

COLSIBA – Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana and Agro-industrial Workers Unions

A COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STRATEGY BASED ON OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Women workers from Latin American banana plantations met in San José, Costa Rica and in Puerto Cortés, Honduras in June and September 2004 respectively and we agreed to prepare and set up the **Platform for Industrial Action for Women in the Latin American Banana Sector (PRMB)**. Given that we women account for practically half of the population in the countries represented by COLSIBA, our aim was to integrate a gender equity approach into the clauses of collective bargaining agreements that help women workers in our organisations.



COLSIBA Women's Platform for Industrial Action, Ecuador 2012

Faced with disadvantageous situations and conditions as women workers, we set up the **PRMB** under the protections provided by the constitutional and labour rights in our respective countries and backed by international treaties such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, which has been ratified by each of our countries (Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama in 1980, Guatemala in 1981 and Costa Rica in 1984). This Platform provides a regional agenda for women worker to support our various collective bargaining negotiations at local level.

THE HONDURAS EXPERIENCE

Prepared by Iris Munguía, COLSIBA Coordinator and FESTRAGO Women's Secretary, with support from Gloria Guzmán

When we returned to our country after setting up the Platform we met with women union leaders, members of women's committees and female members of various trade unions in the banana sector. Our aim was to work out how we were going to put forward our proposals and get support from our male colleagues and other women. Together we agreed the following:

1. **Raise awareness** on the platform amongst more women on the plantations, enabling them to learn about the regional agenda.

2. **Capacity building** of our fellow women union leaders in collective bargaining strategies.
3. Make women aware of the need to have **women sitting on the negotiating bodies** in order to champion the clauses submitted at the preliminary stages of the collective bargaining process.
4. Hold meetings with the women's committee and male and female bosses from the packing department to **discuss women's needs and prepare clauses** using the PRMB as a guide.
5. Preparation of a document with **5 clauses** on: 1. The Crime of Sexual Harassment, 2. Non-discrimination of women who live with HIV/AIDS, 3. First aid kits containing sanitary towels, 4. Job stability for women and 5. Canteen management by the women's committee at the packing plants.
6. To **seek support** from union leaders and women members and share our proposals with the trade union Executive Boards.
7. Hold **meetings with the women's committees of each trade union**, with the aim that each committee should meet with women workers on each plantation so that the women could assimilate the content of the clauses and insist on being involved in the committee preparing the list of demands.
8. At our first attempt we did not get a single clause accepted. We tried again at the next contract discussions and, helped by our previous experience and better preparation, we sought out **male colleagues who would support our efforts** so that when it came time to negotiate we would get at least one clause accepted.
9. This time we insisted on having a woman on the negotiating body to champion the clauses we had proposed. Finally **getting women onto the negotiating body** was a huge step forward because for many years, indeed ever since the unions were set up, it has been the men who have been the negotiators.
10. At these second negotiations we only managed to get one clause accepted (the one on sexual harassment). This was not what we were expecting but we considered it a vindication of our efforts. Moreover, this success reinforced our **determination** to continue our involvement in the process and to make our male colleagues aware that we alone, as women, can champion our own specific needs.
11. In subsequent collective bargaining negotiations we kept up our efforts to exert our influence and we continued holding **regular meetings with women on each plantation** in order to find out which other clauses we could include in the next round of negotiations and getting women involved in standing up for themselves.

As women, we continue our involvement in the negotiating bodies and we go on fighting so that every time a collective contract is to be negotiated women's demands are included. SITRATERCO, STAS AND SITRAEASISA have secured clauses benefitting women, with a total of 8 clauses across the three unions.



FISTRAGO Womens Committee

THE GUATEMALA EXPERIENCE

Prepared by Selfa Sandoval Carranza, SITRABI Press and Promotion Secretary, COLSIBA Women's Employment Coordinator

'OUR EXPERIENCE IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING FOR SPECIFIC CLAUSES FOR WOMEN IN COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS, AS NEGOTIATED WITH THE DEL MONTE COMPANY (TRADING AS BANDEGUA) BY THE IZABAL BANANA PLANTATION WORKERS' UNION (SITRABI) '

The influence women have had on collective bargaining negotiations:

1. We **raised awareness** on the Platform for Industrial Action (which COLSIBA already had in place) with members of the **SITRABI executive board and groups of SITRABI members (men and women).**
2. We met colleagues from the women's committee and bosses from the packing sector to **discuss our needs as women** and we **prepared our own proposals** based on those discussions.
3. Once our proposals/list of demands had been prepared, we submitted them to the communications committee, which meets before the final submission of demands in order to **review which articles can be taken to the negotiating table.**
4. In 2004, we began **to formally submit our own draft agreements**, using the PLATFORM FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION FOR WOMEN IN THE BANANA SECTOR as a guide to draw up clauses for women. However, not one single clause from our proposal got passed on this occasion. At the next contract negotiations, we submitted another proposal but again we failed to achieve anything.
5. In 2010, we met colleagues from the women's committee and some male colleagues from the packing department and we discussed **the importance of having women involved in the collective bargaining negotiations** so that there would be someone championing our interests when negotiations were taking place but we only managed to get one woman to represent us at these negotiations.
6. We **prepared a new proposal** and submitted it to the negotiating body and the communications committee.

7. At the next meeting held **to elect the negotiating body**, we put forward our colleague, María del Carmen Molina Palma, to act as an observer but in fact she ended up being a negotiator. This was a fantastic experience for her and she did an excellent job at the negotiations, getting 5 clauses accepted. Of course, the clauses are not going to be accepted exactly as we would like but as our representative, she showed considerable skill in capitalising on particular clauses and exploiting the circumstances.

At the next contract negotiations in 2012, we again prepared another proposal and this time we managed to get another four clauses accepted.

In 2015, we again submitted our list of demands and got another clause accepted, evidence that we have been making progress and **gaining negotiating knowledge and skills** but we have realised how important it is to have skilled women leaders representing us in the collective bargaining negotiations.

It is also important to listen to the opinions expressed by some of our male colleagues, to guide all workers (men and women) on making good use of our advances, to have vision and to be aware of the strategies used by the bosses to undermine our skills.

Throughout this whole process, we had:

- A meeting with SITRABI executive board members.
- A meeting with the women's committee and bosses from the packing department.
- A battle to get women onto the communications committee and the negotiating body.
- An awareness campaign on the need for and importance of having women involved at the negotiating table.
- A guidance campaign on making good use of our advances.
- Sharing of information about the clauses for women we managed to get agreed as well as information about our obligations to make use of the rights we have gained.
- Regular meetings with the women's committee.
- A social partnership with some of our male colleagues.

TO DATE WE HAVE MANAGED TO GET THE FOLLOWING CLAUSES ACCEPTED:

1. An equity approach in the collective agreement (which we did not have before).
2. Two hours' breastfeeding for women who have given birth to twins or triplets.
3. An additional week's pay over and above the legal entitlement for women who give birth by Caesarean section.
4. A meal for International Women's Day.
5. When women are sacked during their probationary period because they have found the work physically difficult, they will have the chance to be re-hired.
6. Payment for washing the canvas aprons the women use in their work. The company used to pay an outside contractor Q 50.00 quetzals (US\$6.50) for each apron to be washed but now each worker is paid Q 2.58 (US\$0.34) to wash her own apron.
7. 25% salary adjustment in cases of maternity, common illness or accident.

8. Taking unpaid leave due to a child being sick will not affect their attendance record.
9. Whenever there are production shutdowns, the women will work calibrating fruit and testing it for ripeness.
10. Whenever the packing department is hiring, preference will be given to women applicants.
11. Q 8,000 (US\$ 1050.00) to celebrate International Women's Day.
12. A public holiday for Mother's Day (this is due to the government's Legislative Decree)

It is hugely satisfying for us women leaders at SITRABI to have had these successes. Over the course of many years of negotiations, we were unable to get anywhere but today a lot of women are benefitting from our collective bargaining gains.

It is worth highlighting some of the factors we women need to make these advances:

- To encourage women to get involved in the negotiating bodies
- To have class consciousness
- To have subject knowledge
- To have enough arguments to contest particular cases
- To be skilled
- To be dedicated and conscientious
- Teamwork
- To communicate well
- To have analytical skills
- To set up partnerships with our male colleagues
- To have a gift for persuasion
- Not to give up
- To have vision
- And, above all, to have confidence in ourselves.

THE COLOMBIA EXPERIENCE

Prepared by Adela Torres Valoy, SINTRAINAGRO General Secretary and Coordinator of the SINTRAINAGRO Women's Department.



The SINTRAINAGRO Women's Department

I would like to present our experiences as women involved in collective bargaining negotiations in the banana industry in Urabá, Antioquia region of Colombia. We, the SINTRAINAGRO Women's Department, have been able to get various agreements to benefit women across 288 banana plantations.

IMPORTANT FACTORS :

1. BEFORE NEGOTIATIONS: We did a participatory assessment at regional level to find out about the situation facing women at production centres. Based on our findings, we prepared an agenda for women in the Latin America banana industry.
2. DURING NEGOTIATIONS: We prepare women to participate in their local negotiating bodies, which are made up of both men and women, to put forward and fight for clauses specifically relating to women
3. AFTER NEGOTIATIONS: We continue to ensure that women are on the local negotiating bodies and have the capacity and support necessary to follow up the agreements reached.

We helped set up the industrial action platform in 2004 as a guide for our various collective bargaining negotiations. We then shared information about the platform with the union leadership to make them aware of its aims. We also ran workshops for the women worker so they could submit clauses to the bodies responsible for drawing up the lists of demands.

SINTRAINAGRO ACHIEVEMENTS IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

1. In 2004, we ran a campaign called '*Aceptamos Mujeres*' (Let's Accept Women) in the banana plantations and to get employers to employ a large number of women.
2. In the first collective bargaining agreement, we got the following clause included: *That there should be no discrimination on the grounds of age or gender when accessing work and everyone should be treated equally. There should be no requirement for candidates to fall into a specific age bracket in order to be considered for job vacancies.*
3. In later agreements, in order to contribute to the social development of women in Urabá and to improve their quality of life given the situation they face when accessing jobs, we negotiated for the companies to hand the canteen management over to women heads of household who are organised and trained in food handling. We also got an agreement for the women to make work clothing for the workers.
4. Between 2009 and 2011, we negotiated for the companies to take on, through their social foundations, the promotion and support for all training activities for organisations representing women heads of household to ensure the women were provided with work skills.
5. In 2011, we also negotiated for the companies to ensure they would hire one women per plantation on a 36 hour contract (6 hours per day) in order to increase the number of women working for them.
6. We have also negotiated for companies to ensure that they offer three days' work (based on a six-hour working day) when advertising for vacancies in the cutting and packing processes.

7. We also got the companies to agree that they would not require candidates in the selection process to fall into a specific age bracket in order to be considered for job vacancies

OTHER ACTIVITIES THAT HAVE SUPPORTED OUR NEGOTIATION POWER

- We have designed and implemented training processes with women workers on working rights, social rights, sexual and reproductive rights, family violence, family finances, human rights, working together, the right to freedom of association, etc.
- In order to find out about the reality and difficulties that women banana workers in Urabá and Magdalena face when accessing work, we did some research and ran a campaign on sexual and reproductive rights, resulting in a book entitled *Derechos y reveces : de las trabajadoras de la agroindustria del banano en Urabá* ("Rights and setbacks of women workers in the Urabá banana agro-industry").
- We have stood as candidates in local political elections, winning seats as councillors on local administrative boards and community action groups.



- We have taken part in national summits for elected women under the banner "Women Make a Difference"
- We have taken part in various national organisations such as the Colombian Women's Initiative for Peace (IMP), Public Women's Network (Red de Mujeres Públicas), the Women's Pacific Route, and working women's conferences.

This empowerment has also enabled us to take part in various international networks and events such as the IUF Latin American women's committee, the World Banana Forum, the EU funded Make Fruit Fair project and Fair Trade forums in Sweden, Germany and Holland.



'KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK SISTERS, OUR FIGHT GOES ON TODAY, TOMORROW AND FOREVER'