



This Crisis Has a Woman's Face



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About This Newsletter:

This newsletter reports on the issues, news, struggles and life experiences of Asian women workers.

About CAW

Committee for Asian Women (CAW) is a regional network of 43 women workers groups in 14 Asian countries that aims to empower women workers to protect, advocate, and advance their rights. CAW is part of the global movement advocating workers' rights for over 30 years.

CAW's Vision

CAW envisions a world where all people are free to develop their potential without any form of domination and exploitation based on class, gender, colour or religious belief. This is a world where the common wealth is used for the common good, workers enjoy the fruits of their labour, women prevail against patriarchy, and women workers determine their own destinies.

The success of this newsletter depends very much on your contribution and comments. We welcome feedbacks, articles, news and artworks on women workers' issues from our readers. Please feel free to write to us at awwn@cawinfo.org

The views held by authors of articles in this newsletter are their own. The authors are responsible for any factual errors in their articles.

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Editorial

Don't Mourn! Organise

The word that we frequently hear nowadays is 'crisis'. In addition, it is said that sacrifices and compromises are necessary in order to overcome the 'crisis'. In particular women are the first to be asked to sacrifice. However this is not the first time women workers are being asked to sacrifice. When it was the Asian financial crisis in 1997, we had to struggle to keep our meager jobs. Also we had to endure the reduction of our salary and worsening working conditions. That was enough sacrifice but now we are being asked to do it again. However, this call for sacrifice from women is not just limited to times of crisis. Even when economic growth was high at almost 5-10% women's working conditions were not the best or the same as that of male workers. The excuse that the role of a woman as mother must be protected is often used to explain away women's unstable, temporary and lower paid jobs.

I don't just want to keep talking about how women are discriminated far more than men and that women make up the majority of irregular jobs. I'm not going to keep insisting that the work of women is undervalued here. These arguments have become cliched. The more important concern is what needs to be done now.

Organise ourselves with our perspectives! The crises that forced us to endure hard times has come to us again with a harsher pace and depth. It is very hard for us to see the exit from these conditions especially from this financial crisis. The root of these crises is based on the severe capitalist competition resulting in overproduction and destruction of the eco-system. Then why do women suffer more from these crises? The answer is in a system that is patriarchal system that has especially dominated Asia's political and social structure.

While labour, the earnings from labour and the respect for labour is core to any socio economic development, in Asian societies the value given to labour hinges on "making a big pie first, and then distribute it". Thus policies such as prioritising labour intensive producing cash-earning products are valued higher than women's social and reproductive work. So women's work is regarded as unproductive or unpaid labour and ideas such as gendered division of labour have dominated Asian society.

We, women, have hoped that women's social participation, especially in the labour market would give empowerment to women's rights and equality. It surely has contributed to the empowerment of women on the one hand. But it has not yet overcome the gendered division of labour. And it has strengthened women's double burden rather than relieved it. We had hoped that export oriented industrialisation would contribute to the escape from poverty and improving the wealth for our community. But our old hometown and our friendly nature have all but disappeared and our lives are getting more insecure because of changes in overseas trade.

Women will always have to face difficulties such as insecure jobs and unstable life styles as long as male dominated /gendered division of roles and labour continues. Women have to develop capacity and vision to revive sustainable development going beyond capitalist, patriarchal and environmental problems.

The USA's labour activist Joe Hill had said, "Don't mourn, organise!" I would like to say "Don't mourn, organise ourselves with feministic alternatives."

Kim Aehwa
EXCO member of CAW

This Crisis Has a Woman's Face

Committee for Asian Women

This financial crisis has a gender bias. It has a woman's face as the crisis is severely hitting women and is directly affecting their families and communities. Pressure is being placed on public spending for health, education and the social safety nets as developing countries are experiencing declines in growth, export income and remittances. It is women and children who are bearing the brunt of these cutbacks. In many countries, women are largely responsible for looking after the family, yet they have the least income with which to do so. It is time for governments to take stock and respond accordingly.

Recent research by Oxfam International reveals a hidden aspect of the global economic crisis: the impact on women workers in developing countries. Initial findings from the research, with women in global supply chains, show that the crisis is having a devastating impact on their livelihoods, rights and also their families. Women are often the first to be laid off and usually have outstanding pay still owed to them as many employers evade their legal obligation to give proper notice and pay compensation. Governments tend to turn a blind eye to this resulting in large-scale impunity for wage violations. Last year the wages of millions of women were spent mostly on food and putting their children through school. With the current financial crisis, the lives of women who were already suffering from poor labour conditions have become even more precarious.

Oxfam International states that failure to act now, to protect the rights of women living in poverty from the economic crisis, will have a disastrous impact on global development in general, and women's rights, livelihoods, and families in particular.

The global economic crisis is the result of a globalised export market and investment economy that has hit home faster than predicted. Asian countries most reliant on export market and investment are the worst hit. Countries with a large domestic market may survive longer. However, the loss of workers' job security and social protection, severe unemployment, growing poverty, loss of labour rights gained over the years are issues that must be addressed. The economic downturn could lead to increased competition among firms and economies in the region to attract foreign investment. This competition will sacrifice existing labour standards, as already seen in the drastic deficiency of working conditions.

The World Bank highlighted that women in 33 countries, almost half of them in sub-Saharan Africa, are highly vulnerable to the effects of the economic crisis. The World Bank predicts an increase in infant and child mortality, less girl schooling, and reduced earnings. There is an urgent and critical need to monitor the gender impact of the crisis and ensure that governments are responding to the needs of women both in the labour market and at home.

"The economic downturn could lead to increased competition among firms and economies in the region to attract foreign investment. This competition will sacrifice existing labour standards, as already seen in the drastic deficiency of working conditions."

The ILO estimates that in the Asia Pacific region 23 - 27 million people will become unemployed in 2009. This estimate may be easily surpassed as in China alone more than 10 million workers have lost their jobs since the beginning of 2009. This is a direct result of the closure of factories especially in the garment, electronic, export oriented and construction industries.

China, the factory of the world, has been experiencing unprecedented labour market pressures. Approximately 20 million Chinese migrant workers, who lost their jobs in factories and cities, have returned to their home villages. This trend has added considerable pressure to the rural labour markets where job opportunities are already scarce. According to a recent report, 95% of returning migrant workers is unskilled, with low educational qualifications, making it more difficult for them to find a job or start a new business.

In the manufacturing sector, garment and textile industries in Asia, predominantly women worker based, have declined as export contracts dwindle. More than 80% of garment workers are female. The majority are internal migrant workers who are responsible for financially supporting their rural families. In addition, workers who have not been laid off have had to confront a reduction in working hours and monthly wages. The majority of workers in vulnerable employment are women workers who are unskilled, low paid, overseas migrant workers and workers in home based, casual, temporary and subcontracted work.

More than 90% of women employed, in the Malaysian garment industry, are migrant workers from Bangladesh, Burma and Vietnam. The impact on migrant workers is severe due to the government policy to dismiss migrant workers first before local nationals and to send unemployed migrants home.

Cut back in jobs in Indonesia's electronics, manufacturing, construction and textile sectors has exceeded 400,000.

Cambodia has suffered job losses in the textile and clothing sector accounting for around 16% of Cambodia's GDP due to a decline in overseas demand. The sector is expected to shed more than 44,000 jobs from 2008 to 2009.

In Thailand unemployment in 2009 will surpass 1.13 million. Decreased tourism together with decreased foreign consumption has hit the tourism industry in many Asian economies, notably in Cambodia and Thailand. The majority of workers in the entertainment and tourist service sectors are women.

In Vietnam an additional 300,000 workers in the formal wage employment could be unemployed in 2009. Also, more than 35 million labourers in the countryside are likely to face higher under employment. Women workers who return home will be either be unemployed or employed in agricultural or home based work for very little or no wages.

Remittances workers - international migrant workers: In the Philippines alone 5,000 migrant workers a day are returning home adding to the bludgeoning unemployed sector. Economies such as the Philippines, who are reliant on these remittances, will suffer doubly with the loss of this revenue. On the other hand Malaysia has 2.1 million regularised migrant workers employed in manufacturing (36%), plantations (17%), construction (15%), domestic help (14%), services (10%) and agriculture (9%). Malaysia earns 2,136,000,000 Ringgit Malaysian (\$6,000,000 US dollars) in foreign levies a year.

The income of the **rural-to-urban migrants** supports their rural families. For retrenched workers who are not able to find new urban employment, whether in the formal or informal economy, seeking rural work opportunities is often the only remaining option. This process of reverse migration has already begun throughout the region, notably in China, India and Vietnam. Furthermore, this shift will often coincide with reduced wages and household income.

Hand in hand with unemployment is the systemic increase in poverty. Growing poverty will hit Asia where another 140 million will join the ranks of the very poor. People of below subsistence income i.e. the working poor will grow by another 50 million. There will be an increase in child labour, trafficked and undocumented foreign labour. The impact of the financial crisis will disproportionately hit the poor, the informal sector and women workers who are largely left outside of formal social insurance schemes.

Working women will be affected more severely and differently because:

1. They are in vulnerable and disadvantaged employment

- Women workers are concentrated in labour-intensive export industries that feed into global supply chains. The decline in global market has hit the supply chain in the South. Shrinking global demand for clothes, textiles and electronics (as well as for related business services like hotels and restaurants) means that women will be the first to lose their jobs;
- Women workers are also concentrated in the lower levels of these global supply chains, in casual, temporary, sub-contracted and informal employment, where work is insecure, wages low, working conditions poor, and workers less likely to be protected by conventional social insurance systems. In one instance, Cambodian workers who were retrenched without pay for two months refused to return to their rural homes just to ensure that their children could stay in school;
- The poorer the family, the more important the woman's earnings are to the family's subsistence, as these go directly to food, children's health and education. Working poor women have no savings and a small pay cut will affect their families' ability to survive. They respond to this by cutting back on food and health care for themselves;
- Unpaid care work in the household (for children, the elderly or sick family members) exacerbates the double burden of overworked, underpaid poor women.

2. They lack access to Social Protection Schemes:

While governments of many Asian countries have strengthened their social protection schemes, a large sector of women workers cannot access the safety nets – women in contractual, informalised employment, which fall outside the coverage of social security benefits;

- Social benefits are directly linked to women keeping their jobs. For example, most maternity protection systems in Asia are paid solely by employers.

- Privatisation of health care systems drastically reduced women's options, relying solely on employers' capacity for medical care which had been made available only for formal employees.

Social unrest

The social upheaval will be tremendous as more and more migrant workers, the majority of which are women, join the ranks of the internal migrants, domestic, informal workers and the unemployed. We already see unrest as receiving countries cease to issue work permits and forcefully repatriate foreign workers and undocumented workers.

Unrest in families will increase as family situations change: loss of income, dropping out of school, more unpaid care work and loss of rural livelihood.

Factory closures have led workers to protest and many of their demands are targeted at employers to pay wages, to retain their jobs, and for redundancy payments. Workers through their unions are responding to unfair labour practices. Unions question their governments and demand that governments step in to take up their issues. But this is not always the case during the financial crisis. It was said that some unions had given up the strong position and accepted wage cuts as an alternative solution to retrenchment.

Desperation had increased in the rural areas, as livelihood options diminish and governments continue to fail to implement land reform programmes, sticking instead to the chronically flawed agricultural trade formulas.

Conclusion

The situation for workers is very bleak. Governments continue to bail out banks and financial institutions. But for workers the policies are harsh and inhumane. In Malaysia for instance, when it comes to retrenchment it is "Foreign Workers First Out," opening the door to gross contractual irregularities. This must stop and workers and their communities must be protected. CAW calls for solidarity among working people, their organisations and communities to unite in building an Asian wide labour solidarity to get our voices heard. Any effective rescue packages, any new alternative to today's crisis must take gender issues into account if it is to work at all. Woman workers everywhere demand more commitment and a will from governments and representatives that speak on behalf of labour and women workers to make it work for them.

"Women workers are concentrated in labour-intensive export industries that feed into global supply chains. The decline in global market has hit the supply chain in the South.

Shrinking global demand for clothes, textiles and electronics (as well as for related business services like hotels and restaurants) means that women will be the first to lose their jobs"

CAW's recommendations are:**1. For policy makers/ governments.**

- a. A social programme that takes into account the gender dimension of the economic crisis; ensure that the needs of women workers are being met such as family allowance for all dismissed and contractual workers, expansion of social services to include healthcare, maternity benefits, housing assistance, provisions for children and child care benefits;
- b. Implement tax cuts and concessions for companies whose recruitment and employment strategy ensure the protection of jobs and provide job security to women workers, especially in the informal sector, without pay cuts;
- c. Provide adequate social, health and safety protection cover for women workers;
- d. Introduce price control of essential goods and services such as food and fuel, rents and basic utilities such as water, electricity and transport.
- e. Adopt emergency response mechanisms such as repatriation loans assistance and priority employment mechanisms for dismissed and deported migrant workers.
- f. Protect small scale entrepreneurs, strengthen local market economy and re-invest in local sustainable agricultural production for local consumption.

2. Standards for trade negotiations:

- a. Abandon the neo-liberalist development paradigm and re-negotiate trade on fair and equal terms, and strengthens regional cooperation and solidarity;
- b. Engage trade agreements that protect labour standards and advance international standards in the social and environmental domain, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) core labour standards, UN Human Rights and Humanitarian Instruments, and incorporate gender concerns as an integral element in every aspect of trade negotiations;
- c. Crucial public services and goods such as energy, water and other basic utilities should not be surrendered to the market, such as privatisation by European corporations;
- d. Protecting the rights and welfare of migrant workers must be considered as fundamental basis of bilateral labour relations and not simply to be put under "services agreements" in trade negotiations or global migration forums;
- e. Repudiate trade agreements that encroach on the security of livelihoods of small farmers in developing countries and ensure food security for all by protecting local plants and seeds.

3. Economic restructuring.

- a. Invest in industries that promote sustainable economic endeavours which provide long term formal employment, environmental sustainability and food sovereignty.
- b. Nationalise public services so that basic healthcare, medicines, transport, childcare, other provisions such as pensions, are not affected by the market.
- c. A stable and equitable financial structure with a regulated financial system that eliminates private ownership of financial institutions altogether.

4. For workers and trade unions.

- a. Build and strengthen Asian Labour Solidarity among workers organisations, trade unions, women and human rights groups
- b. Support workers who protest and fight for their rights, and learn from experiences of takeover of the running of factories where owners have indicated a closure - such as in Thailand and Indonesia. This is empowering for workers, mitigate the race to the bottom and force employers and government to consult workers directly about rescuing factories and industries in trouble.
- c. Challenge governments to negotiate with investors who will protect workers.
- d. More than ever continue to demand for decent wages and a high standard of code of practice for workers. This not a time for allowing already well earned and fought for standards to drop.
- e. Demand nationalisation of essential economies and industries and food productions such as oil, food production and transport, provision and inclusive social protection measures so that they do not suffer the vagaries of the market.

This article is a summary of a presentation given by Lucia Victor Jayaseelan in UNIFEM's Panel on International Women's Day 2009 "Gender Perspectives of the Economic Crisis".

Impact of Financial Crisis on Women Workers in Japan

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The sudden deterioration of the world's economy after October 2008 has seriously affected Japan. During the past decades, the economic growth in Japan has relied greatly on the export of automobiles and electric products. However, many large companies, that had previously shown significant profits, have now declared red settlement of accounts due to the drastic decrease in sales. The decrease is a direct result of a slump in exports to the West.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare revealed on 27 February 2009 that around 158,000 irregular workers would lose their jobs for six months from October last year to March this year. Migrant workers from other countries were being seriously hit. It was estimated that 80% of Japanese Braziliansⁱ would lose their jobs and houses until March. The dismissal of workers, since last autumn, has continued due to the slump in business. The ministry predicted, at the end of last year, that the number of irregular workers dismissed would be approximately 35,000. However, the real number has exceeded this expectation.

Dismissal of Irregular Workers in Rapid Succession

Dispatched workers account for 70% of 158,000 expected dismissed workers. An indirect employment pattern, when dispatch workers conclude a contract with a dispatching company they are sent to work for a different company, makes the employment and status of the workers much more unstable. The Temporary (Dispatch) Work Law was enacted in 1985. At that time only 26 work categories were allowed to employ dispatched workers. However, with deregulation accelerated, dispatching work in manufacturing industry has suddenly increased since it was legalised in 2004. Large automakers and electric manufacturers have begun to adopt personnel management to curb employment of full-time workers. They began to hire short-term employees such as dispatched employees and contract workers who are called "workers who work for a limited period of time." These irregular workers are a disposable labour force used as an adjustment valve, just like just-in-time method of "World famous Toyota" which was applied to workers. Under this system workers were treated as commodities and materials instead of humans.

Toyota Co. and Sony Co., and other large manufacturers, announced retrenchment plans by the mass, the dismissal of temporary (dispatched) and contract workers: Toyota 6,000 and Sony 18,000 respectively (including full-time workers in and out Japan). According to the newspapers as of mid-December last year, a total of 73 companies had announced that they would dismiss 35,500 workers by the end of March this year. Most of the temporary workers working in factories come from rural areas where employment opportunities are limited. Thus many live in apartments which their companies rent. This means that the workers will lose their right to accommodation when they are

ⁱ **Japanese Brazilian** (*nikkei burajiru-jin*) is a Brazilian citizen of Japanese ethnic origin, or a Japanese immigrant living in Brazil. They began migrating to Japan in large numbers in search of higher paid work in 1990 when the immigration law was revised. Since then, they have dominated the manufacturing workforce.

dismissed or have their contracts cancelled before the contract period expires by the end of the year while the cold winter arrives. Working under severe work conditions with low wages they have to pay their apartment rent and cannot afford to save any money. To make matters worse they are not admitted as members of social insurance.

On the other hand, new school graduates' employment opportunities are also getting worse. Unofficial employment contracts made with companies requiring them to start work from early spring are being cancelled in succession. Thus young people feel that their right to work is being taken

away. Looking at foreign migrant workers, most of them work as irregular workers. Some have to go back to their countries as a result of frequent dismissal and worsening situations to find work after being dismissed. The Japanese society is changing into one with big differentiation between rich and poor and a society that is facing major poverty problems like the "working poor". These problems are being reported on frequently by the mass media these days.



Women and Poverty

"Poverty" is becoming a big social problem in Japan, where women's poverty is invisible but becoming more serious. In 2003 the number of women who worked as an irregular employee exceeded more than 50% of employed women workers. In 2008 the number climbed to 55% (approximately 35% of both male and female employees worked as irregulars.) Japanese women's working pattern has been known as M-shaped for the past decades i.e. women working retire at marriage or on giving birth and come back to work again when their children get old enough. When working again it is common for them to have part-time work with short periods of time and low wages because they have to shoulder housework and child-rearing by themselves alone. Thus, a part-time worker means "a housewife who works as a part-timer". But now even new graduates cannot find a full-time work. Increasing number of new graduates has to start working part-time or as a contract worker. Many women dispatched workers are registered in dispatching companies' workers lists by their names and expected work categories i.e. "registered-type." Their employment contract is only concluded when there is work to do in the companies which they are to be dispatched. When they don't have any contract offered to them they cannot get any income from work. Eighty percent of dispatched workers work as this "registered type" and 80% of workers in this category are women. Work available for women dispatched workers is mainly clerical work or work in service industry. Therefore, problems are not clearly visible like mass dismissal as in the manufacturing industry. Yet it is apparent that this system has deprived women workers of their rights and is making their employment and income unstable.

A total number of 7.69 million (43.7%) working women in private companies, earn less than two million yen a year (approximately \$20,000 US dollars), which is the poverty line of Japan. The number of these women is rapidly increasing. There is a wage differential between men and women workers,

who work as regular workers: women's average wage stands at 66.9 against 100 for men. In the case of women part-time workers their wages are even lower, less than half of full-time male workers in 2007.

The situation for single mothers is even more severe. Since working short hours as a part-time worker cannot give them the necessary income to support and raise their children, they have to work in more than one workplace. Many of them work for workplaces such as supermarkets, restaurants and other eating places. However, even working hard like this, the low hourly wages and long work hours, does not give them enough money to live on and support children. They have serious concerns about their own health as well as their children's. They also worry about their children's education and their future.

Another conspicuous problem today is that even regular employees can be forced to work as a part-timer or a dispatched worker upon pregnancy or at childbirth. They are sometimes forced to work under worsening labour conditions. Maternity leave and childcare leave are not fully guaranteed for irregular employment workers. Although decreasing childbirth is a big social problem in Japan, the working environment for women to continue working has not been improved instead it is worsening.

Efforts Made by Labour Unions and NGOs

The poverty problem is closely linked with a rise in the number of irregular workers in employment. This has become indisputable over the past several years. In October 2007, the Anti-Poverty Campaign was formed by the collective efforts of a wide range of civic organisations, labour unions, lawyers and researchers. After the world economic downfall, last October, labour unions and member groups of the Campaign began to receive increasing calls or visits from the workers who were worrying about their jobs and seeking advice due to dismissal and unemployment. In responding to this situation and having concerns about the employment situation, as many dismissal cases continued, members from the Anti-Poverty Campaign and several labour unions decided to cooperate to support homeless workers through the winter season by setting a camp in Hibiya Park in Tokyo, the district where the government offices are located. The camp site was open for six days from December 31 to January 5, when most companies were closed. Later this activity was called "the Village for Dispatched Workers to Spend over the Year-end." Newspapers and TV took up this problem and gave it prominent coverage. Five hundred and five jobless people registered to stay in the village, with the help of some 1700 volunteers. Goods such as rice, vegetables, and meat were given and sent to the village and a considerable amount of money was donated by the citizens. Three meals a day were served to the villagers. They were also provided a tent, clothes for the cold winter and beddings. The auditorium of the Health, Labour and Welfare Ministry was finally opened for them to use, and they were able to sleep in the warm place during the last few days of the camp. While the village was opened activities like labour consulting and advice for public assistance were conducted. After the dissolution of the village a variety of support activities to help them find jobs and earn a livelihood was continued.

The activities of the village for homeless workers made the deteriorating employment and poverty problem visible to the public and were motivating factors to change the attitude of politicians. Yet, specific political measures have not been taken even now due to the scandals of central government officials and a lack of leadership including that of the prime minister.

Although labour unions and the Anti-Poverty Campaign are struggling together in the work to realise "fair and safe living and working," the voice of women is still unheard and they remain invisible. Women workers, single mothers and women working under many employment forms started to

form “Women and Poverty Network” last September. They have begun to work to tackle these problems with their own pace. Action Centre for Working Women (ACW2), a nation-wide women’s organisation, aimed at strengthening the safety net for women this year and pursuing cooperation with “Women and Poverty Network”.

Many Japanese companies have manufacturing and service sectors in other Asian countries and they have many subcontracting firms there where many local people are working. The economic situation in Japan will impact on the industries in other Asian countries and the lives of workers there.

It is time for workers to unite. Information exchange should frequently be done in order to have greater international solidarity.

Financial Crisis and Impact on Workers in Korea

Kim Aewha

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Impact on Local Economy

The global financial crisis has affected the Korean economy in two ways: the drastic change in the Korean exchange rate because of the foreign capital withdrawal and the decrease of Korean exports because of decreasing consumption power across the world. An incidental consequence of these impacts is that the property market is in the verge of collapse. Twenty nine percent of households in Korea can’t make ends meet and are accruing debt. The Korean middle class has collapsed and irregular jobs have increased due to the 1997 Asian financial crisis, but now, vulnerable groups or fragile bottom groups such as temporary women workers and migrants are further victimised.

The exchange rate hike has increased the price of imported raw materials and parts for manufacturing. This is making it difficult for manufacturing companies depending on imports of parts to continue their operation. As of January 2009, the operation rate of the manufacturing sector was approximately 60-62% (of its total production capacity). In addition many small and medium sized companies are about to default because of the intensive credit crunch. In addition, the prices of commodities are going up.

Korea is an export oriented economy. With no alternatives to exports, a decrease in exports makes the Korean economy fall into a recession.

Impact on Workers

Regular workers are facing decreases in their overtime or weekend work because of the cut down in production at their factories. This has resulted in a decrease of their income, since overtime payments accounts for a big portion of their wages. Further, “voluntary retrenchment” of older or experienced workers is forced with some compensation.

Youth unemployment is increasing because companies are cutting down the numbers of new hires. In addition, the Federation of Korean Industries, the national institution for companies, announced its policy to cut down the wage for newly employed workers. Irregular workers, women and migrants are the first targets to be dismissed. In particular, migrant workers are facing decreases in their real income because of the devaluation of the Korean currency against the dollar. Due to the closing of small and middle sized factories where migrants usually work, migrants are leaving Korea.

“For women workers the number of jobs in regular and secure sectors is decreasing. However, the jobs most affected, among male workers, are in the temporary and daily work sectors. The number of women in comparatively secure jobs in companies with over 300 persons has been decreasing in recent years.”

For women workers the number of jobs in regular and secure sectors is decreasing. However, the jobs most affected, among male workers, are in the temporary and daily work sectors. The number of women in comparatively secure jobs in companies with over 300 persons has been decreasing in recent years.

Government's Strategies

Lee Myung-bak's administration definitely shows that its policies are for a few large corporations to increase their competitiveness in the world market. Its policies are asking for more sacrifices from workers and common people even though their living conditions deteriorated due to the IMF crisis, during 1997 to 1999, and are yet to recover. That's why the popularity of the current government is very low and the people's expectations for the current government also seem very low.

There is a strong growing trend that the Korean economy which depends on export, growth and open market should be reconsidered. Instead of further deregulating the real estate market, which would fuel speculation, the government must create policies to strengthen domestic consumption.

The Korean government announced, in March this year, that it would reduce agricultural incentives or subsidies for farmers in order to strengthen competitiveness of Korean agriculture. This would result in more farmers giving up their farming.

Korean government has put public funds into banks and construction companies that are in crisis in order to bail them out. Korean administration tries to overcome the crisis with its mega construction projects and deregulation of property market. This is a pro-conglomerate policy. On one hand, it has cut down property taxes for big property owners and corporate taxes for big corporations; on the other hand, it is forcing workers to accept cuts in their wages with the rhetorical slogan of let's share the suffering.

The government welfare funds for poor people have been decreased. And the Korean government is cutting down jobs in the public sector. That's why the job creation promised by the Korean government could not get any trust from the public. The internship system for youth has just provided positions that were created because of other workers' dismissal.

Regarding the shortage of the liquidity in dollar, Korea has made a deal for currency swap with the U.S. and the EU. Regarding contraction in the real estate market, the Korean government has lifted the restrictions to the property market that limits speculative capital in it.

Currently, the primary concern of workers is job insecurity or joblessness rather than wages and working conditions. The Korean government has tried to evade responsibility and criticism stating that the crisis is a global issue and started because of external factors.

Other proposals by the Korean government are to cut down the minimum wage and tighten the law around irregular workers that has already been criticized because it disadvantages irregular workers. According to the current law on irregular workers, companies should give regular status for irregular workers who have worked over two years. The Korean government proposed to extend the two year term to four years and extend the three months' probation period to six months. This is to postpone the period for starting the acceptance of the minimum wage. They also tried to change the law on the minimum wage with a 10% wage cut-down for elderly workers over 60 years old.

The changes of these laws have worsened workers' purchasing power and fuelled social unrest. It has weakened Korea's domestic consumption market.

Struggles of Trade Unions

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) is struggling to stop the deterioration of the laws regarding irregular workers and the minimum wage. But the conditions for the struggle are not good because many workers and trade unions are being affected by job insecurity and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)ⁱ. In addition, the government's strategy to divide trade unions or workers from each other has been to implement a piece by piece structural adjustment instead of a one-time implementation. This prevents workers from uniting in common grievance. It intends to stop the whole workers from gathering. The programmes are usually not announced clearly and wholly so that it is difficult for trade unions to react to them.

Workers realise that as the global economic crisis involved global actors, so it is very important to strengthen solidarity of workers of the world in order to overcome this global crisis.

ⁱ **Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)** are policy changes implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in developing countries. These policy changes are conditions for getting new loans from the IMF or World Bank, or for obtaining lower interest rates on existing loans. Common policy required in structural adjustment is the privatisation of state-owned industries and resources.

Espie Hupida: Healer and Peace-weaver

Jurgette Honculada

National Federation of Labor

[Espie Hupida was a key resource for CAW's 2006 study on "The Impact of the Armed Conflict in Mindanao on Women and Women Workers" and CAW circulated a petition letter for her release and that of her colleagues in October last year. CAW board chairperson Jurgette Honculada writes this update after a recent interview with Espie.]

Exuding a quiet glow, 42-year old peace worker Esperancita Hupida speaks of her 45-day captivity by the dreaded Abu Sayaff Gang (ASG) and how the otherwise harrowing experience has been a gift, allowing her to plumb yet untold depths in her persona.

Espie, as she is fondly called, was programme coordinator of *Nagdilaab* Foundation, founded in 2002, to shelter and spearhead direly-needed development programmes among poor communities and brutalised individuals and families in war-torn Basilan. This was preceded by long years of Roman Catholic Church work that superseded *Nagdilaab's* founding (*nagdilaab* is Cebuano for raging fire).

Among the latter's programmes are psycho-social or trauma healing (for war widows and orphans), education and literacy, peace and health training, and livelihood and micro-finance for women, the latter registering high repayment rates in spite of adversity, an indication, Espie says that "... although severely affected by war, people are still hoping for peace".

A new and broader framework informs the work of *Nagdilaab* and other NGOs in conflict areas. This enlarged framework was compelled by the dead-end that pure relief and rehabilitation (R&R) work had come to represent, rushing from one crisis to the next, hardly addressing the roots of the conflict and eventually resulting in NGO burn-out and donor fatigue, among others. Displaced communities had said in mid-2008 "We have had enough of relief efforts, we want more sustainable mechanisms (for peace and development) ..."ⁱ

The humanitarian work (integral to this broader framework) is voluntary on the part of *Nagdilaab* and its staff, not what they are paid to do daily. But development is the new word for peace and Basilan's NGO workers daily negotiate this fragile and perilous interface. As Espie says, "Going to Basilan is a conscious personal decision... on the ferry boat (from Zamboanga City) you say your prayers ..." given the constant threats and kidnappings.

At high noon of Sept. 15 of last year, an Abu Sayaff band abducted a group of six en route to Tipo-Tipo municipality to attend a research presentation on displaced persons. Apart from Espie, the group included two male drivers and Espie's colleagues in peace advocacy Milet Mendoza (who led the research team harnessing local trainees) and Ludy Dekit of the Christian Children's Fund (CCF).

To leave a trail, Espie shed her shoes, thus alerting paramilitary (and later, military) elements who were in hot pursuit. The abducteesⁱⁱ had to flee down steep trails with their abductors, the barefoot

i Among the elements of this broader framework are bridging leadership (training key leaders at the Asian Institute of Management in education and advocacy), organising of the NGO community for complementation, not competition, building a common agenda of converging resources, assistance and focusing of programmes, and a recognition that even armed groups which cause problems are part of the stakes for peace. Thus *Pagtabangan* BASULTA (mutual help in Basilan, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi) was formed at national and provincial levels with *Tabang Mindanaw* and *Nagdilaab* as respective lead convenors. At the same time the Mindanao Emergency Response Network (MERN) was organised with *Nagdilaab* as secretariat, to coordinate government and NGO efforts to address immediate needs in the wake of disasters and emergencies.

ii save the lone *Yakan* who was immediately released

Espie sustaining a sprain and cuts on her feet. To keep herself going, wounds and all, Espie envisaged the faces of her three children. During prolonged detention she would do the opposite: blotting everything out from memory except thoughts of survival. In flight, an ASG member gave Espie his pair of socks, another his pair of boots, prompting her to say, “No matter their crimes and seeming incorrigibility, people can still change ...”

Espie’s experiences could fill a small bookⁱⁱⁱ, but let this account end with some insights gained and lessons learned.

First, drawing on everything she had learned as an NGO and peace worker, Espie lived through an experience that brought her to death’s door, not once, not twice, but daily. These skills include community organising, communications, advocacy, dialogue; and faith.^{iv} Espie laughs at the irony that she was targeted and taken as an NGO worker; and survived for the very same reason.

Second, Espie says the NGO community needs to develop new strategies and methodologies given the fact that “some groups reject your agenda; other groups do not want to be in your debt (for ushering in development)”.

Third, a change of perspective: counting each day not as one of prolonged suffering but “as a blessing, a gift of life, thus you can survive for tomorrow ... and tomorrow ...” To extend her prayers to last an entire day, she would add mysteries and intercessions for both living and dead (using a comb in lieu of beads).

Espie speaks sombrely about the domestic deficits caused by her work and vocation: inadequate time for her children (two in college, one in grade school), and her husband’s serving as shock absorber (also playing negotiator). However the greater trauma, she says, is not the kidnapping but giving up the work in Basilan which has been her life. Thus has she been grieving and speaks of the pain of leaving various programmes she anchored in Nagdilaab, including the women’s programme.

And yet, paradoxically, God pulls her out when she is at her peak but also has a plan for her, e.g. leaving consolidation of one cooperative for work in another and the closure of church women’s work spurring Nagdilaab’s birth.

Espie seeks to build a house of healing, compelled by the gravity of the Mindanao situation, and God’s stupendous love. “Grabe ang Ginoo (God is great),” Espie says, “I have never felt so loved, so at peace within”.

Recalling day 1 in captivity, Espie says she had to decide how to survive as a woman; and survive she did. (Turning philosophical, she adds there are various forms of kidnapping, for example, an ideology that holds you hostage.) Thus Espie wants to return to healing which started with the widows and orphans of Basilan. She thinks of ordinary victims without her skills and training, without recourse to her networks, with no self-awareness and capacity to process their experiences. Espie knows that one cannot escape the victim syndrome, but how to turn victims into survivors and thus into agents of change?

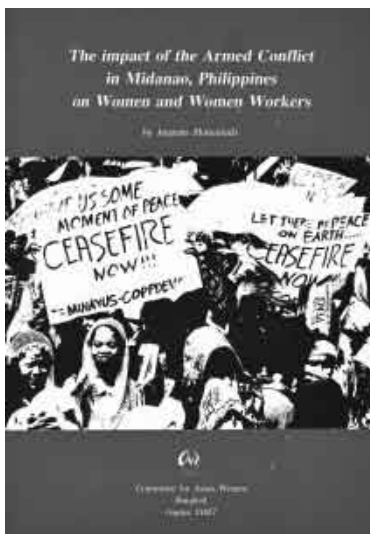
iii including practical survival tips such as how to bathe on a *tabo*-ful of water (*tabo* is a small plastic water container common to Filipino bathrooms)

iv She used the disaster management equation (vulnerability x risk x hazard divided by resilience + capability) on herself as a survival mechanism.

Esperancita Hupida, healer, woman of great hope and greater faith, working to reconcile the contradictions of gender, race and religion, by binding the wounds of war and walking the path of peace, knowing this is difficult but not impossible because she has been to hell and back (or beyond), and for this reason “makes a joyful noise unto the Lord”, daily.

Jurgette Honculada is the author of CAW's publication: *The Impact of the Armed Conflict in Mindanao, Philippines on Women and Women Workers*.

Jurgette is general secretary of the National Federation of Labor and vice-chairperson of PILIPINA, a national Filipino women's organisation. She is currently the president of CAW EXCO.



CAW's publication: *The Impact of the Armed Conflict in Mindanao, Philippines on Women and Women Workers*.

You can fill in the Publication Request Form in this newsletter and request a free copy.

Would They Catch the Right Mice?

-- Financial crisis and its challenge to China

Juliette Li

Committee for Asian Women

“I don't care if it's a white cat or a black cat. It's a good cat so long as it catches mice.”

-- Deng Xiaoping, former Prime Minister of China

That was perhaps the most famous quotation of Deng Xiaoping. It was interpreted to mean that being productive is more important than whether one follows a communist or capitalist ideology. Twenty years later, the people have already stopped asking the question of “white cat or black cat”. For the average Chinese, what really matters is the daily routines of life that they have to deal with, not the economic or political system. But the question of the “mice” remains. Has the economic reform, initiated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1980s, delivered what that people longed for? If “mice” is wealth, the GDP growth has been more than sufficient to make not only Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping but also the great king of the Qin Dynasty proud. But if “mice” equals a fair

Would They Catch
the Right Mice?

distribution of wealth, which should be among the ultimate goals of communism, China still has a long way to go.

The global financial crisis has added to the challenge. Since February 2009, the Chinese New Year period, 23 million migrant workers have become unemployed in China.

One of the world's biggest toy manufacturers, Smart Union Group Limited, closed down two of its big factories in Guangdong at the end of 2008, leaving 6,500 people jobless (Lianhe Zaobao, 2008). One of the biggest state-owned enterprises Bao Steel Group Corporations cut by 10% the salaries of the whole workforce (The Economic Observer, 2008). The unemployment rate is already 9.4% and one out of every four new college graduates will face difficulties finding jobs in 2009. (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008)

While factory closures in the "world's factory" become usual, workers are not getting any compensation. Workers complained that working conditions in factories has deteriorated since October 2008: managers frequently lose their temper and workers were blamed or punished for minor mistakes. Applying for unpaid leave has been extremely easy and salaries have dropped dramatically as there is less work to do. All these signs lead to one single message i.e. the factories want workers to resign, so that they will not need to pay redundancy compensation to the ones laid-off.

Besides encouraging voluntary resignation, many factory owners are also attempting to escape from their responsibilities. In October 2008, fifty factory workers blocked the highway bridge at Luoxi in Guangzhou in South China. Their boss had absconded, owing them 3-months salary, a total of 320 thousand Chinese Yuan (Dayang News, 2008). In another case, an export oriented shoes manufacturer closed down, in February 2009, when the Taiwanese owner and all of the high level managers disappeared overnight. Over 300 workers did not get salaries owed to them. Some of the workers had been working there for over 12 years (Sina, 2009). These were not random incidences as newspapers report similar stories each day. The Nanfang Daily (2008) said 52.70% (3600) small-size export oriented toy factories closed down during the first half of 2008. In Dongguan, approximately 2800 factories were also closed down (Coollaud, 2009).

How many laid off workers have been able to go home with their compensation and owed wages? Even if they were paid the compensation or owed wages how long can they and their dependents survive on this? How much can or will the governments do for them and what is their priority: workers or investors? What is the ultimate solution to these issues? The local government was said to have assisted in the case of Smart Union Group Limited (Nanfang Daily, 2008). They promised to pay the two months salaries owed by Smart Union Group, after several thousand workers staged a demonstration. However, lay off compensation was not mentioned at all. On the contrary, the municipality of Qingxi twon, Dongguan was said to have promised to help Taiwan businessmen by threatening labourers and slowing down the process of dealing with the workers cases.

Some laid-off workers have left the cities while others continue to struggle hoping to find employment. The majority of these workers are women whose earnings support their families back home in the rural areas. They tend to choose to move into the informal labour market, especially domestic work. Since October 2008, the salary of domestic workers in the South has dropped at least 20% as the labour supply increased. A job agency said domestic work in the past was dominated by women in their 30s or 40s, but recently many young girls have registered to be domestic workers. Everyone is ready to do anything for survival.

Eleven million workers, almost half of the 23 million unemployed migrant workers, are now wandering the cities looking for employment while the other half have returned to their home towns or villages. Little is heard about their life after this.

A Chinese blogger, on her travels in Guizhou province which is one of the poorest provinces in the Southwest China, described her encounters with ex-migrant workers who had returned to their villages (Yang, 2009):

A young man who had returned to the village compared his income in the village and outside:

"I think I must go back to the cities again. I could hardly make 20 yuan a day... things are cheaper here but you still need to spend money on food and essentials, at least 30 to 40 yuan daily. No one can make this much here... Where I worked before, we can earn around 100 yuan a day. I want to go there again. There are so many more opportunities outside.."

A female migrant worker who had returned home due to her pregnancy and the massive layoffs as a result of financial crisis complained about her life in country side:

"I am not used to the life here anymore. I feel so lonely and so difficult to kill the time. I miss those days in the factory. Everywhere there are people, on the street and in the factory. It was so warm... Everything is so inconvenient in the village. It takes more than an hour to get to the wet market. It is difficult to walk on the unpaved streets under the continuous rain, plus the bad smell from the buffalos and pigs..."

Annual net income per capita of farmers in 2008 was 4,761 Chinese Yuan but the disposable income of their urban counterparts was up to 15,781 Chinese Yuan (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). This gap, of over three times more, keeps the migrant workers moving. Though the financial crisis will reduce urban income, it is not enough to stop the movement.

Leaders of the communist party vowed to fight the financial crisis. A four trillion Chinese Yuan (about 585 billion US dollars) stimulus package will be invested over two years (News of the Communist Party of China, 2008). The focus of the stimulus package is expanding domestic demand, stimulating consumption and development of the rural areas. The investment will be distributed into six fields ranging from construction projects to research and development of high-technologies to eco-friendly environment building. Yet behind the applause and compliments lies the confusion of the grass-roots Chinese workers.

The first distribution plan announced that 80% of the fund would be put in huge construction projects, as seen in Chart I and Table I below. The government claimed that these constructions would bring massive job opportunities. In fact, it is well-known in China that such projects tend to benefit corrupt officials and major contractors. Multi-level subcontracting and illegal subcontracting are common practices and subcontractors often cut down costs by using materials with low quality. The evidence of this is obvious: the collapse of many buildings in Sichuan during the earthquake in May 2008. Migrant workers were the only ones that provided labour in this field working under hazardous conditions. Salary was always late if it was paid at all. The occupational accident rate in the sector ranked the second highest only lower than in mining industry. How to prevent corruption and make workers the main beneficiaries had been a great challenge for the government.

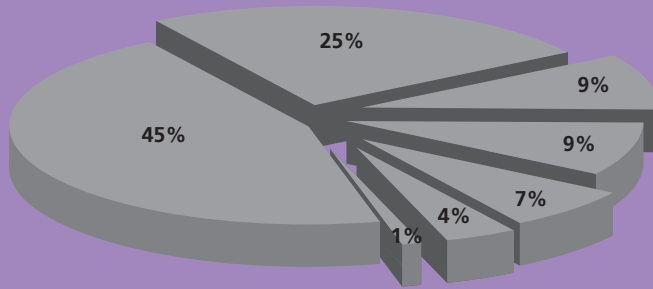


Table I: Distribution of the Stimulus Package

45%	Building of railways, highways, airports and electricity networks in rural areas
25%	Reconstruction of earthquake damages
9%	Construction of basic facilities in rural areas
9%	Eco-environmental protection and energy saving projects
7%	Project of housing security
4%	Support creativity and development of high-technologies
1%	Health care and education

Projects	Amount (Billion Chinese Yuan)	Percentage (%)
Building of railways, highways, airports and electricity networks in rural areas	1800	45
Reconstruction of earthquake damages	1000	25
Construction of basic facilities in rural areas	370	9
Eco-environmental protection and energy saving projects	350	9
Project of housing security	280	7
Support creativity and development of high-technologies	160	4
Health care and education	40	1
Total	4000	100

Source: News of the Communist Party of China (2008)

Although the plan was to expand domestic demand, the stimulus package allocated only 1% to health care and education. Even after the government had managed to increase the amount in the new planning period, the allocation was merely 3%. The leaders cannot see or will not admit that under consumption in China is the result of low income, high health care and education fees and lack of retirement security among the majority of workers.

Every crisis comes with an opportunity. Will China ultimately catch the "right mice"? Will the Chinese government be able to stand for the workers and eventually share the wealth among all the people? Time will tell.

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Asian Labour News

Note: Sources of the following news items are mostly from communication with labour group networks. The Committee for Asia Women does not have the means to verify their validity first hand. Please contact us if you are interested in more information or to contact the sources directly.

Formal Economy/Informalisation of Work

Korean Owned Company Busted Trade Union in Cambodia

Source: Free Trade Union of Nex Dia Group Limited, February 2009

Free Trade Union of Nex Dia Group Limited has been bullied by the Korean owned company since registration. In order to separate the union leaders and the workers, the management rearranged the position of the leaders so that they would not stay in the production line and meet the workers freely. The company also tried to offer compensation or send out threatening messages to cause union leaders resign. On 15 December 2008, Mr.Seung Sao, secretary of the union was asked by the company to resign from the leadership position as he was only aged 22, below the legal minimum 25 years of age for leading a union. Mr. Sao refused to resign and the company dismissed him. The management threatened all 50 members of the trade union that if they would not give up the union, they would all be fired. The company was believed to be seeking a renewal of the workforce.

Financial Crisis May Deteriorate Health of Sri Lankan Garment Workers

Source: *Women's Center, February 2009*

The garment industry in Sri Lanka had been seriously hit by the drop of demand in Middle East and the United State due to the financial crisis. Almost half (47%) of Sri Lanka's export income is from garment exports. Garment exports yield 3.2 million US dollars every year. The industry provides jobs to 300,000 workers the majority of whom are women. It is recorded that there is a 30% fall in the demand of garment products and that prices have fallen by 15%. The Labour Department of Sri Lanka has published in its journal that 66% of garment women workers suffered from anemia. The health situation of Sri Lankan women workers is expected to deteriorate amid the financial crisis.

Massive Lay-offs in the Philippines

Source: *Pagkakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Timog Katagalugan (PAMANTIK-KMU or Solidarity of Workers in Southern Tagalog), January 2009*

Many workers were laid off in Laguna Technopark Incorporated (LTI) in Binan, Laguna. The management of Integrated Microelectronics Incorporated (IMI) was laying off 7,000 regulars out of its 17,000 workforce, terminating 500 workers daily. Hoya Glasdisk Philippines in LTI laid off more than 800 workers in January. More than 200 teary-eyed contractual women workers of Zirtex, another electronics company in LTI, were surprised to know that they were already laid off, when reporting to work in one day morning. Another group of women workers from Testech Incorporated complained that they have been "temporarily terminated" on 16 January. Fujitsu Ten in Canlubang, Laguna offered voluntary resignation to 1,750 out of its 5,000 regular workers.

It was believed that some employers had used the financial crisis as an excuse to retrench workers and in turn weaken the power of unions. Teody Santos, a worker of Daiho Philippines, reported that his company announced voluntary resignation plan to more than 500 workers shortly after they had formally registered their union.

Informal Economy

Sri Lanka: Fishermen Win Lawsuit against Hotel Owner

Source: *www.AsiaNews.it, March 2009*

Two hundred fishermen have obtained recognition of their right to remain in the area, where fishing has been practiced for more than 200 years. The community had been in the dispute with the owner of several hotels, Mr. Rockwood, since he wanted them to leave the coastline facing a piece of property he bought in 1995.

With the support of the World Forum of Fisher People, the fishermen finally won the case. The tribunal decided that since the strip of coastline had been used for fishing for more than 200 years that the fishermen community will be able to continue using it in the future. For the World Forum of Fisher People, it is an historic victory "against the displacement of coastal communities in the name of tourism development and foreign income earnings."

Asian Plantation Workers Vulnerable to Weed Killer Health Threat

Source: *www.reuters.com*, Feb 2009

A Malaysian plantation worker Rajam Murugasu became blind in one eye after she slipped and accidentally sprayed the weed killer Paraquat in her own face. Paraquat is banned in the EU and restricted to licensed users in the US. Yet it is widely used in China, India, the Philippines as well as Malaysia. The health ministry of Malaysia had reported that Paraquat has caused the most common cases of pesticide poisoning. The government says it is aware of the health hazards associated with paraquat, but added that it reinstated its registration due to an appeal from the industry and the users. Swiss paraquat manufacturer Syngenta insists the herbicide is safe and that eye protectors are required only when the weed killer is being mixed and loaded into sprayers.

Apart from lacking legal protections from the governments, labourers in Asia and other developing regions have little say over work conditions, as they are already struggling to earn enough to support their families. They may know the danger of using highly toxic weed killers, but they have no access to alternatives.

Labour Rights in Conflict and Suppression Areas

Labour Organiser Arrested and Detained in the Philippines

Source: *Pagkakaisa ng Manggagawa sa Timog Katagalugan-Kilusang Mayo Uno*

PAMANTIK-KMU (Solidarity of Workers in Southern Tagalog-May First Movement), January 2009

In January, a labour organiser, Leonardo B. Arceta, 51 years old, was taken by the police in Westdrive Subdivision, Barangay Labas, Santa Rosa City, Laguna, and detained in Camp Vicente Lim in Calamba City, Laguna. Arceta was an organiser of OLALIA-KMU. The organisation claimed that the arrest and detention was illegal as the warrant had a different name. Workers and the family had headed to Camp Vicente Lim to seek Arceta's release. The police, however, refused to communicate and denied the family's request to visit Arceta.

Migration and Labour

Job Broker, Placement Agency and Employer Bullied OFWs

Source: *APMM (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants), February 2009*

According to four Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) employed by Jia Chiarng Company in Taiwan, a migrant workers agency Golden Green based in the Philippines over charged their placement fee. They were forced to pay up to 130,000 peso (2,700 US dollars) as placement fee plus 33,000 Peso (700 US dollars) to 65,000 peso (1,400 US dollars) to the broker, Sage International, based in Taiwan. Sage International reportedly forced 51 OFWs to sign an agreement that they would be paid on a piece rate. When six of them refused to do so, they were locked inside a dirty and unlighted room until the 45 others assented to their new conditions of work.

Asia Pacific Mission of Migrants (APMM) called on the Embassy of the Philippines and the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) to punish and blacklist the above abusive companies.

Five Died Protesting against Forced Eviction in South Korea

Source: Asian Transnational Corporation Monitoring Network (ATNC), January 2009

At 6:00 AM on 20 January, people opposing eviction in Youngsan-Gu, Seoul lost their lives as a consequence of violent oppression from the police. The government staged an anti-terror operation less than a day after people facing eviction prior to any negotiations started demonstrations. One thousand and five hundred policemen were dispatched to disperse about 50 protesters. The police forced entry into the building where the protesters were and a fire suddenly broke out. Despite the dangerous circumstances the police, without taking any safety measures proceeded with the operation which claimed six deaths including five protesters and one police officer.

Financial Crisis and Impact on Nepal's Economy

Source: GEFONT, February 2009

In Nepal, the financial crisis has impacted the entire manufacturing sector resulting in massive factory closures. Many workers have lost their jobs as export of items such as ready-made garments and woolen carpets sharply dropped.

The number of people gaining foreign employment has started to fall. Daily out-migration for employment from Tribhuvan International Airport dropped to 656 persons in August last year. Every year an average of 350,000 new people entered the labour market in Nepal, of which nearly 200,000 people join foreign employment. Unemployment problem is expected to be aggravated due to the low demand in foreign labour markets. Associated with unemployment and the intensified threat of returned migrants workers are various social problems. The remittances, whose contribution to GDP had been 18%, may come down sharply causing further deterioration in Nepal's economy.

The tourism industry which has contributed to a high proportion of the economy has again come under heavy threat. The declining hotel occupancy and number of tourists entering the country indicated a serious drop in the income of the country.

Migrant Workers Worst Casualties of Economic Crisis

Source: The Irrawaddy, February 2009

Many migrant workers are facing bleak prospects as economic woes in the Gulf, Singapore and Taiwan are leading to mass layoffs of labourers from sending countries such as Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

In Thailand, the labour ministry is delaying the issuance of some 700,000 work permits to migrant workers as a measure to help the estimated one million Thai workers expected to lose their jobs. Thailand has in the past attempted to cope with domestic economic crisis by deporting Burmese migrant workers. When employment plunged following the 1997 economic meltdown, the Democrat-led government reacted by withdrawing work permits and repatriating migrant workers. It was unsuccessful. Burmese workers continued to enter the country, both legally and illegally, drawn by demand for cheap labour. As a leading country in the region, Thailand should acknowledge that the Thai economy is likely to continue to employ migrants.

ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF)

Date: 20-23 February 2009

Place: Bangkok, Thailand

The ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF) sought to strengthen civil society across the ASEAN region, through direct People-to-People engagement. This regional forum established a two-way process, in which domestic issues were escalated to higher regional forums and the local impacts of regional issues were highlighted for community level groups. The APF encouraged regional civil society to engage on critical ASEAN issues both within and with ASEAN institutions. It was attended by over 1,000 people this year.



A group demanded the ASEAN leaders a "hunger free" South East Asia



Participants of the panel discussion of APF



Art performance on the life of ASEAN people

CAW co-organised two workshops on trade, gender and labour in the APF to highlight women workers' issues in the social movement.

The workshop on '**Trade Liberalisation and the ASEAN Economic Blueprint: Implications to Women Workers, Informal Work and Social Protection**' was co-organised by CAW, Homenet Southeast Asia and International Gender and Trade Network – Asia. In the workshop, Dr. Worawit Jareonlet talked about the ASEAN Economic Blueprint's nature, focus and impact to workers. The blueprint lacked a social dimension. Its "export-oriented" model caused ASEAN countries to compete with each other for foreign investments by creating policies integrating cheap labour with mostly women workers. It was recommended that ASEAN prioritise the social dimension of its peoples to talk about social protection, land reform and progressive tax to lessen the gap in wealth distribution.

Doris Lee from AMRC Hong Kong discussed the 'flexibilisation' of work caused by global supply chains. Informal work is dominated by women and brings more work to employers without granting rights and benefits to its workers. In this setting, labour law is seen as lacking in protecting workers' rights because it excludes informal work as work.

Naty Bernardino of IGTN-Asia raised feminist economics as an alternative to neoliberal and traditional economics. Feminist economics sees gender as influential in economic outcomes and it redefines economics as provisioning of human needs including paid and unpaid work, productive and reproductive work. With this perspective, she critiqued global financial crisis, states' bailouts and investment guarantees 'vis a vis states' social provisioning, which is highly imbalanced and biased to investors and companies. Women are 'default care providers' in the economy and their



Participants of the workshop 'Trade Liberalisation and the ASEAN Economic Blueprint: Implications to Women Workers, Informal Work and Social Protection'

multiple burdens are intensified. Recommendations on national level is a departure from neoliberal policies, such as export-led, to a sound industrial policy, labour export policy to full local employment and privatised social services to state provisioning; at an ASEAN level regional stimulus package for social insurance, regional food stock, abandon free trade negotiations and agreements, promotion of alternative regionalism, and pro-people, nationalist development for regional integration and policy; and on global level, complement global stimulus social packages – safety nets and debt cancellation, a social guarantee to parallel multilateral investment guarantees, against a re-launch of the DOHA round, additional financial means through tax (tax on financial speculation), support women projects and so on.

The workshop on '**Critical Views on the ASEAN-EU FTA: Areas of Concern and Campaigning opportunities**' was jointly organised by EU-ASEAN FTA Campaigns, FTA-Watch Thailand, FOCUS on the Global South and CAW. Around 90-100 men and women participated the workshop.

In the first presentation, Mr. Joseph Purugganan from FOCUS on the Global South said that the process of economic integration has now become the priority of ASEAN. ASEAN envisioned the goals of this economic integration as a vehicle to address asymmetries among ASEAN economies and bridging the development gaps among member-countries. While ASEAN's record in this regard is dismal, the renewed drive for economic integration is anchored on free trade agreements such as the EU-ASEAN FTAs that are by design, WTO-plus, ambitious and fast-paced agreements.

ASEAN's obsession for closer economic relations through these comprehensive and ambitious trade and investments deals, may in fact lead to exactly the opposite i.e. a region further divided along economic, political and social lines.

These FTAs pose serious threats to jobs, people's access and control over resources, policy space and regional integration. They must be stopped or cancelled.

Dr. Jiraporn Limpananont of FTA Watch Thailand disclosed that the EU's draft on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is similar in aggressiveness to the USA. The EU seeks to increase enforcement of protection standards and IPR rules that are biased towards patent holders and may severely compromise the common good. For example, access to affordable medicines may be threatened as strong enforcement of IPR rules and standards may ensure monopoly and control of companies over medicines. At the same time, one participant commented that EU's insistence on strict IPR standards and enforcement creates a drain in the limited resources of developing countries as they will be required to put in place policies, mechanisms and other instruments for monitoring and enforcements of these IPR regulations.

The Bio-IPR Impacts of the EU-ASEAN FTAs

EU's demands accession to the Budapest Treaty does not ensure accountability or protect the sources and ownership of biogenetic resources. The effects are seen in the food security of people as it will encourage monopoly of TNC seed companies, and narrow the options of farmers and rural households to save and exchange seeds. There will also be long-term and other impacts on the biodiversity as it requires uniformity and standardisation in terms of protecting new plants. For instance, it will also severely compromise the principle of benefits sharing in the utilisation and access of biogenetic resources and other materials owned and managed by local and indigenous communities. The Bio-IPR impacts are also comprehensive and multi-faceted, encompassing a wide-range of rights, such political, economic, social-cultural, etc.



Ms. Irene Xavier spoke in the workshop 'Critical Views on the ASEAN-EU FTA: Areas of Concern and Campaigning Opportunities'

Ms. Irene Xavier, member of Committee for Asian Women, said that the FTAs render the women workers and the workers in ASEAN in general worse off than before in terms of further eroding a very defective system of labour rights and their enforcements. FTAs are developments on the way in which companies are trying to maximise their profits and interests in exchange for the violation of workers' rights with impunity. Globalisation has rendered workers' rights and movements weaker and successfully out maneuvered the labour movements.

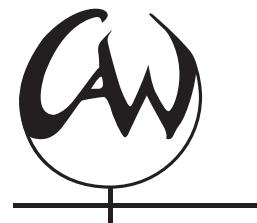
The recommendations of the workshop were:

1. Stop the EU-ASEAN FTAs and other unjust and unfair FTAs (i.e. ASEAN- Australian/NZ FTAs).
2. ASEAN should focus more on regional economic integration that puts people's welfare and development at the center, and the principles of solidarity, human rights, sustainable development, labour rights, environmental protection, and sovereignty over resources and equitable sharing of benefits and resources as cornerstones.
3. ASEAN should proceed cautiously on free trade agreements and ensure accountability, transparency and people's participation.
4. Ensure people's right to know, access to information, prior and informed consent.
5. People's and working people's awareness should be raised about the FTAs and their impacts.

Coming Events

Training on Advocacy for Domestic Workers – Indonesia

The Committee for Asian Women and JALA-PRT, Yogyakarta-based domestic workers network will conduct a national training and consultation on the country's "domestic workers are workers" campaign from 25-27 July 2009. The training aims to strengthen capacities of groups working towards labour standards protection and recognition for Indonesian domestic workers. It will bring together domestic workers' unions, support NGOs, trade union representatives and labour support groups for a three-day intensive learning of advocacy skills and strategies from national and regional representatives. The event hopes to prepare Indonesian domestic worker leaders to campaign for national legislation and advocate internationally for an ILO Convention on Domestic Work. For more information contact CAW Programme Officer Niza Concepcion at niza@cawinfo.org



Advancing a Peoples' ASEAN: Continuing Dialogue

To pursue the goal of advancing a peoples' ASEAN, the Second APF / Fifth ACSC (APF II / ACSC V) will feature expanded dialogue with ASEAN governments' and ASEAN Secretariat's senior officials who are involved in the three ASEAN Community Councils. The key objectives of the dialogue are to explore the options and limitations and identifying potential solutions for the ASEAN to meet the demands and aspirations of its peoples, and to foster governments-peoples cooperation in creating building blocks for a just, people-centred, and genuine caring and sharing ASEAN Community, which we hope is a shared goal of all the ASEAN governments.

The forum will be held in Chaam, Thailand from 18th October 2009. For more information please refer to CAW website <http://www.cawinfo.org/2009/09/asean-peoples-forum-call-for-participation/> or APF website www.aseanpeoplesforum.org



CAW welcome three new members in our network:

Thai Labour Campaign (TLC)

The Thai Labour Campaign (TLC) was formed in February 2000 to help workers and small farmers to stand-up for their rights. The first five years of TLC's work is well summarised in the 2005 Annual Report. The 2007 Annual Review presents a fully-illustrated review of TLC's work during 2006 -2007, covering the campaign for the Right to Freedom of Association, the Rights of Migrant Workers and such fields as Gender and Trade, the Thai Women Forum, FTAs and SEZs, Global Solidarity and Labour Rights media.



Red Flag Women's Movement

Red Flag Women's Movement (RFWM) is the women's wing of the Ceylon Plantation Workers Union (CPWU) popularly known as the Red flag Union, based in Kandy. In the colonial period CPWU was set up to advance the rights of plantation workers. RFWM aims to support women workers in taking on leadership roles and to mainstream women's issues as workers' issues within the trade union movement. Since its establishment in 2005 RFWM strengthened women's active participation in debates; began to change male workers attitude towards women; mobilised domestic workers and ensured women workers receive their salary themselves.

Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (KASBI)

KASBI (Committee of Independent Unions Action) was founded in 2003 in Tangerang Banten to pursue the victory of the Indonesian workers struggle. In 2005 workers, from 14 municipalities, in eight provinces in Indonesia, attended a meeting and the officially changed the name of the organisation to KASBI-Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (Congress of Indonesia Unions Alliance). KASBI strengths lie in organising demonstrations and strikes against government policies that oppress labourers and people in general. It works to improve the welfare of labourers by promoting labour laws that protect the interest of labourers. KASBI struggles against imperialism, oppression, fascism and feudalism and works to unite labourers so that there is no discrimination amongst private labourers, civil servants and other workers.



CAW welcome two new programme staff:

Suvechha Adminkari as Programme Officer focuses on the formal economy; and Win Theint Theint as Junior Programme Officer focuses on the informal economy.

CAW bids farewell to Deepa Bharathi who leaves CAW as Programme Coordinator. She has worked with CAW for seven years. She continues to be a member of CAW's Thai Foundation Board (Collective Action for Women Workers).

All CAW's publications are not for profit and to advance women workers' rights. We would like to exchange publications with your organisation. In case you do not have printed publications, you are welcome to give us a donation to cover the printing cost and the postage fee.

Thank you for your support to Asian women workers.

Request for Asian Women Workers Newsletter

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	Power to Better Our Lives Now: Wage Campaign 2008	CAW	25
	Situation of Women Workers Living in Conflict Areas and Under Politically Suppressive Regimes, Sri Lanka	P.P.Sivapragasam & P.Logeswary	60
	Informalisation of Work through Free Trade Agreements: Eroding Labour Rights	CAW	30

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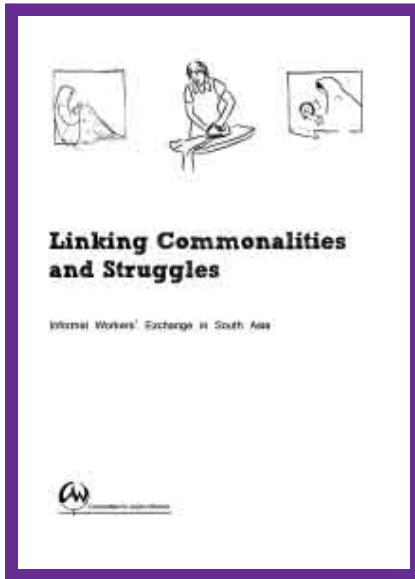
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New Publications in CAW



Linking Commonalities and Struggles: Informal Workers' Exchange in South Asia

This is a report on the South Asia Conference on Informal Labour and Trade Union Organisations organised by Committee for Asian Women (CAW) and Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) in August 2007 in Pune, India.

The conference brought together participants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Thailand and India to share experience and discuss organising strategies for women workers in the informal economy, especially waste pickers, domestic workers and home based workers.

In many countries in South Asia, women constitute a large part of the informal workforce. Street vending in Sri Lanka is women-dominated. Women are paid extremely low wages whether they are waste pickers, domestic workers or employed in work in the informal sector. However, their income is crucial in supporting the family and also society.

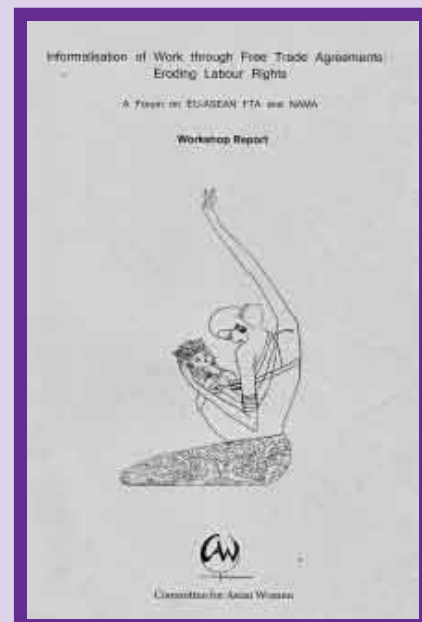
Two things must be ensured in order to achieve development goals; gender equality and concept of decent work as defined by ILO. Organising women in the informal economy for social protection (unions or other member-based organisations) should thus be taken up. It will help influence the governments in passing laws to protect women.

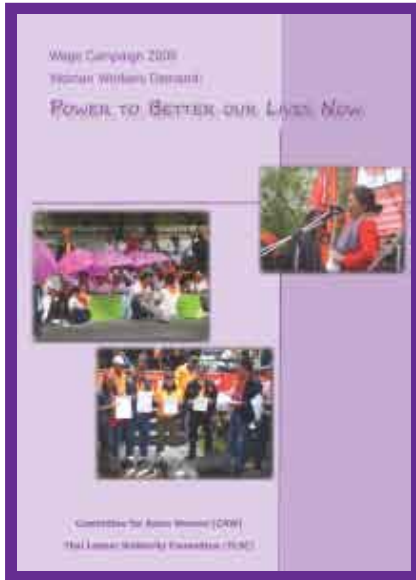
Informalisation of Work through Free Trade Agreements: Eroding Labour Rights

With liberalised trade, competition from foreign goods entering the domestic market often destroys the local sector and causes loss of jobs. The loss of agricultural land for setting up factories causes workers to migrate to other countries in search of better job opportunities.

Women's double burden is compounded by the privatisation of essential public services and increase in prices of basic commodities that are important for their social reproductive work. Energy, water and other basic utilities that the EU is targeting for private investment by multinational corporations are crucial public goods that should not be surrendered to the market.

CAW organised a two-day forum on the EU-ASEAN FTA and NAMA and their implications on the labour force in South East Asia, especially on women workers. The workshop aims at educating women workers to empower women to claim their rights, to understand the impact of key FTAs, and to highlight organising strategies.





Power to Better Our Lives Now: Wage Campaign 2008

Women are the backbone of society and the economy and have always worked. Sometimes they get paid and sometimes their work is unpaid. Women constitute 70% of the world's population that currently lives in poverty and two-thirds of this group are illiterate. Despite feminisation of the labour force in Asia women remain at the bottom of the wage bowl, suffering unequal pay, inhumane working conditions and floating tenures. Eighty percent of working women in the informal economy have no regular or stable income. Women workers in Asia are the worst hit due to the increasing prices of rice, oil, fuel, transport and all basic commodities.

On 1 May 2008, Labour Day, the Committee for Asian Women pledged solidarity with millions of women workers, activists and human rights defenders all over Asia who were mobilising for action on this day. CAW joined the workers' mobilisation in Bangkok together with regional representatives to highlight wage issues and also for better living conditions for women workers.

Situation of Women Workers Living in Conflict Areas and Under Politically Suppressive Regimes Sri Lanka

Author: P.P. Sivapragasam & P. Logeswary

This study provides information on the living conditions of working women under the environment of war in Sri Lanka. The information was collected through literature reviews and interviews with women working in the agricultural, informal, public and private sectors in Kandy and the northern eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. They represented all ethnic, religious and cultural groups including the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim.

The conflict has widowed a lot of women, which in turn has caused discrimination against them. The main work that is now available to them is informal work, especially agriculture-based work, which is not covered by any law. Women workers are deprived of civil rights such as right to organise in the guise of prevention of terrorism.

In addition, the state of emergency has made it impossible for women to live in a secure environment. Women are not safe enroute to work or within their workplace as they have no protection from violence or sexual harassments. The Armed Forces cannot be held accountable for their excesses, disappearances of people and preventive custody, which are effected under the emergency regulations. People can only complain to international institutions for justice.

