

-20th Anniversary of Korean Women Workers Association –

**20 Years of Korean Women Workers Movement
Evaluation and Future Tasks**

Date: October 30, 2007

Organized by: Korean Women Workers Association

Supported by: FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

Contents

1. Foreword	3
2. 20 Years of Korean Women Workers Association Evaluation and Future Tasks	4
3. Sharing the Experience of Twelve Activists in the Women Workers' Movement: an analysis of interviews with KWWA activists	49

Korean Women Workers Association

3rd fl. 351-28 Seogyo-dong, Mapo-gu, Seoul 121-837
South Korea

Tel: 82-2-325-6822

Fax: 82-2-325-6839

E-mail: kwwnet@kwwnet.org / kwwnet@yahoo.com

Website: www.kwwnet.org

Foreword

This volume is the second conference report in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Women Workers' Association (KWWA).

KWWA has played a leading role in the drive to reform laws related to women workers, such as the Equal Employment Act (1987) and the Infant Care Act (1990). It also contributed to the major achievements involved in the formation of the Korean Women's Trade Union in 1999 and in the establishment of the National Cooperative of House Managers in 2004, an organization for domestic workers and babysitters. Nevertheless, we have recently witnessed deterioration in the conditions for women workers in which many women are forced to confront poverty caused by globalization as well as increased income polarization.

The purpose of this report is to share our experiences and concerns in the hopes of contributing to a global grassroots movement. We hope that you find this report informational and thought-provoking. We also wish to thank the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for its support in carrying out the research to make this conference possible.

Thank you.

CHOI Sang-rim
Chairperson of KWWA

20 Years of Korean Women Workers Association

Evaluation and Future Tasks

By Yong Ju Son (former General Secretary of KWWA)

1. 20 years organizing and building the power of women workers

Since its founding in 1987, Korean Women Workers Association (KWWA) has been working tirelessly to organize women workers. At the time, Korean society was experiencing an explosion of democratic unionization nationwide, and KWWA was centrally concerned with organizing labor unions at non-unionized work sites. Over time, however, KWWA became increasingly concerned with building the power of women workers who are excluded from male-dominated, large enterprise unions. In particular, the changing reality of women workers—such as the

intensification of irregular employment, further exclusion of women workers from labor laws and social protection, growing levels of poverty for working women, and the persistence of low unionization rates among women workers—required special attention and new strategies. Over the last 20 years, KWWA has not only strived to organize women workers at the work site, but also aimed to meet new challenges facing unemployed women, irregular women workers, informal sector women, and working poor women.

1) Focusing on the effort to build strong democratic unions

At the time when KWWA was founded, under the dictatorial regime of Chun Doo-hwan, it was practically impossible to operate a labor movement organization in public. The few activists whose names were known in public had to prepare themselves for search, confiscation and arrest by the government at any time. For that reason, many labor movement organizations operated informally or secretly. In spite of

these obstacles, KWWA resolved to build a new women workers' movement and began operating as a public labor movement organization.

Beginning with the historical Great Workers' Struggle in July and August of 1987, the enthusiasm for building new unions was virtually explosive. KWWA began actively supporting the work of union organizing, distributing flyers

that read “Two people can start a union.” KWWA supported union organizing by facilitating educational programs on themes such as the “role of officers and members” and “women’s autonomy” and helped awaken workers’ consciousness about what unions are, what unions do, and how union activity affects workers’ lives. KWWA also built union leadership skills by implementing dynamic educational and discussion forums around themes such as “Korean society and workers,” “the position of staff in operating of democratic labor unions,” and “the issue of women workers and labor movement.” Leadership development workshops were repeated twice and three times a month after the very first one was held, showing just how much such education was indispensable to democratize newly-formed unions and company unions. Senior labor leaders with depth of experience in the democratic labor movement of the 1970s comprised the core of KWWA’s activities. They helped the leadership and membership of unions in determining the direction of the labor movement and made it possible for workers to dedicate themselves to union activities, in turn strengthening the consciousness and militancy of union members, and reinforcing the cohesiveness of unions.



Leadership Development Workshop for Women Leaders of Trade Unions (Seoul, 1989)

In addition, KWWA joined the strikes by male workers and persuading them of the need for family-based struggle, meeting with their wives to form family committees to support the workers’ struggles. In 1988, the Wives Program Committee was established, forming family action councils, wife member meetings, etc.

In addition to these activities—union organizing, union democratizing, women worker support and family-based struggle support—KWWA organized union staff leadership development programs, mobilized women’s departments in existing unions and developed cultural and educational programs to mainstream women workers’ issues. Through these efforts, KWWA has worked to strengthen the labor movement since the Great Workers’ Struggle of 1987, and built a foundation for addressing the challenges facing women workers.

2) Focusing on mass-based organizing through membership mobilization

In 1989, building upon on two years of experience since the founding, KWWA began supporting

unions and organized small group meetings and discussions with on-site members, entry and mid-

level women workers, women managers, and chairwomen. KWWA also began focusing on education programs such as interactive training, publicity and outreach, policy discussions, and cultural programs promoting broad-based organizing.

In other words, KWWA was primarily engaged in providing support for labor union organizing efforts in the early years, but after 1989, it sought ways to recruit and directly organize members. Four years after its founding the organizational mission was re-established as a mass-based organization. In 1991, as part of its broad-based organizing effort, KWWA re-organized its membership structure to consist of formal members, associate members, and regular members, and implemented membership-wide

educational and capacity building programs. As a result, KWWA was able to organize a range of members from directors of women's departments in unions to women worker groups in diverse industries and work sites, as well as married women worker groups. Branch-specific activities were invigorated as well. Also from 1992 onwards, KWWA felt that the focus on manufacturing workers in industrial sectors was too limiting for organizing and expanding the base of women workers' movement and began organizing in non-manufacturing sectors as well. Particularly in a climate when more and more women workers were becoming marginalized by the labor movement due to the growth of irregular work, it was strongly proposed that new and different methods be mobilized to organize insecurely employed women workers.

3) Organizing unemployed women, the biggest victims of the IMF crisis



A Meeting of Unemployed Women's Aid Society (Incheon, 1999)

Unemployment became an extremely significant issue in South Korea during the IMF financial crisis in late 1997. Even though women were among the most affected by unemployment, the

dominant image of unemployed workers remained male. Outdated ideologies regarding the gendered division of labor resurfaced to suggest that "women should return home," and there was widespread sentiment, especially in large corporations, that it was somehow justified to lay off women workers to protect the jobs of male workers. Women's unemployment was not recognized as a significant social issue, and the government did not give particular attention to women's situations in their unemployment policies.

Recognizing the seriousness of women's unemployment, KWWA and regional branches

responded by forming the Committee on Women's Unemployment in June 1998. This Committee uncovered and exposed actual case studies of unemployed women and proposed policy alternatives. Through telephone and in-person interviews and financial assistance, KWWA organized unemployed women and formed the Women's Aid Society to Overcome Unemployment across the country. The Women's Aid Society was open to any unemployed women who wanted to join, and it encouraged the participants to help each other and work to improve unemployment policies. The members actively participated in promoting social justice as well. They took part in petition drives and campaigns calling for increases in the

national workfare budget to promote job assistance and public employment programs for the long-term unemployed, and the members also spoke out at various community forums related to women's unemployment. Over time, these activities influenced the public opinion and media coverage began to change their narrow focus on male heads of household. Although the Women's Aid Societies were loosely organized, they contributed to expanding the space of the women workers' movement. Women who were unemployed or laid off from their jobs came together and voiced their concerns as urgent social issues, demanded appropriate policies and by organizing unemployed women, they advanced the effort to organize women workers.

4) Forming the Korean Women's Trade Union to organize the unorganized and irregular workers



Foundation of Women's Trade Union (Seoul, Aug. 29, 1999)

In response to the drastically worsening situation of "fire women first" policies following the IMF financial crisis, and the expansion of the irregular workforce, KWWA decided to establish the

Korean Women's Trade Union.

1) Organizing women workers requires a trade union which is able to organize insecurely employed women workers, the majority of non-unionized (unorganized) women workers.

2) Based on the experiences of existing regional unions, there is a clear need for full-time organizers as well as policy development capacity in order for such labor unions to succeed.

3) KWWA has thus far been both a membership-based mass organization and a policy organization. There was a need to transform the membership-

based character of the organization into a labor union that can organize women workers more extensively, and promote a mass-based movement for women workers.

With these resolutions as basis, the Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU) was launched on August 29, 1999. As an organization open to any woman worker regardless of occupation or regional location, KWTU sought to protect the rights of women workers, most of whom were in small businesses or irregular employment—and repeating the cycle of employment and unemployment based on marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing. At the same time, KWTU also aimed to overcome the limitations of existing union activities that failed to encourage active participation by women because of the continuing conservatism of male union leaders

and the ongoing pattern of union activities that privileged large factories, male workers, and regular employees. Over the last 8 years since the launch, KWTU has worked tirelessly to organize and strengthen unorganized and irregularly employed women workers. KWTU began with 450 members at first, and has now grown to 10 regional branches and over 70 industrial units including over 6,000 members.

Since the launch of KWTU, KWWA and KWTU have implemented joint bylaws and conduct evaluations and project planning on a yearly basis. KWTU has become a model example of a irregular women workers' union, and has produced many success cases in which women organized themselves and forged their own futures.

5) Establishing the National House Managers Cooperative, an organization of informal women workers

In July 2003, KWWA formed the Planning Committee to Promote Social Enterprises for

Low-income Women. The idea was to expand the decentralized and regionally dispersed Middle-aged and Senior Women's Homecare Personnel Dispatch Program into a social enterprise for low-income women. With the polarization of the labor market, the majority of middle-aged and older women faced increasing difficulty in finding work, and they were primarily employed in informal sectors including domestic service. KWWA found that intensive professional development efforts could promote financial independence for unemployed and low-income women and decided to



Foundation of National House Managers Cooperative (Seoul, Nov. 2004)

establish a national organization to represent women in the informal sector.

The National House Managers Cooperative (“the Cooperative”) was founded in November 2004. Its visions were declared as follows:

One, the National House Managers Cooperative is a new women’s labor movement, calling to recognize as social labor both house work and care work that have historically not been recognized as labor at all.

Two, as an alternative economic movement to promote the financial independence of middle-aged and elderly women who are excluded from the labor market, we shall promote “house managers” as socially accepted forms of employment through which jobs can be created and shared with others.

Three, as a public enterprise with a cooperative culture and democratic decision-making structure, we are a cooperative movement that cultivates an alternative business culture.

Four, we are a women’s job creation movement that promotes effective policies for economic advocacy for middle-aged and senior women.

Over the last three years, the National House Managers Cooperative has grown to 836 members (as of May 2007) in 9 regional branches, and has emerged as a model women’s social enterprise.

Through research of homecare dispatch service (including hospice and childcare) workers, discussion forums, and policy advisory activities, the Cooperative has been demanding for increased public attention and legal reform for homecare workers’ rights.

6) Organizing Working Poor Women



Foundation of Hope Center to End Poverty & Secure Women’s Labor Rights (Seoul, Mar. 25. 2006)

The issue of the working poor has emerged as a major social issue since the intensification of income polarization and globalization. In

response, KWWA has focused its attention on the “feminization of poverty,” namely the issue of poverty for women workers. The situation of working poor women workers can be traced to several contributing factors. The concentration of women in irregular employment and the widening wage gap has resulted in increasing poverty for women workers. The existing social security system is based on the model of regularly employed male workers, and women workers in informal sectors face insufficient social safety networks. Furthermore, due to the gender discrimination of labor markets that privilege regularly employed male workers, female-headed

households are increasingly impoverished and find it difficult to escape poverty no matter how much they work.

KWWA, together with regional KWWA branches, has selected ending poverty and securing women's labor rights as the foremost task for the next 3 years (2006-2008). The Hope Center to End Poverty and Secure Women's Labor Rights was inaugurated in March 2006 in order to expand the direction of KWWA programs and movement-building efforts to include

7) Conclusion; Summary

KWWA's organization-building and movement-building activities over the last 20 years can be divided into 4 major periods. The first period covers from 1987 to 1992 when KWWA assisted the widespread explosion of efforts to form new labor unions. KWWA began assisting the formation of democratic labor unions, and focused on recruiting as members unmarried and married women factory workers and wives of other workers.

The second period covers the stretch to 1998 when KWWA was reorganized to transition from an assistance organization to a mass-based, membership organization, focusing on building a broad organizational base. Rising to the needs of the workers, KWWA organized programs like women's job counseling, job training, employment referral services, regional wives programs, and public lectures which expanded the contact zone with unorganized women workers.

unemployment to poverty. The hope is to build a national, organizational foundation for poor working women so they can take leadership in addressing these issues. This also marks a significant expansion of the horizon for the contemporary women workers' movement. The Hope Center headquarter is comprised of organizations such as the regional branches of the Unemployment Aid Society, the National House Managers Cooperative, and the Single-Parent Female Heads of Household.

The third period includes 1999 to 2002 during the IMF financial crisis when KWWA's position as a professional organization was in demand to address the expansion of women's unemployment and irregular employment. In response to the worsening labor conditions for women, KWWA built such broad-based organizations as the Women's Aid Society to Overcome Unemployment and the Korean Women's Trade Union, and worked to develop an organization in which women workers can have strong agency and take leadership.

The fourth period covers the present moment when the intense societal polarization and the issue of the working poor have emerged as key social issues of the time. To organize unemployed, poor, and informal-sector women workers, KWWA has established the National House Managers Cooperative and the Hope

Center to End Poverty and Secure Women's
Labor Rights. KWWA has also committed to
directly organize working poor women, and is

working to build the capacity of working poor
women.

2. Twenty Years for Women Workers (to realize the task of women workers)

1) Employment Security and Rights for Non-standard Workers

Struggles to Counter Persistent Employment Insecurity of Women Workers

From the late 1980s and on, the Korean economy was undergoing large-scale structural adjustment. Textile, wig, garment, basic assembly, and light industry were moving to Southeast Asia seeking cheaper labor. Widespread factory relocation, shutdown and closings in garment and electronic industries threatened the livelihood of women workers, and heated fights arose to stop factory closings and to demand unpaid retirement pay. KWWA actively supported these struggles of women workers.¹ In addition, KWWA anticipated even more long-term employment insecurity due to industrial structural adjustment, and focused on raising this as an issue and proposing alternatives.

From 1990 to present, KWWA has continued to undertake research studies to stop employment insecurity of women workers and to propose related policy alternatives. In 1991, a discussion forum was convened to urge more public attention on the issue of employment insecurity, and proposed an employment insurance system to



A Campaign for improving the Act on Dispatched Workers Protection (2004)

guarantee a certain degree of basic livelihood even in spite of unemployment. As a result, the Employment Insurance Act was passed in the National Assembly in 1993 and became effective in July 1995. In October 1995, KWWA sought to raise public awareness of the newly implemented Employment Insurance Act, and organized a symposium on “Employment Insurance Act and Women’s Employment Security” which urged social responsibility for childcare leave. Together with further consultation with women’s labor groups, KWWA submitted a proposal concerning childcare leave to the government.

In 1993, KWWA determined that the proposed Act on Dispatched Workers Protection would in

¹ From the beginning, KWWA has supported a variety of struggles of women workers which are not discussed in detail here due to space considerations. These include solidarity campaigns, protests against mass layoff due to factory closings, efforts to reinstate fired workers, efforts to increase wages, struggles at specific worksite, foreign-owned corporations, etc.

fact worsen employment insecurity, and together with women's and labor groups, systematically fought to oppose the Act. Shortly before the Act's implementation in 2000, KWWA presented a timely research on the condition of dispatched women workers, revealing the reality of insecure and low-wage employment facing dispatched women workers and exposing the harmful effects of the Act on Dispatched Workers Protection. Since 2000 when irregular employment of women became particularly intensified, KWWA collaborated with KWTU to set up a special committee called Movement Headquarter for the

Rights of Irregularly Employed Women, and continued to support the struggles of irregular workers, raise public awareness, and seek institutional measures to address the situation.

Following the implementation of Non-Regular Workers' Protection Law in July 2007, there have been an increase in mass firings of non-regular workers and rise in indirect employment due to outsourcing. A countermeasure is sorely needed, as well as other concrete interventions to ensure that anti-discrimination policies are properly enforced.

Foundation of Action Center for the Restoration of Irregular Women Workers' Rights

In 2000, KWWA selected "activating the movement to secure the rights of irregularly employed, micro-businesses, and unorganized women workers" as its central project. Together with KWTU, KWWA determined that 1) the unemployment situation, further irregularization of women workers, and deteriorating labor conditions must be opposed, and 2) stronger solidarity and unity through KWTU and counseling and support in order to secure the legal rights for irregularly employed workers. The Action Center for the Restoration of Irregular Women Workers' Rights was formed, with the central office in charge of policy and public

relations, and regional offices working in counseling, organizing, and public relations. The Headquarters developed the following programs over the last 5 years.



Foundation of Action Center for the Restoration of Irregular Women Workers' Rights (Seoul, March 5, 2000)

Yearly Summary

	Activities by Action Center for Restoration of Irregular Women Workers' Rights
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - March 5, Headquarters formed with central office and 9 regional branch offices - Conducted national campaign (9 regions, twice monthly (July – October) - Support for the struggles for secure employment of golf game assistants - Fact-finding research on dispatch workers - Published a handbook on legal rights for non-regular workers - Action to counter and reform of laws concerning non-regular workers
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National campaign (9-18 times regionally) - Action to increase minimum wage (conducted research study of labor - conditions in service sector and presented at discussion forum) - Published a book featuring case studies of non-regular workers who fought for their rights - Produced a documentary video on irregular workers - Action for employment security for “special employment” workers - Action to counter and reform of Non-regular Workers Act
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National relay campaign for the rights of non-regularly employed women workers - Action to increase minimum wage - Action concerning non-regular workers at schools - Published a handbook on legal rights for non-regular workers - Produced a video on organizing activities of non-regular workers - Action to counter and reform of Non-regular Workers Act
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National campaign (8 regions, 4 times) - Fact-finding research on non-regular workers in schools - Action to increase minimum wage and to reform the Minimum Wage Act - Action to counter and reform of Non-regular Workers Act
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National campaign (9 regions, 4 times) - Action to counter and reform of Non-regular Workers Act - Action to reform the Minimum Wage Act

Through these activities, KWWA has been able to raise public awareness of the non-regular

employment issue. With the cooperation of KWTU, KWWA has also directly engaged in a fight for non-regular women workers, producing exemplary cases and organizational accomplishments. Particularly since 2002,

KWWA has successfully organized nutritionists, cafeteria cooks and librarians who are employed as irregular workers at schools, working with regional branches in conducting research and sponsoring discussion forums.

Guaranteeing the Rights of Specially Employed Workers

Specially employed workers—directly and indirectly supervised and paid by an employer yet classified as “self-employed”—remain in legal limbo. Women occupy the majority of these specially employed positions, facing further expansion due to the growth of the service sector. However, without being classified legally as “workers,” they could not receive any legal protection or remedy even in cases of occupational injury or unjust termination. With KWTU’s successful effort to organize 80 golf game assistants (“caddies”) working at the 88 Country Golf Club, KWWA prioritized the issue of extending labor legal protection to include specially employed workers, and organized petition drives and campaigns, and urged government action. The struggle for golf game assistants soon broadened to include all women workers excluded from legal protection and launched into the current efforts for legal reform.



Campaign to Enact Specially Employed Workers Protection Law by golf caddies (Seoul Oct. 2000)

Despite a 5 year effort led by the government to produce legal protection measures for specially employed workers, no solution has been reached and the issue remains unresolved. KWWA, KWTU, and Korean Women’s Association United have released two statements urging protection of basic labor rights for specially employed workers.

2) Actualize Minimum Wage and Protect Micro-business and House Managers

In 2001 KWWA and KWTU conducted a research project on 528 women workers in 107 cleaning contracting companies in 9 regions. The research exposed the shocking condition/reality that 22.9% of all survey

respondents were earning the legal minimum wage which was at the time 421,490 Won or less. KWWA launched the first National Campaign and Petition Drive (10488 signatures) to raise the official national minimum wage since the

establishment of the 1988 Minimum Wage System. During this effort, KWWA interviewed Minimum



A demonstration at the gate of Korea Minimum Wage Council. On the Panel is written “Can you live on 420,000 won for a month?” (Seoul, June 25, 2001)

Wage committee members, delivered petitions, sent a letter demanding an increase in the minimum wage and registered women workers’ voices to the Minimum Wage Committee. With the slogan, “How do you live on 420,000 Won a

Rights for home-based workers and workplaces with 4 or less workers

After participating in an International Conference² for Solidarity with Home-based

2 Held from March 20 to 22 in 1995 in India, the conference was co-sponsored by SEWA, ILO, International Union of Food Workers, and International Chemical Workers Union. ILO presentations were made about labor conditions and labor movements in Asia, and participating 15 countries each presented reports and recommendations. Based on the country reports, a set of recommendations were adopted for submission to the ILO.

month,” KWWA organized protests in front of the Minimum Wage Committee and raised public awareness on the issue. By raising the minimum wage issue which no union was interested in, KWWA and KWTU was a catalyst in articulating minimum wage as a major labor issue. In 2002, together with KWTU, KWWA held press conferences, campaigns, protests, petition drives, and solidarity actions with related groups. By forming the “Minimum Wage Coalition” comprised of 50 labor unions and civic groups committed to building public discourse for increasing the minimum wage and reforming the legal system, KWWA has fought to achieve a dignified, living wage and bring about legal reforms. In 2005, a program called “Lunch with Younghee, a minimum wage worker,” was designed to demonstrate what life is like on a minimum wage.

Workers in Asia in March 1995, KWWA began working to secure basic rights for home-based workers. KWTU sought cooperation from the FKTU and related government officials participating in the ILO meeting to consider adopting the recommendations from this international conference at the regular convening of the 82nd ILO Convention. They organized the report back session of December of that year and published a resource booklet in Korea to promote the rights of home-based workers.

There was no guarantee that the resolutions and recommendations on homebased workers would be passed. However, as the result of a year long

international solidarity effort the Convention on homebased workers was presented and adopted in June 1996 at the 83rd Regular Convening of the ILO. KWTU publicized the recommendations adopted by the ILO by publishing a resource booklet. In addition, the KWTU urged the government to investigate the conditions of

homebased workers and establish legal support and protection measures for homebased workers. KWTU also urged unions to adopt homebased workers' rights as labor rights and organize homebased workers. Despite these efforts the protection of homebased workers remains unaddressed

3) Employment Equality

Eliminating wage discrimination and securing equal pay for equal work

Even though women perform work that is already separated along gender lines and do the same or comparable work as men, women workers have received lower wages. KWWA has sought to address such gendered wage differentials.

In 1987 KWWA published a book entitled "The Current Situation of Women's Labor – Korean Women Workers' Wage Issues." This book analyzed the discrimination of women workers, provided theoretical analysis of the wage conditions of women workers from employment to retirement, and offered suggestions about how to resolve the issue of the wage gap (e.g. women continue to receive approximately half the wages of male workers). Also in 1989 the "Resource Guide for the Struggle to Increase Wages for Women Workers" was published presenting case studies of women workers fighting to eliminate discriminatory wages and to secure maternity rights. It explained that women's low wages and discrimination can be traced to discrimination in employment and hiring, performance evaluation, the allocation of benefits and bonuses, and

seniority practices.

In 1989, with the support of KWWA and autonomous worker-led struggles in the primarily male Samryung Fine Chemicals and the predominantly female Colomin Confectionary Company and Taehan Optical Enterprise Company³, a fixed wage system was established to ensure gender equity. Also in 1989, the women workers at Daerim Trading Company

³ Located in the Guro Digital Industrial Complex, Taehan Optical Enterprise Company was allocating lower wages for women even though there was no difference in their skill levels. The women's department of the union at Taehan was actively participating in women's educational programs organized by KWTU, and they conducted a survey on the wage gap, followed by educational and discussion forums about the issue. In the process, they faced heated opposition from male workers who claimed that "men perform more difficult work," and that "men have a greater responsibility to support the family", which was countered with the logic that "women also need to make a living," and "women's low wages ultimately hurt men as well., After 54 days of struggle, the workers were able to obtain reduced promotions, equalize salary scales between men and women, equalize family pay difference between men and women, and graduated pay raises to narrow the wage gap between men and women.

formed a committee to oppose gender discrimination in wage increase practices and tried to narrow the wage gap by increasing women's wages. In 1990, Samsung

Pharmaceuticals workers gained a fixed wage system that ended discrimination against women workers in terms of family pay and children's educational stipends.

Reforming the Gender Employment Equality Act to achieve employment equality

KWWA has worked tirelessly with women's and labor groups to reform the Gender Employment Equality Act.

But determining that the law can not prevent roundabout and indirect discrimination, women's groups began the second movement for employment equality in 1994.⁵ The reform movement this time moved from the legal reform movement to a more broad-based movement based on workers' systemic participation and debate. However, with the elimination of core demands including indirect discrimination and prohibition on sexual harassment from the second set of revisions in August 1995, a third reform effort became necessary.



A press conference for reforming the Gender Employment Equality Act to achieve prohibition of indirect discrimination and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (Seoul, Oct. 1995)

The first reform movement took place with women's groups at the center working together with experts. Women's groups proposed reform measures and consulted union leaders, achieving the first round of revisions in April 1989.⁴

The third reform movement was led by the Joint Committee to Prohibit

Indirect Discrimination and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Oppose the Amendment on Dispatch Workers, which organized petition drives, published informational booklet titled "Let's Change the Equality Law!" and extensive public information campaigns. In addition, the Joint Committee submitted petitions, and promoted legislations, and succeeded in achieving the third set of revisions in February 1999, prohibiting indirect discrimination and sexual

⁴ First revisions include the following: One, prohibited are discriminatory hiring practices on the basis of gender, marriage status or pregnancy or discrimination of working conditions. Two, maternity protection is not considered a form of discrimination. Three, temporary preferential treatment to address existing discrimination is not considered a form of discrimination. Also included are measures for equal pay for equal work, burden of proof on the employer in gender discrimination cases, and provisions to count maternity leave as included in time of continuous employment.

⁵ Second revisions include prohibition of recruiting on the basis of appearance, height, weight or other such conditions that are irrelevant to the job performance (Article 6), extension of childcare leave benefits to male spouses as well as women (Article 11), and tougher penalties.

harassment at the workplace. The reform movement also succeeded in bringing together not only the industry federations and women workers' organizations as well as the two national labor confederations (KCTU and FKTU) and Korean Women's Associations United (KWAU).

terms of indirect discrimination.

Based on these activities, women's and labor groups came together in July 2000 as the Solidarity Committee to Reform Women's Labor Law⁶ and launched the fourth reform movement. The goal was to concretize prohibitions against indirect discrimination, to clarify the definition of and enforcement against sexual harassment at the workplace, to establish prevention and recourse measures to address verbal assault and physical violence at the workplace, and to strengthen the dual work-family support system. The reform movement at this time garnered significant public attention through direct action and colorful methods such as public performances and protests, one-person protests, declaration of statement by 300 public figures, declaration of senior women public figures, protests by pregnant women, surprise "diaper protest" by 6 leaders of the Solidarity Committee, as well as children's campaigns. As a result, the fourth set of reforms was accomplished, increasing social responsibility and expanding maternity protection, defining sexual harassment by employers, concretizing the

⁶ Formed in July 2000, comprised of Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU), Seoul Women's Trade Union (SWTU), Korean Womenlink, Korean Women Workers Association (KWWA), and Korean Women's Association United (KWAU).

Prevention and Elimination of Verbal and Physical Violence and Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

In 1999, KWWA, together with the Korean Womenlink and the two national labor confederations, established “Counseling Corner for Gender Discriminatory Employment, Indirect Discrimination, and Sexual Harassment.” Also, in order to improve the educational effectiveness, KWWA produced a video titled Jaehee’s Story (2000) and a film titled Friendly & Harmonious (2005). KWWA also monitored the implementation of sexual harassment prevention education at workplaces, exposed that sexual harassment prevention programs are being inadequately implemented, and urged that prevention education programs be expanded and made more substantial. As a result, the Ministry of Labor made it possible for small businesses with less than 30 employees to receive sexual

harassment education for free of charge.

And in 2006, KWWA sought to expose the seriousness of sexual harassment by customers occurring frequently in situations where there are no legal protections against sexual harassment. To address this problem, KWWA conducted a research study on “sexual harassment by customers” with 467 workers in customer service sector jobs. The research findings were presented to the National Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Labor, urging policy measures to prohibit sexual harassment by customers. As a result of these activities, sexual harassment prevention and action became a major area of work within KWWA.

4) Promoting Maternity Protection

Expanding Maternity Protection

Since its founding KWWA has continuously stressed the need for maternity protection and has engaged in support activities to secure related items through collective bargaining. In 1989 KWWA produced a resource guide analyzing items concerning women in collective bargaining titled “Collective Bargaining Items that Protect Women’s Lifetime Labor Rights!” and worked to advise labor unions in securing 60 day leave after giving birth, one-year paid leave for childcare,

one-hour nursing break, menstruation leave, as well as the elimination of graveyard shift work.

In the 1990s, KWWA has supported unions in securing 90 day leave after giving birth, minimum one week leave for husbands, prohibition of employment discrimination based on pregnancy or childbirth, and discontinue dangerous and harmful work for women workers.

Maternity Protection and Occupational Illness

Occupational illness is a very important item in protecting the maternity of women workers under adverse working conditions. KWWA organized a case study forum in 1990 with Korean Womenlink and Incheon Women Workers Association on the subject of occupational illness and maternity protection and vividly showed the reality of maternity destruction and adverse working conditions. Having recognized how seriously the reproductive health of women workers in electronics assembly factories is destroyed by the use of hazardous and toxic materials, KWWA sought to educate and discuss with union leadership on ways to protect women workers.

In 1995 at the Busan LG electronics assembly company an incident took place involving a large number of women workers who were exposed to chemical solvents, and became a huge social issue. KWWA supported the struggle of the victims along with regional groups in Busan. Based on these incidents, KWWA conducted a study on the use of chemical materials and women workers' reproductive health with 1,427 workers in 30 worksites in the electronics industry. The findings were published in a report in 1998, and became useful in preparing for policies concerning the health of women workers.

Social Sharing of Maternity Protection

Since 1995, women's labor groups started to recognize the importance of promoting social sharing of maternity protection and began preparing applicable policy proposals. The efforts became more full-fledged after 2000.

Centering around the Solidarity Committee to Reform Women's Labor Laws in which KWWA plays a leadership role, a wide range of activities promoted public awareness for social sharing of maternity protection. These include creative actions including performances and rallies, protests by pregnant women, surprise "diaper protests" at the National Parliament, and a children's campaign called "We're happy when our moms are happy." As a result, legal revisions were approved in July 2001, expanding the maternity leave from 60 days to 90 days and inserting social sharing of costs for maternity and childcare leave.



A Campaign to achieve social sharing of maternity protection (Seoul, April 23, 2001)

When social sharing of maternity protection was first implemented in 2002, KWWA's Equality Hotline (EQUALINE) provided counseling services concerning maternity protection, documenting the process and analyzing the results, and keeping a record of in-depth case studies that vividly captured maternity and childcare leave in action. These case studies were analyzed by October and violations were revealed, leading to further demands for policy improvements. From 2004 and on, multi-dimensional actions were launched, such as a national campaign to implement women's maternity rights,

5) Work and Family Compatibility

In the late 1980s it was common for women workers without access to proper childcare to leave their children with food and toilet in the room, lock the door and leave for work. As a result, there were tragic cases resulting in deaths of children locked inside during a fire. From the perspective that the issue of childcare was not the responsibility of individual families but of society at-large KWWA promoted the idea of the social

organization-wide mobilization of KWTU, and solidarity activities through the Solidarity Committee on Women's Labor. Established as a result were the provision of leave for miscarriage or stillbirth, and social sharing of all costs associated with 90-day maternity leave. Continued efforts have persuaded government initiative to consider implementing a paid maternity leave system, ongoing monitoring and supervision, and a maternity leave system for irregular workers. Still, maternity protection for irregular workers and paid leave provision for spouses remain inadequate, and require further action.

responsibility of childcare and developed childcare services to support both work and family responsibilities. Through the operation of independent childcare services KWWA created a model of a collective childcare facility, reform of childcare law, establishment of workplace childcare and other systemic reforms, as well as the institutionalization of after school education programs.

Operating an independent non-profit childcare service

KWWA established Healthy Kids Daycare in 1989 in an attempt to build a model of cooperative childcare that provides valuable education for the children as well as allow their parents to work. For KWWA branches in

Incheon, Bucheon, Gwangju, and Machang, the daycare operation was one of the most important programs in the early years of KWWA.

Based on the educational policy of accepting and

respecting the children's ideas and opinions, KWWA's daycare program was unusual at the time because mothers were not considered solely responsible for raising the children. A monthly meeting of parents encouraged the participation of both mothers and fathers, and college students

Reforming daycare-related laws

In 1989 when KWWA was still operating the daycare program, there was a tremendous lack of legal foundations for daycare. Worse yet, even the newly created laws did not consider the needs of low-income families. With the implementation of new laws, private daycare facilities that were operating as nonprofits were required by law to register with the government, and many faced the risk of closing their doors if they could not meet the facility conditions required by the law.

As a result, Regional Social Daycare Association representing nonprofit daycare facilities that had been devoted to providing quality daycare in low-income neighborhoods opposed the new law, refusing to register with the government and fighting for more just laws concerning daycare. Along with the parents of KWWA's daycare program, KWWA organized a petition campaign to refuse compliance with the child welfare law

Institutionalizing after-school education

Having operated an after-school study program associated with the daycare program, KWWA began supporting the establishment of after-

were actively organized to volunteers as aunts and uncles. After the revision of childcare laws in 1990, a large number of daycare services were created throughout the country, and KWWA's daycare was closed in late 1990.

and establish better daycare laws. Continued actions such as a protest march in front of the National Assembly building eventually led to the Daycare Act in December 1990. Despite the implementation of Daycare Act, however, there were still no provisions for supporting privately run nonprofit daycare facilities concentrated primarily in low-income neighborhoods.

In 1992, KWWA continued to present proposals and statements to establish better daycare policies. At the regional council elections In 1995, KWWA voted to select the expansion of daycare and government support as a major organizational goal, and to this day, KWWA continues to work in cooperation with regional branches to make childcare a public social responsibility.

school educational program for primary school children in 2004, as part of an effort to socialize after-school daycare.

After-school programs were particularly necessary for children of low-income working parents because many primary school students would wander aimlessly in the streets or skip meals while their parents were still at work, in turn becoming vulnerable to dangerous situations. In 1998, KWWA petitioned the government to start dispatching after-school teachers to primary schools. The after-school teacher program had two purposes. First was to provide adequate protection for children in low-income households, and secondly, the program created training and employment opportunities for many women who lost their jobs during the IMF financial crisis.

The Ministry of Labor accepted this proposal, and implemented support for after-school classroom as part of a public jobs program. As a result, 70 teachers were dispatched to 43 primary schools in 7 regions throughout the country. However, the

teachers were subjected to extremely low wages and insecure employment in which their contracts were subject to renewal on a yearly basis. KWWA organized public forums and submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Labor to address the situation, and since 2004, has played a major leadership role in the After-school Daycare Task Force Team of the Korean Women's Association United, participating in the preparation of School-age Child Protection and Education Assistance Act. Also in 2005, KWWA regional offices organized meetings and workshops to establish local government ordinances, and played an active role in raising awareness in the local community. Presently, the School-age Child Protection and Education Assistance Act is currently pending decision at the National Assembly.

6) Policies for Women and Unemployment

Establishing the Action Center for Women's Unemployment

The financial crisis beginning in late 1997 quickly raised the profile of the unemployment issue. Women were among the groups most affected by unemployment. Once terminated from their jobs, women faced far more difficulty finding another job, and because most women were employed in the service sector with less than 5 employees, they were not eligible to receive unemployment

insurance benefits even after they were fired. Unemployed female heads of households in particular faced extremely bleak prospects. In spite of these needs, no government policies addressed women's unemployment issues. In 1998, KWWA compared notes with the regional branches about the employment situation of women workers, and resolved to take action to

overcome unemployment. As a result in June 1998, Action Center for Women's Unemployment was established and continues to organize timely and effective response.

Yearly Summary

	Action Center for Women's Unemployment Activities
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founded on June 9, declared movement to reinstate unemployed women workers - Counseling: job placement, and provision of other information about unemployment - Research: monitoring of public employment agencies and report on the situation of women's unemployment - Policy recommendations - Medical services for unemployed women - Livelihood assistance: provision of basic goods to unemployed heads of households - Education: job training seminars - Organizing: Women's Aid Societies - Solidarity: with both national labor confederations and Korean Women's Associations United, urged employment security for women workers and solutions for women's unemployment
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counseling and analysis of employment counseling - Monthly workshops for counselors - Education: weekly meetings for job seekers, re-employment seminars, employment workshops for unmarried women - Organizing: Women's Aid Societies - Livelihood assistance: supported the national campaign to help unemployed families - Medical services - Policy research: 1-year evaluation of the Action Center for Women's Unemployment, public forum on policy recommendations to support unemployed women, public forum on countermeasures to unemployment of middle-aged women - Solidarity
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counseling and analysis of employment counseling - Monthly workshops for counselors - Education - Organizing: monthly meetings and group counseling programs - Livelihood assistance: supported the national campaign to help unemployed families. Open Eve

	livelihood assistance for unemployed women - Medical services - Policy research: public forum on employment preparedness of female university graduates and measures to overcome discriminatory employment - Feasibility research on basic welfare system - Survey on unemployed middle-aged women workers - Operated 2 regional Self-Help Centers - Solidarity
--	---



A Campaign of demanding Korean government to make proper policy for unemployed women (Seoul, 1998)

Activities of the Action Center for Women's Unemployment can be divided into the following three.

- 1) Direct support for unemployed women workers: counseling and training, medical services, and other services
- 2) Policy advocacy: campaigns and research, policy recommendations and raising awareness through public forums
- 3) Research studies on unemployed women workers: organizing unemployed female households, regular meetings and training for

counselors

As a result of these actions, subsequent government policies included several measures addressing the issue of women heads of households, such as job training allowances for women heads of households and the establishment of a system encouraging the hiring of women heads of households.

At a policy discussion forum in 2000 about the direction of the Action Center for Women's Unemployment, it was determined that the Action Center has achieved a significant part of its original intent and purpose. It was therefore proposed that the Action Center be reorganized in 2001 as follows: 1) Self-Help Center programs for the most vulnerable group of women workers who may not be able to enter the labor market, e.g. job placement, training, and comprehensive services; and 2) functioning as a center to re-claim the rights of irregular and women workers who end up repeating the cycle of unemployment and employment, serving the role as a government-supported public job counter or other job creation service.

Operating Regional Self-Help Care Centers

Building upon the past accomplishments of the Action Center for Women's Unemployment, KWWA began facing a new challenge beginning in 2001. In 7 regions (Seoul, Ansan, Bucheon, Incheon, Machang, Gwangju, Busan), KWWA was commissioned to operate regional self-help care centers created with the implementation of the National Basic Livelihood Guarantee Law, and relocated most of the Action Center's activities into operating the Self-Help Center. Rising to the challenge that KWWA produce an exemplary model of self-help for women, KWWA focused its energies on stabilizing and professionalizing the Self-Help Center.

Most participants in the Self-Help Center were those belonging to the poorest segment of the poor in Korea, facing extreme difficulties entering the labor market, e.g. the elderly, alcoholics, those without trade skills or education. These participants were required to live on limited government assistance and at the same time, register at a Self-Help Center to receive job training in order to become self-supporting. Assigned with the task of operating Self-Help Centers in 7 regions, KWWA determined through a research study that the participating trainees at the Self-Help Centers can not become truly self-reliant by simply receiving skills-based employment training. Not only do most participants face grueling conditions of poverty, but many of them also suffer from emotional and psychological wounds. Therefore, in addition to

skills-based employment training, the participants require psychological, emotional, and social training and support to become self-reliant and independent. KWWA has thus resolved to provide self-help programs that are genuinely women-centered and people-centered, not one that values outward appearance, measurable quantity or perceived productivity.

One of KWWA's core self-help program builds leadership so that they develop the will and the strength to become independent women rather than recipients of assistance. In 2004 and 2005, KWWA organized Leadership Building Training for Self-Help Participants for the leaders of the economic cooperatives that formed out of the Self-Help Centers. KWWA is building allies and forging partnerships between these women leaders and the Self-Help Centers.



A opening ceremony of a small business by unemployed women's community in Guro Self-Help Center (Seoul, 2003)

In order to overcome the structural limitations of the self-support programs in Korea and seek alternative ways to build true self-reliance and

independence, KWWA has organized two study trips to visit European counterparts to study exemplary precedents. The findings and lessons

Creating Jobs by Expanding Social Service

With shortage of jobs and difficulty of re-employment, low-income and middle-aged women and women who are de facto heads of households face persistent unemployment. Beginning in 1999, KWWA has carried out job creations programs for middle-aged women in their 40s and 50s by dispatching them for homecare, childcare, and post-birth maternity care through a professional housework dispatch program.

Korea had boasted an annual economic growth rate of 16% to 17% even during the oil crisis in 1970s. Since 2000, the Korean economy has taken the appearance of “growth without employment.” With high rates of youth and middle-aged women’s unemployment becoming a society-wide issue, job creation in the social



A babysitter caring disabled children in low-income family (Seoul, 2006)

learned from this process have been shared with other groups through workshops and audiovisual materials.

welfare service sector—e.g. dispatching housework personnel free of charge to low-income and frail elderly living alone 3 times a week to prepare food and do laundry—has emerged as a viable path to employment.

The government announced plans to create social service jobs in each ministry, and KWWA began its social service job program with the Ministry of Labor in 2003. At the time, there was widespread criticism at the time because most of the government-led social service jobs were designed as low-wage and temporary employment opportunities. For this reason, KWWA established a number of fundamental principles in the process of determining whether to participate. For one, KWWA decided to accept only a certain number of social service jobs in employment areas most in need by women workers, e.g. after-school classrooms and homecare service for low-income families. To ensure that these jobs are not limited to one-time only, KWWA made a policy to institutionalize continuous employment. More social service jobs would be accepted as program participants required expanded job options.

In 2003, KWWA developed a teaching assistant dispatch program for disabled children, a helper

dispatch program for the elderly (to provide housework for seniors living alone), and an after-school teacher dispatch program in Seoul, Bucheon, Incheon, Ansan, and Busan. In 2004, in developing a model of social service job creation program, KWWA implemented an after-school teacher dispatch program in a nationwide effort involving 7 regions. Together with the 7 regional branches, KWWA organized a public forum to explain that the current social service job creation is only a temporary solution for unemployment, and that it actually runs the risk of intensifying the concentration of unemployed women in low-wage and insecure jobs. KWWA submitted policy recommendations concerning the after-school classroom program to the Ministry of Labor, and demanded improved working conditions.

Since 2005, KWWA began a low-wage babysitter dispatch program as a pilot project in 4 regions. This program dispatches babysitters or childcare

assistants free of charge to low-income families, so that women can work unworried, in order to fight poverty. As a result of the program, KWWA was able to highlight several cases of families abandoned by the current welfare system. For instance, there was a low-income family with a disabled child who is not eligible for care in existing daycare services, and in another single-parent family, it was discovered that the mother was forced to work 3 shifts a day to make ends meet while her child was neglected at home. These cases were widely reported on broadcast TV, newspapers, and other media, and KWWA received attention for providing alternatives for children in low-income families. The government likewise noted the childcare dispatch service and the so-called “Care Mom” service in Gyeonggi Province. To this day, KWWA is supporting the housework and care service for low-income families as part of the National House Managers Cooperative’s social service jobs program sponsored by the Ministry of Labor.

7) Securing the Rights of Working Poor Women

Policy response for the issue of women’s poverty

In 2004 and 2005, KWWA engaged in consultation and policy recommendations concerning women and poverty. As a result in 2004, several recommendations from KWWA—such as “comprehensive solutions for overcoming poverty,” “institutionalization of women’s care labor as social service employment,” and “development of homecare service into social service enterprise”—were

reflected in new policies.

As a representative case point, the Korean government used to calculate the Basic Livelihood assistance based on a family of 4, with a 30-something male head of household, mother, and 2 children. However, families with a disabled or elderly member are bound to have higher medical expenditures, and female-headed

families typically incur higher childcare costs. Because the national welfare budget did not take these varieties of families into consideration, all those who fall outside the purview of 4-member families faced insufficient coverage. KWWA therefore proposed a set of policy recommendations in 2005 to ensure that additional childcare and education assistance be incorporated into the calculation for female-headed households, and the government is currently reviewing this proposal. In 2005, with the realization that there is a clear need for building capacity for better policy and organizational response, KWWA reviewed and evaluated unemployment and low-income projects of the past and decided to launch a more robust movement to expand the rights of low-income women. In 2006, KWWA adopted a set of five policy priorities⁷ to prevent women's poverty, and in cooperation with 9 regional branches throughout the country, continues to raise public awareness of the issue of working poor women through monitoring and special campaigns.

⁷ 1. Establish employment assistance policy to create self-supporting jobs to prevent women's poverty. 2. Establish comprehensive assistance policy for poverty prevention of working women heads of households. 3. Establish historical childcare assistance policy to prevent intergenerational transmission of poverty and to reform conditions for economic participation. 4. Establish minimum wage and end employment discrimination against women. 5. Reorganize public aid to strengthen income assistance policies.

Supporting Low-income female heads of households

In 2005, KWWA and regional KWWA branches have analyzed the lives and working conditions of low-income female heads of households neglected by the welfare system, and conducted “Research on Ways to Overcome Poverty for the Working Poor Women Heads of Households.” The research was conducted with 1006 working poor women heads of households in 5 regions throughout the country. The findings indicate that the core reasons behind women’s poverty are as follows: employment insecurity in which unemployment and employment are repeated over and over again, low wages, and lack of institutional support for housing, medicine, and childcare. Based on these findings, KWWA has presented 7 core tasks for poverty prevention for working poor women. This includes expansion of Basic Guarantee coverage for the upper tier of low-income households (those who earn less than 120% of the Basic Livelihood line, disqualifying them for basic livelihood or social service assistance but still subjected to poverty), improvement of social insurance system, provision of job training and secure employment opportunities, support for childcare and other care work in the household, establishment of measures concerning the health of female heads of household, provision of housing assistance, and development of psychological and emotional support programs. The research study has reminded the public of the urgency of solutions and the seriousness of the situation of working poor women heads of households who are doubly

burdened by work and childcare yet remain marginalized by the social welfare system.



A female household holding a panel written 'Make a proper measure for children of single parents family' (Seoul, Oct. 7, 2007)

In 2006, KWWA focused its attention on the issue of single-parent working poor women. With the understanding that concrete and practical institutional reforms are required to address the issue, KWWA has formed a planning committee with related members of the National Assembly, and presented a public forum on policies for single-parent working poor women and needs for legal institutional reform. KWWA also urged for more practical and comprehensive policies through the national inspector from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family. It was presented that in order to address the issue of one-parent working poor women, what is needed is a comprehensive approach involving changes in family, labor, and social welfare systems.

9) Conclusion

Achievements

Since the founding, KWWA has worked to develop policy responses to counter women's employment insecurity, to eliminate wage discrimination and obtain equal pay, to expand maternity protection, and to obtain employment equality and legal reform to ensure compatibility of work and family. With the cooperation from the two national labor confederations and effort by women's labor, several goals were achieved. These include employment equality measures including the provision of equal pay for equal work, prohibition of indirect discrimination, and prohibition of sexual harassment at the workplace. Also accomplished were legal protections for maternity such as 90 day maternity leave and complete socialization of the associated cost.

KWWA was always the first to draw public attention to the condition and demands of women workers and taken action to urged policy changes. In the early 1990s when women workers' employment insecurity spread as a result of industrial structural adjustment, KWWA raised awareness of the seriousness of women's employment insecurity and proposed policy

measures such as the establishment of employment insurance and better job training. From the late 1990s when women's unemployment issue was becoming increasingly serious, KWWA tirelessly pressured the government to establish women's unemployment policies. With increasing employment insecurity and irregular work after the IMF financial crisis, KWWA worked with the KWTU in creating exemplary cases of irregularly workers' struggles to raise the profile of minimum wage and special employment issues which then became labor's central demands. As a result, not only has KWWA placed these issues on the agenda of broader social movements, but also contributed to improving the working conditions of women workers themselves. Over the last 20 years, KWWA has worked directly with unemployed workers, specially employed workers, irregularly and part-time employed workers, female heads of households, and working poor women, building a solid base for the women workers' movement.

Remaining Tasks

Korean labor market's ongoing exclusion of women workers reflects the fact that legal change can not transform the reality for women workers. Less than 30% of employed women are legally

classified as workers, and women workers continue to face intense polarization, increasing irregularization and povertization. To improve the situation of women workers for whom the law

remains ineffectual, what is needed is a concrete effort to reform the system and to expand its application. Furthermore, new policy initiatives are necessary to comprehensively address education, housing, medical issues for women workers.

Legal reform alone is not sufficient to improve

the quality of life for women workers. In addition to advancing economic status for women workers, a movement for life is needed, one that goes beyond the value system of consumerism, competition, and efficiency. Moving beyond a movement based on the economic demands of women workers; necessary is a new movement for workers to lead a cooperative and happy life.

* This article was presented at the second symposium in celebration of the 20th anniversary of KWWA on 30 October 2007.

Sharing the Experience of Twelve Activists in the Women Workers' Movement: an analysis of interviews with KWWA activists

By SHIN Gyeong-a, Professor, Hallym University

1. Research Topic

I interviewed twelve female activists in the KWWA to discover what their lives as activists are like, and what they think about the changes in Korean society, and the prospects for the women workers' movement.

The following were the main focus of the interviews:

To share their experiences, concerns, and ideas
What are their successes and failures of the women worker's movement and what made them

happen

How they have dealt with current issues and what remains to be resolved

What have been their personal experiences and how have these affected their activities in the women worker's movement

To examine what the women worker's movement needs to do going ahead

2. The Interviews

I interviewed twelve female activists who have worked in KWWA headquarters or branches for over ten years.

Interviewees:

Regions	Busan, Masan-Changwon, Daegu, Incheon, Seoul, Ansan, headquarters
Ages	4 persons in their 30s, 4 in their 40s, 4 in their 50s
Positions	Five chairpersons of region Women Worker's Associations

	<p>Three general secretaries of regional Women Worker's Associations</p> <p>Chairperson of Women's Resources Development Center</p> <p>Chairperson of Working Women's Academy</p> <p>Chairperson of KWWA</p> <p>Chairperson of Self-Help Center for Women in Poverty</p>
--	--

3. Interview Analysis

1) Private Experience and Philosophy

Ideas about the formation of the women worker's movement

When female activists think of the women worker's movement, what do they think of? One activist, who was a founding member and has been a chairperson for nine years, defined the women's workers movement as a "practice to change not only the system for working women to solve their problems at work and in the community and to gain self-esteem and identity as women workers, but also to help working women understand their condition."

This understanding of the women worker's movement is the result of experiences in the movement. In the beginning, female activists did not have a clear idea of women's issues. Most activists though women's issues would be solved within the labor movement itself.

When I first worked at a factory in 1983, I heard that a young female worker in another team got raped or something by a male manager. We started working in the factory for the labor movement and we didn't know that kind of thing could happen. We didn't know what to do about it.

I regret that we didn't handle that situation properly at that time.

When they saw the difficulties that women face such as family care, childbirth, child care, etc., activists came to understand women's needs as something that "needed its own field." That is, it was different from organizing trade unions or improving workers' rights. It was not a problem of individual women workers, but an independent issue that should be dealt with at the gender level.

When I was in university, I was a member of the feminist club. The feminism I encountered then was theoretical. It didn't have much connection with my life. I experienced women's issues after I got married and had children. Women tend to easily lose contact with their friends and acquaintances. For instance, if the husband moves to another place for a job, the wife usually moves too, and nothing remains for her except her relatives. For this reason, a specialized

organization such as a women worker's association is needed that focuses on women's issues.

Understanding the conditions for women workers changes the order of priority in

the labor movement. Things which are not normally considered as part of the labor movement, such as maternity protection, child care, etc. are important concerns within the women worker's movement.

2) The present situation at and challenges for the KWWA

Democracy and communication – generation gap and understanding

There are differences between the younger activists and older activists. The reasons why they became activists, their ways of working, and their matters of concern are different. The older generation is more devoted to the labor movement than the younger one, and the younger generation tries harder to achieve a balance between their activities in the labor movement and their private lives. Older activists are more labor movement-oriented, and younger ones are more sensitive to feminism and prefer more varied and creative ways of working.

Older activists know that the younger ones are different from themselves and understand the differences. The older activists think it will be harder for the younger ones to

work for the women workers movement in political pluralism. Older activists think that the younger ones, who make more efforts to balance their activism with their private lives, are somewhat self-centered but much wiser than they themselves were.

KWWA is a mass organization and so it is necessary for activists to communicate with all the members of KWWA. Younger activists who work at branches of the KWWA admit it is not easy to communicate with and organize members in their 40s and 50s because there is not enough communication and not enough shared experience between the groups. Lack of communication between the generations is an obstacle for younger activists to move on.

Working conditions and wages

The biggest problem in working conditions at KWWA is low wages. Activists with ten years experience at headquarters get paid about 1 million won per month and activists in branch offices get paid from 600 to 800 thousand won per month. Activists think these low wages should be increased, but they don't think their pay should

be as much as those paid in companies. However, they say there aren't sufficient financial resources for a paid increase right now. In this situation, activists try to spend less rather than getting an increase in pay.

Spending less might be regarded as self-sacrifice required in the women worker's movement.

Activists take on an alternative lifestyle like sharing resources among other NGOs and public foundation such as medical support and

Work/family conflicts

Married activists suffer from work-family conflicts just as other married women workers do. Most of the interviewee's spouses are also activists, working for trade unions, NGOs, or the like and together they both don't have enough money or time.

While they are suffering from a lack of time, where are their husbands? The husbands often also have a busy life as an activist. Female activists work as hard as their spouses and they take on more responsibilities for child care than do their husbands. One of the reasons for this is financial. Female activists do more housework to be fair because they make less money. Activists don't think it is a solution that their husbands do more housework than they do now, because their husbands already spend long hours at work. They

scholarship. Nevertheless, activists still think they need a pay increase of 100%.

think that the answer should be shortening working hours.

Gender-based division of labor at home, such as child care and housework, hasn't yet been raised as a question by activists. The matter of child care has not been discussed officially within the organization. Single activists understand the difficulties of activists with children and, individually, show consideration for them. Issues such as why consideration for parents is necessary, whether individual consideration is good enough, what a gender-based division of labor at home should look like, and what individual activists and the organization should do when work-family conflicts appear have not yet been raised in general meetings.

3) Results of KWWA Activities

The biggest outcome of KWWA initiatives activists point out is improvement to laws and the system. KWWA has made efforts to have laws/systems such as the following improved: Child Care law, Sexual Equality Employment Act, Employment Insurance Act, Gender Employment Equality Act, child care leave, Supporting Law for Unemployed Female Households, laws for protection of irregular workers, minimum wage laws, etc. They feel that KWWA has had a big

influence on government policy.

KWWA find out what women workers need and tries to get them that. KWWA believes that women workers are the major power to get revisions to laws and social systems. While doing this, activists at KWWA show a keen sensibility to people's needs and sincerity in their work. Activists at KWWA realize the seriousness of the issues for women-headed households and have pushed for improvements to the social systems

that affect them.

The second outcome of KWWA is the organization of a Korean women's trade union. People knew that organizing a Korean women's trade union was needed but doubted whether it was possible. Nevertheless, activists at KWWA organized a Korean women's trade union during the economic crisis and expanded the union to 6,000 members through their efforts. As a result of their hard work, activists at KWWA contributed to giving an impetus to the women worker's movement.

The third outcome has been to organize women. KWWA has not only supported but has also organized women in transition between

employment and unemployment, such as unemployed women, poor women, irregular workers, etc. Besides organizing the Korean women's trade union, KWWA has also organized cooperative unions and some of these have been very successful. The National House Manager's Cooperative is the key example. Activists at KWWA think that projects which view women as beneficiaries, such as providing jobs, vocational training, etc. are not enough, and that activists should help women speak up for themselves and organize themselves on their own. Activists understand what the goal of the women worker's movement is and what the relations between activists and women workers should be.

4) Future of the Women Worker's Movement

Because of globalization and the increasing polarization between rich and poor, more people are having a harder time. As a result, the numbers of those needing help for the women worker's movement are increasing and the concept of workers is changing. In this situation, what should the women worker's movement do?

Increase in progressive welfare

Increases in social welfare and more efforts to organize the beneficiaries of welfare are needed. Women workers tend to lose their job easily, and the women worker's movement may not include them when they are out of work. Many women workers do not identify with the working class, as well. The welfare system could include more women that the women worker's movement.

KWWA pursues "progressive welfare," which is different from that of many other welfare groups. Progressive welfare involves organizing the beneficiary as well as offering them welfare benefits. For the present, it is difficult to know how big the possibilities are. KWWA needs to try harder to connect the welfare system with the women worker's movement.

Focus on the women worker's movement

Welfare work is an easier and milder movement, but it is not about a fundamental and complete solution to inequality. Activists think that the women worker's issue is about discrimination as well as poverty. Activists make more efforts to focus on abolishing discrimination.

Strengthen local community and grassroots organizations

There is an opinion that KWWA should do more things for the local women's movement and grassroots organization. Some say that activities at KWWA should be done not only for the women worker's movement but also for the local

community movement. The reason why they say this should be, at the risk of losing working class identification, is that many women workers experience unemployment and the women worker's movement has limits under neo-liberalism. Activists argue that alternative values beyond economic conditions should be considered.