

THE UNION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

- The road to decent work in the garment and textile industry in Honduras



Gladys Rojas (37) has been working in the clothing industry in the export production zones (EPZ) since she was 14 years old. The last eight years at the American owned clothing factory Southern Apparel Contractors, SOACON.

She is a single mother with a 14-year-old daughter. She is living in one of the dangerous residential neighborhoods in the city of San Pedro Sula, Honduras.

She has been a member of the trade union for 15 years. She sits on the board of the union, is responsible for occupational health and safety, and member of the health and safety committee.

Trade union and strong union network

SITRASOACON is a factory trade union with a collective bargaining agreement. It is member of FITH (Workers Independent Professional Union in Honduras) and the network (RSMH), that consists of all export zone trade unions. Together with the three labour confederations, it has negotiated a tripartite agreement between government, employers and unions, including an 8 percent annual salary increase.



When the unions turned the tide

In 2000, export zone trade unions only had 10,000 members. When one union was founded, another was eliminated through lay-offs or factory closures. In Honduras, union activists risk being fired, blacklisted, threatened or killed. The workers had become afraid of organizing.

When more organized factories closed, the trade unions turned to a special group of consumers for support - US university students and staff. The pressure grew so massive that the company reopened and rehired those laid off.

When no longer having their backs against the wall, the unions could improve collaboration. Today membership has risen five times.

Today 35 percent of 145,000 workers are organized. 60% are women. Trade unions have achieved better pay, access to mortgages, better healthcare, transport, and childcare. The health and safety representative now has the right to decide when to replace defunct machinery and inventory.

The trade unions have worked to empower and educate female leaders, who influence and participate in the collective bargaining processes and social dialogue. Making the trade union more representative and more relevant to both men and women members.

Also good for companies

The relationship between the US-owned clothing company and the Honduran trade unions has improved and they engage in continuous social dialogue.

While workers enjoy the improved working and living conditions, that trade unions have

negotiated, the companies also see greater stability and predictability. This has made investments more attractive, resulting in more jobs in the export zones, despite the comparatively high salary expenses

Honduras:

- Two out of three live in poverty.
- Coup d'état in 2009. Two successive elections with dubious results and strong suspicion of manipulation.
- Worlds' highest murder rate in 2011-12: < 86 per 100,000 inhabitants. Halved since then.



The Consumer Committee CODECO calculates the **basic cost of living** for a Honduran family to be USD 625/m. An EPZ workers' minimum wage is USD 291, or 45 % of living costs. Two adults covered by a collective bargaining agreement earn a bit more, which lowers the pressure for the need of child labour.

3F in Honduras

3F has particularly supported the Honduran EPZ unions' efforts to network, develop policy proposals, and defend workers' fundamental right to organize and bargain collectively. We have also supported their campaigns for the protection of labour rights in relation to outsourcing. Partners

have been supported in developing and implementing their own strategic plans, e.g. for sustainable education systems, and they have been assisted in working towards greater gender equality, and in developing better and more transparent economic administration.

3F's International Work

3F has worked with international solidarity and development for more than 30 years in close collaboration with sister organisations, taking a point of departure in the partners own strategic plans. 3F adds experience from the Danish labour market model and also promotes south-south experience sharing across borders.

3F's programmes are implemented in South and South East Asia, southern Africa, Latin America, the Middle East as well as Central- and Eastern Europe.

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3F, Danish Industry and the LO/FTF Council formed a Labour Market Consortium in 2017 and signed a strategic partnership agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark for the promotion of well-functioning labour markets as a contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8.

