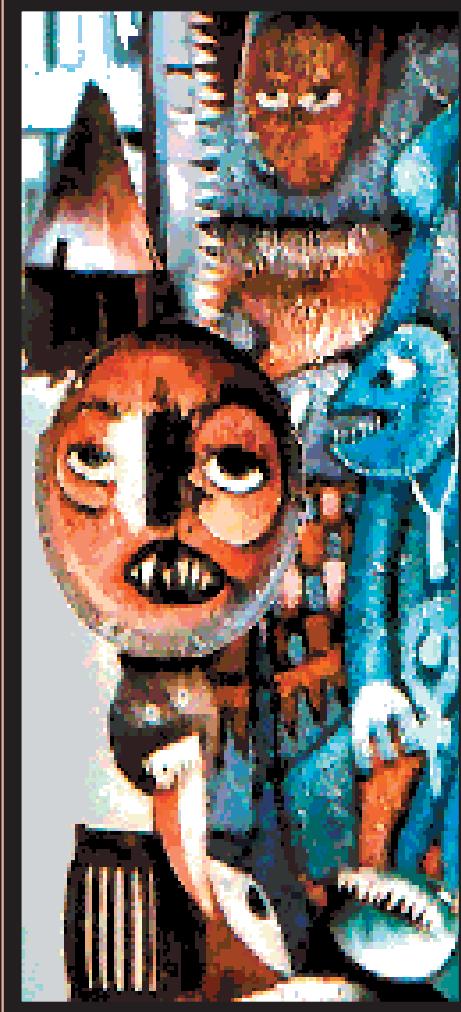
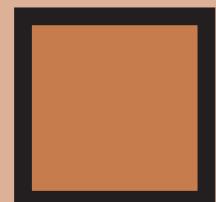


# a story of organising



a shopfloor workbook



a publication series  
for garment workers  
in africa



## **M**essage from Thabo Tshabalala

**Acting Regional Secretary of the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation– Africa Region**



The struggle for workers rights is hundreds of years old and has never been easy despite civilization, democracy, and the development of technology which have solved some problems but created others in its place.

We hope the day shall dawn where through out the world workers rights like all human rights are respected. This booklet covers stories of workers from different countries and continents who all share the same experiences of exploitation and mistreatment. The stories teach a common lesson of organising unity amongst workers who can do nothing alone to change their fate but together have the power to create a different future. We call for all workers in the textile, garment and leather industries to unite under the banner of ITGLWF.

We further call on all workers leaders to educate and teach their members not only through formal education but through vibrant debate and analysis in active union structures. A trade union lives in its member's hearts and minds, and it is through members that we can begin to action new solutions to new problems. Read, learn, share and, mobilize for the improvement of working conditions.

We thank all those international organizations who have expressed solidarity by making this series of publications possible  
- IRENE, CSRSC, SOMO, EED AND FNV

AMANDLA!!!!!!! POWER TO THE WORKERS. UNITED WE BARGAIN, DIVIDED WE BEG.

**Thabo Tshabalala**

# A Message to the Worker Reader

This book is created as a workbook to be used to guide discussion and education on some of the struggles that face workers in the garment sector in Africa. To do this the book uses three methods, story telling, information notes and guided discussion activities. The book is mainly intended for use by workers who are unorganised or recently organised and would be useful to an individual reader but far more useful for a group of workers to work through during a series of meetings or in a study circle format. The book is intended as a guide and a tool to stimulate workers discussions, thinking and planning, not to replace them. The exercises in this workbook should be done as you read through the story and not at the end.

The ideas that form the book are those of democratic worker self governance and development. The assumption that lies behind much of the thinking and opinions in the book is that the only people who can deliver workers from the terrible conditions they currently endure are workers themselves. Unions, international support and campaign organisations, global union federations and well meaning supporters will not have much impact at all unless workers take responsibility for their own destiny. This book really tries to focus the readers thinking around such a decision to change the way things are and then some things to think about on how to achieve worker power. But we emphasise it is up to you, the worker, to make that decision about your own life! Shop floor democratic organisation by workers themselves has been the basis of developing working peoples lives all over the world for decades. ONLY you as workers in the factories can do this, no one else. Organisations and people who offer to do this for you if you vote for them or give them money are lying to help themselves. This is one job that is yours for life. Empowerment is just a decision away, the rest is just a bit of work and thinking.



# What it means to be a worker in Africa

What time do you get up in the morning to go to work? What time do you get home at night? Are you shouted at in the factory? Are wages deducted from you if you are a few minutes late for work? Are other workers fired from the factory with no real reason? Have you been hit or sexually harassed at the factory? Do you earn so little money each week that you have to borrow money to buy food and pay rent? Do you work long shifts without proper breaks? Do you get paid for overtime? Is overtime work voluntary? Are you allowed toilet breaks? Is the factory locked when you are working in it?

## Outlining the problems in Africa

Let's look at some of the problems that confront workers in Africa. The companies selected in the case studies are both Asian owned and have factories in many different countries. These companies are called multinational production companies because they have factories in more than one country. They are foreign production companies that come to Africa to take advantage of trade deals that African countries have with USA and Europe and to exploit the cheap labour costs made available by the desperation of workers caused by poverty. These trade deals, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) between many African states and the USA, means that foreign companies that come to produce in these African countries pay less import duties when they send their goods to USA.

In this process local businesses are often not developed and because they must compete with these foreign companies they are often disadvantaged. This always creates the concern that if trade deals change and these multinationals leave what will be left in the country and how much actual development will have taken place? If domestic industry is not being developed in the meantime this could leave poor countries like Lesotho worse off than before the investment arrived.

It's not that local companies are good companies necessarily, they can be just as exploitative of workers as these multinational producers. The problem is that multinational producers have no roots, they can move easily to countries where labour laws are weak or not enforced and wages are lower.

Governments in Africa as in most poor countries have increasingly taken on economic policies of western governments often recommended by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These policies are referred to as Structural Adjustment Programmes or (SAP's) and they encourage government to control inflation, spend less on welfare and education, open the economy to the world market which means foreign goods and services can come more easily into the country, decrease company taxes and increase labour flexibility by having less strict rules for hiring and firing workers as well as less strict rules about conditions of work. These policies are to make it easier for managers to do business so that foreign companies will invest.

From this way of organising domestic economies comes the idea that countries should compete with each other to get investment and this means that there is never ending pressure to make workers more easy to exploit and more profitable for the investor,

to employ. In order to compete for investment, governments sometimes make labour laws or codes that are more friendly to employers or else they simply avoid enforcing the law. Not enforcing the law can be done by giving insufficient money to the departments that are to monitor and enforce the law. This may include labour inspectors and law courts. Labour inspections may be actively discouraged and it is often difficult to take a case against an employer to court. Sometimes it is not easy to change the laws so governments set up Export Processing Zones (EPZs) which are areas designed to attract foreign companies and often have a different set of labour standards for EPZs to those for industry in the rest of the country, these are usually much poorer making it easier for EPZ employers to exploit workers.

In countries where the unemployment rate is very high and there is a lot of poverty, it is often difficult for workers to try and enforce the rights they have in law as they fear losing what little they have. Management will normally try to play on this fear to ensure that workers do not become organised but stay as vulnerable individuals as this is in their interest and helps to make workers more easily exploitable. Workers will often be threatened with dismissal if they join a trade union. Management sometimes goes even further using security guards with dogs and even guns. Many workers have been injured in trying to enforce their rights or pressing for a better life. The police and army have also often been used in the past by governments wishing to make sure that investors are not negatively affected, often at the expense of workers. It is therefore often quite difficult for a union to organise workers in these types of conditions. It takes bravery on the part of workers to overcome the fear that employers try to fill them with.

Once the union has organised a number of workers the next step is to attempt to reach a recognition agreement with the company. Even when the law says that this should happen where a significant number or majority of workers are organised employers may refuse to do this, knowing it will take a long time for the law to intervene in the situation. Unions in Africa can often be quite small mainly for two reasons, firstly because of the number of people employed in a particular industry may be limited or secondly, workers that will not sign up because they fear dismissal for joining other members in their struggle to improve their conditions. Unions like any organisations need resources to operate well. For a union, the membership is its life blood not only because of the membership fee that helps to build the union infrastructure to make it more efficient (doing something right), but more importantly because to a union, membership is power.



## A Day In The Life Of A Garment Worker In Malawi

My name is Kaonda. I live in Malawi and have worked as a tailor for a garment factory for the past four years. My wife, Chiletso, and I work hard to support our four children. We are always struggling and there is barely enough for our children to survive. My wife and children stay in the central region in our home village. I stay in the city in a hostel to be closer to work. I see them once every three months and miss their company.

I wake every morning around 5 am. I receive 1,400MK a month which is not enough for me to afford breakfast. I leave the house with an empty stomach. I will wait until lunchtime when I can use the 10MK lunch allowance provided by the factory to buy one potato. That will be all that I eat for the day. Most of my salary goes back to my wife and children to pay for rent and food. Their housing costs 500MK per month and our food costs more than the rest of my wages so we are constantly in debt. It is important that I leave early as I live a great distance from the factory where I work and cannot afford to pay for transport. I move fast to be sure that I arrive at the factory before 7 am. If I am even one or two minutes late the manager will penalize me. Once he deducted my attendance bonus, worth 123MK, when I arrived at the factory four minutes after 7 am.

After working there for 4 years I have gotten used to the atmosphere and mostly now I am just very tired. We work extremely long hours, especially when we have a large order for the Americans that needs to be finished. I can remember when for an entire week we stayed on past five and did not stop working until 3 am, and then we took a break and started again at 7 am. We did not get paid overtime wages for the time that we stayed late. The managers said that we were required to stay on until we had finished the targets that they had set and it was not their problem that we were working slowly. There is nothing slow about the way we work. If we even take time to stop and use the toilet for longer than five minutes they will deduct money from our salary as a punishment. They set unreasonably high production quotas and force us to work hard and fast like machines.

The environment inside the factory is uncomfortable and the air is full of dust. My closest friend, Thondoya, has TB and says the poor ventilation is making him ill. The managers often humiliate us with beatings if we make a tiny mistake on the cutting or stitching. I feel angry degraded and helpless by the conditions we face at work, the managers treat us like animals. I see their expensive cars parked in front of the factory and I know that it is my labour that paid for that BMW. Recently my youngest son contracted malaria, he was only three years old and he died. It was a terrible loss for my wife and me. My boss did not even allow me to take off one day of work so that I could attend my son's funeral. I spent that day in the factory sewing blue jeans with a broken heart but I had to push on at work or else I would have certainly lost my job.

By the end of the day when I have finished sewing in the factory I only have enough energy to go back to my room and chat with Thondoya before I turn out the light and wait for it to all start over again tomorrow.

## L i Lian's Story: No Alternatives

Li Lan is a twenty-five year old worker from Sichuan. She is married and has a three-year-old daughter who lives with her mother. When she was eighteen years old, she left home to go south and look for work. She hated life in the factory and one year ago she left the Pegasus footwear factory in Panyu. But now she has returned.

Recalling the days of her childhood, Li said that her family was too poor to afford school books and she had to hand-write all her own books. In school, she did well in most subjects though she was always behind in her phonetics class. After her phonetics exam, she was sure that she had failed and so did not check her results. By the time she realised that she had actually passed, it was too late. Lian Li was unable to go on to secondary school.

Lian Li traveled to Guangdong province when she turned eighteen and began to work at the Pegasus Footwear Factory, Ltd. Life at the factory was hard and lonely, with little entertainment. Li missed her family and friends and was sad they did not know what she was going through. But her wages were better than places she had worked in the past. At her previous job at a Japanese-invested electronic factory, she received around RMB 208 monthly (USD\$25). At Pegasus she earned 500-600 RMB (USD\$60-72) in the low season and RMB 700-800 (USD\$84-96) in the high season.

Though the wages were comparatively good, Li's discontent at the factory was obvious. She was talkative and complained. She was angry at the factory's strict regulations and at the long queuing time for meals. Li accused the factory of denying workers simple benefits in order to profit, knowing that other workers were also dissatisfied, depressed and lonely. Some become mistresses of senior staff members or even co-workers simply to feel loved in some way. Li sighs, "Life is really bad here, but it is much worse at home. Life is life."

A year ago, Li was asked to become a group leader but thought the job would be too stressful and difficult. Instead, she returned home. A year later she is back at Pegasus, "I have no choice. I hated the sense of uselessness I felt while I was at home." Li misses home and especially her daughter and so she refuses to bring photos to the factory to prevent feeling sad. She works all day to make enough money to send some home but her life seems especially unjust when she realises that her monthly wage could only pay for half a pair of the shoes she makes. Li states, "I have to take the lesser of two evils. Life is bad here, but there is nothing at home. I have no alternatives."



# Worker Activity

Look at the stories from workers in Africa and Asia on pages 6-8. Read these stories and then discuss the following issues?

**Step 1**

What are the similarities between these workers lives.

**Step 2**

Why do you think that even though these two workers grow up in different societies on opposite sides of the world, speaking different languages, and having a different cultures still have such similar lives?

**Step 3**

Can you see things in these peoples stories that are similar to problems you face in your life?

**Step 4**

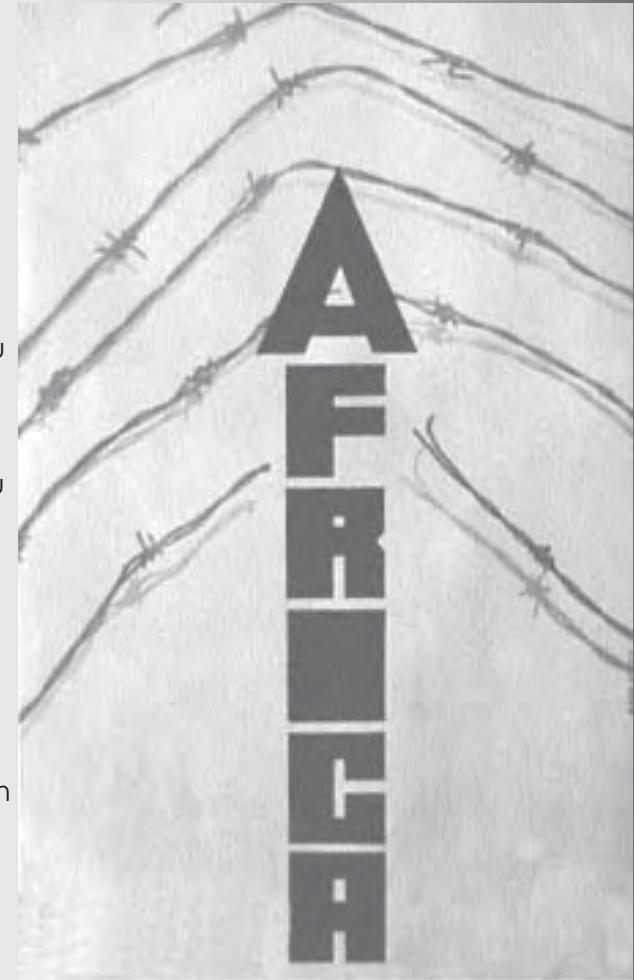
Now have a discussion to decide what are the biggest problems, what you are most angry about and what you fear most. You should talk about reasons for choosing these issues. Why are they the biggest issues?

**Step 5**

Now think about what could be done immediately to change the situation even if it is just a little bit. What would you need to do this?

**Step 6**

Everyone in the group should think about why you are having this discussion together.



# **F**oreign-Owned Clothing Factories

About 30 years ago, many of the retailers would buy clothing from factories in their own countries. However, since then, they have been looking around the world for cheaper producers. Many factories in the United States, Canada and Europe have lost business from the retailers because they have found cheaper factories in Africa, South America and Asia. This has also caused many production companies to start factories in other countries that were production costs are lower. This means that often the owners of clothing factories are companies that might have their head office very far away. In Southern Africa, many of the clothing factories are from East Asia, especially from Taiwan. There are also many South African owned factories in countries like Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland and many Mauritian owned factories in Madagascar. They have gone there in search of cheaper places to make clothes. This will help them to get orders from the retailers.

## **F**actories

The factories where the clothing is made sometimes employ thousands of workers. Workers in these factories are involved in cutting, sewing, trimming, washing and packaging clothes.

Most clothing factories buy materials (called "fabric") from other factories and then cut the fabric into the shape of the clothes, make the clothes and trim off the clothing. This is called a "cut-make-trim", or CMT, factory. CMT factories often do not buy the fabric used in producing garments, which means that they are dependent on other parties to source and supply fabric and are only responsible for the production process so they have less services that they can charge for.

Some factories make the fabric themselves in a textile mill. Textile mills are very expensive to set up and are expensive to operate. Because of this, many clothing factories prefer to buy fabric from textile mills rather than open their own textile mills.



## **R**etailers

The clothes are sold to companies called "retailers" sometimes via a long chain of intermediaries and agents. The retailers buy clothes from factories and sell them in shops to individual people and families. Most retailers are large companies with more than one shop to sell the clothes. Some are Multinational Corporations that not only buy the clothes in the whole world but also



sell them in a lot of different countries. Some retailers only sell babies' clothes, or children's clothes, or they may only sell men's or women's clothes. But many retailers sell all kinds of clothes. Retailers sell these clothes at many times the price that it takes to make them, and make a lot of profit doing so. The cheaper the clothes can be made the greater the profit they can make so they force producers to compete. One of the ways of competing is to pay less wages to workers so the factory can make more profit and grow and the retailer can also make more profit.

Although the factories make the clothes, the retailers put their own name on the clothes. This is called a "label". For example, in Lesotho there is a factory called C&Y Garments. This factory sells clothes to

several retailers, one of which is called The Gap. The clothes carry a label which reads "The Gap" or "Banana Republic" and not the name of the factory.

Because the clothes have the label of the retailer, they put a lot of pressure on the factories to make the clothes in the best possible way. If the clothing is of poor quality, the customers will blame the retailer and not the factory. The retailers will tell the factories how to make the clothes, where to make changes and what fabric to use to make the clothes. They will also tell the factories what price they will get for the clothes. Many times, the factory has no choice but has to accept the price that the retailer will give them.

## B rands

There are also large "brand" companies, who are only selling a brand name like Nike, Adidas and Levi's. Their clothing is made all over the world by factories like yours. The products are sold by retailers. The brand companies make a large profit on the clothing, not by making the clothing themselves nor by selling them, but only by giving the label (the name) and the logo to the clothing.

## A gents

Agents are companies that buy from factories for different retailers. This allows the retailers and labels to be even more removed from the factories and conditions that the clothes they sell are produced in.



## Retailers Want Cheap Factory Prices

The retailers want the factories to produce at the lowest prices. This means that the retailers can make better profits. The retailers can look around the world to see which factories produce at the lowest price for the quality they want. They will then buy clothes from these factories.

Not only the retailers are looking around for cheap labour, also the factories that are producing clothes do not want to risk losing their customers, the retailers, and will be looking around for better places to produce.

The easiest way for factories to lower their prices is to move to countries where labour is very cheap (workers are paid low wages). This means that most clothing factories are now located in very poor countries. In reality though, workers wages are a very small part of the actual selling price of the clothes (see example on page 13). Of course, labour costs are not the only costs for the buyers. The price they pay to the factory for the clothing also includes other costs like material, electricity, rent, management wages etc. Also the transport has to be paid, as well as the design of the clothing. So when wages go up, this does not necessarily mean that the factory will be too expensive.

## The Living and Minimum Wage

Among workers' most urgent demands is their right to earn a wage that is sufficient for the daily livelihood needs of themselves and their families. A **Living Wage** is the amount required for a worker and the worker's family to have access to nutritious food, safe water, decent housing, adequate health care, education, clothing and other basic necessities. From this wage, workers should also be able to save small sums of money in order to have reserves for times of austerity. The harsh living conditions of countless workers however, indicate that they rarely earn enough to meet these basic needs.

Labour groups worldwide have been striving to establish a realistic living wage in their own countries. Determining a living wage is a complicated process due to the difficulties involved in calculating the exact amount needed by workers to live sufficiently. The fact that factories in many countries, such as China, deduct lump sums from workers' monthly wages to provide accommodation and food makes it even harder to determine a standard living wage. The amount taken from salaries for food and accommodation may be reasonable, but the actual quality of dormitory housing and food provided may not meet basic needs.

## **T**he Minimum Wage

**T**is an amount determined by the governments of some countries to ensure that workers nationwide are paid a minimum amount for basic survival. Though minimum wage levels can set an important standard for employers to abide by and help to prevent exploitation, quite often they are barely sufficient for workers' survival. In Nicaragua, for example, the minimum wage for those working 10-13 hour days in EPZs is US \$64 a month -- hardly 40% of the required amount to buy food alone for an average-sized family.

## **L**iving wage value in Vietnam

In February 1998, a Vietnamese worker in a sports shoe factory had to work:

- \* 23 minutes to buy one egg
- \* 30 minutes to buy 1/2 kg of the cheapest rice
- \* 1 hour to buy 1/2 kg of beans
- \* 4 hours to buy 1 litre of cooking oil
- \* 6 hours to buy 1/2 kg of fish or meat

## **W**here do workers wages go in Malawi?

The workers in the garment sector are mostly the bread winners in their families. On average these workers support 4 dependants. In August 2003, workers earned between US\$12 and US\$34 a month. The cheapest housing is US\$5 per month for one room with a grass roof, without electricity and water.

They will pay about US\$1 per day on food for a family of 4 consisting of morning tea and a bun, potato or cassava for lunch and fish and vegetables in the evening. Some workers have to pay US\$1 a month to the factory for a bread roll at lunch. School fees are about US\$5 a month. Most workers do not use transport to go to their work as short distances can cost from US\$4 to US\$10 for longer distances per month, so they walk often distances of up 30kms.

They buy secondhand clothes which will cost them US\$1,50 per item. Most say they are in debt all the time as a means to survive and will have to pay this back at an interest of 50%.

## In Madagascar:

In a factory where T shirts are made among others for the GAP

\* one line of 32 workers have a target of 1200 T shirts per day

\*basic salary is US\$1.49 per day

\*one T shirt costs US\$0.04 in labour costs

A factory produces handknitted pullovers for H&M, La Redoute, Lerner, Decathlon and Pierre Cardin

The buying company pays US\$3 to 4

The retailer pays US\$10

The Pullover is sold to the customer for US\$40

A trouser made for La Redoute

The fabric will cost US\$3.5

Accessories will cost US\$1

Transport will cost US\$0.17

Production costs are US\$6.67

The trousers are sold in France for US\$23.57



## You are not alone

Workers all over the world experience the same things you do every day. You have more in common with these workers from other countries than a manager even if that manager comes from the same country or even city as you because his or her experiences are not the same as yours.

## O utlining the problems for garment workers globally

The 1980s saw the rise of Multi National Corporations (MNCs) such as brand companies like Nike and The GAP and retail companies like Wal-Mart and Sears. These multi national companies have headquarters in the US, Europe or Japan which closed production in their home countries and now manufacture goods almost exclusively in poorer countries. MNCs subcontract orders to partner companies in places such as Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong. These partners in turn set up factories in countries with poor implementation of labour standards, such as China, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia, among others.

The subcontracting process gives MNCs power to control prices and contract conditions by shifting contractors as they please. Production costs are cut at the expense of workers' livelihoods and basic rights: workers wages are extremely low; health and safety measures remain sub-standard; and they are often forced to work 10-12 hour days, everyday of the week. Local governments in poorer countries often ignore corporate violations of official labour laws as they see MNC investment and production as necessary for economic growth and development. Governments side with foreign investors and the local economic elite in support of their coercive factory "management" strategies. Both these factors are particularly characteristic of Export Processing Zones (EPZs).

Contrary to what MNCs claim, in most cases export-oriented production lowers living standards and creates labour insecurity in poor countries. The creation of new industries, along with other factors of urbanisation, brings thousands of rural people into towns and cities to look for work. These people often desperately need work to send money back home to support their families and so will readily accept difficult work conditions and low wages. They will even accept three-month contracts that are kept especially short in order for employers to avoid legal welfare requirements.

More than ever before, workers in MNC production factories are understanding how and why they accept to work and live in difficult conditions. They are voicing concerns over violations of their basic rights and strengthening this voice through collective demands for more accountable development. Collective organisation through unions and grassroots groups is linking once silent voices to broader struggles in factories, cities, provinces or countries. Expressing concerns over low wages and unfair work conditions is rarely "illegal" as is often claimed by factory management. On the contrary, codes of conduct of companies like the Gap and Wal-Mart which define the way their products should be manufactured often grant workers the right to discuss wages and work conditions. Workers should familiarise themselves and co-workers with factory codes and national labour laws. In doing so, they can begin the process of fighting for what is rightfully theirs – a more dignified and less exploited role in the global production line.

Learning and organising are the first steps in the struggle for improving workers' livelihoods. The process of gaining meaningful change in daily conditions is more complex and workers may be confronted with increased discrimination from employers at first. Workers should strive to overcome such obstacles by seeking help from fellow workers, other unions and support groups. There are blatant violations of workers' human rights, like those in China, Indonesia and Thailand, but workers across the world are not alone in their struggle.

## **W**orkers are people with power

Workers across Africa and other parts of the world experience these things everyday but that does not mean they have to be that way. Often when you look at all the problems you face at work and at home it just seems like there are too many to do anything about them. It feels like you have no control over your life so where do you even start to try and change things?

Sometimes when we have a problem one of the best things to do is to begin by writing down exactly what the problem is. Just by doing this you are already starting to take some control over your life because in choosing to do this you are choosing to take action and not just survive until tomorrow.

You want to list what all the problems are so that you can begin to do something about them by choosing which ones you can do something about. To help you do this the activity boxes on these pages take you through a process of considering problems, things that make you angry and fears you may have. These three elements are important in deciding what to do because problems focus our thinking, anger is our motivation to do something about it and fears are what stop us from doing anything. Managers will try to make workers as scared as possible because a scared worker is a quiet worker who managers can use however they want. Fear is inside the worker though and it is only as strong as workers let it be. Our anger helps us overcome our fear of doing something about our unfair treatment. Focusing on problems ensures that our anger is directed in the right way and doesn't end up being used against us by the managers.

There are many things you will need to think about and learn but the more you do the more in control of your life you as workers will begin to feel. Often we don't do anything about our problems because we don't think anything is possible. Gaining control of thoughts and emotions takes you closer to believing something is possible. As you work through the following section you will learn more and understand better how to take action and realise your power.

You should work through this book with other workers. The reason is simple the biggest source of workers power is the realisation that every worker's future is linked and workers power is as strong as the bonds that tie workers together. Our lives will only change if we stand together, there is no other way, nothing else will change your situation.

## **W**orkers have the power to change their lives

Every day there are new examples of where workers have stood together to say NO, enough is enough, we are human beings like any manager or investor or foreigner and therefore must be treated that same way. We are not animals. We are proud and we will be respected by all.

# A Workers Story Of Organising

## Part One: Greetings

I work in a clothing factory in Swaziland with about 800 other people. We all live in areas surrounding the factory near Manzini. I will share with you the story of how we started to change our lives in the factory. Our story has not finished yet but we can see that we have already done a lot to change who we are. The story starts one morning when we arrived at the factory. I was about 7 minutes late, as I walk a great distance to the factory to save the taxi fare. I was tired that morning as my son Donga was ill and had been up all night tending to his high fever. When I arrived Mr Chan shouted at me that he would teach me a lesson for stealing time from the company and told the wages office to deduct my attendance bonus for the month. I tried to explain that Donga was not well but he just told me to be silent or else he would take more money off. I just went to my machine sat down and started working, what else could I do. The loss of my attendance bonus already meant that I would have to borrow money from somewhere by the end of the month and I already owed a lot of money at a high interest rate. Inside I was crying with frustration and anger but I was too scared to do anything about it. At lunch time when I was about to stop working Chan came to me and told me there would be no lunch hour for me as I must set an example of what happens to workers who think they are clever and come late. Other workers should see me being punished. I said nothing and carried on working. He shouted at me and said, "Do you hear me stupid woman!" I nodded because I was choking back tears, but this was not enough for him. "Stand up and say yes sir!" I did what I was told and then started crying in front of everybody. I was so embarrassed and I tried to sit down. He immediately shouted, "I did not say you can sit down get out of the factory. I am not paying a stupid monkey like you any money for today you don't know how to listen." I was very scared I did not know if I was fired or not. I wanted to say something but I just couldn't and left crying. I got home an hour and a half later to find Donga still very ill. Part of me was glad to be back early so I could look after him. That night my friend Tendai came to visit me to see how I was. She was a good friend and brought some food with to share with me. I talked with her about the day and what had happened and she said I must go back the next day as he was just making an example of me. We spoke late into the night about what could be done and decided it would be best to say as little as possible.

The next morning I got up very early and left for work. I clocked in with some other workers a few minutes early and started work immediately. I said nothing to anyone the whole morning shift and Chan ignored me as though I didn't exist. I even wondered now whether he remembered what had happened the previous day. Later that afternoon I realised why when we were told that the order was running late and the company could not afford to make a loss or it would close down so we would have to work an extra shift that night. We finished at 5pm and had a half hour break and then were to go back to work through to 3 the next morning. I was worried about Donga his condition had not improved and now I would be away the whole night. His granny would be there (my husband had been a drinker and just disappeared two years ago, I never found out what happened to him) but there was nothing in the house to eat as I was to buy food on the way home.

I sat there in the compound miserable and lost in my thoughts. My son was ill and was going hungry now whilst I sat at this factory. What would make a mother neglect her child like this? I began feeling that I was a bad person that if I loved my child I would go to him now and tell Chan to go to hell but I could not afford to loose my job. How would I take care of him then? At 5.30 I went back to my machine. At about 6pm the factory was locked up and most of the managers left. There were one or two Chinese supervisors left who lived in the factory anyway and you could see didn't want to be there anymore than us. Eventually somebody came at three and opened the doors. It was always dangerous to walk at that time at night so I went very quickly and was home by 4 in the morning. I checked on Donga who was still struggling to breathe and then tried to sleep as I would have to rise at 5.30 to make my way back to the factory on time. I left some money with Donga's Granny for food hoping she would be able to walk the 5 km's to the shops the next day.

By the time I arrived at work on Thursday morning I was exhausted. I told myself that I must concentrate as it is when you are tired that you make mistakes and that would mean more money lost as the supervisors are told that they must fine us every time we make a mistake.



We were told that day at lunch time that we were still behind and would have to work until the quota for that day was complete. During the break at 5 that afternoon I joined three other workers who were talking about Chan saying what a bastard he was and how wonderful it would be to make him pay for once. I sat down and we soon were talking and laughing about all the different things we could do to him. Thabo was describing the look on Chan's face if all the workers just stood up and took their sewing machines and left the factory. "Can you imagine him shouting and screaming but what could he do other than to shout and scream." Thabo was right what could he do, he needed to finish this order he couldn't fire us and he couldn't replace us. Dudu said, "he would call the police and they would shoot at us if we did that, and maybe the

## Worker Activity

### Step 1

In a group take 5 minutes and think about the problems you face at work, what things make you angry about work and what makes you scared about work.

### Step 2

Take it in turns to say what your problems are, what makes you angry and what makes you scared. One person could make a list of these.

### Step 3

Well done you have taken the first step towards organising yourselves. Obviously writing a problem down doesn't make it go away but just talking about it should already have made it seem a bit different. Most successful trade unions in the world started with a few workers talking to each other about problems!

## Worker Activity

### Step 4

Now have a discussion to decide what are the biggest problems, what you are most angry about and what you fear most. You should talk about reasons for choosing these issues. Why are they the biggest issues?

### Step 5

Now think about what could be done immediately to change the situation even if it is just a little bit.  
What would you need to do this?

### Step 6

Everyone in the group should think about why you are having this discussion together.

company would close down then like Chan is always saying." I listened to Dudu and could feel her fear when I imagined running down the road with a sewing machine and police following me. I remembered what they had done at the factory next door last year and I shuddered remembering that three workers had been killed. At the same time I remembered how I felt abandoning my sick child so some boss in a far off country could get richer and I felt my anger again but it felt stronger this time. Jabulile started agreeing with Dudu when I interrupted her, half surprising myself, and said, "No Thabo is right what could he really do. We don't have to steal the machines well not yet anyway; we could just stop working and sit there. If we all do it he can't shout at just one of us like he did to me the other day, he could shout but we could just ignore him. Then what could the police do." It was as though as I said this, the idea changed in some way, it started to seem real. Thabo laughed and pretended to shout until he had a heart attack falling down in the dust. Some other factory workers passing by saw Thabo and came over to see what was going on. Thabo laughed from the ground saying' "I'm Chan and I just shouted myself to death!" Everyone laughed. Thuli who was in this group wasn't smiling when she remarked, "one day that bastard must pay." "I would rather he pay us," said Jabulile.

The siren went and we made our way back into the factory, our smiles drying on our lips as we went. Still it was good just to have spoken a bit, it did seem different somehow even if it was just talk. We worked until 8pm that night and I finally found my bed at about 10pm. Donga seemed a bit better but I wished there was some money for medicine. I cuddled him in my bed and again felt like I was failing my child as I drifted into exhausted sleep.



# Workers' Rights And Working Conditions

Because factories try to keep production very cheap, workers in these factories have to work under very poor conditions. They often have to work long hours for little pay. Sometimes the conditions are harsh and workers are locked in the factories and forced to work unpaid overtime. Because governments support clothing industry investment they will prevent trade unions from having too much power or influence to improve working conditions in factories. Also, most of the factory owners are very anti-union and prevent workers from joining unions.

## Labour Violations

Research conducted in different countries in SADC by TURP, CSRSC and SOMO found that workers in clothing export factories are experiencing many hardships. Many of their rights are being violated and they are exposed to many dangers. These hardships and problems have included:

- Seven day working weeks, with no rest periods,
- Compulsory and often unpaid overtime,
- Suspension without pay,
- Repression of unions by government and employers,
- Poor health and safety, like dust, closed emergency exits and being locked in the factory,
- Pollution of rivers by companies,
- Humiliation of workers through strip searches,
- Unlawful and arbitrary dismissals, and
- Low wages that are not enough to live on or wages below the legal minimum.



## Worker Activity

1. Why did Chan publicly shout at Thabo just before announcing the delay in payment? Think of examples where management have tried to control how you think and what you do. Discuss these thinking about ways of protecting workers from these strategies.
2. Labour laws normally deal with the issue of pay. Do you know what the law in your country says about when and how you should be paid?

Ntokozo says, "We must learn to trust each other as a way of ending the fear."

3. Do you think this statement is true?

4. How could trust between workers in your factory be increased?

## Part Two: Taking Control

I returned to the factory that morning and as I suspected we were told that we would have to work through the weekend to make the order and as late as necessary each day to get the orders ready for the American shops. Before this announcement Thabo was singled out by Chan that morning and was told he would not be receiving his attendance bonus as he was talking outside wasting time before clocking in. I could see the anger pass across Thabo's proud face as Chan shouted at him and I pictured Thabo lying in the dust the previous day. I wonder what he must have been thinking as a thin smile crept onto my face. I couldn't help but feel that there were some others that shared that smile. It was a very different feeling from the previous days. After Chan was done shouting at Thabo he announced that we would not be paid on that Friday to ensure we didn't go off and get drunk and not come to work on the weekend. We would be paid when the order was finished. I felt the deep anger coming up inside me. I needed that money to get medicine for Donga I could not wait until Monday and now I would be away from him the whole weekend as well. I am just a slave, I thought, I have no control of my life. I wanted to stand up and scream but I felt the fears rise and my anger turned on me accusing me of being useless and a coward. My shoulders slumped forward and I started sewing. At lunch the same group sat together as the previous day. Thabo was quiet however as he was still fuming over his treatment this morning. Jabulile and Doreen immediately started complaining about the late payment and how it would affect them. I nodded in agreement taking some comfort from the winter sun.

What about getting the union in? Maybe that will make some change. Dudu who was obviously still thinking about getting shot from yesterday immediately responded, saying that would only cause trouble and dismissals. "What are you so afraid of Dudu", I snapped and felt guilty as I realised I was really talking to my own fears. Nthokozo who had been quiet through most of these exchanges came to Dudu's defence saying that we are all scared and that is why we have allowed ourselves to be treated like animals. I nodded and apologised. Nthokozo went on. "Sometimes I think we fear what we imagine more than reality. The fear enslaves us and the managers use it as an ally but it is our choice to fear. We need to learn to trust each other as a way of ending the fear. Yesterday Jebu said that if we all just sat there what could he do. She is right. If we do this we won't fear doing it anymore. We will have made a statement that we are people."

"So are you saying we should call the union?" I asked. "No, I'm saying we should tell Chan to go

to hell unless he pays us our money." Thabo had heard enough. "Lets do something now," he said. There was silence in the group. Thabo's words had brought our fear and anger together, each one of us silently did battle with ourselves. It seemed like a long time passed and I had thought about many different things when I heard myself saying, "Thabo you are right. But we must all act together. You speak to the cutters department, Jabulile is in the dye house and between the rest of us we must talk to the machinists."

Nthokozo was smiling at me now and said, "When we go back we don't work we don't talk we just sit." Dudu was still not convinced asking, "Will the other workers join us? If they don't we are finished!" "Everyone is angry Dudu. Just look around the yard here all these groups talking, everyone will participate." said Thabo. "And who will ask for the money?" enquired Jabulile. We will just write it down and leave it in the front. "Quickly we must move now there is not much time until the end of lunch. Keep the plan simple and tell as many as possible about it", said Nthokozo.

I remember walking away from the group towards other groups of workers to tell them what the plan was and see if they agreed. It was like walking in a dream where I had woken up with one purpose in life this morning and this had changed by lunch time. I felt different. I was scared and the first few groups of people I spoke to I stammered a bit but to my surprise people seemed to be thinking the same way. Tendai was in the second group of women I approached who were sitting under a tree. I was thankful to find her and immediately felt more confident in her presence. She listened and then said almost immediately, "Jebu we will help tell the other workers the more that join in the better it will be." Tendai was known to help many people and she was well respected. With that statement the group split up and moved to talk to other workers some alone and some together.

To my surprise some workers were so angry they suggested we take Chan hostage, and maybe find another use for the scissors but I pleaded with these workers to rather just keep the plan simple and peaceful for now. Some workers were openly afraid and said we should rather just hand in a letter at the end of the day to complain but it was clear to me by the third group there was no going back at this point. I tried to explain this and show how our best chance was to stand together and do the same thing....nothing! It seemed a few moments had passed when the siren wailed an end to lunch. There was something noticeably different in the way that most of people returned to their work stations. There was purpose to their strides and concentration on their faces. I felt a funny feeling in my stomach but it wasn't fear.

## Worker Activity

5.If this was happening in your factory and a group of workers wanted to do something how would you go about spreading the word amongst workers? Think practically of all that would need to be done and how this would be done?

6.What would be the strategic dangers of taking Chan hostage and perhaps hurting him?

7.If workers assualted Chan, why would this have such a different consequence to Chan assualting workers?

8.Why do workers often feel like there are double standards and they are treated like second class citizens in their own country? Is this the kind of society we want to build for our children?

# **T**he tools you need to change things

## **K**now our rights

Many of us know too little about the labour laws in our own countries and about the international labour standards that exist to protect workers. This booklet describes some of the international standards. You will need to find out about the national laws in your own country, and how you can use them. Once you have, education and campaigning, including using the press and media, are very important activities to help inform more workers about the rights that they have and to encourage them to organise.

## **D**ecide what are our priorities

**D**Why not make your own list of rights you would like to have respected? Some rights will be laid down in law but not respected. Some may not yet be laid down in law. Women workers in Nicaragua made their own charter of demands, set them out in a Code for employers to respect, and campaigned until they got their government to agree to it. Perhaps drawing up a charter is something you would like to do.

## **O**rganise with other workers

**O**To claim our rights can be a difficult and dangerous task. Our strength lies in building a strong trade union movement. Trade unions have the right to reach collective bargaining agreements with employers, and take legal and industrial action if it is violated. Workers who find it difficult to make their voice heard in the trade unions sometimes form their own organisations. But many trade unions realise that defending the workers whose rights are most under attack defends the rights of all workers.

## **L**ink up with other workers

**L**We live and work in a world economy where multinational companies can play workers in different places off each other. By building solidarity between workers, we can develop strategies which uphold the rights of all workers. Solidarity is especially fruitful between workers in different countries who share the same employer, and between workers who work in the same global production chain such as garments or food.

## **L**ink up with activists

**L**Together with activists, we can draw in consumer power and also solidarity from other parts of the world to build up pressure for change in factories, companies and governments. Many companies are vulnerable to pressure from consumers. Workers and consumers working together can be a strong coalition for workers' rights. Finding out who buys our products or services can be an important step in building a strategy to defend our rights. Some companies have adopted codes of conduct which state how they will respect certain workers' rights. Workers need to find out whether there is a code for their workplace, and whether it can be used to build their own workers' organisation.

## Workers Mobilise for Their Rights in Nicaragua

Sandra Ramos works with the women workers in the assembly factories ('maquildoras') in the free trade zones of Nicaragua. She explains how the women workers developed a Code of Ethics as part of their campaign for worker's rights. Unlike many other codes, its demands reflect women workers' own concerns.

"In 1993 we started a campaign around the rights of women workers in the free trade zones. We knew that they had little protection for their rights and that it was important to organise the women themselves in order to claim those rights. A lot of women had lost their jobs. A lot of women found it difficult to make use of their rights. We decided to organise at the level of Central America and we formed the Central American Network in Solidarity with Women Workers in the 'Maqilas'.

In 1997 we initiated a systematic campaign. It included press and radio. We collected 30 000 signatures from the public. We worked with national parliament. We also held a mass meeting where women workers developed a Code of Ethics which included their main demands.

But the central aspects were the training courses for the women leaders and the massive information campaign so that the workers would be aware of these demands and use them as instruments to press for their rights.

Our campaign was called '**employment yes, but with dignity**'.

As a result of all the hard work, on 1 February 1998, in front of an assembly of 500 women workers, the Minister of Labour of Nicaragua signed the Code of Ethics. The next day the owners of all the 23 factories in the zone agreed to comply."



## Worker Activity

9.Thabo stuck a note on the door. What other ways can you place initial demands when individual workers are still vulnerable to being singled out and victimised by management?

10.Read about what Ma Agnes did. Discuss why she did what she did and how it helped the workers action. What can be done about managers and supervisors that assault workers?

11.If Ma Agnes was in your factory and did this heroic deed how would you as fellow workers protect her? Try to plan a strategy to help her if she were dismissed.

## Part Three: After Lunch

The familiar cold of the factory in winter covered us as we walked inside. I hardly noticed anything as I walked to my place and sat down. Thabo had managed to slip past the office door where he stuck a piece of paper with a hastily scribbled demand on it. It was in big letters and was to the point it said "PAY US OUR MONEY NOW!" I could read the writing from where I was sitting and I wondered how long it would take Chan to realise. The strangest silence descended over the factory. No one spoke and no needles rattled in their holders. I realised I had never heard the factory like this. I shivered a little from the cold and little from anticipation. Through the office window I saw Chan turn with a puzzled look on his face. This gave way to an angry gaze and again I remembered Thabo rolling in the dust. I did not smile this time anticipating the outburst that was to come. As he came out of the office he started shouting but the silence instead of making him sound louder and more important seemed to drown him out and seem like a little boy having a tantrum. I no longer feared him and almost relaxed as he reached the first row of machinists shouting all the way, "What do you lazy fools think you are doing you will all loose your jobs you apes. I will fire everyone of you...and with this he reached the first person in his path. I did not know her well but I knew her as Ma Agnes. She had been at the factory a long time and was an elderly lady. He struck her across the face and carried on walking forward when most workers stood up. At this Chan stopped. It took some time for anything to happen as it dawned on Chan that maybe he didn't have it figured out quite right. I'm sure I saw fear creep across his face as he suddenly turned and rushed to his office grabbing the piece of paper off the door as he slammed it shut and locked it. The other supervisors stood around not sure what to do. One or two tried to shout "you back to work you," before uneasily leaving the floor to get further instructions. I think at this point Chan wished there was a curtain in the office as we watched him making desperate phone calls one after another. One must have been to the police and maybe another to the head office in Taiwan. I had seen Chan's boss once on a visit here, or at least I thought it was his boss as Chan was scuttling behind him like a little dog as he walked through the rows of machines.

We workers sat. 20 minutes passed when we heard the sound of the police pulling into the factory. I felt scared again wondering what they would do. I could see other people were also looking in the direction of the main door of the factory. There was a loud noise as the police tried to enter only to find the steel door locked shut as it usually was after we re-entered the factory from lunch. More banging before Chan realised what was going on and came running from the office to unlock the door, pushing it wide open. The light came pouring in along with

about 30 police all armed and wearing helmets and bullet proof vests. The workers sat at their machines and watched them as they moved in and stood there not sure exactly what to do. Chan was talking rapidly to the policeman who appeared to be in charge. He nodded and started to pick up his loud hailer when Ma Agnes stood up very calmly and walked to the policeman. The row of police could be seen to stiffen visibly as she approached again not sure what to do, one or two even raising their shotguns as she approached the one in charge talking to Chan. As she reached them the policeman barked in English are you the leader of this. Ma Agnes looked at him levelly when she replied in our own language saying, "I am the leader of nothing, but I'm glad you came so quickly you don't do that when we are robbed at home. I would like to report this man standing next to you for hitting me, as you can see from the blood on my mouth where it is cut."

Chan looked from the policeman to Ma Agnes as all the workers suddenly laughed loudly. The policeman was not that amused. "Sit down old women before I make you!" This time she said it again in English so Chan would understand even though he frequently pretended he didn't understand the language. He immediately said to the policeman he was defending himself only to be met with more laughter when Ma Agnes looked at him and asked why he had to defend himself from a granny, twice his age. As I listened to this I thought Ma Agnes will not be working here long after this how will we help her?

My thoughts were interrupted by the policeman who was now talking into the loud hailer saying that he had instructions from Mr Onagongo from the Department of Labour who Mr Chan had phoned, that this was an illegal gathering and everyone was to continue working or leave the premises immediately. I wondered what we would do. With no leadership who would make a decision as to the next step to be taken. No one did anything although the tension was now unbearable. I could feel perspiration trickling down my back even in the cold factory. The policeman made his announcement again saying this time he would count to three then take action. Maybe Dudu was right, this was not a good idea. Again no one moved or said a word as though everyone was trying to imagine what everyone else was thinking. At this point a Labour inspector arrived and together with the policeman and Chan went into the office and closed the door. We sat and waited whilst the heavily armed policemen fidgeted in front of us.

After some time they reappeared and the policeman spoke again saying that everyone should leave and return tomorrow. We would receive the pay owing to us then. I didn't trust them but at the same time I couldn't see another way out of the situation without making it worse. Workers started to talk to each other and then rose in groups beginning to leave the factory. We would see tomorrow what would happen.

## Worker Activity

12. Why do you think Chan often pretends that he does not speak or understand English?

13. What do you think of Mr Onagongo from the Labour Ministry? Is there someone in your countries labour or similar ministry that uses these kind of attitudes to resolve disputes? How can workers secure better support from government in defending their rights?

14. What can workers do about making decisions in situations like this one?

15. Should the workers accept the offer of pay the next day and leave or stand their ground and continue to demand their rights? What would be the strategic plusses and minuses of each decision?

## Worker activity

16.In a group read the alternate story line on this page and discuss the following issues:

What is the impact of such an action by the police (in the alternate storyline on p29) on workers willingness to fight for our rights

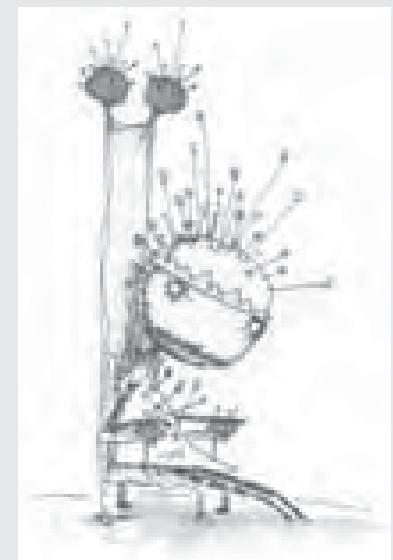
17.If you were a worker leader at Jebu's factory what would you have said to workers outside the factory?

18.As a group discuss how you would make sure the public knows about these actions of management and the police?

### A lternate story line for discussion (this bit is added to the story just for discussion and should be read seperately)

Before any of us did or said anything the police charged at the front row of machinists wielding short whipping sticks and after one or two blows these workers turned and ran, the silence being replaced by screams of fear. The panic moved across the workers and we all started to run. All the other exits were locked though and the only way out was through the main door that the police had come in. They had obviously not thought this through very well. We all gave up, as they chased the crowd it became like a wave of people moving to the back of the factory and then surging forward again to the door and the police. The police and Chan for that matter were caught completely off gaurd by this and as 800 workers surged forward to escape 30 policemen and Chan retreated to the left hand corner of the factory. One policeman caught by surprise and isolated was knocked down by the fleeing crowd and quite badly hurt as people ran over him. Another one panicked and shot his gun up in the air which only made us more terrified in our stampede for the door.

I was propelled through the door by the panicked mob pouring out of the factory. People were running everywhere, many crying. I couldn't see any of the others of the group from earlier in the day and so continued to run in the direction of the gate. I went outside and stood around for a while untill I saw Tendai. I ran up to her to see if she was ok, and then we looked for other people. I was sure this would deal a serious blow to our efforts to take a stand. As if reading my mind Tendai said we are going to have to gather workers ouside the gate and make a decision on what to do next. Other workers were coming out of the next door factory to see what was going on. Maybe they could help, I thought.



## **Part Four: After the dust settled.....**

A group of six of us walked back to the township together that afternoon talking about what had happened. I still didn't have money for medicine for Donga but maybe tomorrow, it would be better than Monday in any event. Thabo suggested that we should go to the union office. I felt torn between doing this and returning home to Donga but eventually felt that it was still quite early and we had started something now that we couldn't just run away from. We were not members of the union as we were told we would be fired if we joined the union. The union officials had tried to get people to join at the gate a few times before and although I think some people did join most of us were too afraid. We thought that the union may give us some advice though so we went along to the office which is where we encountered Benjamin, an organiser there.

He listened to our story and said that we must try to get more workers together to decide what to do. He explained that the union can help with suggestions but workers must decide what they want to do. He said that the union was a workers organisation and therefore should be led by the decisions of the workers as is laid out in the constitution of the union. This surprised us a little because we had seen some unions in action before where they took workers money and told them to work harder and then abandoned them when there was trouble. Thabo said as much to Benjamin who smiled when he replied saying, "I know what you mean and it is a sad thing that unions do sometimes come to think they are more important than workers. It was like this here as well until some workers began to read the constitution and realise that they had the power to change their own organisation. It wasn't easy but in time workers used their democratic rights in the organisation to make it a proper home for workers. When this happened the union started to grow again and workers have gained more trust in the organisation than used to be the case." "That's good to hear," replied Thabo, "I used to think the union was just a money making racket for a few people." "If we join will we be fired?" "I'll be honest" said Benjamin "it has happened before, even though it is against the law, but we took a case to the court about a year ago and although it took a long time we got 45 workers reinstated last week at Marupa Garment who were fired for joining the union. We are hoping that this will be a warning to other employers. We even used some money we got from an international trade union to advertise this in the newspaper to make sure that the managers know about this. Besides Chan sits in the employers association and they were at the court case."

"What can we do about the situation at the factory," Ntokozo asked? Benjamin looked at us seriously and said, "You as workers must decide if you want to take action to start enforcing your rights and taking greater control of your lives and then begin to organise yourselves. As workers you should join the union and then elect representatives to talk on your behalf. I can also come and speak to workers at a meeting. We can hand out some pamphlets outside the gate to try to get a meeting with workers outside the factory. At that meeting we can get direction from the workers and recruit as many people as possible. Once we have enough support we can demand that management recognise the union. We can then as a union together start to demand changes in the factory. This will not happen all at once but it is the way workers all over the world have been protecting themselves for many years. I must caution you though; this will only work if workers are committed to acting together and taking responsibility for the union in the factory as you workers are the union, I am just there to help."

## Worker Activity

19. Why are workers sometimes afraid of joining a trade union?

Who does a trade union belong to? Who should make decisions in a trade union?

20. Benjamin says, ““I know what you mean and it is a sad thing that unions do sometimes come to think they are more important than workers.” What can workers do to make sure that this does not happen?

21. Look at the different things Benjamin says about the union. What do you think of the principals of this union? How do you think this union can ensure that it stays worker focused?

22. What do you think of the strategy to refuse to work the next day if there is no money? What would you do?

Ntokozo responded that the workers seemed very committed today, but Benjamin went on to say that that was a good start but the momentum that had started had to be carried through or else workers would become fearful and demoralised again.

“What should we do tomorrow?” I asked. Benjamin explained that we should go back to work and see if they pay the money, if they didn’t then we should refuse to work again. He promised that he would be outside the gates in the morning and would help by talking to workers as they were coming in. This would just be for the immediate problem of tomorrow but after that we would need to begin to organise the workers in the factory so that all workers could play an active role in making decisions and enforcing their rights. Thabo said that we should then call the meeting for the following day which would be Sunday as we would be working on Sunday for sure because of the delay caused by the stoppage. “Do you get paid overtime for work on Sunday,” asked Benjamin? “No” we responded and he shook his head saying, “you have a lot more rights than you realise and that Chan sounds like a difficult character but if we stick together and put in some hard work we can change things there.” We agreed that we would work towards a meeting at lunchtime on Sunday and Benjamin would address the workers through the fence. We had to get word around for workers to assemble at the township side of the compound for a meeting and that Benjamin would tell them the same the next morning as they came into the factory.

We left the union with a new sense of what had to be done. We were all excited and walked a little quicker because of it. One thing was for sure I saw my working life very differently that afternoon to how I had felt when I woke up that morning. As I think about it now what I was feeling as I returned to Donga and his Granny that winter’s afternoon... was hope.



# Fighting For Your Rights

If the factory you are working for is breaking the law and violating your rights, you must campaign to get the factory to stop this. The most important starting point is for you to work with your trade union. The union has many resources and skills to help you. Also, when workers stand together they can achieve much more than when they work on their own. The union will protect workers and always act in their interests. Remember the union is made up of workers just like you. It is your organisation and you should become actively involved in the union. Unions are democratic worker organisations controlled by workers for the benefit of workers. Use your power to enforce your rights.

## Step 1: Recruiting Members

The union cannot do much to help workers if workers at the factory are not members of the union. Therefore, the first step is to ensure that workers in your factory are recruited to become members of the union. It is important that when you recruit you explain to other workers that in joining the union, the union becomes their organisation as well and they should attend meetings and help to give the union direction and strength. The union is not owned by anyone but the workers who have formed it and are its members.

The labour law may prevent you from recruiting members at certain times in the day. You must work with the union organiser to establish when it is best to recruit members.

New members need to fill out a membership form and then they must begin to pay a monthly amount to the union. This amount is called a monthly subscription and helps to fund the union activities like meetings and pay organisers, lawyers etc. As unions are democratic organizations you have a right to check that money is being spent in the interests of workers. The finances of the union are discussed at various meetings and how they should be handled is determined by the union constitution.

## Step 2: Getting The Union Recognised By The Factory

When you have recruited sufficient members in the factory, the union will demand that the employer recognizes the worker's organisation. This means that the union can come on the factory property to meet with the employers and to negotiate for better wages and working conditions for workers. Organisers will also be able to meet shop stewards (worker leaders in the factories) to help with grievances or cases of unfairness in the factory.

It will also mean that if the workers have any problems the union can come on the factory property to speak to the employers about this.

## Worker Activity

23. What do you think are the attitudes and values of a good shop stewards?

24. If you were elected as part of a shop stewards committee at this factory what would you try to do in the first 30 days, 120 days and 12 months?

25. How would you respond to Sipho who asked about money?

26. If you saw Ma Agnes what would you say to her and why?

27. How could workers help Ma Agnes?

28. Do you think Ma Agnes is a workers leader?

When the union approaches the factory to demand that the employer recognise it, they will have to prove that there are enough workers as members. This is why it is important that workers sign membership forms.

If the union can prove to the factory that it has sufficient members, then the union and the employer will sign a "recognition agreement". This agreement will outline all the rules and rights that workers and the union will have. It will also explain how workers' problems in the factory will be sorted out.

Sometimes the law in a country will make it a right for the union to be recognized once a certain percentage e.g. 30% or 50% of all workers have joined the union. If the law does not give this right or the right will not be enforced by the government then workers may have to strike to force the employer to recognize their trade union. Remember the point of workers coming together in an organization called a union is to increase your power which you don't have much of on your own. Going on strike is a way of teaching the managers about your power.

In many countries battles have been fought by unions to get recognition because even when enough workers have joined the union as required by the law before recognition is granted, many employers fight against recognising the union, sometimes even taking the union to court. These battles have sometimes been helped by the ITGLWF Africa, which is an international federation made up of textile, garment and leather unions from all over the world representing thousands of workers. The ITGLWF has a presence Also international campaigns to put pressure on the companies to correct wrongs and recognize the union have been successful in the past.



# Part Five: Getting Organised

On Saturday I woke up before the old alarm clock made its terrible noise, dressed quickly and left for work. Benjamin was there as he had promised and I could see him talking to workers and handing out pamphlets as I approached the gate. He spoke briefly to me and then said I should go inside and not talk too long to him as management would be watching and there was no point in singling me out as a leader at this early stage. "What did he mean by worker leader?" I wondered as I passed through the gate on the way to my little space in the factory. As I entered the factory I saw the wages clerk window was open and workers were receiving their wages. We had won our first small victory! I never felt so good going up to the window to receive my pittance wage without the attendance bonus as Chan had promised. Also money for the day that he sent me home had been deducted. The missing money didn't bother me at all that morning we had made something happen. I realised that I was feeling relief at the fact that here was confirmation that as people we had some power to change things, we needn't be twenty first century slaves. We worked until 8pm that day and returned on Sunday to work again.

At lunch time most workers moved to the north side of the compound where Benjamin was standing on the other side of the fence and talking to workers. Many people had helped spread the word around and there was a sense of anticipation about what was to come. Thabo started by shouting to workers that this was Benjamin from the union and that we should listen to him and ask questions. Benjamin told the workers that he was there to help because some workers had said that there was a need to organise ourselves. He again said that it was up to us to decide what to do and that he could only advise. He said that many things that were happening at the factory were not legal and that if we stood together we could do something about this. One worker called Sipho shouted out, "will you get us more money? They pay us shit here." Benjamin waited a while and then said, "I cannot get you more money but I can help you get yourselves more money." Many workers asked questions and even more wanted to explain to Benjamin the problems they faced at the factory. Benjamin explained the process of getting recognition for the union at the factory and what would have to be done. He always emphasised that it would be our union that management would be recognising. Before long the siren went signalling the end of Lunch. By this time union forms had been handed out and workers were to take them to the union offices or to give them to others to take for them. We were also told to think about who we would want to be worker representatives. Everyone was talking amongst themselves as we made our way back to the cold factory. Chan said nothing that afternoon and stayed in his office making phone calls. Every now and again he would walk out stare at the different production lines and then go back into the office.

The next day I was approached by a few workers who said that I must be a shop steward others were also approached. I was a bit worried about this as this was not where I had thought things would go when this all started on Friday. I laughed and said there were a lot of other strong people to consider first but in truth I was scared of what this would mean. I would no longer be part of the crowd but become known to management as a troublemaker and loose my job for sure.

I was still thinking about this on my way home when Ntokozo saw me and called me over to tell me that he had seen Ma Agnes on the way home that day and that she had told him that Chan had fired her at the end of the day telling her not to come back to work. As

## Worker Activity

29. What do you think of the strategy of using the courts do you think this would work in your country?
30. How could workers use the assault charge to put pressure on Chan?
31. Do you think workers should strike if management don't want to recognise the union?
32. Should workers demand the reinstatement of Ma Agnes and recognition at the same time?
33. How can workers deal with the issue of spies when this happens?
34. If you were to talk to workers to collect demands like Jebu and Thabo how would you plan to do this?

I listened to him I felt a sense of guilt for what had now happened to this old woman and my fear began to return. Ntokozo had taken her to Benjamin on the way home and she was at the union now. "Can the union do anything about this," I asked? "Benjamin said we should act on it right away. He took Ma Agnes to the police to lay a charge of assault against Chan. He has also registered a protest at the chief of police on the basis that Ma Agnes reported a crime to a policeman who didn't act on it. He also said that we should demand her reinstatement as a union and if they refuse we could try to strike or use the courts for the matter."

"What do you think will happen , Ntokozo?" I asked "I don't know really but we will have to think about this clearly as the union is still new at the factory and not that strong as yet. I am worried if we strike about Ma Agnes the workers maybe divided and this would break our attempts to organise." "But Ma Agnes stood up for everybody," I shouted, "we can't abandon her now." "I'm not saying we must abandon her, I'm just saying we must be clever in how we respond," replied Ntokhozo. I suddenly felt that I had gotten into something much bigger than I thought. The feelings of joy over our small victory were quickly being replaced by worries about Ma Agnes and if I am honest for myself and my family too. I slept uneasily all night waking several times to check on Donga.

On Tuesday Benjamin spoke to workers through the fence again. He was with Ma Agnes when he spoke and he explained that the union was lodging a case against Chan for assault and against the factory for unfair dismissal. He also explained that the courts were slow and that at some point we might need to support these efforts. He also reported that some 600 workers had joined the union and that the union could now demand recognition from management. A quick vote was held by workers and everyone agreed that this was the best course of action now. Sipho wanted know about when wage negotiations would start and Benjamin explained that was for us to decide but it would be best to be strong and have support of as many workers as possible before starting a fight with the company about money. At the same meeting ten of us were suggested by the workers to collect grievances together and take these to Chan. As my name was shouted out my heart sank. That was the end of my job. Chan's spies would be at this meeting for sure. I would be on the other side of the fence with Ma Agnes before the end of the day. Nothing happened though and over the next two days workers spoke to us about the different problems they had and which ones were the most important. On Friday Thabo and I addressed all the workers during lunch and a final list of complaints was agreed. It was a scary but exciting experience to have the support of everyone. All ten of us met Benjamin that night to plan the way forward.

# **U**nderstanding Workers' Rights

Factories are not allowed to treat workers any way that they want to. There are rules that have been developed to protect workers from bad treatment. These rules are called "rights". Workers have rights at work to protect them from bad treatment. There are a number of different rights that workers are given. Rights may come from law or through agreements between employers and trade unions.

These agreements are called collective agreements and they are the outcome of negotiations between your union and companies. The collective agreements may be about wages, benefits, working conditions etc. The idea behind achieving a collective agreement is to improve working conditions beyond that which is provided for by the law and rights in the law. Remember many workers rights contained in the law are for minimum conditions only, you and the union can attempt to negotiate better conditions than these.

Sometimes when employers have been very difficult the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation for the Africa region has helped to link the union to international campaigns and has even come to assist the union organizers deal with the company. The ITGLWF works with different unions in different countries to help improve labour conditions.

## **G**etting the factory to co-operate

## **U**sing the law

If the union is recognised at the factory, then many problems that workers' experience at the factory can be dealt with. If the company refuses to deal with some of the problems, then the union can go to the Labour department of the government to request them to help. The union can also take the company to labour courts. Your union organiser will know what to do when the factory will not solve workers' problems. The law is not the only way to solve problems though sometimes workers will have to come together and make their power known through going on strike to force the employers to listen.

## **U**sing worker power

There are some issues which the law will not help workers with. For example, what is a good wage? The law is silent on this. Also, the law sets minimum standards but does not say how high standards must be. The law leaves this for employers and workers to agree on. When workers stand together, they have a lot of power. This power will be needed to resolve some of these problems. Workers can show their power in a number of ways. One of the strongest ways is for workers to go on strike. Another way is for all workers to refuse to work overtime. If the workers are stronger than the employers, then factory problems can be resolved this way. The law sets out how strikes can take place. Be sure that you know what the law says about strikes. union organiser will help you with this.

## **E**lecting A Shop Stewards' Committee

Workers who are members of a union in a factory, must together elect a committee of members to become shop stewards. The shop stewards will be the union leaders in the factory. They will represent workers to management. The union will work with the shop stewards to help them become strong and effective leaders. The union will train them and meet with them to help them with problems.

The shop stewards will be accountable to the workers. The shop stewards must meet with workers to ask them what are the problems in the factory. This means the shop stewards get a "mandate". The shop stewards take this mandate to the employers and demand changes. If the employers make another suggestion, the shop stewards should return to workers to ask them what should be the new mandate.

To be a strong and effective shop steward, you need:

To be brave and without fear when speaking to employers, to be close to workers and learn about what their problems in the factory are, to always get a mandate from workers before speaking to the employers, to make decisions with workers and the union, never make decisions on your own, to attend union and shop steward committee meetings, to be trained by the union, know union policy on different issues, always tell other workers what is going on, know the labour laws of the country.

Make sure that the union and workers know about all meetings that you have with the employers. Sometimes, an employer will try to get the shop steward onto their side to weaken the union. As a shop steward you should always be careful of the employers tricks to try to divide you from the other union members you represent.

You should keep a notebook that has the issues that workers are raising and is somewhere to write down incidents that happen or what management says when in a meeting. The shop stewards committee should write a list of all the issues that are important to workers. This list should be discussed with the union. The committee should decide what the most important issues are and try to tackle these issues first.

Shop stewards play a very important role in sharing information with workers about what the issues are and what can be done. This is important because it is the workers in general who must tell shop stewards and the union what to do. That is give them a mandate. To give an effective mandate workers must know what they are talking about and so the shop stewards must educate the other members. This is also very important if workers have to stand together and exercise their power as workers will not support a strike action if they feel there is no hope or do not really know what or why they are doing this.



# Part Six: Planning

Benjamin had asked us to collect labels from the clothes we were working on that day. He said this would help to decide on a strategy to organise the factory. He also suggested we take note of who the big order that we had been working on was for, taking note of what was on the boxes and price tags that were being put on the clothes. He also asked us to find out which companies the foreign quality control people came from and to see if there were any charts on the wall called Codes of Conduct.

The atmosphere was serious as we gathered around Benjamin's old desk. We went through the list of complaints that the workers had agreed on earlier in the day. Benjamin helped us put these complaints into different groups. We put all the complaints that were already covered by the law into one group and issues that were not rights recognised by the law into another group. Things like pay for overtime, no double shifts, no toilet breaks, wage deductions for errors, working until late at night, locking workers up at night all went into the group that Benjamin explained the law said something about. These we could put down and send complaints to the factory and the labour department that the law was being violated.

The other group of demands that related to transport home, increased wages and other issues like this Benjamin called substantive demands and explained that we would have to bargain for these by using our power as workers on the shop floor as we had done the other day. To bargain we would need to get the union recognised as the bargaining agent for workers at the factory and then we could begin to demand higher wages.

As we looked at the first list we were surprised by how many rights we had in the law and asked why if we had all these rights the government didn't just tell the factory to obey the law. Benjamin explained that the country had borrowed money some years ago and the government was forced to change some economic policies in order to get these loans. He said it was called a structural adjustment programme. The idea was to make a free market that would attract businesses and they would employ people and so help the country develop.

"So what happened?" Ntokozo asked. Benjamin replied, "We were not the only country borrowing money and having to change policies where the government was supposed to help people to where the free market and business was supposed to do it. Because all the different countries ended up competing with each other to get businesses to invest most poor countries got very little as often all they had to offer was raw materials and cheap workers. So to try and get some investment the government has to make the country as welcoming as possible to companies like Marupa Garment, which they do by not forcing these companies to obey the law. You saw how the police intervened when you stopped work. That is your countries police force but they will take instructions from Chan Long before you."

"But why bother to have these laws in the first place then, that's stupid," commented Thabo. Benjamin continued explaining. "At the same time as trying to get investment the rich countries developed rules around how trade should happen. There are different

## Worker Activity

33. If workers wanted to strike how would you plan for this?
34. How would you go about collecting information about a garment order in your factory?
35. How should workers try to use all the rights they have in the law?
36. Where would you go to find out what the law says about your rights?
37. How could workers use their organisations to pressure labour inspectors to enforce the labour laws of the country?
38. How could workers use international friends to support a demand for recognition in your factory?
39. Why must workers have the final say about what is demanded overseas?



forces from unions and political groups all over the world who believe that there must be laws about the conditions that people work under otherwise the trade competition is unfair. If I had a prison full of people and made them make clothes for no money I could sell these more cheaply than a factory that pays wages."

"You can hardly call what we earn wages and how is our life different from a prison exactly?" enquired Ntokozo. "I hear you Ntokozo" said Benjamin, "but these are funny people they like to say something is one way like the free market when in reality it is really another way. So although the trade rules say that workers should be free to join unions and protected from illegal actions of employers in reality this would take money from the people that make up these rules, so they just pretend they are important so that other people don't go around doing whatever they want to do. You see the market isn't free at all it's just called that to control people."

"So how does this help us?" I asked. "Well the rules mean that our countries have to have laws" explained Benjamin, "and if you have laws you can't ignore them completely before someone goes to the powerful country to say hey, look here your rules are being violated this is the evidence. The International Labour Organisation is a place like this where we have managed to embarrass companies and governments before. In other words government will only enforce the laws that regulate your work if they are forced to and that is why you must organise yourself so that you can force them too." Benjamin continued explaining that there were also friends in these other countries in the form of other trade union groups like the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation and groups in society like the Clean Clothes Campaign who see what is going on as wrong and work to make others in these rich countries aware of this. "That is why I asked you to find out who the clothes are made for and to bring labels as evidence. Labels often have codes that tell us who made it and where it goes. See look at this label." Benjamin pointed to a small number that was on one of the labels I had pulled from the line that morning. "This we use as evidence when we contact our friends overseas to ask for help. If Chan does not act reasonably then we can fight here with work stoppages and also our friends in the North tell the shoppers that buy

the clothes that these or those clothes were made under horrible working conditions because the shop or brand is greedy for money and nothing else. This causes some people to shop less at the stores so the big companies do not make as much money. To try to convince the public that they are not bad guys they say that they are not employing the workers that are mistreated other companies do that and these days they have been forced to also bring in codes for how their suppliers (factories like yours) are supposed to behave.

"But these Codes are useless," blurted Dorothy, "there is a code for an American shop called All Mart in our factory and Chan behaves as he likes." "Its true Dorothy until you are organised those codes are useless to you and only help the shops in places like America and Europe pretend that they care. If we get organised though we can start to tell people over there that its lies. Our allies at ITGLWF and Clean Clothes Campaign will not ask retailers not to buy from the factory anymore because they want the factory to keep the orders but they want the conditions to improve so they will push retailers to make sure that they still buy clothing but they must insist on good labour conditions."

Benjamin continued explaining, "The brands and the shops make most of the money. Your factory will sell a shirt to them for say \$3 and they sell the same item for \$20. Some of these like All Mart are so big they tell many factories what price they will pay and how soon the clothes must be finished. If they are late they fine the factory or even refuse to take the order. In this way they keep control of their suppliers as though they owned them. It's the Not So Free Market"

"That's just like Chan fining us when we come a few minutes late," I said. "I suppose it is in a way but the factory owners will still have food to eat that week you might not, that is a major difference," said Benjamin. "The shops and the brands are the real bastards then, they know what's going on because they send their people to look at the quality of clothes so they see exactly what's going on in the factories and do nothing because they know they cause the problems in the first place"



40. Who makes the most money from all of your work?

41. What would you advise workers to do if there was a code of conduct in the factory

42. How can workers use visits from inspectors to their advantage?

43. If management recognised the union how would you prepare to negotiate the first set of worker demands?

44. How would you decide what demands are the most important?

45. Have a debate where half the group argues Thabo's point about going on strike and half the group argues Benjamin's point on striking?

46. What can be done to protect the 10 representatives from dismissal.

47. How could workers ensure that they stay active and involved in controlling their own organisation the union?

48. What do you think happened at Jebu's factory over the next 6 months? You should discuss why you have this opinion and what you may have done differently.

49. If you met an owner of a big shop that sells something you sew for \$20 or \$30 what would you like to say to him or her?

50. What would you like to say to Chan?

concluded Ntokozo angrily. "So what do we do then?"

"Why don't we just go on strike until Chan gives in," asked Thabo? "We could do that but I don't know if we will all stay together on the issue and if the factory is in trouble we could put it out of business", reasoned Dorothy. Benjamin intervened to say that these factories always claimed that they were about to close its how they use fear to control people. It was normally not quite as desperate as that and there was space to fight for rights and wages without having to close a factory. What was necessary was to get the managers to respect us as a first step then they would think twice before behaving badly.

We talked late into the night and slowly a plan emerged. There was a long debate about whether we should go on strike and then place our demands or place the demands first and then go on strike if these were not met. In the end we decided that the following was the best strategy.

The ten representatives would take a list of all the issues that were rights to management and demand that these be addressed or else these would be taken to the labour department and companies that the factory was producing for would be contacted. In addition the union would deliver a letter demanding recognition as it represented more than half the workers in the factory and according to the law had a right to be recognised. Once the union was recognised we would begin the process of wage bargaining.

We would meet with workers on Monday to explain the plan and the demands, and to get a mandate to demand these by a certain day and if they were not met to get agreement from all workers that we would stop work in order to force our demands. In the mean time Benjamin would speak with some friends overseas to prepare them should there help in embarrassing the factory and the shops we supply become necessary.

It was a good plan and Monday would tell how good.



# L labour Law

Each country has a law which sets out what rights workers have. These rights are called "labour standards". This law protects workers against abuse by employers.

The law is available to the public for you to know and understand what your rights and labour standards are as a worker. The law is a long, thick document. It will normally set out what the basic conditions of work should be and will cover things like: the number of hours you can work, payment for overtime, maternity leave, health and safety standards like ventilation, fire exits, the safety equipment workers should have. There may be minimum pay legislation, sick leave, holiday leave, meal and tea breaks and government inspections of factories.

There are different labour laws that also tell you how to deal with a dispute that may come about between the union and the company. This sort of labour law normally covers issues like: union recognition, stop order facilities, dispute procedures, labour courts, dismissal procedures (what is a fair dismissal and what is not) and the rules about striking

These laws may be contained together in one code or in a number of different codes, depending on which country you are living in.

If this law is broken or lower standards are introduced, as a worker you can fight this. It is best if workers to fight together through a trade union. Through your trade union, you can go to the government and demand that they protect you as workers.

A factory cannot victimise a worker who complains to the government. This is also against the law. Despite this, many factories continue to victimise workers. Trade unions always read and study the law so that they understand it and will be able to use it to fight against factories which break the law.



# **H**ow governments attract investment

The governments of poor countries know that many of their people can be employed in clothing factories and that this will help their people to earn a wage. They try to encourage clothing factories to invest in their countries. They make it even cheaper for these factories to be set up. The governments will pay for the factory building and will sometimes even pay some of the wages of workers. The governments may also prevent trade unions from recruiting members in these factories because they are afraid this will push up workers' wages or they create obstacles to workers enforcing their rights by not enforcing labour laws.

Government support causes clothing factories to move to these countries. However, when clothing factories find other countries that are cheaper, they move there very quickly. The workers lose their jobs and the countries lose their money.

## **I**nternational Labour Standards

Labour standards can be different for different countries. The lower the minimum labour standards a country has, the less rights and protection workers have. Trade unions, business and governments have got together at international level to try to set minimum standards.

They have formed an organisation called the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which is responsible for setting international labour standards. The ILO cannot force a country to implement its labour standards, but countries can choose to introduce the ILO labour standards.

The ILO has laid down fundamental core labour rights in the ILO declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. These rights are considered human rights that apply in all countries, whether or not governments have ratified the conventions.

When a country adopts an ILO convention, it agrees that they will change its labour laws to be the same as the convention. Your union will be able to find out or will already know if your country has adopted the ILO core conventions. If not you and your union should campaign to have these core labour standards adopted.

If government breaks ILO conventions that they have signed or allows them to be broken your union should organise that this be brought to the attention of other nations at the ILO as this will embarrass the government and may force them to take action against the employers who are breaking the conventions.

## Using Codes Of Conduct

Some companies have adopted codes of conduct and the fight still goes on to force others to do the same. But even with the codes that have been adopted the problem is that still many of these codes are very weak and that the companies are often not making sure that the standards are really implemented.

Still, in their codes, the retailers are agreeing that workers have rights. This is a major victory in itself as for years they would not even acknowledge this. So if a code does exist it is important to use it in the fight for better conditions. If a retailer that buys from your factory has a code you have the right to know about it. The Code should be in your factory on the wall for everyone to see. It should be explained to you what the rights are according to the Code of Conduct. You should also be able to complain somewhere, if this code is not implemented by the factory. You can use the code, as one tool amongst many in your tool box of strategies , to claim your rights.

Remember this is one tool amongst many and you and other workers in your factory should look at all the different ways to advance your fight for better conditions. Other tools include the trade union, pressure on your government to enforce labour laws, international federations that your trade union may belong to and of course organizing in the workplace to ensure that all workers there are aware of their rights and motivated to fight for them. Nothing will change by hoping it will. The power we have as workers begins by realizing that we must stand together against exploiters. This is called solidarity and it begins in the factory. Other workers in other countries will also stand by you as well as campaigning organizations and union federations but the fight starts in your own factory and for that the workers must stand together, organize themselves and have a plan of action to bring about change.

Sometimes a retailer's code of conduct may have higher labour standards than a country's labour law . If this is the case, the factory must not just implement the labour law but must raise labour standards to the level of the code of conduct. If the factory does not implement the code of conduct, workers and the union must demand that the retailer ensures its supplier (the factory) improves the labour standards. If the factory will not co-operate with the union or will not make improvements in the factory, you can contact the retailer who buys from the factory. The retailer will come to the factory once or twice every year to look at production in the factory. It is important that shop stewards meet with the retailer to tell them that the factory is not implementing the code of conduct.

If the retailer is not happy with the factory, they can threaten to stop buying from the factory. The retailers are very powerful and can force the factory to make changes. Sometimes, the factory will not tell workers that the retailer is coming to visit. They may prevent workers from meeting with the retailer. The employers will also try to make the factory look better for when the retailers visit so that they think that the code of conduct is being implemented. They may threaten workers and tell them to keep quiet and not to complain to the retailers about the factory. The union must be told when the retailer is visiting the factory so that the retailer also meets with the shop stewards and the union. This will make sure that the retailer knows all the problems at the factory.

If shop stewards are afraid to talk to the retailer, then workers' problems can be presented through the union organiser.

# Organising a Factory

**S**tep 1: speak to other workers about issues in the factory

**S**tep 2: draw up a list of issues that workers are unhappy about

**S**tep 3: make contact with the union

**S**tep 4: recruit more members in the union

**S**tep 5: elect a shop stewards committee

**S**tep 6: draw up a plan of action

**S**tep 7: involve workers at all times and educate workers about their rights

**S**tep 8: if there are codes of conduct find out about these and begin to use them

**S**tep 9: if the employer victimises workers and the union has not been able to resolve this, then you may need to draw on international support, contact ITGLWF

**S**tep 10: sign an agreement that will build your organisation by getting union officials access to the premises and check off facilities for members subscriptions

**S**tep 11: continue to recruit members to build union power in the factory

**S**tep 12: press management to sign a recognition agreement

**S**tep 13: develop a list of demands to put to management

**S**tep 14: keep records of what is happening at the factory



Part of the Workers Newsletter  
Project of



## IRENE

Stationsstraat 39  
5038 EC Tilburg  
The Netherlands  
contact: Peter Pennartz  
T: +31 13 535 1523.  
F: +31 13 535 0253  
email:peterpennartz@irene-network.nl  
website: www.irene-network.nl

Produced for



## TGLWF Africa

503 Charter House, Brand Road  
Durban, South Africa  
T: +27 31 201 0719/F: +27 31 201 0323  
email:admin@itglwf-africa.co.za  
website:www.africalabournet.org.za

*Please note that the views expressed in this booklet are not necessarily those of the parties that have funded this project.*

Produced by



## CSRSC

18 Springdale Road  
Kloof, Durban  
T/F: +27 31 764 1760  
email: labrat@dbn.stormnet.co.za  
website: www.cspsc.org.za

In collaboration with



## SOMO

Keizergracht 132  
1015 CW Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
T: +31 20 639 1291  
F: +31 20 639 1321  
email: info@somo.nl  
website: www.somo.nl

Funded by



## EED

Ulrich-von-Hassell-Strasse 76  
53123 Bonn  
Germany  
Tel.: +49 228 81 01-0  
Fax: +49 228 81 01-160  
email:eed@eed.de  
website:www.eed.de

with additional funding from



## FNV

Naritaweg 10, 1043 BX  
Postbus 8456, 1005 AL  
Amsterdam  
T: +31 20 581 6300  
F: +31 20 684 4541  
website: www.fnv

*Material used for fair use.*

produced for ITGLWF Africa as part of the workers newsletter project of IRENE  
by CSRSC in collaboration with SOMO  
and funded by EED with additional funding from FNV

in the interest of worker education there is no copyright on these materials please feel free to use

printed by Prontaprint South Africa 2005