



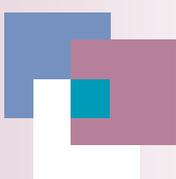
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International  
Labour  
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## ILO COOP

### Intervention Model Briefs



# Advancing domestic workers' rights through cooperatives in Trinidad and Tobago:

## An ILO, NUDE and SWCC initiative

**This brief summarizes one example of the ILO's work in advancing domestic workers' cooperatives. The ILO supported the National Union of Domestic Workers (NUDE) in Trinidad and Tobago to provide their members with access to employment opportunities and improved working conditions through a cooperative society.**



## 1 Background

**Domestic workers** comprise a significant part of the global workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. They work for private households, often without clear terms of employment, unregistered in any books, and excluded from the scope of labour legislation. They often face very low wages, excessively long hours, have no guaranteed weekly rest, and at times are vulnerable to physical, mental and sexual abuse or restrictions on freedom of movement.

Exploitation of domestic workers can partly be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation, and often reflects discrimination along the lines of sex, race and caste. The adoption of the [Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 \(No. 189\)](#), which has been ratified by 25 countries to date, was a historical step in the struggle of domestic workers. The [organization of domestic workers](#) is key to ensuring their access to labour protections and the advancement of their collective interests.



Currently there are at least [67 million domestic workers worldwide](#), not including child domestic workers and this number is increasing steadily in developed and developing countries. Even though a substantial number of men work in the sector – often as gardeners, drivers or butlers – it remains a highly feminized sector: 80 per cent of all domestic workers are women. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there were at least 17.9 million domestic workers in 2013, representing 6 per cent of the labour force.

In Trinidad and Tobago, domestic work is growing, especially among low income women. In 1982 the [National Union of Domestic Workers \(NUDE\)](#) was formed. Since then the union has achieved some progress towards legislation which now provide for sick leave, maternity leave, and annual vacation leave. There remain several issues to be addressed, such as the absence of employment contracts, lack of retirement benefits, and limited access to financial products and services due to minimal employment records.

### National Union of Domestic Workers (NUDE) in Trinidad and Tobago

NUDE was formed in 1974 to secure the best quality of life for domestic workers and other low-income workers by organizing, providing effective representation, skilful negotiation, advocacy, and continuous programs of training and education for the workers and in 1982 officially registered as a trade union under the Trade Union Act. It advocates for equal rights for domestic workers through direct mail campaigns, media communication, etc. It convenes meetings on domestic workers' issues involving unions, NGOs, government and UN agencies, universities and individual researchers. Through its advocacy, organizing and networking initiatives, NUDE works for the recognition of domestic workers as workers under the Industrial Relations Act. In the campaign on promoting the ratification of ILO Convention 189, NUDE partners with other domestic workers' organisations in the Caribbean region.

In 1998, the ILO organized a workshop in Jamaica aiming at developing a regional strategy to [improve the status, terms and conditions of work for domestic workers in the Caribbean](#). Inspired by this initiative, NUDE members decided to form the Service Workers Centre Cooperative Society Limited (SWCC) with a view to addressing some of the above-mentioned challenges and provide decent employment opportunities and related services for domestic workers. In January 2014 the SWCC was registered as a cooperative. Nevertheless, after its formation challenges remained, including need for training in cooperative management, lack of marketing strategy, and lack of internal procedures (e.g. recruitment procedure, pricing of jobs, standard contracts). It currently has 28 domestic worker members. Domestic workers cooperative experience in Trinidad and Tobago is not unique. [Dozens of other similar domestic worker cooperatives are being formed around the world](#), in addition to [cooperatives providing other types of care services](#). An [ILO mapping exercise](#) in 2013 identified over 40 domestic workers' cooperatives worldwide as reflected in a [brief on domestic workers' cooperatives](#).

## 2 ILO's interventions

### a. Initial consultation and needs assessment



The ILO, through its [Office for the Caribbean](#) in Trinidad and Tobago and the [Cooperatives Unit](#), has supported NUDE in strengthening the capacities of SWCC. On May 2016, an [initial consultation meeting](#) was organized with stakeholders towards conducting a needs assessment of NUDE and SWCC to achieve financial viability and improve domestic workers' terms and conditions of work. The needs assessment set forth short and medium term recommendations toward strengthening the cooperative.

### b. Validation workshop on the recommendations of the needs assessment



In order to review, validate and prioritize the recommendations from the needs assessment, the ILO organized a [workshop and consultative meeting](#) with NUDE and SWCC members on November 2016 in Port of Spain. More than 30 participants from NUDE and SWCC as well as relevant government departments and research institutions reviewed the recommendations and discussed issues around business planning, marketing, financing, governance, management, training and education of SWCC.

### c. Development of the business plan

To support NUDE and SWCC toward developing a business plan for SWCC, the ILO supported the organization of a [workshop](#) with 19 SWCC members on May 2017. The workshop was facilitated by lecturers of the [Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies \(CCLCS\)](#), using the [Community-Based Enterprise Development \(C-BED\) methodology](#), a low cost and easy to implement participatory training approach designed by the ILO for helping entrepreneurs and micro-business owners to plan and improve their businesses. The participants engaged actively in the group exercises including business plan overview, business profile writing, market analysis, marketing strategies development and management planning. The outcome of the workshop was a draft business plan for SWCC, based on a consultative and participatory development process.



### d. Follow-up to the business plan



As a follow-up to the development of the business plan, the ILO supported the organization of a [workshop](#) on topics of priority as identified by the members of SWCC. These include Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) for domestic workers; further revisions to the action plan and business plan for SWCC; and validation of model employment contracts developed for SWCC in consultation with the members.

## Highlights from the SWCC business plan

### ■ Organizational Description

The SWCC's core business is to provide domestic services to both commercial and residential customers.

### ■ Vision Statement

To create a mechanism for economic empowerment of domestic workers and a platform for recognition of the social and economic contributions which these workers make to the development of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

### ■ Mission Statement

To establish a soundly structured and economically independent cleaning and maintenance services company that employs environmentally conscious workers drawn from a pool of highly trained, courteous and dedicated personnel.

### ■ Core Values

Professionalism, Certified, Reliability, Efficiency, Honesty, Confidentiality, Hardworking.

### ■ Products and Services

Housekeeping, Residential cleaning, Care for the elderly, Child care, Ironing, Residential landscaping, Residential painting, Commercial cleaning, Commercial painting.

### ■ Members

SWCC currently has 28 members, who are also owners and employees of the cooperative. These members are committed to highest level of excellence in the delivery of services to its clients.

## 3 Next steps

In order to ensure the self-sufficiency and sustainability of SWCC, the ILO is facilitating the establishment of a partnership between SWCC and CCLCS for their future cooperation on the management and improvement of the cooperative to improve its sustainability and to serve its members better.

For further information on ILO's interventions on cooperative development, visit [ilo.org/coop](http://ilo.org/coop) or contact us at [coop@ilo.org](mailto:coop@ilo.org)

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