 14 workers were either not asked this question during the interviews or did not provide a direct answer to the question. The overwhelming sense was that these 22 workers felt comfortable participating in meetings and believed that the Sangam leaders and TNLU were genuinely considered their input. The petitionary participation style of this process is evidenced by one worker's experience of giving a grievance regarding an electric crematorium that was undermining his and other urban workers' income.

"An example is the problem we had with the electric furnace running 24 hours. When we approached the union, the union helped us to fight against them [the Madurai Corporation]. If we make a grievance, if we takes a point to them they do tend to listen and they do intend to rectify it and they do take actions towards that, so we do have a good involvement." (CW4)

As the Sangam has become more independent of the TNLU it appears the process for determining collective bargaining demands has evolved further to become something akin to a deliberative participatory process. According to the Sangam President, decisions such as whether to hold a demonstration in support of certain demands are now taken only with the agreement of the members who attend the meetings where such actions are discussed (CW16).

While my impression was that the TNLU and, in turn, the leaders of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam created a good culture and structure for Sangam members to participate in the formulation of demands, I acknowledge that selection bias in my interviews may influence this impression. The workers I interviewed were mostly selected by the TNLU staff with my input regarding what mixture of genders, rank and rural workers would be appropriate. It is possible that the

TNLU staff selected cremation workers that they knew more closely and these are likely to have been the workers who had greater involvement in the Sangam.

One worker who said he often voiced his grievances at meetings noted that not all members do participate in these discussions; “if 40 people are there, 4 may talk and 36 be quiet. This is because they feel shy” (CW3). To balance this, at some interview sites I interviewed some workers who were not pre-selected by the TNLU and their level of participation did not differ noticeably to the norm. However, I recognise that the selection bias remains a limitation in relation to this and a number of findings in my research. Extrapolating this finding, regarding participation in formulating collective bargaining demands, should be thus be done with caution.

The selection of leaders should, in theory, be a highly participatory process for members in a labour union. However, the selection of leaders within the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam probably falls towards the ‘thinner’ end of participation. The Sangam has two clear layers of leadership. In each of the four districts (in which the Sangam is active) there is a district president and district secretary and above that is a state level president, secretary and treasurer. Union members do not have a vote in selecting who fills these leadership positions. Instead at large state-level meetings every few years the TNLU suggests which members would make good leaders and there is room for discussion and approval from those present (CW7, CW16 and Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). As such, the selection of leaders can be defined as being a consultative participation process only.

The actual implementation of collective bargaining activities by Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam such as demonstrations and face to face negotiations show a strong level of participation by the Sangam members. Most obvious is the participation of thousands of cremation workers in the mass demonstrations in Madurai that were run by the Sangam and TNLU. The TNLU gave training to some of the cremation workers, including but not exclusively the district leaders, so they could be at the forefront of these demonstrations, walking at the front and speaking to the crowd and invited guests. Leaders of the Sangam, as well as selected cremation worker members, were also at the forefront of the

Sangam's face to face meetings with state government and Madurai Corporation officials and leaders to deliver the demands of the Sangam. The type of participation by cremation worker members in these two important activities of the Sangam fits with the 'implementation participation' style described by Crocker.

6.3.4 Participation in public discourse and policy making in Tamil Nadu

The above mention of the cremation workers participation in public demonstrations and negotiations with government officials brings the discussion to the final area of participation that I sought to explore — the collective participation of the cremation workers in state level discourse, policy setting and budget planning through the vehicle of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. Prior to the formation of the Sangam and its collective bargaining activities, the cremation workers seem to have had a very low profile and low level of participation in state level politics and even in their village panchayat decision-making. Several of the workers stated they did not have the knowledge, skill or the social standing required to approach the government as an individual and demand policy changes (CW1, CW6, CW7, CW15 and CW18).

The TNLU's organising work gave the cremation workers awareness about their rights and what level of treatment and support they have the right to expect from the community and government (Manohari Doss and Pandey Interviews, 2015). This knowledge appears to have been the first step towards empowering the workers to participate in public demonstrations and make demands to village panchayats, the Madurai Corporation and the state government. The second, and arguably more important, step was the formation of the union as an organisation that could harness their collective strength to have a greater impact in public discourse and policy making. The impact that acting collectively as a union had in enabling the cremation workers to participate in politics and policy making at a state level was eloquently described by one of the cremation workers.

"If 10 people join together and they clap then the sound will be reached to others. When we joined together and if we join as a union, people will come to notice us, the officials the members the people in a higher position will recognise us only if we are together. Unity is a must, because if we are

collectively tied then only people who are government officials will come to know of the struggles we face and they may help us, they may give us improvement in our life” (CW21).

The collective participation of the cremation workers — through the vehicle of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam — in public discourse and policy setting at both the village panchayat level and the state level resembles a bargaining style of participation. The cremation workers, as non-elites, use their collective power to bargain with the elites of the Tamil Nadu State Government, Madurai Corporation and panchayats to further their interests. Crocker (2008) notes that the greater the power imbalance between the non-elites and elites, the less influence non-elites will have on the outcomes. Such a power imbalance is certainly present between the cremation workers and their adversaries, and this bargaining has not yielded every outcome the cremation workers hoped to achieve such as the establishment of their own welfare board.

As will be discussed in more detail in section 6.4 on sustainability, the frequency of bargaining with the Tamil Nadu state government and Madurai Corporation appears to have declined in recent years as the TNLU has reduced its ‘handholding’ and financial support for the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. This may indicate that the cremation workers were relying to some extent on the TNLU’s power and knowledge to conduct this bargaining and not their own. Nevertheless the Sangam has, under its own steam, participated in some public debate and bargaining with powerful officials in government and the Madurai Corporation. In doing so it provides a good example of a group of marginalised and poor people being empowered with both knowledge and collective organisational strength to project their desires and demands into the public consciousness and political decision-making.

6.3.5 Summary of discussion on participatory development

It is difficult to stamp an overall mark on the degree of participation the cremation workers have had in the formation of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and its ongoing operation. As Table 2 illustrates the Sangam has shown a large variation in types of participation from passive participation in the initial organising to deliberative participation in deciding the it’s bargaining actions; and it is difficult to weigh in which areas a high level of participation is

more or less important. However, I do not think that in this case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam the critiques of labour unions' non-participative practices, such as corruption and cliques, were evident. Instead, anecdotal evidence suggests that the structure and the culture of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam has enabled a relatively high level of participation from those cremation workers who choose to be involved.

Feelings of empowerment expressed by some of the workers are further indication that the Sangam's processes have been genuinely participatory. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, an authentically participatory approach to development can empower local people by helping them realise their own, and collective, agency. This connection was evident in the comments of several cremation workers who said that they had gained a sense of pride as a result of being part of the Sangam, and a realisation that they could challenge injustice and take action to shape their own destinies (CW15, CW20 and CW26). This sense of empowerment was powerfully illustrated in the response of one worker whom I asked how it felt to be speak and sing into a microphone at one of the demonstrations.

"I felt proud and felt like it gave me a strength that we should have the courage to fight and we have to achieve more in life so it gave me a spirit to fight and it gave me a spirit that we should achieve something in society so we'll have a better living. So until that I'll have like the spirit of fighting and asking the government." (CW20)

One case study can neither prove nor disprove the theory that labour unions in developing countries enable strong participation amongst those workers whom they are seeking to support. However, it is a helpful illustration of a labour union that was formed to pursue development goals, employing styles of participation that have, in some instances, been empowering for the informal workers it intended to help. Furthermore, this case study suggests there are no structural obstacles that prevent labour unions in developing countries functioning in a participatory manner. The genuine ways in which cremation workers have been able to participate in the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam indicate that labour unions, in both their formation and on-going functioning, can aspire to fulfil Crocker (2008)'s vision of 'authentic development'.

Table 2. Types of Participation Exhibited by the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam
Source: The author, based on Crocker's typology and interviews with cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, 2015

Type of participation	Example within the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam
Passive participation	The initial organising of the cremation workers by the TNLU displayed a passive style of participation whereby the TNLU took the lead in decision-making but the cremation workers could provide questions, comments and ideas. .
Consultative participation	The election of the Sangam's leaders allowed input and review by the cremation workers, but the decision was typically made by the TNLU.
Petitionary participation	The setting of collective bargaining demands and also legal cases to pursue resembled a petitionary style in the early stages of the Sangam as the cremation workers would typically give their grievances to the TNLU which would in turn decide how to act.
Participatory implementation	As responsibility for organising the Sangam transferred from the TNLU to the cremation workers themselves, the workers took charge of day to day decision-making.
Consultative participation	The election of the Sangam's leaders allowed input and review by the cremation workers, but the decision was typically made by the TNLU.
Bargaining	The manner in which the Sangam has engaged in public discourse and policy making with the Tamil Nadu state government resembles a bargaining style of participation.
Deliberative participation	Decision-making about collective bargaining demands and what actions to take involve negotiation between a wide-range of members whose views are all taken into account. This aspect of the Sangam's decision-making is akin to deliberative participation.

6.4 Sustainable development

6.4.1 Introduction

For several decades development actors have been urged to ensure their interventions build the self-reliance of recipients so they can sustain whatever change they have created long after donor money and expertise has been withdrawn (Cassen, 1986). However, achieving sustainable change can be difficult. External evaluations of the African Development Bank and European Commission in the early 2000s found that fewer than half their development projects in Africa and Asia respectively had achieved sustainable change (Riddell, 2007). Regardless of the challenge I believe achieving sustainable development is a principle which most development interventions should aspire to as, without sustainability, development will ultimately fall short of achieving its long term goal — a world free of poverty and injustice.

Theoretically the formation of a labour union is well placed to be a sustainable development intervention. Labour unions require little in the way of costly or complex technology to maintain and members can shoulder much of the workload. Also, in principle, union members pay regular dues, providing the means of financial self-sufficiency. However the reality for labour unions in the informal economy appears quite different and as Spooner (2012) noted in the literature review, many struggle to sustain themselves without donor support. Spooner (2012)'s suggest that there are two fundamental challenges to labour unions in the informal economy becoming self-sustaining. First is the immense difficulty of collecting dues from members who are often poor and second, it is a challenge to develop some of the workers into leaders with sufficient skill and knowledge to guide the union and its activities.

This chapter will explore the experience of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam in the five years since donor funding ceased and it became largely self-sufficient. In particular, it will look at how the challenges above – the need to develop leaders and the low income of cremation workers – have affected the Sangam's ability to continue to effectively represent the interests of its members. By exploring the experience of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam I hope to be able to offer some initial judgements as to whether the formation of labour unions

amongst informal workers is a development intervention that can fulfil the principle of sustainable change.

6.4.2 Financial sustainability

Labour unions may not require expensive technology and infrastructure but they do have on-going running costs. These costs can include reimbursing members and leaders for travel to meetings and demonstrations, government registration fees, printing posters and pamphlets and sometimes costs associated with legal cases taken on behalf of members. If staff are employed to manage some of the union's tasks then this is a substantial extra cost. However, Devenish and Skinner (2004) note that for unions in the informal economy, paid staff are rare and it falls on members to undertake most tasks.

External donor funding from the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions allowed the TNLU and cremation workers to meet these costs in the Sangam's early years. TNLU staff member Pandy stressed how the donor money enabled the TNLU to bring together the cremation workers for meetings and demonstrations quickly, making the organising and collective bargaining process much easier than if they had needed the cremation workers to first fundraise to cover the costs themselves (Pandy Interview, 2015). However since 2010 the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions has not funded the TNLU to support the cremation workers and the Sangam has had only minor financial support from the TNLU.

In principle, the Sangam, like other labour unions should be able to collect dues from its members to fund itself. However the challenge of collecting dues from informal workers is well established in the literature:

“The vast majority of informal economy workers, particularly women, have precarious livelihoods and many face extreme poverty. Their ability to pay regular membership dues is severely restricted and may be erratic and vulnerable to external shocks (economic crises, natural disasters). Even where organizations have some income stability, it is rarely sufficient to cover the costs of paid staff, meeting expenses, adequate premises, and so on.” (Bonner & Spooner, 2011, pp. 91-92)

The TNLU seems to have been well aware that the cremation workers would struggle to afford even moderate membership dues. According to Pandy, their

strategy was to raise the cremation workers' incomes through collective bargaining to such an extent that the workers could afford to pay annual membership dues sufficient to run the Sangam when NZCTU funding finished (Pandy Interview, 2015). However, as outlined in Chapter 5, the income gains achieved by most of the cremation workers were in the end only modest, and it remains unrealistic to expect them to pay for some of the more expensive operating costs like staff and large scale travel.

The low income of the cremation workers may prevent them from paying hundreds of rupees in fees, but it does not necessarily mean they cannot pay any membership fee at all. Indeed, it is argued that even small membership dues are important as they help build a sense of ownership amongst the workers and help provide at least some basic services (Devenish & Skinner, 2004; Spooner, 2012). However, the Sangam does not have a centralised system of collecting membership dues. Manohari stated that collecting membership dues from workers right across Tamil Nadu would be "hectic" and a very time consuming process (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Instead, the TNLU had encouraged the Sangam to adopt a more decentralised financial system, whereby members pay for their own travel expenses when attending local level meetings and pay annual membership dues to their local area or district leader to contribute to the cost activities being undertaken directly in their area.

The collection of membership dues in this manner does not appear to have been implemented evenly across all the areas where the Sangam has members. I asked fifteen of the cremation workers whether they paid membership dues to support the Sangam and only seven stated they paid annual dues of between 12 and 50 rupees. Workers in one district did mention a system for collecting membership dues, similar to that which Manohari stated. One of them explained that: "Collectively sometimes we contribute some money for the local meetings we conduct and for getting posters. Collectively we join together just the local bodies around here" (CW25).

This example suggests that a decentralised system of financing operating costs is a feasible strategy for the Sangam. There were no apparent reasons why such a system could not be implemented by the Sangam in other areas too.

Certainly there appeared to be a willingness amongst the cremation workers to pay a small due as part of their union membership. Three of the workers stated they would pay a small fee to the Sangam if requested (CW15, CW19 and CW23). They seemed to understand that by financially contributing to the union they could stand to gain in the long term by achieving better incomes and access to social welfare through collective bargaining. This belief was clearly conveyed by one worker who stated “whatever the amount of the union fee, somehow I will earn and I will pay, because somehow the union will benefit me” (CW23).

6.4.3 Developing skills and knowledge to run a labour union

The on-going running of a labour union requires a broad range of organisational, administrative and leadership skills as well as a sound understanding of the principles of collective action and bargaining. Labour unions that are small or represent low income workers are unlikely to be able to afford expert staff or outside professionals with just membership dues for income. Instead, these unions will likely rely on their elected leaders as well as members to have the required knowledge and organisational skills such as budgeting, reading, writing, public speaking and negotiating (Ahn, 2007, pg.141).

The TNLU were aware that developing the skills and knowledge of the Sangam’s leadership was important to its future self-sufficiency. During the formative period of the Sangam, the TNLU provided its leaders with education about legal rights and government welfare schemes as well as training on how to conduct lobbying, advocacy and negotiations with government officials. Leaders were also taught to speak at meetings and demonstrations and concisely present the worker’s demands (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015).

Manohari stated that the bulk of this training took place over one or two days. This seems like a short period to develop such a complex set of knowledge and skills, especially given the cremation workers started with a relatively low level of formal education (many stated they had left school by age 14). The admission by one of the Sangam’s district presidents that he felt lacked he the knowledge and skill “to have a lawful and rightful talk” with government officials suggests that this training was insufficient (CW16). Manohari also felt that the

Sangam leaders required further training to properly fulfil the duties of leadership and she highlighted communication and bargaining skills as particular skills that needed to be developed.

Developing the skills and knowledge of the worker members themselves to a level in which they can effectively lead the union themselves and engage in relatively complex activities like collective bargaining with government authorities does not seem to be an impossible task. With just the very limited training provided a number of the Sangam members have shown impressive leadership in their areas, continuing to run meetings and bargain with village panchayats. However, the amount of time that it takes to develop the required skills and knowledge should not be underestimated, and donors and NGOs seeking to establish labour unions within the informal economy should be willing to invest in this training adequately before withdrawing their support.

6.4.4 Impact on Sangam's ability to sustain collective bargaining

The Mayana Vettiyangal Sangam, like most labour unions in the informal economy, has clearly had to grapple with the challenge of raising funds from low income members, and the need to develop the skills and knowledge required to run a union. The question is, what impact have these challenges had on the ability of the Sangam to continue to deliver livelihood improvements to its members in the years since external support was withdrawn? This section will look at whether the Sangam has been able to sustain collective bargaining, one of a labour unions core functions and the mechanism through which it could achieve many of the workers' hopes for improved livelihoods.

According to the workers, meetings at village, district and occasionally state level have continued to be run on a relatively regular basis. These meetings are typically organised by local leaders, one of which spoke of how hundreds of the workers in her areas attend (CW32). These meetings provide the opportunity for members to share their grievances and demands and learn what the union leadership was doing to address these and how they can be involved.

Several workers (CW27, CW32 and CW36) stated the frequency of demonstrations had decreased in recent years. CW36 recalled how in the past there were many rallies, demonstrations and activities by the union and "it was so tight", but he claimed that now he didn't hear about such activities so often.

This experience, though possibly exaggerated by the worker's personal decision to withdraw from close engagement with the Sangam, is fairly representative of the Sangam's struggle to continue to hold large demonstrations as a collective bargaining strategy. It is an experience that broadly corresponds with the view of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam state level President. He explained that the Sangam had recently been discussing plans for a large demonstration in Madurai, and while this demonstration was still possibly going to proceed, he admitted that the organisational effort required and financial costs involved were significant obstacles to overcome (CW16).

Pandy also noted that collective bargaining activities had been pared back in recent years. Whereas in the early years of the Sangam the mass demonstrations or large meetings would be the stage for the Sangam handing over collective bargaining demands and petitions to government officials and leaders, now only the Sangam leaders are present when demands are handed over.

The Sangam's ability to mobilise its members on a large scale in support of collective bargaining efforts has clearly been hard to sustain. The main reason for this appears to be lack of financial means, however a lack of organisational skill may also be a factor. This appears to have impacted the Sangam's ability to achieve better wages and access to social welfare provisions improvements through bargaining with state and municipal authorities. All of the major gains from bargaining with these authorities – formal recognition as workers, municipal employment, safety gear and improved cremation ground amenities – were achieved as a result of bargaining during the 2006-2010 period when the Sangam had the close support of the TNLU (CW2 and CW26)(Karthikeyan, 2008). Other factors may also have influenced the outcome of recent bargaining efforts, not least a change of state government in 2010 (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015).

At a more localised level the Sangam appears to have had more success at sustaining their collective bargaining efforts in the period since 2010. The cremation workers strategy of collective bargaining with village panchayats to get prices set for each cremation seems to have continued in a number of

locations with some gains being achieved. Several workers stated the amount they earn for each cremation has increased since 2010 as a result of collective bargaining with their local panchayat (CW16, CW20 and CW21). One cremation worker described what seems like an annual round of collective bargaining with his panchayat that has led to consistent increases in the pay rate the panchayat sets and families in the village are expected to pay. He stated “there’ll be meetings and after the meetings I’ll be able to come and speak with the panchayat so it gradually increased like 250, 350, 450 and now it has come up to 800 rupees” (CW20).

The ability of cremation workers to sustain meetings and collective bargaining themselves at a local level suggests that other groups of informal workers that work in closer proximity to one another may be better placed to sustain the functions of a labour union under their own steam. Ahn’s (2013) review of 13 labour unions in the informal economy in India shows that three of the unions which had achieved the best results from organising and collective bargaining (unions of seed processing and packaging workers, workers in explosives factories, and brewery workers respectively) covered workers who were relatively closely concentrated in a handful of workplaces or a few districts. However, some of the unions covering more dispersed groups of informal workers such as bullock drivers had also achieved some success, so further analysis of the spatial dimensions of labour union sustainability is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Those workers who engage in bargaining with bereaved families bringing bodies on an individual basis have also been able to sustain their bargaining efforts. While some of the workers engaged in this type of bargaining before joining the union, it appears the new bargaining skills the TNLU taught them have helped them consistently increase the payments they can receive. As described in section 5.4, being part of the union had given cremation workers the collective support and legal backing they needed to engage in more resolute bargaining with families as well as new knowledge about how to bargain in an effective manner. These two factors supporting their bargaining efforts do not appear to have waned since donor money ceased in 2010. A number of the cremation workers stated the average payment they received from families for

undertaking cremation work had steadily increased in the last few years (CW2, CW24 and CW31).

It is important to note that collective bargaining is not the only function of a union, and protecting members' rights and supporting them in legal disputes are also important functions. While these aspects of the Sangam were not the focus of my research interviews, it does appear that the reduction in discrimination and abuse experienced by the cremation workers as a result of joining the Sangam has been a sustained change. A number of the workers noted this as an improvement in their lives, not just back in 2008 or 2009, but in the present too (CW3, CW10, CW19, and CW32).

6.4.5 Summary of discussion on sustainable development

The inherent challenges to the sustainability of informal workers' labour unions — insufficient skills, knowledge and financial resources — appear to be limiting the long term effectiveness of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. The Sangam's level of activity has dropped since donor money and the TNLU's close support was reduced, and few large gains have been achieved through collective bargaining in recent years.

Of the two challenges, raising adequate funds from poor and informal cremation workers seems like the more intractable problem. This is commensurate with the widely held view in the literature that unions of informal workers will generally require outside donor support to maintain the necessary staff and resources necessary to function as an effective labour union (Bonner & Spooner, 2011; Devenish & Skinner, 2004). Developing sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable leaders is also clearly a challenge for the Sangam, but one which could possibly be addressed by increasing the length and depth of leadership training. The Sangam leaders have already shown significant aptitude in continuing to run meetings despite having few resources and needing to travel significant distances to communicate.

The Sangam has had success at sustaining activities on a smaller scale in some localities. In some areas around Tamil Nadu the Sangam members continue to meet on a regular basis, collect small fees from members and sustain effective collective bargaining with village panchayats. However, these localised activities are unlikely to achieve the larger aims of the workers such as

government employment and access to social security. Such improvements will require collective bargaining with state and municipal authorities and that appears difficult for the Sangam to undertake effectively on its own.

Overall, the picture of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam, five years after stepping out on its own, is of a labour union just managing to sustain its core activities but unable to deliver new large scale improvements such as a welfare board or substantial income increases for its cremation worker members. The lesson to be extracted from this is not necessarily that labour unions in the informal economy are inevitably unsustainable. Rather, like most development interventions, the challenge of building self-reliance should not be underestimated, and development planners and practitioners should ensure adequate time and resources are invested in building the capability of those being helped. Given unions are often attempting to achieve large scale change, affecting thousands or tens of thousands of members, a longer term commitment from donors could still deliver good value for money.

6.5 Equitable development

6.5.1 Introduction

The term equity is increasingly a part of the development lexicon but not always properly understood. The concept of equity is closely aligned with that of social justice and is based on the moral idea that all people share a common humanity and should be treated as equals (Jones, 2009). What equity means in practice is often debated but Anderson and O'Neil (2006) and Jones (2009) provide an outline of three key principles of equity. First, all people should have equal chances in life and not have their freedom restricted by factors beyond their control, such as their gender or ethnicity. Second, some goods and services such as food, shelter and healthcare are so fundamental to our humanity and ability to participate in society that they should be allocated to people based foremost on their level of need. Finally, the distribution of rewards and positions

(excluding those that are fundamental human needs) should reflect people's effort and ability and not factors like race or family.⁷

I believe that using these principles of equity to guide development policy and interventions is important for two reasons. First of all equity reflects the human rights of all to be treated equally, something that people intrinsically value (Jones, 2009), and its absence causes strong feelings of injustice, exclusion and resentment that undermine people's happiness and can destabilise society. Second and most importantly for the discussion in the rest of this chapter, there is a growing recognition that development interventions must address the inequities⁸ that are the root cause of poverty (Anderson & O'Neil, 2006; Green, 2012; Jones, 2009). These causes may be inequitable institutions, cultural norms and economic systems which do not offer particular groups of people, be they women, ethnic minorities or poor informal workers, the equal opportunities they deserve; or which deny them access to the basic needs they have a right to, making it extremely difficult to earn a decent livelihood or gain a good education. Unless these inequities, and the power imbalances that sustain them, are challenged, the structural causes of poverty will continue to exist, as they do today despite decades of development aid and economic growth (Jones, 2009).

Labour unions are often associated with the term equity in Western countries. For decades they have been advocates of a social welfare safety net, equal pay for women and have empowered workers to get their fair share of the wealth their labour creates (Brugiavini et al., 2001; Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Hazel Conley, 2014). However, in the development literature the role of labour unions as promoters of equity is less clear. Both Degnol-Martinussen and Engerg-Perderson (2003) and World Bank (2013) note that labour unions in developing countries can have a negative effect on equity in the labour market by entrenching the relatively privileged position of those in middle class professions and doing nothing to support poorer workers in the informal economy. It is argued that this can exacerbate income inequality, and result in

⁷ In application these principles may conflict and there is argument over which take precedence. For me the order in which they are outlined in this paragraph reflects the hierarchy of their importance.

⁸ The concept of equity is related but different to equality. Equality aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy a prosperous life. Equity by contrast involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy a prosperous life, if these inputs are fair then equity is comfortable, to a degree, with unequal outcomes.

unequal opportunities for future generations. Furthermore, there is some recognition that labour unions in developing countries (and in many developed countries too) have a poor record on gender equity and equity for ethnic minorities. Labour unions have failed to include women in decision-making, even where the workforce is overwhelmingly female, and overlooked specific issues faced by women in the workplace in favour of those faced by men (Eade & Leather, 2005; ILO and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, 1999; Thomas, 1999)

In this section I aim to explore these critiques and discuss whether or not labour unions can be agents for equitable development. I seek to explore how the three key principles of equity relate to the functions and aims of labour unions with particular reference to the case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam. These three principles of equity are interrelated in many ways but by exploring each in turn it is hoped that a fuller picture of the relationship between labour unions and equitable development can be formed.

First I will explore whether the Sangam has helped promote equal opportunities for the cremation workers. This involves considering the impact of the Sangam in tackling some of the cultural discrimination and inequitable treatment by state institutions faced by Dalit cremation workers in Tamil Nadu. I will also assess whether the Sangam's decision making and internal processes have provided equal opportunity for women cremation workers or perpetuated the inequities women face in India.

Second, I will discuss whether the Sangam has helped provide the cremation workers with the basic necessities in life such as housing, food, medicine and education for children which all people have a right to. While the delivery of such services and goods was not the direct function of the Sangam, the provision of such welfare by the state government was one of its core bargaining aims.

Lastly, I will consider the final aspect of equity: distribution of rewards should fairly reflect effort and talent. In this case I will explore how the Sangam has fared in addressing inequities in the labour market that have seemingly condemned the cremation workers continued to low pay and poverty despite undertaking difficult and valuable work.

6.5.2 Tackling caste based discrimination in Tamil Nadu society

Dalit people in India face a multitude of inequities that are deeply rooted in the centuries old caste system and the practice of “untouchability”. ‘Untouchability’ imposes social disabilities on people born into the Dalit caste, which relegate these people to a “lifetime of discrimination, exploitation and violence” (Barbour, Palikovic, Shah, & Narula, 2007 p. 2). This discrimination takes various forms: in 28% of rural villages surveyed by Shah, Mander, Thorat, Deshpande, and Baviskar (2006), Dalits were refused access to police stations, and in 33% of villages, healthcare workers refused to enter the homes of Dalit people. The impact of such inequitable treatment — by the very state institutions that intended to protect citizens — on the ability of Dalit people to fully and freely participate in society is profound and one of the core reasons that Dalit people are twice as likely to live in poverty as the general population in India (Alkire & Santos, 2010).

Most of the cremation workers I interviewed spoke of experiencing some manner of caste-based discrimination including stories of derogatory name calling, verbal abuse and even physical abuse. This discrimination took other forms too: one couple described how they had been barred from sitting at tea houses and on buses (CW32) or even allowed to stand next to people of higher caste (CW31). This sense of being denied equal opportunity to others in life was powerfully conveyed by one worker who said “society doesn’t see me as an equal human being, they’ll always treat us as a slave” (CW20).

Addressing cultural discrimination is perhaps not the typical function of labour unions, however, for the cremation workers, tackling these social inequities collectively was one of their primary motivations for joining the union. Close to half of the workers stated that by joining the Sangam they hoped to gain respect and equal treatment from both people in their community and from the government authorities. Furthermore, as will be discussed later, addressing this cultural discrimination is also important to improving the economic fortunes of the workers. The importance of gaining respect was emphasised to me by one worker’s statement.

“They see us as a lower community so there is no much of a respect in and around with these people. So the first thing we hope is the respect from them

and then somehow it would help us gain more income so we could make a living out of it.... The discrimination has to change so they see us as a human being and just because we belong to a community that is lower rate that doesn't mean that we aren't human," (CW21)

Much of the TNLU's initial organising work was focussed on educating the cremation workers so they were aware that their treatment was unjust and that challenging the inequities inherent in the caste structure was both vital and possible. Manohari described how the TNLU endeavoured to break the "caste barriers" in the workers' own minds and get them to realise that "as a human being you are having such rights you are not born in that low caste like that" (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015). Part of this education included attempts to subvert the logic of the caste structure and encourage the cremation workers to think of their work as having a very valuable role in Hindu religious customs. Pandey described telling the workers: "if that particular priest dies here who will do the cremation...? You are the persons who do the last rituals and you are the one who sends them away from the earth so your duties are also important." (Pandey Interview, 2015)

This education appears to have created a more acute and informed awareness amongst the cremation workers of the inequity of the caste system and their treatment. One worker described how the knowledge that all people have equal rights as citizens of India helped some of the workers stand up to caste based discrimination in their community.

"They [the TNLU] have educated us of knowing our rights and how to behave and what our rights are to protect ourselves. Before and all I was afraid. If the villagers say something I have to do, so now I am not having that fear of facing them, now I have my own rights, I can share what I feel so I am not afraid of them." (CW10)

The step of taking action to challenge unequal treatment also seems to have been supported by the collective power that comes from joining together as a labour union. A number of workers stated that knowing they had the moral backing of thousands of fellow cremation workers, as well as the legal expertise of the TNLU, gave them the power to stand up to discrimination and abuse. The manner in which the legal backing, and perhaps even the public standing, of the Sangam and TNLU helped give the workers the support they needed to

oppose discrimination and abuse in their work or social lives is illustrated by one worker's statement that, "When the union comes people think about the union so if I have been brutally assaulted or if I have been hit by somebody I can go to the police station I can complain with the support of the union" (CW3).

Furthermore, the cremation workers appear to have greater power acting collectively than they do as individuals. Their collective power appears to have helped them challenge the maltreatment and discrimination meted out to them by people from higher castes. One worker stated that he used to have a fear of facing others in his community at certain times but "after the union I feel that I am strong enough to face" and that "when a problem arises, the union will back me up and stand for me" (CW19).

It is evident that through education, legal support and collective power, being part of a labour union has enabled the cremation workers to address some of the discrimination they face from higher caste people in their community. A number of workers described how they had gained a little bit more respect or that name calling had been a little bit reduced. The couple that had previously been denied the right to sit on a bus or in a tea house as equals had seen those discriminatory practises in their community change.

"After joining the union we said like we pay the same bus fare so why shouldn't we sit? We also pay the same coffee, the same tea you have why are you discriminating us by providing... And we are not allowed to sit on the table at the tea shop. So these are like major changes, these are like heavy changes because of the union we are able to do that." (CW32)

The degree to which the Sangam empowered the cremation workers to address discrimination and inequity varied between localities and is likely to have been influenced by a range of factors. For some workers, membership in the Sangam appears to have had little impact on their ability to challenge discrimination and exercise their rights (CW9 and CW17). One rural worker's story of not being allowed to enter his local temple because of his caste and the 'dirty work' he does was a stark example of this. He stated that "Even after the union when we stated to the village that we are in the union people of the dominant community are more so they treat us as a slave community" (CW9).

6.5.3 Equal opportunity for women?

Gender inequity is deeply entrenched in Indian society, culture and economy. The UNDP Gender Inequality Index ranks India 130th and states gender inequality in decision making and employment has persisted despite strong economic growth (UNDP, 2016). It is important that development interventions seek to address the inequities that women face in India and ensure that they do not perpetuate these inequities within the internal processes of their own intervention. As noted in the introduction, this can be a challenge for labour unions as they have traditionally struggled to give women equal opportunity to lead and make decisions.

Cremation work in Tamil Nadu is predominantly done by men and is a role passed down from father to son. However, women family members also play a significant part in the cremation work. Several of the women I spoke to described how they undertook a number of tasks for each cremation such as collecting wood and dung to be used as fuel for the burning, as well as collecting water and using it to shape the cremation mounds (CW12 and CW23). One woman, whose husband had died some years ago, said she undertook the whole cremation process, including burning, with help from her brother (CW26).

In total I interviewed five women who were members of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam and asked four of them directly whether they thought they were given the same opportunities and treatment as male members. All four unequivocally stated they had not experienced any discrimination from leaders of the Sangam or the TNLU because of their gender. This is clearly conveyed in the response of one woman that “The union doesn’t have any discrimination on male or female they just treat everyone equally” (CW12).

It is possible that these women may have not felt comfortable answering such a direct question honestly as both myself and my translator were male. However, the women’s responses were well supported by anecdotes in other answers they gave. These included stories of them being lead speakers at demonstrations (CW15), organising and leading local meetings (CW32), and being part of the select group of cremation workers who presented the Sangam’s demands to Tamil Nadu’s Chief Minister (CW26). CW26 was also

the State Secretary of the Sangam, one of the highest positions of leadership in the Sangam.

These acts of leadership, coupled with the women's own reflections on their treatment, suggest that the Sangam's internal culture, procedures and structures have been successful at ensuring equitable treatment of both men and women. The Sangam is not alone in proving that the labour union movement can promote the interests of informal women workers and gender equity. A number of examples of women in the informal economy organising and leading women only unions are well known, such as SEWA, HomeNet, StreetNet and SEWU in South Africa (Chant & Pedwell, 2008; Gallin, 2000). However, there are few documented examples of labour unions in the informal sector, comprised of both men and women, which have achieved something close to gender equity.

The lack of research in this area makes it difficult to ascertain whether the Sangam's success in this area is part of a wider shift within the labour union movement in India and other developing countries to greater gender equity or if it is an outlier. The role of Manohari Doss, as a female leader of the TNLU, is likely a contributing factor to the Sangam's positive approach to gender equity and relatively unique. Either way the Sangam's genuine commitment to gender equity shows that it is possible for labour unions in the informal economy to include and represent women in a meaningful manner.

6.5.4 Promoting equity in public services to meet basic needs

Alongside gaining respect and equal treatment a key priority for the cremation workers, when joining the union, was to gain access to government support like social welfare, public healthcare and education was a close second. The cremation workers lacked full access to these basic necessities of a decent life, not seemingly because of their caste (though that is a potential factor in certain cases), but because of their status as informal workers. Informal workers are ineligible for a range of social welfare and public services in India and many other developing countries because they do not pay tax, or simply because they are invisible to authorities (Srivastava, 2013). However, an equitable approach to development would advocate that basic necessities provided by the government, such as healthcare, education, welfare and shelter, be provided on

the basis of peoples' need regardless of their tax contribution (Jones, 2009). The cremation workers, being a particularly poor and marginalised group, should thus receive at least the same, if not greater, provision of these basic public goods and welfare.

A number of cremation workers stated that their priorities for the Sangam's bargaining demands included better provision of basic government supports like subsidised medicines, healthcare and housing for them and their families. The Sangam appears to have pursued these aims through two demands. The first demand was for the state government or Madurai Corporation to formally employ the cremation workers and, in doing so, open access to a wider range of government support. However, given the low likelihood of the state government agreeing to formally employ rural cremation workers, many of whom only do cremations occasionally, the Sangam also demanded the Tamil Nadu state government establish a welfare board to provide benefits specifically to the cremation workers and their families ("Create social security schemes", 2008; "Vettians take out rally", 2008).

Welfare boards, created to support workers in a particular occupation, are a feature of India's welfare system designed to provide a measure of social security to informal workers. They typically work by taxing the product which the workers and their employers produce (such as Bidi cigarettes or sandals) and redistributing this to the workers (WIEGO, 2016). In the case of the cremation workers, they hoped that such a welfare board could provide them with new houses, grants to support their children's education, subsidies for medicine, maternity benefits, retirement benefits and death compensation (Pandy Interview, 2015).

As noted in Chapter 4 the Sangam engaged repeatedly in collective bargaining with the Tamil Nadu state government during the period 2008 to 2010, and has continued to submit their bargaining demands in the years since. This bargaining achieved some initial successes with the Madurai Corporation formally employing 80 cremation workers who, as a result, gained access to social welfare provisions, including in one case, free housing (CW5). However, despite these ongoing bargaining efforts, the establishment of a welfare board

for all cremation workers in the state has not yet been realised and several of the workers noted their disappointment regards this (CW1, CW3 and CW25).

Manohari Doss was also disappointed that the cremation workers' collective bargaining efforts had not been able to convince the state government to establish a welfare board. She did not however, believe that this was due to a fundamental inability of labour unions to successfully advocate for equitable access to social welfare and other public services for their members. Instead, she noted several other groups of informal workers in the state that had got welfare boards established as a result of their unionised bargaining efforts. This included for women workers employed to provide lunches at rural schools, who Manohari considered to be a vulnerable and geographically scattered group, similar to the cremation workers (Manohari Doss Interview, 2015).

Manohari's suggestion that labour unions can be effective agents for improving equitable provision of social welfare and public goods for informal workers supports the views of a number of Indian academics covered in the literature review (Agarwala, 2007; Kabeer et al., 2013; Nayak, 2013). In particular it accords with Agarwala's contention that in Tamil Nadu where the economy is more liberal, informal worker labour unions are well positioned to gain social welfare and other benefits from the state (2007).

6.5.5 Bargaining for a more equitable economy

It has been noted that labour unions in developing countries largely represent already relatively well-paid workers (Degnbol-Martinussen & Engerg-Perderson, 2003). In the 2013 *World Development Report*, the World Bank tentatively suggests, that by helping groups of well-paid formal sector workers to protect their positions and increase their wages, labour unions may reduce employment growth, denying others (especially poorer and unorganised workers) the opportunity to move into better jobs (2013). This critique has its origins in Milton Friedman's argument that labour unions make "the incomes of the working class more unequal by reducing opportunities to the most disadvantaged workers." (1962, p. 124). Such a situation would see labour unions as the antithesis of equity – creating unequal bargaining power, denying upwards mobility and exacerbating income inequality which, in turn, results in unequal life opportunities for subsequent generations.

The theory that labour unions create inequality in developing countries has been strongly rebutted by Baccaro (2008) and Berg (2015), who point to several studies in recent decades that show wage increases from collective bargaining in developing countries have had a net positive effect on the incomes wages of workers outside of the collective agreement too. However, it appears that labour unions may need to be more active in addressing the economic inequities faced by workers in the informal economy if they wish to gain wider acceptance amongst development NGOs and policy makers. In this section I will explore the impact that joining a labour union has had on the addressing the inequities the cremation workers faced when trying to bargain for better pay. To avoid overly complicating the discussion it will focus on the process of collective bargaining with panchayats as an example of the relationship between labour unions and economic equity.

The discrimination and unequal treatment that the cremation workers faced from people in their community and authorities because of their caste created a situation whereby many of them felt they could not bargain with families of the dead over pay, for fear of verbal or physical abuse (CW10, CW14 and CW27). Rather than being punished, such abuse is, according to the workers, likely to be ignored by police and panchayats because they do not see the workers as having equal rights to other people (CW1, CW3 and CW18). This imbalance in bargaining power appears to be one of the core reasons behind the cremation workers low incomes. One worker stated that for working roughly 24 hours to cremate a body he would be paid as little as NZ\$1 (CW19), significantly less than the average per capita income of NZ\$7 a day in Tamil Nadu. (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2015).⁹ The skill, time and labour required to carry out a cremation is substantial, and such a low level of pay does not appear to fulfil the equity principle that the distribution of rewards should reflect effort and ability.

Section 5.3 described the strategies which enabled the cremation workers to use their collective strength to stand up to caste-based intimidation and rebalance the power dynamics present when bargaining over pay and other conditions with panchayats. Taking pay demands to panchayats together as a union appears to have given cremation workers greater confidence and also

⁹ NZ\$7 is the per capita daily income for Tamil Nadu. As this calculation includes children, elderly and others outside the labour market, the average daily wage is likely to be significantly higher.

forced panchayat leaders to treat them with greater respect and accept their right to bargain (CW18 and CW22). The manner in which collective bargaining altered power relationships between cremation workers and panchayats is well illustrated by the statement of CW18 who said: “Individually speaking the panchayat or the village won’t listen but only after we have the union and recognition a little bit of recognition it was able to bargain, we were able to speak what we want”.

While collective bargaining had helped the cremation workers somewhat re-balance the power relationship, the impact on the workers’ incomes has been modest in most cases. Seven of the cremation workers I interviewed said they had engaged in collective bargaining with their panchayat. Of these, three referred to gaining increases in the pay rates set by their panchayat as a result of their bargaining efforts. For two of the workers (CW18, CW20) collective bargaining helped to substantially increase the payment they received for cremating a body from 161 rupees to 800 rupees in the period since they joined the union.

One of the workers stated that attempts to collectively bargain had been rebuffed by his village panchayat and have not been attempted again (CW9). The final three workers all noted that bargaining as a collective helped them gain respect. While two of them said the pay they receive for cremations had increased over the years it was not clear whether this was a direct result of the collective bargaining.

The process of joining a union and engaging in collective bargaining can thus be seen as having had mixed results in addressing the underlying economic inequities faced by the cremation workers. They appear to have greater power when approaching the panchayat collectively and this has given them the opportunity to bargain for better pay rates that they were denied as individuals. However, this is not necessarily enough to fully overcome the asymmetric power dynamics and substantially improve their incomes.

The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam provides an important example of informal workers countering unequal and exploitative employment relationships despite not necessarily having the legal protections that formal workers have. It suggests that unions and collective bargaining can play a role in enabling

informal workers to earn an income that more fairly reflects the effort and skill put into their work. While the experiences are particular to the cremation workers and the caste-based discrimination they faced, the lessons may be relevant to a number of other groups of informal workers, many of whom are likely to face similar power imbalances due to ethnicity, gender or simply as a result of being informal.

6.5.6 Summary of discussion on equitable development

This section has attempted to assess whether the work of labour unions can have a role in promoting a more equitable society and economy. Counter to typical views of labour unions as actors in the economic sphere, it shows that the Sangam has had the most success in addressing cultural discrimination and ensuring that, as Dalits, the cremation workers are afforded equal civil rights and equal respect as human beings. Furthermore the Sangam provides an example that counters critiques of labour unions' poor record on gender equity. Despite generally having a secondary role in the cremation work, women members felt they had equal opportunity to participate in decision-making, actions and leadership within the Sangam.

The Sangam's collective bargaining efforts resulted in an improvement in the equitable provision of social welfare and public goods to a small group of the cremation workers in Madurai. On the other hand the majority of the workers living in rural areas did not report any meaningful change in respect of getting these basic necessities of life provided to them by state authorities. Equally, the ability of the Sangam to challenge the inequities present in the pay bargaining relationship between cremation workers and panchayats has been modest. Only a handful of the workers I interviewed had engaged in collective bargaining with their panchayats, and while they felt that acting collectively did help create a more equal bargaining relationship, the impact on the pay they received was limited.

The Mayana Vettiyanagal Sangam's impact in improving equity was mixed, but it does suggest that labour unions could be active in promoting more equitable development in a number of ways including, but not limited to, the labour market. Further study of informal worker unions in other occupations,

particularly those which are wage earners, would help develop this understanding of unions as agents for equity in development.

6.6 Conclusion

Where labour unions do feature, they are as frequently criticised for not living up to the principles of 'good development' as they are commended. This discussion has sought to explore some of the critiques levelled at labour unions and assess the performance of labour unions in relation to three important principles of 'good development': participation, sustainability and equity. Analysis of the relationship between labour unions and these principles is relatively scarce in the literature, as a result the cremation workers' experiences of unionism over the past decade have formed the backbone of this discussion.

The importance of taking a participatory approach to development work is a widely accepted tenet of development and one which labour unions are sometimes criticised as failing to fulfil. The first part of this discussion assessed the internal processes of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam against modes of participation laid out in Crocker's participation framework. As with most interventions and organisations, it is clear that the organising and decision-making processes of the Sangam have involved trade-offs between high levels of participation for the Sangam members and the need to be efficient and rely on expertise. However the general picture that emerged was one of a labour union with a culture of striving for genuine participation amongst its members.

The sustainability of labour unions in the informal economy, including the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam is more questionable. While the Sangam has been able to sustain some of its functions at a local level, it has struggled to continue to achieve livelihood improvements for its members through state-level bargaining. Developing financial self-sustainability seems to be a fundamental hurdle to labour unions in the informal economy. However, the challenge of self-sustainability is not unique to labour unions and is an issue for many development interventions engaging with people who are very poor.

The Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's impact in addressing the inequities faced by cremation workers in Tamil Nadu appears to have been largely positive. Not only was it able to make some small in-roads to inequitable pay by rebalancing

power relationships but it empowered the cremation workers to collectively stand-up to caste-based discrimination and abuse. The Sangam's success in helping the cremation workers get more equal treatment from some authorities like the police as well as from the other people in their community was one of its foremost achievements in the view of most workers and one which shouldn't be underestimated. While unionising and collective bargaining is not an immediate or easy means of addressing the deeply embedded inequities that many informal workers face, the Sangam's example shows that it can help deliver real change.

The discussions in this chapter have been wide-ranging, traversing three different principles of development, each of which contains great nuance and detail. This has provided a well-rounded picture of the place of labour unions in 'good development' practise but limits the ability for detailed analysis of many of the ideas and contentions raised. Furthermore much of the assessment has been based on a single case study and drawing wider conclusions from this to apply to the rest of the informal workforce should be done with caution. Nevertheless some unique and valuable insights into the relationship between labour unions and the principles of 'good development' have been revealed. In the following conclusion I shall attempt to draw together the key threads of this discussion with the findings from early chapters to answer the question of whether labour unions can be good development actors.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Early in the process of formulating ideas for this thesis I came across *Labour Unions and NGOs: Terms of Engagement* by Deborah Eade and Alan Leather (2005). I realised, that in all my years of undergraduate and postgraduate development studies, it was the first time I could remember reading about labour unions. Given the shared interest of the union movement and development sector in promoting social justice and tackling economic inequality, this struck me as strange. The authors also felt that the potential contribution of labour unions to development was overlooked but they did not shy away from highlighting some of the short comings of labour unions that have resulted in them being treated with scepticism by the development sector. *Labour Unions and NGOs* inspired me to explore these critiques further and so I set out in this thesis to ask whether labour unions can be agents for good development.

At the outset of my research I set four key questions, each of which was intended to contribute to the overarching purpose of assessing whether labour unions can be good development actors. To inform this research I have drawn heavily on a case study of cremation workers in Tamil Nadu, India. The case study of their union offers an insight into what strategies informal workers can use to organise and collectively bargain and an opportunity to assess whether the functions and outcomes of a labour union can fulfil the principles of 'good' development. These four questions were:

- Why are labour unions overlooked as development actors by mainstream development literature and strategies?
- How were the cremation workers in Tamil Nadu organised into a labour union – the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam?
- What strategies did the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam employ to collectively bargain and how successful was collective bargaining in improving the livelihoods of the cremation workers and their families?
- Have the processes and outcomes of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam met the following principles of good development – participation, sustainability and equity?

Chapter Two explored why labour unions are so often overlooked by mainstream development actors and policy makers, as well as the place of them in the development literature. It is clear that labour unions are viewed with suspicion by a number of development NGOs and policy makers due to their inconsistent track record in meeting some of the standards of good development such as participatory practise and promotion of equity. Labour unions have been accused of failing to promote gender equity and perpetuating economic inequities by supporting the interests of relatively well-off formal sector workers.

It is this final point, the inability to effectively support informal workers, which appears to be the most salient reason why labour unions are overlooked as development actors. Informal workers are typically among the poorest and most vulnerable people in developing countries and therefore most in need of development interventions. However, the process of organising informal workers into a labour union and undertaking collective bargaining is difficult. Few examples of informal workers achieving substantial livelihood improvements through a union are published.

To address the question of how informal workers might be able to overcome these challenges to organise into unions and undertake collective bargaining, I explored the experiences of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam, a group of cremation workers with no clear employer, low incomes and scattered across a large area. As such they represent many of the toughest challenges to union organising and collective bargaining in the informal economy and therefore make an important case study.

A prolonged period of trust building, face to face meetings, education and encouraging the workers themselves to recruit their colleagues were all strategies successfully employed by the TNLU to organise the cremation workers into the Sangam. These strategies largely reflect the approaches already noted in the literature. That they were successful with such a geographically scattered group of workers provides further evidence of their efficacy.

There are fewer established strategies for informal workers to undertake collective bargaining. The experience of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam provided an opportunity to add to this nascent area of research. The Sangam did follow one of the few recognised approaches when it targeted some of its demands towards the state government and municipal authority. The Sangam's use of mass demonstrations, worker-led negotiations, external donor funding and the courting of sympathetic media to place pressure on the government authorities are also all tactics that have some precedence in the literature. This approach yielded some livelihood improvements for workers in the main urban centre, but has proven difficult to sustain for the union.

By contrast the Sangam's strategy of collective bargaining with panchayats appears to be a relatively innovative approach. This strategy allowed the cremation workers themselves to take full ownership of the bargaining process and in some localities it has resulted in small, but continual, improvements in income. The cremation workers appear to feel more comfortable bargaining within the more formal structure of the panchayat and as a collective, than they do bargaining individually with families of the deceased. Most importantly to the cremation workers the experience of voicing their demands and standing up for their rights gained many of them a measure of respect which is highly valued. Given panchayats are established in most parts of rural India this strategy could be applied to other informal worker groups.

As acknowledged in Chapter Three, the knowledge and ideas gained from this research is reflective of the particular environment and situation of the participants involved. They are also reflective of the research methods undertaken. The informal economy is highly heterogeneous and there is no guarantee strategies that work for one group such as the cremation workers are appropriate for others. What this exploration of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam's strategies does strongly suggest is that informal workers are more powerful when acting collectively and that strategies to gain leverage over bargaining counterparts can be devised. Furthermore, it shows that even a group which is highly marginalised has the ability to bargain for meaningful livelihood improvements. This indicates that labour unions can be development actors, capable of improving the livelihoods of those men and women who are poorest and most in need.

To establish their credentials as development actors, labour unions not only need to show they can support the aspirations of workers in the informal economy, but that they can do so in a manner which accords with the principles of good development. As Eade and Leather noted in *Labour Unions and NGOs*, the development sector has been critical of labour unions' track record in respect of some important principles of good development. The case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam offers an opportunity to explore these critiques further by assessing Sangam's performance against three selected principles of 'good development' – participation, sustainability and promotion of equity.

As membership based organisations, labour unions are theoretically well placed to be participatory. However, as Eade and Leather note, the reputation of unions as participatory organisations has been somewhat damaged by the dictatorial actions of some union leaders. The case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam is an example which counters this. In both the formation of the union and its ongoing operation, efforts to include the cremation workers in decision-making and action have been genuine. A number of the workers felt empowered as a result of this. With the union led by the cremation workers themselves and a style of deliberative decision making commonly used to determine the unions objectives, the Sangam shows that labour unions can be a highly participatory development intervention.

Most development interventions seek to create change that is sustainable without donor support in the long term. Establishing a self-sustaining labour union in the informal economy is a considerable challenge. Informal workers are unlikely to be able to afford the level of membership dues required to meet the costs of staff, transport, and communication that are necessary to carrying out the basic functions of a union such as collective bargaining and legal advocacy.

Financially, the cremation workers experience echoes that of other informal workers' unions noted in the literature. Since external donor funding was withdrawn, the Sangam has struggled to continue to achieve large and meaningful improvements for the majority of its members. This is not a challenge necessarily unique to labour unions. Many development interventions supporting informal workers and the very poor will likely struggle to be financially self-sustaining in the short to medium-term. This suggests that

donors supporting the development of a labour union for informal workers must be prepared to provide long-term funding, until the time workers have achieved substantial income gains and are able to sustain the union through their own membership dues.

Tackling the underlying inequities which cause poverty is important to achieving sustainable and just development. The case study of the Mayana Vettiyanal Sangam suggests that labour unions are well placed to challenge inequity on a number of fronts. In addition to promoting more equitable bargaining relationships as might be expected of a labour union, the Sangam helped the cremation workers address the discrimination they faced from government authorities and higher caste people in their community. Finally, the Sangam provides an example of a labour union promoting equal opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and leadership of the union. With gender equity identified as a key shortcoming of other unions by Eade and Leather, the Sangam's active encouragement of its female members shows it is not a universal failing and other labour unions can look to replicate its success.

This thesis has shown that forming a labour union has resulted in some good development outcomes for cremation workers in Tamil Nadu and in doing so suggests that labour unions can be good development actors. They are able to address some of pressing needs of men and women in the informal workforce of developing countries, in a manner which is participatory and equitable. Moreover, it has provided an outline of how to achieve these outcomes by exploring and assessing some of the strategies for informal workers to organise and undertake collective bargaining.

It is hoped that the findings and analysis in this thesis will help instigate further research and debate as to what role labour unions can play in development and how they compare to other interventions to support informal workers such as co-operatives and micro-enterprises. It is also hoped that development policy makers and donors include labour unions when considering interventions to improve the livelihoods of men and women in the informal economy. Given the immense challenge facing the development sector, of eliminating poverty from the world, the potential contribution of labour unions should not be overlooked.

References

- "Create social security schemes". (2008). Create social security schemes, say cremation ground workers, *The Hindu*
- "Cremation workers' conference". (2005). Cremation ground workers' conference, *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/10/05/stories/2005100507700400.htm>
- "Crematorium workers recognised". (2008, 8 January 2008). Village crematorium workers to be recognised as government servants *Dhimani*.
- "Crematorium workers". (2014). Crematorium workers lead life of the dead, *Times of India* Retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/Crematorium-workers-lead-life-of-the-dead/articleshow/45529780.cms>
- "Vettiyan take out rally". (2008). Vettiyan take out rally, demand welfare board, *The Hindhu*.
- Agarwala, R. (2007). Resistance and Compliance in the Age of Globalization: Indian Women and Labor Organizations. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 610(1), 15.
- Ahn, P.-S. (2013). *Organizing for Decent Work in the Informal Economy-Strategies, Methods and Practices*. New Delhi: International Labour Organization Retrieved from http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_233207.pdf.
- Alkire, S., & Santos, M. E. (2010). Acute Multidimensional Poverty: A New Index for Developing Countries In O. P. H. D. I. (OPHI) (Ed.), *OPHI WORKING PAPER* (Vol. 38, pp. 139). OPHI website: Oxford University
- Anderson, E., & O'Neil, T. (2006). A New Equity Agenda?
Reflections on the 2006 World Development Report, the 2005 Human Development Report and the 2005 Report on the World Social Situation (Vol. 265). Overseas Development Institute website Overseas Development Institute
- Andrews, T. (2012). What is Social Constructionism? *Grounded Theory Review*, 11(1).
- Apter, D. (1965). *The politics of modernization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Arnstein's, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216-224.
- Baccaro, L. (2008). Labour, Globalization and Inequality: Are Trade Unions Still Redistributive? (pp. 81). Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies
- Baghramian, M., & Carter, A. (2015). Relativism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information
- Barbour, S., Palikovic, T., Shah, J., & Narula, S. (2007). Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's "Untouchables". Human Rights Watch website: Human Rights Watch.
- Berg, J. (2015). *Labour Markets, Institutions and Inequality Building Just Societies in the 21st Century*. Cheltenham, UK Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Black, J. K. (1999). *Development in Theory and Practise* (Vol. 2nd Edition). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Boghossian, P. (2006). Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism.
- Bonner, C. (2013). Collective Negotiations for Informal Workers *Organising In The Informal Economy: Resource Books For Organisers* (Vol. 6): WIEGO and StreetNet International.
- Bonner, C., & Spooner, D. (2011). Organizing in the Informal Economy: A Challenge for Trade Unions. *Journal for International Relations and Global Trends*(2).

- Brandl, B. (2013). Collective Bargaining. In V. Smith (Ed.), *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia* (Vol. 1, pp. 99-103): Sage Publications
- Brugiavini, A., Ebbinghaus, B., Freeman, R., Garibaldi, P., Holmund, B., Schludi, M., & Verdier, T. (2001). What do Unions Do to the Welfare States? (pp. 124): Fondazione RODOLFO DEBENEDETTI.
- Brundtland, G., Khalid, M., Agnelli, S., Al-Athel, S., Chidzero, B., Fadika, L., . . . Okita, S. (1987). Our Common Future ('Brundtland report'): United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development
- Brydon, L. (2011). Ethical Practices in Doing Development Research. In V. Desai & R. B. Potter (Eds.), *Doing Development Research*: SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Budlender, D. (2013). Informal Workers and Collective Bargaining: Five Case Studies *WIEGO Organizing Brief No 9* (pp. 26). WIEGO website: Women in the Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). Glossary. *BLS Information*. Retrieved 17/06/2017, 2016, from <http://www.bls.gov/bls/glossary.htm#C>
- Burrow, S. (2016). Organising for Decent Jobs – Formalising Informal Work [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.ituc-csi.org/organising-for-decent-jobs>
- Bury, M. (1986). Social constructionism and the development of medical sociology. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 8(2), 137-169.
- Cassen, R. (1986). *Does aid work?: report to an intergovernmental task force*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Castillo, G., Frohlich, M., & Orsatti, A. (2002). Union education for informal workers in Latin America. *Labour Education*, 2(127), 84.
- Census Organization of India. (2011). Tamil Nadu Population Census data 2011. Retrieved 09/08/2016, 2016, from <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/tamil+nadu.html>
- Chacko, E. (2004). Postionality and Praxis: Field Work Experiences in Rural India. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 25(1), 51-63.
- Chant, S., & Pedwell, C. (2008). Women, gender and the informal economy: An assessment of ILO research and suggested ways forward (pp. 64). Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office.
- Chen, M. (2012). The Informal Economy: Definitions, Theories and Policies (pp. 26). WEIGO website WIEGO
- Crocker, D. A. (2008). *Ehtics of Global Development* Cambridge: University Press.
- Datta, R. (2003). From Development to Empowerment: The Self-Employed Women's Association in India *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 16(3), 351-368.
- Degnbol-Martinussen, J., & Engerg-Perderson, P. (2003). *AID: Understanding International Development Cooperation*. London: Zed Books.
- Delvaux, E. (2002). The challenge of the informal economy. *Labour Education*, 2(127), 84.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1998). *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*: Sage.
- Desai, S., & Dubey, A. (2012). *Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives*. (11, 46). Economic and political weekly.
- Desai, V., & Potter, R. B. (2014). *The Companion to Development Studies*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
- Devenish, A., & Skinner, C. (2004). Organising Workers in the Informal Economy *The Experience of the Self Employed Women's Union, 1994-2004*. School of Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal1.
- Doss, E. (2010). Annex 3: 2008-09 TLU CTU KOHA Project Dalit Workers' Rights (revised) Madurai Institute of Self Management.
- Doss Interview (2015). [Thesis Field Interviews].
- Eade, D., & Leather, A. (Eds.). (2005). *Development NGOs and Labor Unions: Terms of Engagement* Bloomfield, U.S: Kumarian Press Inc. .

- Eaton, A. (2015). *ORGANIZING INFORMAL WORKERS: LESSONS FROM NINE CASE STUDIES AROUND THE GLOBE*. Paper presented at the 17th ILERA World Conference, Cape Town, South Africa. <http://www.ileraworld.com/dynamic/full/IL12.pdf>
- Egulu, L. (2004). Unions and PRSPs – an analysis of the World Bank's view. *Labour Education*, 1-2(134-135), 124.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550.
- England, K. (2006). Producing Feminist Geographies: Theory, Methodologies and Research Strategies. In S. Aitken & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Approaches to Human Geography* (pp. 286-297). London Sage: Sage.
- Fairtrade International. (2015). Trade Unions and Fairtrade in Common Engagement for Workers' Rights [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://www.fairtrade.net/new/latest-news/single-view/article/trade-unions-and-fairtrade-in-common-engagement-for-workers-rights.html>
- Fields, G., & Jr., H. W. (1989). Wage-setting institutions and economic growth. *World Development*, 17(9), 1471-1483.
- Finlay, L. (2002). 'Outing' the Researcher: The Provenance, Process, and Practice of Reflexivity *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), 531-545.
- Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*. New York Monthly Review Press.
- Freeman, R. B., & Medoff, J. L. (1984). *What do unions do?*. New York: Basic Books
- Funder, M. (2005). Bias, Intimacy and Power in Qualitative Fieldwork Strategies. *The Journal of Transdisciplinary Environmental Studies*, 4(1), 9.
- Gallin, D. (2000). Trade Unions and NGOs: A Necessary Partnership for Social Development *Civil Society and Social Movements Programme* (Vol. Paper 1, pp. 33). UNRISD website: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
- Gallin, D. (2001). Propositions on Trade Unions and Informal Employment in Times of Globalization. *Antipode*, 33(3).
- Gallin, D. (2002). Organizing in the informal economy. *Labour Education*, 2(127), 84.
- Gideon, P. (2010). Receipts and Payments Account for the Grant Received From Tamil Nadu Labour Union - New Zealand for the period 01.07.2009 to 30.06.2010. Madurai Gideon & Associates
- Government of Tamil Nadu. (2015). *Tamil Nadu - An Economic Appraisal 2011-12 to 2013-14*. Government of Tamil Nadu website: Government of Tamil Nadu Retrieved from <http://www.tn.gov.in/dear/State%20Income.pdf>.
- Gray, D. E. (2004). *Doing Research in the Real World*: Sage.
- Green, D. (2012). *From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States Can Change the World*. Rugby, United Kingdom: Practical Action Publishing Ltd and Oxfam
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Competing paradigms in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Hacking, I. (1999). *The Social Construction of What?*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Haggerty, K. D. (2004). Ethics Creep: Governing Social Science Research in the Name of Ethics. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27(4), 391-414.
- Hammersley, M. (1991). *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge.
- Hazel Conley. (2014). Trade unions, equal pay and the law in the UK. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 35(2), 309-323.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. London: Sage.
- Hill, E. (2010). *Worker Identity, Agency and Economic Development: Women's Empowerment in the Indian Informal Economy*. London: Routledge.
- Holian, R., & Coghlan, D. (2013). Ethical Issues and Role Duality in Insider Action Research: Challenges for Action Research Degree Programmes. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 26(5), 399-415.

- Horn, P. (2002). Organising the Informal Sector: Lessons for Labour. *Informal Work.*, from http://www.globallabour.info/en/2007/09/organising_the_informal_sector.html
- Horn, P. (2005). New forms of Collective Bargaining: Adapting to the informal economy and new forms of work *LABOUR, Capital and Society*, 38(1&2), 25.
- Human Rights Watch. (2014). Cleaning Human Waste "Manual Scavenging," Caste, and Discrimination in India (pp. 104). United States of America: Human Rights Watch
- Human Rights Watch & Center for Human Rights & Global Justice. (2007). Caste Discrimination Against Dalits or So-Called Untouchable (pp. 77).
- ILO. (2002). *Decent work and the informal economy*. Paper presented at the International Labour Conference, Geneva.
- ILO. (2010). Decent Work and the Informal Economy (pp. 20). ILO website: ILO.
- ILO. (2016). Informal Economy *Employment Promotion*. from <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm>
- ILO and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. (1999). The Role of Trade Unions in Promoting Gender Equality: Report of the ILO-ICFTU Survey (pp. 70). ICFTU website ILO Gender Promotion Programme.
- Indian Academy for Self Employed Women. (2012). Collective Bargaining by Workers of the Indian Unorganized Sector: (pp. 16). WIEGO website: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).
- International Monetary Fund [IMF]. (1999). Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers - Status and Next Steps. Retrieved 12/11/2016, 2016
- International Trade Union Congress. (2016). About Us - Equality Retrieved 25/11/2016, 2016, from <https://www.ituc-csi.org/about-us>
- John Degenbol-Martinussen, P. E.-P. (2003). *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation*: Zed Books.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26.
- Jones, H. (2009). Equity in development *Why it is important and how to achieve it* (Vol. Working paper 311, pp. 47). Overseas Development Institute website Overseas Development Institute
- Kabeer, N., Milward, K., & Sudarshan, R. (2013). Organising women workers in the informal economy. *Gender & Development*, 21(2), 249-263.
- Kambhampati, U. S. (2004). *Development and the Developing World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kapoor, A. (2007). The SEWA way: Shaping another future for informal labour. *Futures* 39(5):554-568, 39(5), 554-568
- Karthikeyan, D. (2008). Making a living amidst the dead, *The Hindu*.
- Karthikeyan, D. (2008). Making a living amidst the dead, *The Hindhu*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/making-a-living-amidst-the-dead-what-they-say-madurai-matters/article1174900.ece>
- Kelly, H. (2008a). KOHA-PICD 3A:Project Report Form - Education for Dalit and Excluded Workers' Rights (pp. 15). Wellington: New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.
- Kelly, H. (2008b). KOHA-PICD Project Application: Dalit Workers's Rights and Development Project *Annex 2: Summary of the Legal Aid Activities/Labour Cases/Negotiation*. New Zealand Council of Trade Unions: New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.
- Klugman, J. (2002). A Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies *Volume 1: Core Techniques and Cross-Cutting Issues*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Lampard, R., & Pole, C. (2015). *Practical Social Investigation: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Social Research*: Routledge.
- Langhelle, O. (2000). Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Expanding the Rawlsian Framework of Global Justice. *Environmental Values*, 9(3), 295-323.

- Leal, P. A. (2010). Participation: the ascendancy of a buzzword in the neo-liberal era. In A. C. a. D. Eade (Ed.), *Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords* (pp. 89-101). Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.
- Lee, R. E., & Renzetti, C. M. (1990). The Problems of Researching Sensitive Topics An Overview and Introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 33(5), 510-528. doi: 10.1177/0002764290033005002
- Levin, M. (2002). Cooperatives and unions – joint action for informal workers. *Labour Education*, 127(2), 5.
- Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 53(1), 69-105.
- Living Wage Foundation. (2016). Advisory Council Retrieved 13/12/2016, 2016, from <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/team/advisory-council>
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.
- Mather, C. (2012). WIEGO Research Project: Informal Workers' Organizing. Solidarity Centre website: WIEGO/Solidarity Centre
- Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design : an interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Momsen, J. H. (2006). Women, Men and Fieldwork: Gender Relations and Power Structures. In V. Desai & R. B. Potter (Eds.), *Doing Development Research* (pp. 44-50): SAGE Publications
- Murphy, E., & Dingwall, R. (2007). Informed consent, anticipatory regulation and ethnographic practice. *Social Science & Medicine*, 65(11), 2223–2234.
- My Agriculture Information Bank. (2015). Rural Local Government (Gram Panchayat). from <http://agriinfo.in/?page=topic&superid=7&topicid=619>
- Nayak, N. (2013). Organizing the Unorganized Workers: Lessons from SEWA Experiences. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 48(3).
- New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade Aid Programme. (2015). *New Zealand Aid Programme Investment Priorities 2015 - 19*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade website: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Retrieved from https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/_securedfiles/Aid-Prog-docs/PIC-Fund/Aid-Investment-Priorities-2015-19-web.pdf.
- Norris, N. (1997). Error, bias and validity in qualitative research. *Educational Action Research*, 5(1), 172-176.
- NZAID. (2011). *International Development Policy Statement*. MFAT website: MFAT Retrieved from <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/>.
- Offenheiser, R., & Holcombe, S. H. (2003). Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing a Rights-Based Approach to Development: An Oxfam America Perspective. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 32(2), 268-306.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1). doi: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x
- Paul, G. (2007). Receipts and Payments Account for the Grant Recieved From Tamil Nadu Labour Union - New Zealand for the period from 01.04.2006 to 31.03.2007. In M. G. Paul (Ed.). Madurai Gideon and Associates.
- Peet, R., & Hartwick, E. (2009). *Theories of development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives* (2nd ed.): Guilford Press.
- Pettit, J. (2012). Empowerment and Participation: bridging the gap between understanding and practice (pp. 10). Sussex, UK: Institute of Development Studies.
- Preston, P. (1996). *Development Theory an Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Ratnam, C. S. V. (1999). Trade unions in the informal sector: Finding their bearings *The interests of the organized and the informal sectors are considered conflictual: organized labour, privileged and protected, sees unorganized labour in the informal sector as a threat to the perpetuation of their current position* (Vol. 3, pp. 25-48). Labour Education ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities.
- Riddell, R. C. (2007). *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* . New York Oxford University Press.

- Rostow, W. (1960). *The stages of economic growth, a non-Communist manifesto*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Rugendyke, B. (2007). *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World*.
- Sanjari, M., Bahramnezhad, F., Fomani, F. K., Shoghi, M., & Cheraghi, M. A. (2014). Ethical challenges of researchers in qualitative studies: the necessity to develop a specific guideline. *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine*, 7(14).
- Schafer, J., Haslam, P. A., & Beaudet, P. (2009). *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors, and Issues*. Ontario: Oxford University Press.
- Scheyvens, R., Scheyvens, H., & Murray, W. E. (2014). Working with Marginalised, Vulnerable or Privileged Groups. In R. Scheyvens (Ed.), *Development Fieldwork A Practical Guide* (pp. 312): Sage.
- Schurman, S. J., & Eaton, A. E. (2013). Trade Union Organizing in the Informal Economy: A Review of the Literature on Organizing in Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Western, Central and Eastern Europe *The Transformation of Work: Challenges and Strategies*. Soliarity Centre website: Rutgers University
- Sen, R. (2012). Unionization & Collective Bargaining in the Unorganized Sector. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 47(4), 598-616.
- Sengupta, A. (2000). Realizing the Right to Development. *Development and Change*, 31(3), 553–578.
- Shah, G., Mander, H., Thorat, S., Deshpande, S., & Baviskar, A. (2006). *Untouchability in Rural India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications
- Shinde, P. K. (2005). *Dalits and Human Rights: Dalits: security and rights implications*. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Sismondo, S. (1993). Some Social Constructions. *Social Studies of Science*, 23(3), 515-553.
- Smith, S. (2006). *Let's Organize!*
- Spooner, C. B. a. D. (Ed.). (2012). *The Only School We Have: Learning from Organizing Experiences Across the Informal Economy*. WEIGO website: WEIGO.
- Srivastava, R. S. (2013). A social protection floor for India (pp. 197). New Delhi: International Labour Office.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*. London: Routledge.
- Steele, P., Fenrando, N., & Weddikara, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Poverty Reduction That Works: Experience of Scaling up Development Success*. London Earthscan.
- Stewart, F., & Wang, M. (2003). Do PRSPs empower poor countries and disempower the World Bank, or is it the other way round? *Working Paper Number 108* (pp. 32). Oxford: Oxford University
- Sundar, K. R. S. (2011). Non-regular workers in India: Social dialogue and organizational and bargaining strategies and practices (pp. 66). Industrial and Employment Relations Department, International Labour Office, Geneva: ILO.
- Sundaram, S. (2000). Organizations Working for the Unorganized Labour - the Case of Mumbai (pp. 107). New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Tango International. (2009). Sustainability of rural development projects: Best practices and lessons learned by IFAD in Asia. In I. F. f. A. Development (Ed.), *OCCASIONAL PAPERS Knowledge for development effectiveness* (Vol. 8).
- Thapar-Bjorkert, S., & Henry, M. (2004). eassessing the research relationship: location, position and power in fieldwork accounts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 7(5), 363-381.
- Thomas, H. (1999). Trade unions and development (Vol. 100). Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies.
- UN Women. (2014). Orange Day, 25th July 2014 Violence Against Women and Girls in the Informal Economy [Press release]. Retrieved from

- http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/what%20we%20do/orange_day_action_plan_july%20pdf.ashx
- UNDP. (2016). About India: Challenges. *UNDP in India*. Retrieved 09/10/2016, 2016, from <http://www.in.undp.org/content/india/en/home/countryinfo/challenges.html>
- United Nations. (1963). *Towards a dynamic developmental policy for Latin America*. New York: United Nations.
- Urquidí, V. (1962). *Free trade and economic integration in Latin America : the evolution of a common market policy*. Berkeley University of California Press.
- Uvin, P. (2007). From the right to development to the rights based approach: how 'human rights' entered development. *Development in Practice*, 17(4-5), 597-606.
- WIEGO. (2015). W.O.R.D database. Retrieved 29/02/2016, 2016, from <http://wiego.org/content/institute-self-management-and-tamil-nadu-labour-union>
- Wells, J., & Jason, A. (2010). Employment Relationships and organizing strategies in the informal construction sector. *African Studies Quarterly*, 11(2&3), 13.
- WIEGO. (2015). Links with Poverty. WIEGO website
- WIEGO. (2016). Worker Welfare Funds in India [Press release]. Retrieved from <http://wiego.org/informal-economy/worker-welfare-funds-india>
- Willis, K. (2011). *Theories and Practises of Development* (Vol. 2). New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, R. (2007). Visit by NZCTU President ROss Wilson to Tamil Nadu Labour Union, Madurai, India, September 2007 (pp. 9). Wellington: New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.
- Wilson, R. (2010). Extracts from UnionAID Report to Koha-PICD on Evaluation Project *TNLU Tamil Nadu Dalit Workers' Rights and Development Project* (pp. 6). New Zealand Council of Trade Unions: UnionAID.
- Women, I. S. f. S.-E. (2012). Collective Bargaining by Workers of the Indian Unorganized Sector: Struggle, Process, Achievements, and Learning (pp. 22). WIEGO website: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing.
- Woods, M. (Producer). (2011, 16/12/2015). Interviewing for research and analysing qualitative data: An overview. [Powerpoint Presentation]
- World Bank. (1995). *World Development Report 1995 : Workers in an Integrating World*. New York: Oxford University
- World Bank. (2013). *World Development Report 2013: Jobs* (pp. 422): World Bank.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*: Sage.