



SEWA supports female waste recyclers in India

Young trade unionists learn from each other in Uganda

Rwanda: opportunities for women in construction

MONDIAAL FNV: WHAT WE DO AND WHY

Mondiaal FNV is the organisation for international solidarity and support affiliated to the largest trade union in the Netherlands, the FNV. We believe that everyone has the right to a living wage, social protection, good working conditions and collective bargaining. In other words, the right to decent work. We want prosperity to be achieved in a fair and decent way and not as a result of exploitation somewhere else in the world. We want the products that we use here to be created fairly and not as a result of exploitation somewhere else in the world.

This is why we support trade unions all over the world. And our reason for this? Because trade unions have the power to improve life and work at grassroots level for many people. We strengthen our partners' capacity, conduct effective lobbying and link local unions to the international trade union movement. Our focus is on global production chains such as clothing, fruit and vegetables, as well as palm oil, and we address important issues such as a just climate transition, gender equality and social dialogue. In 2023 we achieved an improvement in the working conditions of 5.3 million workers and social protection for 415 million people as a result of our work throughout the world.

CONCRETE EXAMPLES

In this magazine we present a compilation of stories from our field of work. These are stories that we are proud of, that clearly illustrate what we and our trade union partners are working on in all parts of the world and what we are accomplishing. You can read more about these and other stories on our website mondiaalfnv.nl.

We hope you enjoy your read!

On behalf of Mondiaal FNV



Karen Brouwer
Executive Director

Cover photo

From 13 to 17 November 2023, Uganda's National Organisation of Trade Unions NOTU organised a youth camp in Grand Praclos Gardens near the capital city of Kampala. Nearly 350 young trade unionists gathered together, including delegations from Kenya and the Netherlands. Among the activities at the youth camp was a joyful march along the streets, aimed at recruiting members.

Photographer: Samuel Kuteesa and Jacob Kabunga - Focus Images



WASTE RECYCLERS IN INDIA

TRADE UNION SEWA IMPROVES WOMEN'S WORKING
CONDITIONS THROUGH RECYCLING SYSTEM

In India hundreds of thousands of women collect waste. They select usable materials such as plastic and paper and sell these to buyers who see to it that it gets recycled. All too often the women work under appalling conditions: the work, which is irregular, is poorly paid, precarious and the women's vulnerable position exposes them to exploitation and abuse.

Trade union SEWA organises these women, enabling them to achieve a sustained improvement in their living conditions. At the foot of the landfill site of megacity Ahmedabad, you can see many women like tiny dots, high up in the huge waste mounds. All kinds of waste ends up here: wet, dry, construction materials and food - everything gets dumped here. From here, the women select materials that are still usable for recycling. Plastic, rubber, paper, clothing and metals, as well as worn shoe soles and even hair.

Self-employed women working in this informal economy collect and select waste for more than eight hours a day. The roughly two to three euros a day that they earn in this way often makes them the family's main breadwinner. Their work and income is directly influenced by scrap dealers, middlemen, recyclers and waste contractors, who all take a piece of the pie. The women are vulnerable and their negotiating position is weak.



ABOUT SEWA

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is an Indian trade union for independently employed women workers. SEWA was founded in 1972 and now has nearly three million members across the whole of India. SEWA is committed to fighting for domestic workers, street vendors, agricultural workers and women who are active in the services sectors, for example waste contractors. Mondiaal FNV supports SEWA in achieving improvements in income and social security for these women.

For 20 years now, trade union SEWA has worked with women in this informal economy with the aim of improving their position. The trade union organises waste pickers and stimulates various forms of waste recycling. This has given SEWA considerable experience in innovative approaches to waste processing and recycling.

This has resulted in the establishment of the modern value creation centre (VCC) in Ahmedabad. The VCC receives waste and pays decent prices for it. After the recyclable pieces of plastic in the waste have been sorted, they are delivered directly to certified recyclers. New paper is made from the paper waste. This is used by SEWA members to make notepads and other stationery in the SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre.

Women separate waste in SEWA's Value Creation Center.



The VCC is owned by the female waste pickers themselves: of whom there are over 400. What is more, they run the entire operation. This gives them better control of the whole waste cycle, from start to finish. The women are, for example, much less dependent on buyers putting pressure on them to charge lower prices. Besides this, it leads to regular work, fair wages and cleaner and safer working conditions.

This is SEWA's approach to tackling all the projects that they develop: right from the start, the members are closely involved at all the stages of the process. They have a voice in the discussions and help shape the outcome - and so become active participants. This results in a sustainable improvement in the living conditions of the SEWA women.



In the SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre, the women make the notepads and other articles from the recycled paper.

FAIR ENERGY TRANSITION

Waste dumping on landfill sites makes India one of the world's biggest polluters. 20 percent of all man-made CO₂ emissions come from dump sites and 40 percent of all waste is currently not recycled but simply dumped. To prevent a large proportion of waste ending up on the highly polluting dump sites, waste separation is essential; waste that is not incinerated prevents CO₂ emissions in the environment. Better segregation and recycling of waste - such as paper and plastic - is precisely what SEWA and the women from the informal waste sector are committed to achieving.

Trade unions worldwide have for years been striving for a so-called just transition: by which is meant a fair energy transition that is carried out in a manner that is fair for the workers too, with decent work and a safety net for people who have lost their jobs. This is how SEWA is seeking in the long term to achieve a self-sufficient Zero Waste Management system. This includes establishing the construction of the modern value creation centre (VCC) in Ahmedabad (see main text). The intention is for this VCC programme to be rolled out nationwide. In this way, SEWA is actively contributing to tackling the huge problem of the ever-growing waste stream and associated massive CO₂ emissions.

Watch the short video about the waste recyclers





YOUTH CAMP IN UGANDA

UGANDA'S NATIONAL ORGANISATION OF TRADE
UNIONS NOTU UNITES 350 YOUNG PEOPLE FROM
DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

For a whole week in November 2023, nearly 350 young trade unionists from Uganda, Kenya and the Netherlands gathered together to meet and learn from each other. "You could clearly feel the strong motivation and determination of the 'young' members."

From 13 to 17 November 2023, the Ugandan trade union organisation NOTU organised a youth camp in Mukono, in Grand Pracos Gardens, some 25 kilometres west of the capital Kampala. Nearly 350 young people gathered together, including delegations from Kenya and the Netherlands. The Dutch delegation comprised young people from FNV sectors Trade, Construction & Housing, Young & United and Mondiaal staff. A unique gathering made possible by the FNV Solidarity Fund.

To a great extent, the challenges faced by the participants are similar: young people identify insufficiently with trade unions and have too little knowledge of the work and importance of trade unions. The exchange of experiences and knowledge is therefore an important area of focus.

Active FNV members - as here, for example, activists from Young & United and young active members from the Trade and Construction & Housing sectors - play an active role in international union exchanges with colleagues from across the border. The aim is to learn from each other at an international level, to show solidarity with each other and to support each other in building trade unions from the bottom up.

In a wider trade union context, perseverance is, in my opinion, of tremendous importance. We have that too, in this country, but what you see in the young people over there is something I've not seen here yet.

Ayra
active FNV Trade member



from left to right: Matt, René, Tendayi, Ayra and Edu of the Dutch delegation.





Participant at the youth camp during the joyful march that took place to recruit members.



Barbara Badaru's fondest memories of the last camp are the interactive panel discussions on various different subjects, particularly the one on mental health, and the campfire too.



The passion with which they sang for solidarity and the trade union movement, while people held hands and stamped in time to the rhythm of the music, was just wonderful to see.

Aleksandra
Young & United board member

At the camp we came into contact with young people who dare to think outside the box, where we in the Netherlands are often rigidly stuck in our own way of thinking. [...]. Keeping in touch with them digitally will trigger a host of new initiatives in both countries.

Matt
active FNV Construction & Housing member

Keep up the fight! And don't let those old federation stick-in-the-muds decide what the future of the trade unions is going to be like.

Advice from /by **Frank's** Young & United official, to young Ugandan trade union activists

Read the whole story about the youth camp in Uganda





**WOMEN IN THE
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY**

**MORE, BETTER AND SAFER WORK
IN RWANDA**

In Rwanda, Mondiaal FNV works together with the construction trade union STECOMA. After agriculture, construction is the largest sector in Rwanda and there are increasing opportunities for women to find work in this sector. They are, however, confronted by a number of challenges. “The situation has improved through the intervention of the trade union.”

In Rwanda most of the work in construction is in the informal sector. The construction workers invariably receive a low wage and there are many industrial accidents owing to the precarious working conditions. What is more, women workers often experience discrimination and sexual harassment.

STECOMA stands up for women working in construction and is improving their position and working conditions. In conjunction with the government, the union conducts practical exams, which means that women, too, are able to obtain certificates allowing them to show formal evidence of which skills they possess. This enables them to find more work, at other workplaces too.

It also earns them greater respect. This is important because in Rwanda there is still a common preconception that construction work is not suitable for women.

Come and meet some of these women. Who are they, what do they think of their work, what do they feel about trade union work and what are they proud of?



Agnes (30) is a wife and mother of four children. She works as a bricklayer in the construction sector in Kigali, Rwanda. She is also union leader on behalf of the construction union STECOMA.

‘The union works hard to improve women’s situation’

When my mother fell ill, I had to drop out of secondary school because I was the eldest child and I became the breadwinner. As I had been interested in construction from an early age, I went in search of work on construction sites, where I worked first as a helper and later as a pointer. Then, along with 250 other women, I took part in a seven-month bricklayer training programme run by construction union STECOMA. And in 2013 I became a bricklayer.

In 2015, I was elected union leader by my colleagues, which enabled me to represent women in the construction industry. This is necessary because it is difficult for women to take on jobs that are a long way from home owing to family responsibilities. Women in the construction sector also face discrimination: men are invariably given priority in recruitment processes and women are sometimes paid less for the same work.

The union works hard for women. We take part in negotiations, including for equal pay for women and we emphasise the need for workers to be given contracts. The union also organises workshops on construction sites to make workers and employers more aware of the challenges faced by women who are at work there. We also lobby for the provision of private areas for women on construction sites, where they can have their own changing rooms and toilets.

Thanks to the union, it is easier for me to find work and I have also benefited considerably from the certification programme. I managed to go back to ‘school’ and acquire skills in a field I love. My hope for the future is that my children will be educated at the highest level.

– PROJECT BRIEFLY –

CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE FOR WOMEN WORKERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Construction union STECOMA in Rwanda has approximately 68,000 members, almost all of whom are informal workers in the construction sector. Mondiaal FNV supports STECOMA in improving the working conditions of women in the construction sector by developing information material and conducting a campaign, training female trade union leaders and visiting workplaces and negotiating improvements for women in the workplace.



Francine (36) is a wife and mother of two boys. She works as a bricklayer, steel bender and painter in the construction industry in Rwanda. She is a union leader at Stecoma construction union.

'Helping people with problems keeps me strong'

During the civil war, more than half a million people were murdered, including my father. It shaped me. My family and I had to run for our lives. I was seven years old at the time. I got separated from my mother and the others in the chaos and I hid on the streets of Kigali for weeks on end. And then I was taken in by strangers. They became my second family. They protected me all that time. Two years later I was reunited with my family, including my mother and younger sister.

After the war, my mother took in many homeless orphans, so I grew up with 18 children in the house. As the eldest daughter, I took on a lot of responsibilities at an early age in order to help my mother. And in the same way, now that I'm an adult, I work actively in a variety of community organisations. Helping people with problems keeps me strong.

For eight years now I've been working in the construction industry as bricklayer, steel bender, and painter. I joined STECOMA in 2015. I was elected by my colleagues as secretary for Nyarugenge district, which has approximately 200 union members. The leadership training that I followed gave me a great deal of self-confidence. As trade union leader, I am in a position of influence and I inspire other women in the construction industry to themselves become more confident in the workplace.

Working in the construction industry has improved life for my family and myself and I have many plans for the future. I first want to raise my children and after that go to university to get an engineering diploma and then become self-employed. That is my biggest dream.



Grace (33) is a single mother of an eight-year-old son and works as pointer, bricklayer and construction site helper in the construction industry. She is a member of construction union STECOMA.

'The union helps me tackle the challenges at work'

I come originally from a village in Northern Rwanda. There I had all kinds of jobs but not enough to live from. In 2014 I left home for the capital city in search of a better life. In 2016 I attended a neighbourhood meeting of construction union STECOMA. I became a member because I hoped that that would help me get work in the construction industry. And it did too. I was accepted for STECOM's practical skills programme for women. Together with a lot of other women I trained in pointing, bricklaying and working as a construction site helper. I'm now officially certified. I also learned about my rights as a worker and the issues faced by women in the construction industry. That gave me confidence to look for work in this sector.

The union helps me to tackle the problems and challenges at work with the confidence that I am not alone. I've already had to deal with sexual harassment. And also with supervisors asking for sexual favours in

exchange for work. And male colleagues harass me now and again. Sometimes things have gone so far that this has forced me to quit my job.

The situation has improved through intervention by STECOMA at the construction sites where these problems occur. Every time a problem is reported, the union intervenes and makes all the workers aware of the situation. The union also takes action if wages have not been paid.

I'm happy with my work in construction. It has had a positive impact on my life. I've never had the benefit of an education but I've now acquired the skills that you need to earn an income. This has changed my status at home as well as in the community. My hope for the future is that I'll get a lot of work, be able to carry on working hard and do what is necessary for my child's education."



Emerthe (45) is a wife and mother of six children. She works as a pointer and supervisor and sometimes as a trainer in pointing for women. She is also a union leader at construction union STECOMA.

'I like exchanging ideas'

During the genocide in 1994, when I was about 15 years old, I left school. After the war, I never had the opportunity to go back to school and I started work. I began as a helper in the construction industry and as an apprentice I learned other skills too. I became a member of STECOMA and I took part in their training programme. In 2016 I received a certificate for pointing and paving.

In 2010 I was elected at STECOMA as a women's representative for the Kicuciro district. Since then I have been a member of the teams that train women on their rights. I also provide training on sexual harassment and how to deal with corruption that occurs through sexual solicitation at work. I like exchanging ideas and travelling to different construction sites to talk to women about their rights. I want to motivate them to enjoy what they do and also to join a trade union so that women can speak with one voice.

My living situation has gradually improved and I am now finding work more easily because STECOMA works in cooperation with employers. I am currently working at a large housing project near the outskirts of Kigali. With a team of all-female pointers and construction site helpers, I'm smoothing the joints. We work very fast and I'm very busy.



**Watch the short film
about women in construction
in Rwanda**

About this publication

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Design: René Mohrmann

Production: Global Village Media

Print: Opmeer bv.

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