

Uganda Textiles, Garment, Leather & Allied Workers' Union  
(UTGLAWU)

**WWW/UTGLAWU REPORT ON WOMEN WORKERS RELATED PROBLEMS  
GENERATED DURING THE ACTIVITY CONDUCTED IN JANUARY 2010,  
SUPPORTED BY WWW**

## **Background**

UTGLAWU: while attending the GHOWERN international conference in Nairobi in 2009, I interacted with the leadership of Women Working Worldwide during the activity and particularly June Hartley the Advocacy and Information Officer. It was at this conference that I got to know about WWW and its good programmes and activities to which our union expressed interests in taking an active part. Subsequently I wrote to the above officer who managed to get us some small funding to initiate the activities of WWW programmes in Uganda particularly within the textile sector among others.

Accordingly, UTGLAWU organized a one day workshop as the initial WWW activity which took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2010 at Madkas Motel, Kampala.

The overall objective of the programme was to contribute towards the emancipation of women in this sector through understanding/appreciating their problems that require urgent response, identify the level of compliance of workers rights and empower workers especially women through awareness raising and training.

During the workshop, presentation to achieve the desired objectives were made and indeed discussions done to the expectations of UTGLAWU which organized the said workshop.

UTGLAWU was formed and registered in 1974 to represent workers in the textiles sector both economically and socially. A bigger percentage of the workers in this sector are women in the ratio of about 70% to 30% women and men respectively.

Textile is one of the traditional sectors that have sustained Uganda's economy since the colonial times to date. The sector involves a very big part of the country's population and in the formal employment, it brings together over 150,000 workers (men and women and in the sex racial percentages of 67% to 30% respectively in the country.

The sector both in the informal and formal sectors ranging from the farm to manufacturing and marketing both locally and internationally involves over 2,500,000 people.

The union currently brings together over 3,200 subscribing members from 10 active branches and with a gender ratio of 70% to 30% women and men

respectively (estimates). Most of the jobs thereof right from the farming to the factories for the women workers especially are in most cases semi skilled hence less paying.

The major stakeholders in the sector are the government, farmers, private sector business people, the workers and their unions, employers and their organizations, academic institutions/researchers among others.

In accordance with the National Textile Policy, 2009 the sector has greatly depleted and now being revived.

The sector is faced with a number of problems generally that include but not limited to poor farming methods hence poor yield, inadequate supply chain, low level of employment and poor conditions of employment for those who are working, employers facing unfair trade terms, taxation, unfair competition among others. These reasons have contributed to the abandonment cotton farming as the stakeholders continued to loose hope in textile business in Uganda.

### **Brief overview of the sector**

In reference to the National Textile Policy, 2009. It indicates that Uganda is a cotton producing country that once recorded an annual production of 480.000 bales in 1969 and a potential of producing 1.000.000 bales at full employment level. 90% of lint produced in Uganda is exported at a miserable price of less than US \$ 1 per Kilo.

Following the coming into force of the National Industrial Policy in February 2008 priority sub sector policies like the National Textile Policy, had to be formulated in order to realize its broader objectives. Is formulated with views to enhancing the performance of the agro-based industries in the country, so as to increase value addition on locally available raw materials and export of manufactured goods.

It is now acting as guide to specific policy actions/interventions for the revival and sustainability of investments in the sub sector in addition to offering policy makers and private sector operators a coherent direction to guide co-ordinated performances and implementation of the policy.

### **The degree of incidence of the problems**

During the activity workshop which we organized in Uganda as a response after receiving the support, presentations were made and the participants discussed and identified a number of issues.

Many gender disparity problems do exist in Uganda and indeed many researches have been undertaken to this effect but in other circles other than the women workers.

The workshop identified the following as some of the problems facing especially the working women in Uganda in addition to the general problems that face the whole sector.

- Low levels of education.
- Gender disparity issues
- Discrimination at work
- Lack of support from their husbands
- Traditional believes by different cultures

- Low levels of income
- HIV/AIDS
- Extended families
- Home responsibilities
- Sexual harassment
- Inadequate sanitary facilities
- Unequal participation in decision making
- Lack of support from fellow women
- Low wages/salaries within the sector
- Fear
- Stigmatization
- Lack of proper implementation of Law and Collective Bargaining Agreement
- casualization of Labour
- Inferiority complex

### **Situation analysis**

The union currently brings together over 3,200 subscribing members from 10 active branches and with a gender ratio of 70% to 30% women and men respectively. Most of the jobs thereof right from the farming to the factories for the women workers especially are in most cases semi skilled hence less paying.

The workers are not very highly educated, highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS scourge and yet have extended families to care for. These factors coupled with the known gender disparities in the African setting continue to disadvantage the workers hence the dire need for any response that addresses these problems that may be consistent with the MDGs and the DWCP.

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The sector however, is one of those that are characterised by lots of economic constraints amongst the workers. Their common problems range from but not limited to non application of the required legal labour standards, inadequate terms of employment, low salaries, exploitation by employers, ignorance and stiff competition in the business extended families, among others and which all lead to low disposable incomes.

The poor farming methods and other related problems and consequences also contribute to other problems like child labour, HIV/AIDS, poor nutrition and others which all lead to poverty persistence in the country.

The production of cotton in Uganda is characterized by small –holder producer many of whom lack appropriate farming skills. In many cases, farmer group are not well organized and the organizational structure themselves are weak while in most of the cases, there are no farmer groups at all. This aspect constraints capacity building for farmers and their ability to adopt new technology. Due to weak organizational, farmers also have limited influence on policy decisions.

This trend of events coupled by the International financial crisis and other global and local economic situations renders workers highly vulnerable to all sorts of economic despair. Under such situations, one of the best approaches to deliver

workers from this dilemma is the involvement in activities that are geared at empowering the workers in various ways.

### **Supply chain information**

There is high Value Addition in the Textile Chain, whereas the sector is considered to be underperforming relative to its full potential, it employs at least 2.5 million Ugandans monthly women and youth, across the value chain with the potential to more than double the number at full employment level.

The supply chain in Uganda has for long been very inadequate and characterized by a number of gaps and inconsistencies hence leading to the poor performance of the sector.

An analysis of the cotton value chain reveals that farm practices such as thinning and stamping are usually overlooked by small- holder farmers. It also suggests that there is limited use of fertilizers and agro-chemicals due to their high cost. The principle sub sectors are cotton growing-mainly by small holders, ginning, spinning and weaving, knitting textile, garment and apparel manufacture.

### **Recommendations for action**

- Undertake research on the current situation of women in different sectors publication and dissemination of findings.
- Continuous gender mainstreaming amongst the workers and all other stakeholders
- Continued negotiation, lobbying and advocacy of women issues at all levels.
- Need for heightened awareness of women issues and/or concerns at the workplace and also in their respective communities
- Empowerment of women both socially but mostly economically, through providing them with entrepreneurship skills and Income Generating Activities.
- Enhancement of women's education levels, through feasible and befitting programmes.
- Develop materials for training and education on women related issues
- Involvement of other trade unions and/or core stakeholders to the problems especially those associated with women since the said problems require a multifaceted approach if it is to best be tackled.

### **Workers' participation and feed back**

The problems so identified herein above was done during the workshop that was attended by participants from a wide range of stakeholders the including the following; workers leaders from other national unions, COFTU leaders, the Ministry responsible for labour, UWEA, FUE representative and UTGLAWU Branch leaders among others,

The workshop objectives were achieved through the presentations that were made and the subsequent discussions conducted where the problems were identified and the recommendations that were proposed.

Appropriate action on women issues can best be achieved through mainstreaming women related issues in all UTGLAWU Programmes in partnership, coordination and networks with other relevant stakeholders.

We however intend to provide feed back to those who participated in the activity and also to our members and other workers through our normal meetings with them as and when they may come. The other good method of feed back will be sharing this report with the workers and the employers.

### **Conclusion**

The initial funds that we received from WWW, was not enough to do much work in this aspect and yet it is critically important to undertake activities in response to women related problems and/or issues. It is therefore prudent to mobilize resources so as to effectively organize responsive action on women problems and other issues in form of activities and then develop a more comprehensive report.