



International
Labour
Organization

Empowering Union Participation for Strengthening the Role of Vietnam General Confederation of Labour in Better Work Vietnam

Within the last decade Vietnam has experienced an impressive average annual GDP growth of 7% and the poverty rate has fallen from around 40% to below 17%. Living standards have risen substantially and the country is successfully transitioning from a centrally planned to a market economy: the nation also joined the World Trade Organization in 2007. At the same time as providing opportunities for growth this transition is leading to an increase in the level of industrial disputation including strikes (from 2009 to the end of 2012, there were 1,985). Despite revisions to the national Labour Code that provide for strengthened union recognition and collective bargaining, many enterprises are struggling for effective workplace cooperation and meaningful worker representation. The role of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) - Vietnam's sole national trade union organization - is changing: in the past, with the dominance of state owned enterprises, trade unions worked alongside the government and management to increase prosperity and promote government policies. In a market economy, the VGCL needs to strengthen its capacity to represent workers interests, in particular at the enterprise level.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Partners:

Levi Strauss Foundation

Beneficiary Countries:

Vietnam

Timeframe:

March 2009 – June 2012

Budget:

USD 332,332

THE RESPONSE

The partnership is supporting workers' organizations within Better Work – a multi-country innovative partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation aiming at improving compliance with national labour laws and core labour standards while enhancing business competitiveness. This project supports Better Work Vietnam in particular.

The project acted to provide workers, employers and the public with an improved understanding of the role that trade unions play at the enterprise level, and improved the ability of the VGCL to represent workers at the enterprise level. A focus was placed on the apparel sector – Vietnam's second largest export industry (18 per cent of total in 2010).

A range of new training materials and methodologies including active adult learning, coaching and mentoring in key areas of consultation, problem solving, communication, negotiation and collective bargaining were employed to deliver practical training tools and products to over 60 enterprises in Ho Chi Min City, Dong Nai and Binh Duong provinces.

A second project phase saw an expansion in the scope of awareness raising and capacity building with additional activities related to improved representation, training of trainers recruitment and retention of membership to build longer term sustainability for the trade union.

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RESULTS

An independent evaluation conducted in 2013 concluded 'effectiveness of the capacity-building efforts was demonstrated through: (a) the integration of effective teaching methodologies into union training programs; (b) the participation of trade union workers in democratic union activities and social dialogue; (c) the application of innovative bottom-up approaches; and, (d) the strengthened focus on industrial relations in the Better Work Vietnam enterprise assessment process'. The project has resulted in increased awareness and capacity of workers and trade unions to participate in dialogue in factories subscribed to Better Work. It has also significantly built capacity of the Vietnam Trade Unions in apparel to deliver effective education and training to factory representatives. Specifically:

- Performance Improvement Consultative Committee (PICC) training was delivered to 214 PICC members, thus improving their ability to participate in a key element of the Better Work programme at the factory level. An accompanying guide was also distributed;
- A training kit for enterprise level union participants was developed;
- 27 VGCL/FOL trainers developed key skills in adult learning methods collective dispute resolution, communication, negotiation and collective bargaining;
- Workplace information sessions updating workers on the role of trade unions including collective bargaining and workplace cooperation were conducted in apparel factories and reached 1,744 workers;
- 30 enterprises participated in collective bargaining/negotiation skills, recruitment, and dispute settlement training;
- 1,600 workplace posters on the benefits of union membership and participation in dialogue and consultative processes were printed and distributed to the Federation of Labour and workers;
- 10,000 information booklets on the role of the union, workplace cooperation and collective bargaining were distributed;
- 15,000 pocket books discussing the role of trade unions were printed and distributed among workers;
- 5,000 Labour Law pocket books were distributed to local unions and workers;
- 520 consultative committee guidebooks were produced and distributed.



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BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

The partnership furthered workplace cooperation and social dialogue, joint problem solving by management and unions on issues of labour standards and competitive and constructive approaches to dispute resolution.