

# The effects of the Decision for Life project in Southern Africa and Brazil

March 2010

## Introduction

Decisions for Life is a project that runs for 3 years, starting in October 2008, for implementation in 14 countries. These are in alphabetical order: Angola, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Botswana, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Ukraine, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It aims to reach young women workers in the service sector in those countries to help them make premeditated decisions about future employment/career, family building and work/life balance. The project is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs -MDG3 Fund, through ITUC, UNI and the Wage Indicator Foundation.

This report is restricted to participating countries in the southern hemisphere, notably in Southern Africa, plus Brazil. It is based on interviews with key participants from trade unions and added as an appendix to the regular report for presentation at the funding agency.

40 representatives of trade unions and national WageIndicator web teams from Southern Africa plus Brazil got together in the Mozambican capital of Maputo from 22 till 26 of March 2010 for training, coordinating their activities and to exchange experiences with the Decisions for Life project at midterm, i.e. after 18 months.

## Overall conclusion

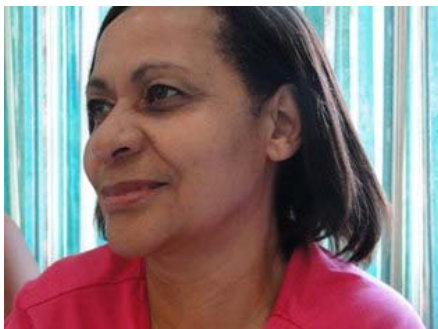
The Decisions for Life project appeals to young working women.

Female trade union officials and activists on both union and confederation levels consider the project as an opportunity to strengthen their positions. Moreover they have seen fit to promote the project in such a way that it became part of mainstream trade union policies within a matter of six months, since its introduction in March 2009 in Southern Africa. They consider this achievement as a unique event in their trade union history.

Decisions for Life causes creative new approaches among trade union rank and file, reaching out to many women in the different participating countries.

The project and its related MGD3 topics of employment opportunities, family building and work-life balance are considered by the women involved thus far to be agenda setting, giving them a chance to put working women's problems and needs centre stage, triggering new trade union policies and leading to solutions.

## South Africa



*Theodora Steele - organizing secretary of COSATU, the country's largest confederation of trade unions. Theodora is responsible for nationwide organizing, campaigning and gender issues. She says:*

### **Decisions for life is already mainstream in the unions**

**Theodora Steele:** *“The fact that gender is lumped together with organizational and campaign matters actually provided an almost ideal platform for mainstreaming the Decisions for Life project. Which is exactly what happened in COSATU. In November 2009 the national congress decided to integrate it in its program for the next 3 years. Since then the Decisions for Life project has been filtering down through all the COSATU-affiliates. So it can be said that it is no longer restricted to the services sector, organized by affiliate SACCAU, but its outreach permeates all of the economy where women find employment and are reached by the trade union movement. “*

### **Decisions for Life means a new horizon for working girls**

**Theodora:** *“In terms of the effect the Decisions for Life project has had on the trade union organization as such, it supports the need to rejuvenate the leadership. Young female trade union activists have picked up the relevance of the Decisions for Life-aims soon after their introduction and used them to widen working girls' horizons, open up their minds and give them a more optimistic outlook on working life. And while doing so they have explored their own capacities to direct a union and to recruit new members, which are very much needed.”*

### **Men are kept at an arm's length, family means: mother, working daughter, baby**

**Theodora:** *“Family building for many young working women in South Africa has acquired a peculiar meaning that is a far cry from the traditional husband/wife/children pattern. Whatever the reasons (this is not the place to analyse them) most girls, when they start working after school are mothers already, single mothers, teenage mothers. The father may still be around, but usually the couple does not live in the same household. Men are kept at an arm's length, also because sexual harassment and child abuse lurk around the corner. The new family pattern emerging is that of a 3-generation extended family, with grandma looking after the child of the young working mother, who brings in the money to support the household.*

*It is under such family conditions that these responsible young working women have to create a balance with their working lives. This certainly isn't easy. Being young they want to enjoy life after working hours, they want to go out, dress fashionably as their peers do, and after that go home to look after their kid(s) only to get up very early next morning and face the productive tasks ahead at the work place. Small wonder that (too) many of these young women take energizing drugs of a kind. This is a dangerous path, as they may end up with drug addiction and possibly worse.”*

**Theodora Steele** holds that the Decisions for Life-campaign, which she says to have had a passion for since she heard about it, came at the right time as young South African working women seem ready to be exposed to its message. They are tempted by life, but at the same time with the proven capacity to act responsibly. Decision for Life helps to confront them at an early age with the consequences of their decisions.



*Patricia Nyman - SACCAWU's national gender coordinator. She says:*

### **Decisions for Life is a platform for victimized girls, but also revamps trade unions**

**Patricia:** *"It is important, comes at an opportune time for the trade union and it is a good tool. Because times have changed. During the anti-apartheid struggle it was quite normal for working people to join the unions, it was the sensible thing to do. But in today's South Africa unions are in membership need, in particular of young recruits, and especially in the services sector where female employment predominates. But young working girls are not interested, they don't even know the unions exist, or they think it is something for older people. They don't automatically come to the unions any more. Yet, the Decisions for Life-project somehow is changing that."*

### **Organizational conspiracy against young working women**

**Patricia:** *"Young women in the services sector face special problems that have to do with the combination of family and job responsibilities. Working hours are 'unsocial': long working days combined with the demand to be flexible, usually at inconvenient times. All working girls experience similar problems in this sector. Sexual harassment on the job is a key problem. If you want to keep your contract you have to abide by the manager's invitation to go out with him. If you refuse, he does not prolong your contract. There are signs of hope though. Just one example. Recently a girl of 20 refused her boss-suitor and went to the union instead, through the shop steward. This led to a grievance hearing at which both the girl and the manager were present, the girl assisted by a union representative, to give her a feeling of confidence and comfort. This assistance is standard. It is difficult enough for the victimized girl to speak up in public, let alone to prove the accusation of sexual harassment. So the result was that the higher management found the manager not guilty, but replaced him nevertheless. So this particular girl got him off her back, but this means that they just replaced the problem. The man in question is known to be a serial. There are many cases like that. All of this amounts to one big cultural and organizational conspiracy against young working women"*

### **Sexual harassment proof**

**Patricia:** *"In terms of building up harassment proof, we now advise the girls to store all unwelcome text-messages and phone calls in a safe file, for eventual future use when proof must be presented."*

### **Decisions for Life is a platform for victimized girls**

**Patricia:** *"Decisions for Life has provided a platform to bring victimized girls together for the first time. We organize meetings for maximum 25 girls in a safe environment where they can exchange their embarrassing experiences, bring them out into the open. That in itself is a great relief. Knowing that they are not the only ones to boasts their self confidence. We also hear many cases of domestic violence in this way."*

### **Decisions for Life organises new talent for the trade unions**

**Patricia:** *"Within SACCAWU the Decisions for Life-project has given rise to an intense recruitment and talent scouting drive. Since SACCAWU is organized in regions an operation has been put in place that involves 2 teams per region. These union activists organize small meetings of 6 every fortnight. These 6 then are instructed in how to recruit new members: the target is 4 new members per participant in this drive. In 5 regions this initiative has already filtered down to the shop floors. All in all over the past year 200 participants, recruiters actually, have got involved. From this new group, mature union workers and shop stewards in the regions, are selecting promising candidates for future leadership positions in SACCAWU. The first such core group of young women activists was formed in December 2009. As a result of the Decisions for Life-project the women's activists' network in the union has been strengthened considerably."*

### **You must not forget that trade union leadership is male dominated**

**Patricia – 18 years in SACCAWU:** *"It is energizing, stimulating, inspiring and motivating to work with these young women. They have no trade union baggage, they are not fighting for positions within."*

*They are what the trade union needs. We mentors are grooming them to take over. If we fail to do this, the position of gender coordinator that I hold in the union lands in the danger zone. You must not forget that trade union leadership is male dominated. Therefore we must also fight for our own positions within the union if we want to continue helping victimized young women workers.”*

**Decisions for Life means: think before you act! But the baby is a fact before the career starts**

**Patricia:** *“The focus of the three main issues of Decisions for Life: future career, family building and the work-life balance, is meant to make young working women reflect on the consequences of the decisions they are about to make in these fields and are actually leading to some postponement of decisions with lifetime consequences. Think before you act! However that turns out differently in the South African service sector. To say it straight most of the young women who start to work have a child already. No potential effect of postponing the decision to become a mother on future employment will have been taken into consideration when she got pregnant. But the fact that they have a baby to care for makes them more responsible and tougher. An example is an 18 year old. We got in touch with her because she had a conflict with her former employer, Woolworth (a supermarket chain). We tried to help her, but eventually she opted to start her own little business. She loves to design clothes and has her own sewing machine. Now she designs wedding gowns and other special outfits and makes them as well. Her child is with her mother when she works. Though the father of the child insists to marry her, she refuses. She knows the most likely outcome: violence at home. Because the more assertive the women, the more abusive the men are likely to become. He tells her: you want to work? But then you do the household too and look after the kids. On top they tend to be jealous control freaks. So by working and not marrying she is standing up for her rights. Since she left employment for the informal sector, we have maintained contact with her. We teach her to use her organizing skills in her new working environment. That is also one of the effects of Decisions for Life, that we step by step increase our outreach, also outside of formal employmen.”*



*Sisanda Mbokotho, legal counsellor SACCAWU – Headquarters*

**Young working women are the most vulnerable**

**Sisanda:** *“Over the past year Decisions for Life has reached 67 percent of SACCAU’s female members. Since the service sector union has a membership of 150,000, of which the majority is female, we estimate that by now some 75,000 working women have been exposed to the project and its aims. These women work in catering, casinos and the hospitality industry. Especially in catering exploitation is crude. Normally they don’t get a salary at all, not even the minimum wage, only tips and fees of customers. Here young working women are the most vulnerable.”*



*Tabisa Sigaba, national coordinator union shop stewards in SACCAWU*

### **We tend to forget our families**

**Tabisa:** *“My work is assisting vulnerable individuals in case of conflict. The Decisions for Life-project is about changing attitudes. First you stand up for yourself. Then you make others around you accept that. And next you take your own decisions. To most it is so evident that you must work to sustain your family that you even sometimes forget to tell your family. Young workers, like myself, focus on careers so much that there is a tendency to neglect home. I take myself as an example. I have a 5-year old kid. After I come home late from work, next morning she asks me: where have you been last night? Been working. My fiancé, who is very understanding, complains: you’re out so often and now that you’re home all you do is sleep!”*

### **Decisions for Life brings the truth about sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS: Enough is enough. What is it to be? Fall down or stand up?**

**Tabisa:** *“The project serves as a platform where young girls can fall back on. And it puts them centre stage within the union. As a recruiting tool it works much better than the old union approach. A little briefing on Decisions for Life, a project ‘made for you’ is enough to pave the way for drawing in new members. But maybe more important are the liberating effects the project has on young working women who had been subjected to sexual harassment. An open discussion in groups brings out the truth that it happens to everyone. They tell about so called sugar daddies who seduced them, usually older men, uncles, friends of the family. They now openly talk about the risk of HIV/AIDS, about how to make a better life for themselves. Before Decisions for Life they told themselves: leave it. But Decisions for Life managed to break open this secretiveness. Now girls self confidently say: Enough is enough. What is it to be? Fall down or stand up?”*

## **Zambia**



*Silvia Chimpapwe is chairperson of Zambia’s national women’s movement and represents the union of financial institutions and allied workers ZUFIAW at the board of the federation of free trade unions FFTUZ. She heads the women’s education program of her union and is a professional trainer herself.*

### **We explain our husbands what union work means**

**Silvia:** *“On a regular basis I give seminars in towns throughout the country, assisted by local committees who prepare a venue with the proper facilities. The overall effect of this education drive has been that whereas before only 20 percent of elected delegates to the national union congress were women, today 70 percent are. This is nothing less than a breakthrough, because in Zambian culture husbands must give their wives permission to perform outdoor activities. Many husbands are jealous, feel the need to check on their wives. So we encourage our women unionists to explain to their husbands what they are doing and what union work means.”*

### **Decisions for Life in company seminars**

**Silvia:** *“In planning seminars we expressly involve the employers. Zambian labour law stipulates that union work is allowed during working hours. This means I have lawful access to the banks and insurance companies where most of my trainees work. Whenever the seminar is held during working hours, I limit myself to recruiting 2 employees per office for half a day – with the consent of the employer. We organize full day training sessions during weekends. I try not to do more than 25 trainees in a seminar, or we will have 15 one day and 15 the next. It is into this operational training practice that the Decisions for Life-project is easily introduced.”*

### **Decisions for Life is out of the box. Work-life issues were not yet on the agenda**

**Silvia:** *“When I first learned about Decisions for Life I was excited, it sounded like fun, something far away from the office. The focus on work/family issues is very welcome. Because in Zambia there is little recognition for it, both within the union and among employers. There is such a prejudice against working women. In the banks they occupy the positions with the lowest pay. And in the collective bargaining process they are usually forgotten, or simply traded off by the male negotiators.”*

### **Decisions for Life enters the collective bargaining table**

**Silvia:** *“Within the union I use my position and the freedom I enjoy to do my own training program for mainstreaming the Decision for Life-project. Now Decisions for Life issues are already on the agenda of the regular youth and women’s programs. Women are silently taking over leadership of the trade union. This means that the issues raised by Decisions for Life will find their way to collective bargaining in a structural manner.*

*Somehow Decision for Life starts to have impact. Early 2010 it served as a platform for making an inventory of work-related complaints of young women, the issues they raised and the solutions they proposed. The report is meant as input for the next round of collective bargaining. But to my surprise I was approached by a recently retired central banker who requested a copy. He was going to circulate it amongst all employers in his extensive network, he promised.”*

### **Small scale debates on job security and decent work**

**Silvia:** *“In 2010 our focus will be on job security in small scale debates, organized by local committees on the shop floor level. This campaign will be accompanied by printed materials such as flyers, brochures and posters. And of course the so called DecentWorkCheck from Mywage Zambia. And last but not least sexual harassment on the job must be addressed permanently. This happens in Zambia too. But where to draw the line? Verbal, non-verbal, physical? Certainly a code of conduct helps a lot as part of a policy to fight sexual harassment. Such a policy is negotiable with employers in your collective bargaining process.”*



## Zimbabwe



*Wongai Zhangazha, journalist working for the Zimbabwe Independent, a weekly, and Mywage.org/Zimbabwe.*

### **Zimbabwe is more traditional than South Africa. We postpone building a family**

*Wongai: "Decisions for Life has a good focus. But Zimbabwe is unlike South Africa. It's more traditional. Here girls finish school first. They may get married while still at college, but usually postpone building a family while still studying. Maybe also under the impact of HIV/AIDS. Single mothers there are, but usually after a divorce. The Decisions for Life project has been introduced to the major women's organizations in Zimbabwe. But to my mind the real breakthrough of the project should come through trade union involvement."*



*Fiona Gandiwa Magaya works since 3 years as the women and gender coordinator in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions ZCTU.*

### **Public debates in labour forums**

*Fiona: "Decisions for Life helps women in the trade union to rise to positions of leadership and to mobilize the rank and file. From my position I survey the activities of affiliated unions nationwide. The issues raised by Decisions for Life filter down through union officials to shop stewards and the shop floors. Each quarter, after working hours at local ZCTU-offices, so-called labour forums are organized to debate conditions at the work place, sexual harassment, legal protection and combining work with family responsibilities. These are public debates, not just for union members. Such labour forums are held in each of 35 affiliates in different industries."*

### **Flyers, leaflets, T-shirts**

*Fiona: "On March 8 2010, International Women's Day, in each of ZCTU's 6 regions the federation organized manifestations and debates in major cities, as well as in some outlying districts. In Harare alone some 500 women participated. Elsewhere the turnout was similar, so several thousands of women participated. We distributed leaflets explaining what Decisions for Life is all about. We handed out t-shirts, which were much appreciated, also as a piece of clothing, given the hardship of the people. Even when worn a lot they will last for at least a year. We received reports back from our*

women's committees in all regions. From this we got the impression that women everywhere stand up for their rights. They demand equal opportunities, maternity benefits and an end to sexual harassment."

#### **Coalition with Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy**

**Fiona:** "The plight of working women who have no contract – the great majority, given the official unemployment figure of 80 percent – is particularly hard: for them there is no maternity leave at all. Since these women by definition must find some form of employment in the informal economy, the ZCTU decided to join forces with the Zimbabwe Chamber of the Informal Economy, which has already established 200 chapters throughout the country, to try and remedy this dramatic neglect of the most vulnerable part of the working population."

## **Angola**



Luzia Tungaica of the Angolan trade union confederation UNTA is vice president of the national committee of syndicated women.

**Luzia:** "In July 2009 UNTA started its national Decisions for Life activities with a meeting with female journalists and soon after a debate was organized in the capital Luanda at which 50 women workers were present. In August the project was presented at the National Committee of UNTA. Since then in 2009 a few target groups among working women have been prioritized."

#### **Men don't want their women to work outside the house**

**Luzia:** "Telecom workers in 8 Luandan enterprises have been approached for participation in sensitizing debates. Per enterprise 5 women participated in a debate on the relevance of the Decisions for Life goals in their working lives. Next a thematic debate was organized in the catering industry, involving both men and women. The problem here is that women earn less than men for doing the same work with equal qualifications. Here it became very clear that men don't want their women to work outside the house, a problem widespread throughout Angola."

#### **Raise awareness and recruiting among young women**

**Luzia:** "I feel inspired to carry out new activities in a systematic way. Thus in 2009 in August, October and December, seminars were held to educate female workers on Decisions for Life-issues. This culminated in a protocol, an agreement within the union leadership, to direct efforts towards young working women, with the dual aims of raising their awareness and to recruit them as trade union members. The issue of family building is seriously tackled from 2010 onwards. First of all the domestic workers' right are put on the agenda. This is the most vulnerable group on the labour market. On April 16, when UNTA celebrates its 50 anniversary a national campaign will be launched on behalf of domestic workers. The street vendors will stand in the limelight on May 1st, with a parade and manifestation in front of the Labour Centre in Luanda. And shortly after the focus will be shifted to school leavers, young aspirant workers who enter the labour market looking for their first job."



## Mozambique



*Hagira Faquir, national women's coordinator at the Mozambican union of bank employees SNEB:*

*"If anything, Decisions for Life has had a great impact on me. Over the last year, since I was elected in May by all 5 UNI-affiliates in Mozambique to become their coordinator I have grown personally. I learned to speak in public and last December I, of all people, even acted successfully as a moderator of a meeting. So for me there is no question that Decisions for Life helps you to achieve your own goals as a working woman faster and more efficiently".*

### **Too much job hopping**

*"My daily job is handling loans at the Maputo based bank that has employed me for the greater part of her working life. What I see happening around makes me worry about the future employment possibilities of young working women in the services sector. There is a lot of job hopping going on, from bank to bank. These young girls only care about money now. They think only of today, not of tomorrow, when they lack solid working experience they will find it difficult to make a career. We have to teach them patience, to learn to wait. And here is where Decisions for Life helps, because it wants to make you reflect. Build up pension rights? Invest in buying a house?"*

### **The girl's dream**

*"Building a family in modern urban life is still very much the girls' dream. Marriage, having children is now complicated by the wish to remain working as a mother. Domestic violence is not so widespread in Mozambique. The couple may come to terms easily on how to combine working and family life, for example by hiring domestic help, which is cheaply available. But Mozambican men don't cook".*

The Decisions for Life potential lies almost exclusively in the modern urban centres of Mozambique. Village life is dominated by small scale farming and migrant labour, as many men leave for the mines, where they live in compounds for the greater part of the year separated from their families.

### **Developing a strategy to reach young women**

*"The Decisions for Life-project has potential in union work, to recruit new members amongst young female workers, which are not attracted by old union ways. Also it may serve as a vehicle to renew trade union leadership. Since the launch of the Decisions for Life-campaign in October 2009, I have set up a committee of young female SNEB-members. Together we have been working out a strategy which includes seminars for training, selection of topics for debates at meetings and events, as well as active participation in international and national events such as March 8, International Women's Day, April 7, National Women's Day and May 1, Labour Day. The strategy also includes a media component. We seek maximum exposure of events in close cooperation with the web team on meusalario"*

## Brazil



*Rosangela Da Silva combines her work as second secretary of the national printers union with the coordination of the Decisions for Life project in Brazil.*

### **Bring your children to the workplace to show what work-life balance means**

**Rosangela:** *'I have always been socially active and always with a focus on gender-issues. So when a representative of UNI-America presented Decisions for Life at a special union meeting in March last year, it was clear that I wanted to be part of the project. The project starts to have some effect. You must realize that Decisions for Life for the first time in Brazilian trade union history has put the reconciliation of personal and working life on the trade union agenda. And already now both trade unions and workers make it a point to put it in the program of the union. To show to each other that we share the same problem, we organized a day for working mothers in 5 companies where they brought their children along to work: show them- rephrase?. That made a difference. Trade unions are now taking into account families, the quality of family life. This has been translated into collective bargaining issues such as parental leave for both fathers and mothers, 6 months paid maternity leave, stimulated by tax reductions for the employer. Decisions for Life facilitated this recent decision making process.'*

### **Dedicated website to post information on violence and sexual harassment**

**Rosangela:** *"Also in Brazil the Decisions for Life project has helped to bring domestic violence, abuse and sexual harassment on the job out into the open. In Brazil it has resulted in a dedicated website, where violated women can post their stories anonymously: sharing by spitting it out helps. In particular cases the trade unions also help women to go to court. All this leads to increasing awareness by providing opportunities to talk about these embarrassing experiences, that used to be kept private. There are no limits to what you can achieve."*



**Mywage** backs up the Decisions for Life-campaign by mainstreaming young women's opinions about kids, career, work-life balance. Mywage writes about labour rights, wages, minimum wages, career issues, family issues and problems related to sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS. Mywage in South Africa has 17,000 visitors per month in March 2010. Journalists of Mywage.co.za set a target to have in October 2010 33,000 visitors a month. Mywage has strong media coalitions with CareerJunction and Ananzi.

Dedicated Mywage websites in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi and Namibia run similar stories as in South Africa. Since these economies are smaller the number of visitors are smaller. Therefore the sites in Zimbabwe and Zambia have set a target of 5,000 visitors by October 2010. Botswana, Namibia and Malawi go for 2,000 visitors per month by October. Media partnership is set in Botswana with Ananzi and in Zimbabwe with the Insider. In Zambia there are no media partners

yet, although ties with several radio stations are strong. In Malawi the media deal with Malawi times is in the pipeline.

### **MyWage – team Southern Africa by March 2010**



Left to right:

- Sam Banda Junior-journalist Mywage.org/Malawi
- Karen Rutter Mywage.co.za and editor Mywage websites for Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe
- Wongai Zhangazha – journalist Mywage.org/Zimbabwe
- Meluse Kapatamoyo – journalist Mywage.org/Zambia
- Heidi Hochstenbach – regional manager Southern Africa
- Sanday Chongo Kabange – journalist Mywage.org.Zambia



**Meusalario** backs up the Decisions for Life-campaign in Brazil, Angola and Mozambique. Meusalario.org.br in Brazil reaches 50,000 visitors a month and is linked to 600 trade unions websites, as well as the large and highly popular web portal UOL. With such an outreach it may be confidently said that the Brazilian Meusalario team will go for 65,000 visitors by October 2010. The sites from Angola, Mozambique run similar features like wage information, a DecentWorkCheck, a big section on women and work. These sites both now reach 1,500 visitors a month. Their target for October is 5,000 visitors per site.

### **MeuSalario in Angola, Mozambique and Brazil**



Left to right:

- Geni Marques – journalist Meusalario.org.br
- Egidio Vaz Rapaso – journalist Meusalario.org/Mocambique
- Due to personal change there is currently no journalist for Meusalario.org/Angola

***Decisions for Life  
Regional meeting Maputo  
March 22-26, 2010***