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With the initiative of a WYR, one affiliate has proposed the elimination of tax discrimination against women workers. In Indonesia, women cannot claim tax exemption or reduction when filing income tax unlike their male counterparts. In the Philippines, an affiliate with inputs from its three WYRs sent a letter to the labour department requesting to formally start the process for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. An affiliate in Cambodia represented eight women victims of sexual harassment and obtained compensation for one victim. This brings to three affiliates (out of five as targets) and six out of 32 or 18% WYRs who have started social dialogue with relevant government agencies on selected w/y and other social and labour standards.

07 January 2019

The Honorable Secretary SILVESTRE H. BELLO III Department of Labor and Employment Intramuros, Manila

Dear Secretary Bello,

NTUC Phi would like to reiterate its formal request for the DOLE to start the process for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment at Work.

On other negotiations, two WYRs in the Philippines proposed, negotiated with their respective unions/schools and obtained approval for the inclusion of trade union rights in the senior high school curriculum at the university level (started in Dec 2019) and in career guidance orientation among senior high school and fourth year college students (will start in March-April 2020).

These results showed the continuing support of the participating affiliates to the ongoing training of the WYRs. The affiliates provided policies, structures and resources necessary for the development and advancement of the WYRs. Also, the initiative and assertiveness of those WYRs certainly contributed to their achievements so far.

Opportunities to exercise leadership abound and affiliates and WYRs need some tools to seize those opportunities. The project has provided some of those tools. Nevertheless, how these WYRs achieved such results in such a short period of time should be looked at more closely. These will then be included in the NPC discussions for possible replication by other WYRs and affiliates.
After the w/y leadership training, the WYRs reported and made presentations to their organizations. With the support of the affiliates in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Philippines and Timor Leste, 12 among the trained WYRs used parts of at least one module of the training materials and trained and sensitized further 2,338 WYRs on various concerns within their unions.

More encouraging initial progress

1 After the presentation of the 3 NTUC Phl WYRs about the project to the NTUC Phl General Council, two NTUC Phl federations amended their constitutions and by-laws: in a health workers federation, women and youth representatives became regular executive board members with full rights (Nov 2019); in a land transport federation, women and youth committee chairs became members of the general council (Dec 2019).

2 CLC Cambodia appointed its woman trainer representative in the project-supported validation workshop in July as Treasurer, becoming a member of its governing body.

3 In KSBSI Indonesia, two of its affiliates (federations) established their youth committees and increased w/y representation in their governing bodies to 50% and 10 affiliates established their women committees.
Leading changes through National Project Committees (NPCs)

To assist in effective participation in the project, National Project Committees among ITUC-AP and ATUC affiliates in Southeast Asia are to be set up (1) to provide stakeholders with a working appreciation of the project with focus on the indicators; (2) after determining the current situation of women and youth participation in trade unions at the confederation, federation and basic/company levels; (3) which provides the basis for creating national action plans considering the initial plan of the WYR participants in the first part of the women and youth leadership training; (4) and create the NPC with its terms of reference for steering national activities and progress; and (5) with the assistance of focal points in implementing and monitoring activities.

First off the block: NPC Thailand, 22 November 2019, Bangkok

The affiliates of the ITUC-AP Thai Council were first off the block - 10 participants (five women, four (two women, two youth) from NCPE, TTUC and SERC, including the General Secretary Brother Thavee, with the Project Manager shepherding the meeting in the three-storey SERC building with meeting venue on the third storey, offices on the second storey and open space, a multi-purpose long table and chairs on the first storey.

Brother Thavee acknowledged the challenges in increasing participation of women and youth in trade unions and welcomed the opportunity provided by the project to address some of them. Sister Rusjiporn, the TTUC woman participant in the women and youth leadership training, said she gained various ideas and information that could be used in union work. For example, she never appreciated gender concerns until she experienced Anna in the Part 1 training.
Participants identified low interest among the youth, multiple responsibilities for women, and low awareness of the value of union work by society as among union realities in Thailand.

There was some apprehension on whether Thai unions could increase women and youth leadership given the current situation. As the participants dug deeper into the indicators of participation or representation in unions and elsewhere, it became clearer that increasing leadership would also mean having new or additional responsibilities, rather than just only getting higher positions/titles.

The struggle to fill the short baseline survey indicated the need to build data. Unions should improve their information on company level/local unions with women and youth committees, representation of committees in union governing bodies, collective agreements addressing women and youth concerns, among other things. They agreed that the exercise gave them a better picture of the women and youth realities on the ground.

There are no federations in Thailand; there’s the national center, then the local union. Would that be better than the center-federation-local axis of unions in the rest of Southeast Asia?

Participants say their initial priorities and activities include seats for women and youth in union governing bodies through resolution or constitutional amendment, leadership training, crafting collective bargaining (CB) provisions for women and youth, and CB negotiation training.

The participants agreed that the NPC would be composed of three representatives from each affiliate representing women, youth and the executive committee of the organization, and the General Secretary of ITUC-TC, subject to consultation with the Labour Congress of Thailand (LCT) who was not able to send representatives.

The chairing of the NPC meetings will rotate among LCT, NCPE, SERC and TTUC, with the Project providing secretariat support in the first meeting. SERC, the incoming ITUC-TC General Secretary for 2020, assisted by the focal point, probably the SERC participant in the WYR training, will organize the next NPC meeting where the NPC terms of reference will be adopted, the targets finalized, and the activities set.

The focal point will prepare the agenda, take and write minutes, help ensure that meeting feedback gets into the relevant work plans and other documents, and report progress of country activities and progress towards indicators.
In a huge hall as grand as the name of the hotel, the venue prepared for the 2nd CTUM Congress, with all those banners and back tarp, probably reflecting the excitement of the work before them, 50 participants from CTUM’s various sectoral federations jam about their participation in the women and youth participation project.

There were two (2) observers from solidarity support organizations.

An exercise, answering two, short questionnaires, with Burmese translation already there (thank you, CTUM!), generated lots of questions, and clarifications, regarding the questionnaires and the project itself. The participants agreed “Questionnaire builds strong statistics and data, improve the union’s data.”

The exercise indicated lots of things to do. Stories were contributed:

- Those in agriculture are mostly seniors, more youth and women needed there.
- Women involvement is a serious need.
- “I realized that women are not only for cooking, washing, and other house things.”
- “Women are taking subordinate positions”.
- “More women should be in leading roles.”

“Youth need more attention,” the young participants said. They were right; youth reality is practically the same all-over Southeast Asia.

Participants specified, posted, clustered (with the resource persons), what they want, what they wish, to accomplish with the project.

There was a range of wishes and numbers (targets), and a number of commons.
What kind of programs, activities to get to their wishes?
• There was a flurry of consultations, as it was suggested that the activities were too general.
• Most were capacity building. “But what kind?”
• They agreed they will need to provide some more details; they will specify activities to enable them to get to their wishes, wants, needs.

“What activities to get to your results?” they will need to SMART-ify their results, programs.” CTUM, its federations, and locals, themselves, will set their priorities among the many that they have identified. The Project, with the CTUM WYR trainees, will continue to assist, teach, coach, mentor others.

They said they will get back to their unions, discuss some more, and then do planning. They will adapt the ten one-day modules to their realities, – initially, leadership, advocacy and campaigns, organizing, gender. “Then monitor how you are progressing,” stressed the resource persons.

The women and youth committees were elected right then and there! Trained focal persons Sandar Soe was elected as Youth chair and Swe Swe Khaing was returned as Women chair.

Planning with high expectations:
NPC Indonesia shows the way,
9 December 2020, Jakarta

KSBSI Vice President Markus Sidauruk spoke in the opening session. He expressed appreciation for the project which would give chance for faster increase in women and youth participation.

Indicator 4’s 50% would be too high for them - promotion or new responsibilities. Indicator 5: WYRs have started social dialogues. Their unions have started dialogues.

KSBSI President Elly Rosita Silaban looked into the meeting periodically. She said that women and youth should prepare comprehensive position paper, including the background, indicating how women and youth committee could be more involved, more responsible. “How many more could be organized to add members you should be more responsible as leaders.”
They would like to place workers’ rights, OSH, in the school curriculum. They will try working with teachers’ unions.

“...They just ask, please give, please give. They should give us position, say 30% participation, the rationale and “What will be your [women and youth] role in activities?” “A proposed action plan should be part of this position paper.”

Participation is hampered by work and family responsibilities. And where meetings are held. “If meeting outside, good participation. If in office, not so good.” Activists say participants are bored meeting in the office.

There are “standards”, numerical targets, for women participation in union activities, “but not yet for youth.” They are trending towards 25% for youth in programs.

What are needed for youth organizing? They themselves suggested: services (legal or otherwise), social security, health insurance, workers’ rights training …

They would like to place workers’ rights, OSH, in the school curriculum. They will try working with teachers’ unions.

Interesting: A job creation team from three centers is supported by ILO. Indonesia has an Industrial Relations Court. There is no government tripartite women’s commission. Regional wages bodies have women representatives, but as labor, not as women labor; the same as in other ASEAN countries. Only government and employers are in the vocational-technical agency. Indonesian unions have started organizing TVNS workers.
Project Program Manager Dom and ATUC DGS Cedric walked from the VGC TQT hotel through leafy boulevards, dodging hordes of motorcycles, to the spanking 11-storey VGCL building. From one monument to VGCL progress (the hotel) to another, the building.

A meeting with VGCL officers, including VGCL Senior Vice President, on ATUC matters and the project, gave an indication of the importance the Vietnamese attach to the project.

There were five participants from the VGCL side, including one male and one female WYRs. Sister Ha Thi Phuong Thao, Deputy Chief of Division, VGCL International Department, and Sister Bui Phuong Chi, Chief of Division, VGCL Women Department, provided seniority to the meeting.

NPC Vietnam is set to do more for women and youth, 20 December 2019, Hanoi

What more to do in Vietnam where there is high participation of women in trade unions and political life? Vietnam is sixth in Asia’s ten most gender equal countries (after Philippines, Lao PDR and Singapore). Eight ASEAN countries occupy the top ten (excluding the 2nd and 3rd), according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2018.

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Seventeen of 83 federations have women Presidents. 59 federations have women Vice Presidents. 16 other federations have important positions for women.
Three women trade union leaders are in Parliament, and “they lead in discussing women issues there”. Parliament has a woman chair. Three of 10 Parliament leaders are women. Some 27% of Parliament members are women.

Leadership target - must have women leaders in all federations. There is high women leadership in admin work or white-collar jobs.

Women labor standards are high:
- The 4-months maternity leave has been raised to 6 months. Although maternity leave is not credited for seniority.
- Paternity leave from five to 14 days.
- Women in 7th month pregnancy are transferred to “soft work”.
- There are breastfeeding programs, lactation rooms.
- Retirement age has been increased by 5 years

VGCL has three million members in industrial zones, 60-70% women, working in garments, seafood, others.

There are “difficulties, as workers are mostly women, young, migrant. “Women facilities are under construction. Kindergarten [schools] not enough. What to do after working hours?”

Women provisions in CBAs: Better than the law – subsidies for small children; presents during International Day; free or subsidized kindergarten. Sharing responsibility in childcare.

VGCL was founded 1929, 90 years old in 2019, 10.3 million members.
They target one million new members for recruitment.
Most union officers are part-time.
VGCL hopes to share their good practices in women and youth provisions in collective agreements.
VGCL is following, tracking, 20 unions and their collective agreements.

They need to gather more information on their youth and their participation. They need to pay more attention to youth and their concerns.

They will concentrate project activities in areas closer to Hanoi given the resources that the project would make available. They have to connect many activities.

Sidelights:
Vietnam has a labor court.
VGCL has trade union representatives in Parliament, and the economic development agency.
Parliament committees 7 from trade unions, 3 women.
VGCL has regular meetings with the Prime Minister; 4 women are in the team.

The women room was a wonder. It looks like a room from home. And the quaint plants, sprouting and growing from jars!!!

On the way back to the hotel, Lam, Dom and Cedric paused for coconut coffee at a roadside shop. They sat on tiny chairs, with an equally small table before them, facing the street, and watched the motorcycles and other vehicles go by, as light rain fell. Thank you, VGCL, for the fruitful meeting, the loads of quaint Vietnamese coffee, and the wonderful time.
They were fondly called 3Rs, the NTUC Phl WYRs, Rem, Ronnel and Ritz. They all are in the ITUC-AP definition of youth.

The two NTUC Phl WYRs are both teachers. Both are college level teachers: Rem in a state university in the province of Rizal, adjacent to Metro Manila; Ron in a private university in Metro Manila. The 3rd WYR who is working in a migrant worker NGO could not find time, due to multiple responsibilities.

Interestingly, all three are pursuing further schooling on their own – Rem for her PhD, Ron and Ritz for law degrees. Their stories are stories of people with multi-responsibilities, including laundry, house work, taking care of sons (Ronnel didn’t make it to Part 2 of the WYR training because his spouse was scheduled for delivery), union work, and, of course, not least, their full-time jobs. Those are the scourge of youth angling for more active union participation.

It is a challenge to schedule meetings among the WYRs, including the NTUC Phl women chair and the youth chair, who are with six others in the 11-member NTUC Phl Project Committee (NPC).

All three WYRs are from the modest families. Rem’s father is a retired seafarer; mother is a homemaker. Ron’s father is a tricycle driver; mother was a canteen manager. Both are the eldest among three siblings; both have bands of two (employed) younger siblings.

Rem and Ron have long been unionists. The young Ritz became a unionist only in 2019.

Rem started work in 2006 as ‘wellness coordinator’ at an exclusive girls school, and was induced into the union in 2015 by the then public teachers union federation president who said: “It’s about time that you commit to something bigger and worthwhile than your own salary and promotion”.

That was providential: Rem’s 2-3 hours one-way commute from home was taxing; she was struggling to find meaning in her work. She realized there was something missing, and found it by being of service to both teachers and students. “My joining the trade union made things fit together.”

Rem works as public relations officer in her local union. She is also regional chair (Luzon island) for tertiary and technical vocational education in her TOPPS federation. She does lots: evaluate needs of teachers and how unions could help; implementation of the anti-bullying law in the education setting; how education institutions could help in mental health; psychological first aid for survivors of disasters; basic guidance and counselling for teachers; and child and adolescent development.
Ron was the ward of the private teachers’ federation NATOW, dragged into union activities while still a student, rising to be youth chair in his local union.

Both Rem and Ron were ‘discovered’ by NTUC Phl only in 2019. They substituted for government resource persons who could not make it to the weekend JILAF (Japan International Labour Foundation) conferences on employment security and constructive industrial relations. They were ‘revelations’, said the training team coordinator.

They have their passions: Rem for mental health, single parent advocacy, programs on school dating, marriage and commitment. Ron for social justice and teachers’ rights.

Both love motorcycles. Rem trained in motorcycle maintenance. Ron dons headgear and CoVid-19 mask for the drive to meetings.

Rem said the WYR training raised her level of confidence. She feels more competent to share ideas on women issues with other leaders and to propose ‘crazy’ ideas. As a teacher - more confident on trade unions and workers’ rights when interacting with students, classmates and co-teachers, “I feel I am becoming more effective in asserting rights and privileges/benefits.” She says, with training and analysis, plus research, she feels negotiation seems easier. “Dati parang inde kaya.” [Before training, it seemed like negotiation was difficult.]

Ron is a specialist in the ramifications and complexities of K+12 [the Philippine program to institutionalize kindergarten and 12 years of basic education (six years of primary education, four years of junior high school, and two years of senior high school, to provide mastery of concepts and skills, develop lifelong learners, and prepare graduates for tertiary education, middle-level skills development, employment, and entrepreneurship]. He confidently rattles off why K+12 implementation is not as good as it should be. He rails against teachers being treated worse than less-schooled unskilled workers who are made regular after one year of work. Teachers are probationary for three years; sometimes made to undergo additional years of service, before regularization.

Rem would continue advocacy on mental health awareness and programs down to the barangay (village) level. Ron wants more involvement in the union, to provide legal service when he becomes a full-fledged lawyer.

Their messages:

**Rem:** “Learning by doing is all there is. If we don’t act, we don’t learn. Changes happen only when we are able to transform learning into reality.”

**Ron:** “Do not stop learning. The world is vast and scary. So are technology and fast changes. Teachers should continue looking for ways to improve the sector.”