

The effects of the Decision for Life project in India and Indonesia

May 2010

Indonesia



'Decisions for Life issues are used in our recruitment drive'

Sulistri

*Project leader Decisions for Life, Deputy president of KSBSI
Confederation of Indonesia Prosperity Trade Union*

'Decisions for Life has helped us in two ways. First of all the position of our Equality Committee at the confederation level has improved. Before we were not consulted in matters of policy. But now we are making policies. Decisions for Life was used to achieve this better position. Also the project issues were used in our recruitment drive. From April 2009 till April 2010 our confederation grew with approximately 50,000 new members. All combined we now have 511,000 members, 35 per cent of which are women. Decisions for Life helped to increase awareness of unions amongst our target group. These are young working women who are mostly employed temporarily. They don't know their labour rights, but are very keen on making a career for themselves.

The way we expand the project is to take the experience we gathered in a particular situation to a similar company. For example in banking we found that tellers are discriminated in pay in a particular bank. Then we check on the pay of girl tellers in other banks in comparison with their male colleagues. Another example has to do with the work/life balance. In certain companies in the manufacturing industry, where we also organise, women are not paid during maternity leave, but they should be. Also sometimes they are denied the use of their 2 days of menstruation leave, which is their legal right. And they suffer gender pay discrimination and housing allowance. That last thing is not a big issue money wise, but why should they get less than men? So now we bring these matters up in the collective bargaining at the company level. That has been our strategy.

We combined Decision for Life issues with our regular gender training course. So over the last year we had twelve training courses, 10 in 2009 and 2 in 2010 so far, partly dedicated to Decisions for Life issues. I think we have reached 300 of our activists during these meetings. After the project ends, we plan to continue with the activities through our shop stewards.'



'The Gajimu website enriches our Decisions for Life campaign'

Ira Rachmawati

Campaign coordinator Decisions for Life KSBSI

'Gajimu.com is the Indonesian Wage Indicator website. The Gajimu website enriches our Decisions for Life campaign. It brings materials like women workers' rights and career opportunities, work and family balance, trade union in discussion. We also promote gajimu.com with the target group to check their salary, decent salary, and also for information about the provincial minimum wages in Indonesia. In a follow-up meeting with the target group after they have checked at gajimu.com, we usually discuss their salaries to see if it is fair or if they need a raise. That usually leads to a discussion about how to negotiate with the employer for a salary raise.'



'The project has become mainstream very early'

Surnadi

Leader of the KSBSI national youth campaign programme

'We have coupled the Decisions for Life project with our regular youth campaign programme. Because the two are related. That was my first reaction when I heard about it. Through the merging of these activities Decisions for Life has become mainstream very early and has been made acceptable within the unions. Since August 2009 it has become one of our main priorities. The project could be announced already in 14 provinces during our regular basic training programmes for young workers, both male and female.

First I tried the issues out at a seafood processing factory in Jakarta. And it worked. The girls working there liked it. As a union we have access to the premises of the companies where we are organised. So I took the opportunity of the day when their union representative was elected to call for an one-hour meeting. After the positive experience in this pilot I took the project to other companies in the Jakarta area where I am based. Next, in November we had a national meeting of our 14 province secretaries, during which the project was introduced. They picked it up and therefore now we can say that it is under way in the food, catering, hotel and tourist business, where we organise some 12,000 female workers.

For 2010 and 2011 we plan special training courses to increase awareness of these issues and related skills. We do this in small groups at the workplace. Also, we will hold regional meetings in one of our youth camps or at special recreational facilities. Because we believe there is nothing against combining business with pleasure.'



'Decisions for Life gives us more precise arguments'

Sarjono

Secretary of NIKUBA, the federation organizing IT, financial services, banking and retail

'When I first heard about Decisions for Life in May 2009 I was excited. Because I am involved in organising women. The obstacles all young working women face are formulated more precisely in Decisions for Life. Therefore they lead to better insight. And they help to spread the message of the unions. One of the ways we do that is to visit the shopping malls where many young women work. During a break we invite them, sit and talk over a cup of coffee. To increase their awareness and tell them about their rights. They usually know nothing about their rights. Then we move on to the next. We call that our road show.

There is a group of young working women with no protection at all. You find them in these shopping malls and on the premises of big retailers like Carrefour. They are the sales promotion girls, for example trying to sell cell phones. They can be fired any time without prior notice. They make long working hours of 10 to 12 hours a day. They are never promoted and get no allowances whatsoever. You may think that this is just a temporary job, a stepping stone. But it isn't. It's a dead end street. Another such example is provided by the outsourcing practices of some companies. Here also a huge pay gap prevails between the outsourced workers and the staff that is regularly employed, and enjoy labour rights, which are denied to the outsourced workers.

We were already targeting these girls before Decisions for Life because of our Equality programme. When Decisions for Life was introduced we found that it cannot be seen as separate from our Equality programme. It gives us more precise arguments in our talks with these girls. We try of course to recruit them first, to collectively bolster their courage and then we go for a collective agreement.'



'Dominant patriarchal culture in Indonesia'

Yatini Sulistyowati

Chair Equality Committee KSBSI

‘There is this bright girl, working in the marketing department of a bank for 8 years now. Recently she told her manager that she is going to get married. As a result her contract is not prolonged. She will simply be fired. Just think of the waste! Such cases are very common in Indonesia. And the male family members of working girls don’t care. They take the position: never mind your career, your independence. If you work, focus on your work. Why should a girl join the union anyhow? Such is the dominant patriarchal culture in Indonesia.

With our Equality programme we try to do something about it. We strive for 30 per cent female management in all companies. In our gender training programme we look for high potentials. We select them as candidates to represent the union at the company level. The Decisions for Life issues already have proven to be helpful in this selection process.’

India



‘Fight misconceptions about trade unions’

Khushi Mehta

Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad

‘With Decisions for Life we really have had to start from scratch. We began with the choice of UNITES as our trade union partner. Then we both had to set up our teams, we for the online part, and UNITES had to recruit field workers for the offline part. Earlier experiences had taught us the value of a clear demarcation of roles: no mutual interference, but rather mutual support. And it worked. Then we had to think of the kind of information we would provide, how to tackle the rather intimate issues, how to map the targeted sectors, where to find the girls we wanted to reach out to. In the Indian situation moreover you have to fight misconceptions about unions, overcome a negative image and lack of knowledge on the development of trade unions and what they stand for today.

After we beefed up the newly recruited field workers and decided on a work plan we had the official project launch on 7 October 2009, the World Day for Decent Work. We prepared downloadable legislation on women’s rights and made a little booklet for the field workers with an offline pilot survey, using the IIM-logo and reputation to enhance credibility. The pilot was used to answer questions such as: can the teams who do the field work manage, are respondents willing to fill up the survey, what other problems do respondents face? Are they willing to be contacted again for collection of the survey and where? In the meantime we greatly improved our website, which resulted in a huge increase in web visits and data intake. All this was prompted by Decisions for Life.’



'Nobody knows what is happening inside these companies'

Pritviraj Lekkad

President UNITES Professionals

'Our union organisers and Decisions for Life-campaign members have no access to the establishments where our target group works, like software companies and call centres. Likewise the girls working there are not allowed access to the internet from their work places. Given the very long working hours and average commuting time - in Bangalore up to 4 additional hours per day - you realize how important social media like facebook and twitter are for building networks and spreading pdf-material. Whereas we had originally planned an outreach of 10,000 working women to be reached, so far in Delhi, Bangalore and Hyderabad combined we only had 1,200 complete the off line survey and return it to our team members. But in the meantime we discovered some more problems they face. Their rights at the work place are severely restricted, they are exposed to trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation and to domestic violence.

Nobody knows exactly what is happening inside these companies. How do their working conditions affect their health? What about overtime? We have to dig out the truth, using the survey data for analysis and then campaign to arouse collective anger. UNITES in Bangalore may organise only 18,000. But when it comes to a social dialogue we are the only potential partner. There is no one else who organises employees in this sector. So employers have to talk to us.'



'Salaries are low, everybody needs the bonus'

Aparna Chandrashekar

Campaign team UNITES, Bangalore

'I came to know about Decisions for Life while still working as a journalist for the Deccan Chronicle. It gave me a good feeling, so I applied as campaign member. I think the main issue is the work/life balance. It is the workload really and the fact that many of these young women in call centres must work during weekends and have their days off during the working week of their husbands. So what about family life? This is a fairly typical story. In Bangalore these days the small nuclear family is the pattern. Finally, reaching home after a long working day and traffic jams, she still has to look after

her child and husband. Though recently some men started to help their wives, if only by shopping for dinner.

Health also is a big issue, stress and back aches. They sit all day, nine or ten hours with twice a break of 20 minutes for lunch and tea. Their work places are not well adapted, which accounts for the back ache problems. On top superiors put pressure on juniors to increase their output. If not, their bonus is in jeopardy. But everybody needs the bonus, because salaries are too low. Let's say your income is 14,000Rs. Of this only 4,000Rs is salary, the larger part, 10,000Rs, is made up of bonus. So you really feel the pressure put on you. Similar situations prevail in all three sectors that we started the Decisions for Life project in.'



'We can only meet our target group somewhere outside'

Nishtha Saini

Campaign team UNITES, Delhi

'We as campaign members must be flexible to recruit. The working girls that we target very often still live with their families. Parents in India tend to be rather protective. So they will say: out for work is ok, but the rest of your time you spend at home. Actually they smother their daughters. And make it difficult for us to access them even after working hours. But fortunately middleclass parents start to be more open, slowly.

On the other hand the management does not allow us to enter the offices, male or female managers makes no difference. They themselves are afraid, because they are answerable for the actions of their subordinates during working hours. In the situation these working girls find themselves in, during work and at home, it is not easy to fill out the survey we want them to. So we have to meet them somewhere outside whenever there is an opportunity. This is one of the reasons why we use occasions like International Women's Day and other events to meet physically. This is important. Besides we recruit members on facebook and are planning an online monthly newsletter on Decisions for Life issues in India.'



'These girls are afraid of the management and of their family'

Satarupa Choudhury

'In the banking sector working weeks of six days up to 60 hours for young single females are quite normal. Sunday is for the family, leaving no time for special events. Though well educated, they are bypassed for promotion by less experienced men. They are afraid to bring the matter up, for fear of losing their job. So when we find them 'on the lawn' during a short lunch break, they have hardly time to talk and fill up the survey. I think the survey is too long. Besides many girls are reluctant to bring up family issues. They are afraid of family and afraid of the management. Yet our one-to-one approach is conditional to the success of the Decisions for Life campaign and to bring in enough data for analysis. Hopefully there will be enough by the end of the year so that IIM Ahmedabad can make an analysis. Then we can put the results in a newsletter starting in 2011.'



'In the informal sector self-reliance is the answer'

Shweta Tripathi

Project coordinator Hind Manila Sabha (Indian Women's Association)

'I was only briefed about Decisions for Life a couple of weeks before this conference. But it immediately struck me as something fresh. So I was happy to be invited here and in these few days I have learned a lot that I can use in my work. Especially the information on paycheck.in is very helpful, the minimum wages in particular. Because that is a big issue, especially in the informal sector where I am working. The informal sector is by far the largest sector of the Indian economy. And it is growing, due to privatization of former public corporations such as electricity and health. Many former employees now are reduced to the status of temporary workers. And many of these are women. They tend to be underpaid, except when they organise. The information on minimum wages provided by the online team from Ahmedabad helps to put a bottom line in negotiations.

In the informal sector self-reliance is the answer. For this you have to create funds for social security, very much like SEWA did. Trade unionism in India must face this new reality and develop a strategy to counter the ongoing erosion of labour relations. We are trying to grow by setting up committees amongst local communities first. They may be composed of street vendors, riksja drivers, former workers in electricity. The growth model is: you start in the local market place, next move up to the city level and then the state level. You work through experienced volunteers, of which there are enough, especially since unemployment amongst the young is huge. You also use cell phone video conferencing to conduct your regional meetings, or other modern means of communication. Especially the women are keen learners. And access to your target group is not a problem at all: they are all boss of their own time.'

***Decisions for Life
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