

Solidarity Center Management Response

Evaluation Report: Research, Advocacy and Action to Combat GBV in the Apparel Sector (October 2017 – April 2019)

January 2020

The Solidarity Center appreciates the independent evaluation of its C&A Foundation-funded pilot project in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand and acknowledges the value of the lessons learned and recommendations for future programming. The Solidarity Center partially agrees with the Evaluation and respectfully offers the following contextual information and clarifications.

Framework

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as violence that is directed against a person or group of people on the basis of their gender or sex, including acts that inflict mental, physical, or sexual harm or suffering, as well as threats of such acts. The Evaluation report helpfully cites in a footnote the International Labour Organization’s concept of GBV “in the world of work,” which encompasses violence or harassment in the world of work occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work: (a) in the workplace, including public and private spaces where they are a place of work; (b) in places where the worker is paid, takes a rest break or a meal, or uses sanitary, washing and changing facilities; (c) during work-related trips, travel, training, events or social activities; (d) through work-related communications, including those enabled by information and communication technologies; (e) in employer-provided accommodation; and (f) when commuting to and from work. However, the framing of GBV in the background section of the report is limited only to examples, data and discussion of sexual harassment – just one aspect of GBV. References are made to GBV in general throughout the report, yet not to GBV *in the world of work* – the focus of the pilot program. The Solidarity Center respectfully offers that this was a missed opportunity to highlight the problem of all forms of GBV *at work* and to view the program through that lens.

Bottom-up Approach

A bottom-up, grassroots approach is at the core of the Solidarity Center’s work. As a worker rights organization, the Solidarity Center empowers men and women around the world to earn safe and dignified livelihoods, exercise their fundamental labor rights and have a voice in shaping work conditions and public policies that impact their lives. Workers accomplish this by organizing and joining unions, through which they are able to negotiate collective improvements as well as build and balance power at the workplace and within the global economy. As membership-based organizations, unions and worker associations are in a sense “owned” by their members and are vehicles for change. Therefore, change has to come from the workers. A bottom-up approach is simultaneously both time consuming¹ and rewarding because it relies on the workers to own the process and to drive the changes they want.

¹Organizing also is time consuming because it requires staff and organizers to engage with workers outside of work hours or on weekends during their free time.

The Evaluation report acknowledges that most efforts to date to address GBV at work have taken a top-down approach and sought to mobilize management with minimal direct engagement with workers, and it recognizes that the Solidarity Center's piloted bottom-up approach and emphasis on workers' empowerment "are highly relevant." The Solidarity Center welcomes this validation.

At the same time, the report later states that the bottom-up approach had limited relevance to influence international policy process and implies that grassroots workers, who may not be "skilled negotiators," cannot influence international policy. The SC respectfully disagrees. Empowering individuals to find their voices is a first step in collective action, and countless examples exist across the globe of collective action shaping policy at the local, national and international levels, from suffragette movements to more equitable inheritance laws to the efforts of women union leaders around the world who increased awareness and visibility about the root causes, scope and incidents of GBV and persuasively demonstrated the need for an ILO standard, ultimately resulting in the adoption of Convention 190.² "The largest global study on violence against women found that the most critical criteria for bringing about progressive changes to laws and policies on violence against women was the existence of autonomous feminist movements."³ The second objective of the Solidarity Center's pilot project focused on that first step of empowering workers – building their capacity to participate in the International Labour Conference process. Since there is only one worker representative speaking on behalf of all workers during the actual negotiations, it is in the worker planning sessions where participants actively engaged and shared their experiences with GBV in the world of work. They were empowered to participate, and personal experience and testimony are valuable and often outweigh an individual's debating or negotiating skills. Moreover, language proposed by one of the participants was incorporated into the final text of the Convention and Recommendation adopted by the ILO. The Solidarity Center, therefore, finds the bottom-up approach to be relevant to influencing international policy processes. Lastly, the Solidarity Center respectfully offers that the "requirements" to influence international policy processes, i.e., skills and experience in negotiations with an international audience, were the opinions of the Evaluators and not international standards substantiated with evidence.

Participatory Approach to Workshops

Similar to the bottom-up approach, the Solidarity Center's participatory approach to the co-facilitated workshops was designed to first target those most affected by GBV at work – women workers. It followed the feminist participatory action research (FPAR) approach that amplifies women's voice, builds capacity, aims to shift power and fosters collective movements for change. Women-only spaces are critical for women to talk about issues that may be difficult for them to discuss in front of men, particularly given the inherent gendered power dynamics. Since

² Alison Evans and Divya Nambiar, *Collective Action and Women's Agency: A Background Paper*, Women's Voice, Agency and Participatory Research Series 2013: No. 4, The World Bank, 2013; The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, 2012; and The Solidarity Center, *The ILO Global Standard to End Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, including Gender-based Violence and Harassment: The First-ever Comprehensive Legal Standard*, June 2019.

³ Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon, "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in a Global Perspective, 1975-2005," *American Political Science*, 2012.

men also can be victims of GBV at work, future programming (as planned) will include education and training for men.

Efficiency

The project was designed as a pilot to assess the validity of the bottom-up approach to addressing GBV at work given the limited success of top-down approaches and to focus on the empowerment of both workers and SC staff members. Yet, the Evaluators sole method of measuring efficiency was an analysis of cost per direct beneficiary. The Solidarity Center respectfully offers that this is a rather narrow measurement, particularly of a pilot project; it is limited as it does not take into consideration all of the activities, the actual project outcomes or the achievement of objectives (under budget).

Achievements and Impact

While the Evaluation report highlights some of the achievements of the pilot project, the Solidarity Center respectfully offers that it undervalued their significance. While the SC achieved its objectives of strengthening the capacity of participants to combat GBV at work and to participate in the ILO process, the actions taken by them are particularly noteworthy. For a relatively small budget (EUR498,523), the impact is significant – documentation and reporting of instances of GBV that led to personnel disciplinary actions; advocacy for and attainment of language on GBV in collective bargaining agreements; inclusion of language proposed by participant in Convention 190; and continued awareness raising by the women workers despite the pilot project ending.

Recommendations

The Solidarity Center is pleased to see that many of the recommendations in the report mirror those included in the Solidarity Center's proposal for the next phase of programming. These include additional support and continued empowerment of in-country staff, incorporation of men as targets for awareness raising, and psychosocial referrals and support for participants who are victims of GBV.