

War on Want International Programmes Department

Decent Work is at the heart of War on Want's work in the developing world.

National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), Bangladesh:

War on Want has been working in partnership and solidarity with the NGWF in Bangladesh for over a decade. The NGWF is a registered trade union fighting for workers' rights in Bangladesh's Export Processing Zones (EPZs). EPZs are industrial compounds designed to attract foreign investment to developing countries by offering low and non-existent taxes and other incentives. In recent times many multinational corporations have moved operations to EPZs in developing countries such as Bangladesh, taking advantage of a cheap labour force. However, it is becoming more and more apparent that EPZs are failing to respect basic labour rights. Research has shown that employees in Bangladeshi EPZs suffer appalling working conditions. Many toil for up to 80 hours a week and are regularly exposed to health and safety risks. Frequently workers are not paid the minimum wage let alone a living wage and they are not provided with employment contracts. Workers suffer abusive behaviour in the hands of management, with women particularly vulnerable to maltreatment. Workers have no means of holding management to account as trade unions are actively discouraged.

Please see this link for a video detailing the hardships Bangladeshi EPZ workers face:
<http://www.youtube.com/povertyispolitical#p/u/0/WIH3FcAYpGs>

CASE STUDY: The importance of joining a Union



Women's Leadership Training

Shanaz Akter is 22 years of age. Her parents died when she was a child and she lives alone in Dhaka. Shanaz has been working in the garment sector for 5 years and joined the NGWF one year ago. Before joining the federation she was unaware of her rights as a worker and assumed that everything took place according to the rules and regulations of the factory. When union members first asked her to join the federation, she was unconfident and afraid and as a women worker felt particularly vulnerable.

After visiting the NGWF office, meeting other members and participating in training Shanaz developed a far better understanding of her rights as a factory worker. She learnt the requirements of factory owners as enshrined in law and the illegal actions already being taken by management with regards to worker rights and benefits. Shanaz also acquired important skills about negotiation and collective bargaining as well as receiving computer training.

Before joining the NGWF she had not been aware that factory management were paying her less than her actual wage. She also learnt that she had not been paid her overtime correctly and that she was entitled to certain bonuses such as leave for national holidays. Previously she had never thought to question management. Now she realizes the importance of workers becoming members of NGWF and being aware of their rights and legal entitlements. "This is the only time we have managed to obtain the full festival bonus and this was only possible because the NGWF was behind us"- Shanaz said.

Shanaz is now an active and leading member of the NGWF.

NGWF build the capacity of its members to defend their rights and demand implementation of labour legislation: supporting and accelerating the process of training, mobilization, unionisation, research-based national advocacy and networking. In particular, the project aims to promote the active involvement of women, who make up around 85% of the workforce, throughout union structures. The NGWF also puts pressure on employers and the government to ensure that the new national labour legislation (passed in 2006) is fully enforced in the Bangladeshi garment for export sector.

Simultaneously War on Want campaigns hard in the UK, calling on the British Government for improved regulation of multinational corporations and their supply chains.

RESEARCH BRIEFING: *Ignoring the Law*



Through joint research-based advocacy consumers in the UK are encouraged to press for change. Last year the NGWF and War on Want produced a briefing paper raising awareness of the lack of enforcement of labour laws protecting workers rights in Bangladesh's sweatshops.

The briefing paper is available here:
<http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/hidden/inform/16594-ignoring-the-law>.

NGWF General Secretary Amin Amirul Haque and a female garment worker and member of NGWF Hena Begum attended the briefing paper's launch in June 2009. During their visit Amin and Hena participated in a number of events to raise awareness about the dire conditions workers face in Bangladesh's sweatshops and developed links with UK Unions, meeting with representatives from Unite and Unison, and speaking at the GMB Annual Conference.

NGWF is one of the lead trade unions addressing and advocating for an agreement on the Bangladeshi living wage. War on Want attended a stakeholder meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh in August last year to support this work. NGWF brought together the Minister of Industry, representatives of other trade unions and the Bangladesh Garment Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association as well as workers and academics in order to discuss the minimum wage and the need to immediately set up a national board responsible for consulting on and agreeing a national living wage.



The stakeholder meeting underway

For more information on NGWF: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/sweatshops-in-bangladesh>

The Honduran Women's Collective (Codemuh), Honduras:

War on Want supports the work of the Honduran Women's Collective – or Codemuh, as it is known in Spanish – who have been fighting for workers' rights in Honduras for over 20 years. Today Honduras is one of the largest textile exporters in Central America and the third largest exporter to the US after China and Mexico. Over 133,000 workers are employed in Honduras' 24 EPZs, or *maquiladoras* as they are known in Latin America, 75% of whom are women. Although they have created jobs, it is becoming more and more apparent that EPZs are failing to respect basic labour rights. Working in *maquiladoras*, Honduran workers face poor health and safety standards and extremely long working hours as a result of a quota system in which workers must meet unrealistic production targets. Forced to repeat the same motion throughout the day, many workers suffer permanent injury making them unfit for future employment. Medical care is non-existent at most factories, and those workers who leave their job due to injury suffered at work rarely receive compensation. On top of this Honduran *maquiladora* workers earn, on average, 100 lempiras a day (roughly £3), which is not enough to cover basic living costs such as food, health care and education for their children. Workers must also contend with harassment and violence at the hands of managers; women are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Job security is low and maternity leave is rarely an option. Because trade unions are actively discouraged, few workers are able to speak out against labour rights abuses.

Codemuh is the only organisation in Honduras to tackle the issue of workers' health, focusing in particular on women. Codemuh believe that the well-being and dignity of workers must be protected at all costs. Since its founding Codemuh has successfully lobbied for far-reaching improvements in health and safety conditions for female *maquiladora* workers. Codemuh's main policy goal is the reform of the country's outdated health and safety labour legislation (designed in 1959 when the manufacturing sector was small and undeveloped). After carrying out extensive research on workers health, Codemuh submitted proposed reforms to the Honduran National Congress in March 2008. The group is seeking a legal framework that ensures factory owners and the government take measures to protect the health and wellbeing of *maquiladora* workers. In May 2009 Codemuh became the first women-led social movement to host a roundtable meeting with government officials from the Honduran government on the need for a public policy on health and safety in the workplace. On two separate occasions the group met with the Inter-American Court for Human Rights to present evidence on the widespread abuses occurring in the country's *maquiladoras*.

CASE STUDY “How do our employers think we can survive on what they pay us? We can’t feed our families. We are human beings like them, with families, with children.”



Reina, after her accident.

Reina is a 25-year-old single mother from Honduras. She has been working in garment factories since she was 13. In her last job, she worked 7am-7pm, six days a week. She earned just £23 a week and was constantly subjected to insults and ridicule by her supervisors.

One day Reina had a horrific accident at work when a pair of scissors got caught in a machine and struck her eye. Despite the injury being serious, her employer put some cotton wool over the eye to stem the bleeding and told her to carry on working. After several hours of unbearable pain, Reina walked out and made her own way to the hospital.

Reina spent three weeks in hospital and her family had to sell their bicycles and tools they needed for work, just to cover her health care costs.

Reina can no longer see with the eye that was injured and lost part of her hearing on the same side. Reina turned to Codemuh who provided her with the legal support she otherwise could not have accessed. Thanks to their expertise Reina was able to secure over £1,000 in compensation from the company responsible for her accident. Considering that the cost of her medication alone is double what she is getting in state compensation this has made a significant difference. Codemuh is now working hard to get her reinstated so that she is able to earn a living and pay for ongoing medical treatment.

In June 2009 Honduras experienced social and political unrest when a military coup forcefully removed the democratically elected President Zelaya from power. In the aftermath of the coup, Codemuh, together with other grassroots organisations, campaigned against abuses of human and employment rights in the *maquiladoras*. It reported that workers were forced by factory owners to join in the so-called *Marchas de la Paz* (Peace Walks) organised by the de facto president, Roberto Micheletti, and financed by the business community with the support of the military. While the majority of workers opposed the coup, they felt forced to attend these rallies two or three times a month for fear of losing their jobs.

Codemuh has denounced the actions of the Honduran Council of Private Companies, which has used the crisis to try to push through reforms that would relax employment laws in EPZs. Under the proposed changes, factory owners would be allowed to employ workers on a temporary or part-time basis. For EPZ workers, who already face appalling working conditions, long hours and low pay, such legislation would result in the loss of social security benefits, more job insecurity and other long term consequences affecting their livelihoods. Codemuh has campaigned against these proposed reforms, while raising awareness among women workers of the impact of the coup on their civil liberties and employment rights. Working in partnership with Codemuh, War on Want is dedicated to exposing and taking action against the violation of human rights in sweatshops.

Awareness Raising UK Tour- December 2009

Codemuh's Coordinator Maria Luisa Regalado visited the UK in December 2009 to raise awareness of the ongoing impacts of the military coup on *maquiladora* workers in Honduras. Maria Luisa was a key speaker at the Latin America 2009 conference held at TUC's Congress House, as well as meeting with representatives from the NUJ, Unite, Prospect and MPs at the Houses of Parliament.

For more information on Codemuh: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/women-factory-workers-in-honduras>

Asian Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and Labour Action Centre (LAC), China:

To help promote workers' rights in China, especially among migrant workers, War on Want works in collaboration with two grassroots partners, the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and Labour Action China (LAC). With a 9% annual growth rate in GDP over the last decade, China has the world's fastest growing economy. Despite its rapid growth, more than 482 million people – 36% of the population – still live on less than \$2 a day. To escape extreme poverty, many Chinese migrants from the countryside have moved to industrial cities which offer the promise of better paying jobs. Today there are approximately 136 million migrant workers in China.



Women at work in a factory.

However rural migrant workers arriving in industrial areas often find themselves trapped in abysmal working and living conditions. On average migrants work 12 hours a day, 26 days a month and earn the equivalent of just £85 per month, less than half the salary of a local worker. The majority of workers do not have written contracts and job insecurity is exacerbated by the government's failure to enforce national labour standards.

Women migrant workers, who are primarily employed in factories, rarely get maternity leave and there are no childcare facilities. Factory conditions are dangerous, and basic health and safety protection is rarely provided to workers. According to the United Nations, more than 200 million Chinese workers risk serious damage to their health from occupational disease. Illnesses such as silicosis, an incurable lung disease contracted by inhaling silica dust released when rock or stone is cut or drilled, are becoming more commonplace. Many thousands of workers die every year as a result of contracting silicosis at work. Corporations are able to avoid accountability for occupational diseases by exploiting legal loopholes. Moreover, the official state trade union has failed to take action on behalf of workers who fall ill and corporations are rarely compelled to pay sickness compensation.

Together the AMRC and LAC support more than 15 migrant worker organisations in mainland China, working tirelessly to improve the livelihoods of migrant workers, focussing on women and those affected by occupational disease. Through training the

AMRC and LAC empower workers to defend and claim their rights and promote the sharing of experiences between workers across China. They mobilise migrant worker organisations to engage in joint advocacy work to increase pressure on the government to improve labour standards. In October 2008 migrant worker organisations met for the first time with government officials in Beijing to discuss Chinese labour laws, which are weak and rarely enforced. Migrant workers suffering from occupational disease were able to speak directly to government representatives about labour rights abuses and make a call for improvements to occupational health and safety regulations. AMRC and LAC also participated in the drawing up of the 2008 Labour Contract Law guaranteeing workers a written contract of employment. Both organisations are currently involved in consultations around a draft Social Security Law, which would entitle all Chinese to social benefits no matter where they live or work. As well as supporting workers in industrial areas, AMRC and LAC also support five migrant worker organisations in rural areas providing workers' rights training and preparing workers for the problems they will face upon arrival in China's cities. They also support, through rehabilitation and a local support network, those migrant workers who return to the countryside with occupational diseases. The AMRC and LAC also conduct research on the conditions faced by migrant workers in China and neighbouring countries.

Case Study: Seeking compensation for occupational disease in China

My name is Wang. In 1995 I left my village in rural Sichuan province in search of a better life. I travelled to the industrial city of Shenzhen on the south coast of China, where I began a job as a stonecutter in a jewellery factory. The factory conditions were poor, and despite the presence of heavy dust from rocks we were not given face masks.



After seven years the factory managers decided to carry out medical examinations of workers. I was found to be suffering from a lung disease, which management told me was tuberculosis. I was given leave to return to my hometown for treatment. But my condition deteriorated, and I went to the occupational disease hospital in Chengdu, where I was diagnosed with silicosis, an incurable lung disease.

At that time I felt desperate. The factory told me to stay in my village and refused to pay my salary. I spent all my savings and had to borrow nearly 10,000 Yen to pay for treatment. At this time I had no options left, and I did not know what to do. But I was lucky enough to meet a member of a local organisation for migrant workers in my village that supports silicosis victims. They advised me on how to claim and demand my rights as a victim of an occupational disease. I found out about Labour Action China (LAC) and its support services for workers injured on the job. Many of the people they help have been dismissed without compensation after their employers discovered their illness.

Although my level of education is low, with the help of the LAC I learned for myself about labour legislation and what it meant for my case. I also asked members of the migrant worker organisation with more experience than me about my options. Through the organisation I got to know workers from the same factory I had worked in. Together we went to the occupational disease hospital in our home province to obtain a health certificate and to carry out a work capacity assessment – the first step in our compensation claims.

To fight for a better situation for myself and other workers suffering from diseases contracted at work, my local migrant worker organisation brings together workers to study labour law, including contract law, insurance law and legislation on occupational health. Using the knowledge from the course I was able to present my case to government officials in Beijing. This experience made it clear to me that only by learning ourselves about law will we be able to fight for our rights – and the rights of those who work with us.

With the support of LAC and other grassroots organisations, I have continued to fight my case for compensation.

*Wang's name has been changed to protect his identity.

For more information on AMRC and LAC: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/china-sweatshops>

The National Union for Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers (NUPAAW), Zambia:

War on Want has worked for many years in Zambia where it has supported union organising in the flower farming sector. NUPAAW is one of the leading unions for farm workers representing 18,000 workers, an estimated 60% of whom are women. Many workers are on seasonal contracts or work casually, and as such have few rights and little security. Women casual workers are often low paid young migrants with very little community support. The many women who work on flower farms are faced with institutional sexism and a high incidence of sexual harassment and abuse from supervisors who are almost always men. War on Want's support for NUPAAW is based on improving the livelihoods of poor women flower workers in Zambia by providing training to women on labour rights, women's rights and HIV/AIDS, occupational health and labour laws. It also promotes women's committees on farms enhancing the possibilities of women having their voices heard and creating groups working on gender issues from branch level up to national level. It encourages women to take up leadership positions in the union. The project campaigns for improvements in laws that affect women and to improve responsiveness to gender issues amongst trade unions, companies, governmental institutions and the general public. Workers abuses in the African flower industry are also countered by bringing together women's organisations from the region and conducting research into companies operating across Africa.

Last year through support from War on Want, NUPAAW directly trained nearly 200 Zambian flower workers (the majority being women), farm supervisors and trade unionists and indirectly increased awareness about worker rights among more than 1,050 workers. NUPAAW were also able to increase the number of study groups on farms and women's committees (nearly three quarters of all NUPAAW unionised farms now have women's committees). This has put pressure on farm management who have taken action to improve the lives of workers. Workers on certain farms have benefited from the purchase of safety clothing and a greater commitment from management to enforce basic labour rights by, for example, reducing long working hours, taking steps to end sexual harassment and honouring the commitment to give female staff one paid day of leave per month. Women flower workers have become more confident and willing to assert themselves evidenced by an increasing number of women taking on leadership positions within the Union. Farm management is increasingly learning to respect women workers and workplace policy is becoming more gender sensitive. In certain farms women workers are being given positions of authority previously held only by male workers. Through the project women flower workers have developed an increased understanding of HIV/AIDS and how to prevent contracting it as well as the support available for those who are HIV positive. Under pressure from NUPAAW certain farms have put in place workplace HIV/AIDS policies and management are increasingly sensitive to the needs of workers who are HIV positive.

For more information on NUPAAW: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/zambian-flower-workers>

The Global Horticultural, Workers' and Environmental Rights Network (GHOWERN) Conference 2009- The Real Cost of Flowers and Vegetables: Promoting workers' and environmental rights in the horticulture industry

GHOWERN was established in June 2008 in order to raise awareness and fight against violations and abuses of workers' social and environmental rights and freedoms in the horticulture sector. The network comprises trade unions and NGOs from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. GHOWERN hosted its first international conference in Nairobi, Kenya in September last year. The



The conference underway

conference was attended by 77 people from 13 countries including representatives from the ILO, the Kenyan Government, the ETI, Traidcraft and Unions and NGOs from across Africa as well as Colombia and Ecuador. The two day event allowed organisations fighting for labour rights in the horticulture sectors in Africa, Latin America and Europe to come together and exchange ideas, strategies and ways forward. Discussions covered the current challenges faced by workers and management in the horticultural industry;

different approaches to ensuring a living wage for workers; effective implementation of codes of conduct and auditing; mainstreaming women's issues; purchasing practices and workers' and environmental rights. The conference was funded by War on Want and Women Working Worldwide and was organised by War on Want partner Kenya Women Workers' Organisation.

War on Want's Informal Economy Programme:



A market in Zambia

War on Want's Informal Economy Programme supports organisations in Africa working towards better organising in what is known as the informal sector. Currently 1.2 billion people around the world live in poverty on less than \$2 a day and with the recent economic crisis this is set to increase to 1.4 billion, 45 per cent of all the

world's employed. A large majority of the working poor, especially women, earn their living in the informal economy. They work as street sellers and market vendors, as rubbish collectors and small scale farmers and fishermen, trying to make ends meet in any way they can. In many sub-Saharan African countries, street and market vendors make up almost half the working population. In Zambia more than 80% of people who work are employed in the informal economy, including a staggering 91% of women, and in Malawi 88% of people get their livelihood from smallholder agriculture and other informal economy activities. People who work in these jobs don't do so out of choice- the earnings are low and the risks high. Faced with

crushing poverty and unemployment families are forced to make a living in any way they can by turning to the informal economy.

The work of these individuals is unrecognised by national governments and there is little or no legal protection. Many traders and vendors are constantly harassed and moved on by local authorities and some even have their stock confiscated. Street traders receive none of the social security benefits afforded formal workers such as maternity leave, health insurance and pensions. On top of this there is little job security and pay is low. And because street trading is not formally recognised, it is also virtually impossible for street traders to access credit or loans to develop their businesses.

There are also the daily hazards faced by people working on the streets such as the risk of injury by motorists on highly congested and dilapidated roads, having to travel long distances to towns and being forced to sleep overnight on streets with their stock – for the many women street sellers, they face the added risk of being sexually harassed. Designated market areas are old and poorly maintained despite the levies paid by traders to the local authorities. There are health risks due to lack of water and sanitation facilities and congestion due to the sheer numbers of traders competing for space. With no provision for the disabled the high number of street and market traders suffering from a disability are at even more of a disadvantage.

Without the protection and security of formal employment, it is nearly impossible for those working on Kenya's streets and in its markets to escape the crushing poverty that they face and these informal workers are one of the most deprived and disadvantaged groups in African society. To help promote the rights of street traders and market vendors War on Want supports a number of grass roots organisations: in Zambia the Workers' Education Association Zambia (WEAZ) and the Alliance for Zambia Informal Economy Associations (AZIEA); in Malawi the Malawi Union for the Informal Sector (MUFIS) and in Kenya the Kenya Alliance for Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT). These organisations empower informal traders and vendors to speak out, mobilising them to approach local authorities and the government to make them aware of the injustices they face. They call on the government to ensure that appropriate policy and law is developed to recognise the valuable work of street traders and bring an end to the harassment and discrimination they face. In Kenya for example, Kenasvit have played a key role in the drafting and presenting of the Micro and Small Enterprises Bill to parliament which would legalise small businesses run by street traders. They want local authorities to provide specific sites, shelters and facilities such as drinking water, electricity, toilets and security for those working on the streets. These organisations also support street vendors to strengthen their businesses and generate more income for their families by providing business training and access to loans. This gives street vendors the opportunity to transform their street trade businesses into recognized small enterprises. These organisations also look at how particularly vulnerable street traders, such as the disabled, can be supported.

For more information on the Informal Economy Programme: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/informal-economy>

Jobs Jobs Jobs: Decent Work for Development

War on Want has also collaborated with other NGOs to raise awareness among the European general public and decision makers of decent work (encompassing employment, social protection, rights at work, equality between women and men and social dialogue) as fundamental to the eradication of poverty in developing countries. War on Want works with Solidar, a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide, to inform people of the positive and negative effects of globalisation and about how the creation of decent work for women and men will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. As part of the Jobs Jobs Jobs project the International Programmes Department at War on Want ran university workshops, student conferences and attended festivals, as well as organising photo exhibitions and other events all with the aim of showing the link between decent work in the developing world and the eradication of poverty. Easily accessible materials based on research were produced to show that decent work is the only sustainable way out of poverty and is fundamental to building democracy and social cohesion.

For more information on the Jobs Jobs Jobs project:

http://www.solidar.org/page_generale.asp?docid=14366

UPCOMING EVENTS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Saturday 27th February, 11am – 5pm. Fight Supermarket Power- War on Want Annual Conference 2010

Join War on Want for an inspiring day of debate, discussion and practical workshops on building local alternatives; workers fighting back; stopping the sale of Israeli settlement produce; and who controls our food.

Supermarkets wield unprecedented power in today's world. In the UK, they undermine communities and destroy local businesses. From Bangladesh to South Africa, they exploit workers in sweatshops and on plantations, trash the environment and profit from human rights abuse in their pursuit of profit at any cost.

People are fighting back. Across the world communities are standing up to supermarket power.

This conference brings together activists, trade unionists and experts from the UK and the global South who are on the front line of the resistance to supermarket power. Be inspired by the alternative models they are building. Be part of the movement to take back power from these corporate giants.

22nd 28th February 2010: Anton Marcus Director the Free Trade Zones and General Service Employees Union, a War on Want partner based in Sri- Lanka, will be visiting the UK. During his visit he will be meeting with a number of British union representatives about the hardships facing Sri Lankan workers.

Spring- Summer 2010: publication of manual on lessons learnt from women working on workers rights advocacy in Honduras. To be produced in conjunction with War on Want partner Codemuh.

Autumn 2010: publication of comparative research into women migrant workers in South East Asia. To be produced in conjunction with War on Want partners AMRC and LAC.

Late 2010: publication of research into flower supply chains and European companies, particularly British, operating in Kenya and other flower producing countries in Africa. To be produced in conjunction with War on Want partner NUPAAW.

Publications:

Ignoring the Law Research Briefing: <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/hidden/inform/16594-ignoring-the-law>.

Sour Grapes Report: <http://www.waronwant.org/campaigns/supermarkets/wine-industry/inform/16458-sour-grapes>

Jobs Jobs Jobs Project (various documents including case studies and briefings): http://www.solidar.org/page_generale.asp?docid=14366

Love Fashion Hate Sweatshops Campaign:
<http://www.waronwant.org/resources/publications>

War on Want's Sweatshop's and Plantation's Programme:
<http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations>