Project No. 3-4

Region: Africa
Country: Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda

Project:
SYNDICOOP: Poverty Reduction among Unprotected Informal Economy Workers through Trade Union – Cooperative Joint Action

Donors:
The Netherlands

Project Description:
The SYNDICOOP project has brought national trade unions and cooperative organizations together in four African countries (Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda) to develop a common strategy to organize unprotected informal economy workers. Built step-by-step, these sustainable partnerships have helped to reduce poverty through improving living and working conditions of women and men.

Operations are centered on project steering committees, assembling trade union and cooperative partners. From committee to implementation level, innovative and alternative approaches to creating gender equity in the workplace are applied. There is also a systematic approach to working with informal economy groups to organize them in cooperatives and trade unions. All efforts are linked to national PRSP processes with the aim of strengthening the social partners’ capacities to address the particular challenges faced by unprotected workers in the informal economy.

Dialogue between partners so far has revealed the following lessons:

- Trade union and cooperative dialogues lead to a rediscovery of common beliefs and goals of these two movements
- The organization of workers is an important first step towards securing improved conditions of work and income
- Trade unions and cooperatives have a mutually reinforcing role to play in the promotion and creation of decent work
- There is a need to strengthen governments’ capacities to address the decent work deficit in the informal economy

Results of the project to date include the following:

- Number of workers groups registered as cooperatives increased
- Trade union linkages and interaction with informal economy groups increased
- Informal economy workers’ awareness of the role of trade unions and benefits of collective representation increased
- Organization of informal economy workers intensified
- Revolving loan fund assisted group formation, group entrepreneurship and improved working conditions
- Gender sensitization made group approaches more equitable
- Newly established gender focal points in trade unions and cooperatives brought about gender mainstreaming
- Participant incomes increased.

Gender and Ethnic Components:
The SYNDICOOP project has a particular focus on gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of vulnerable women working in the informal economy. It has adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy with the aim of ensuring coordination among project partners on gender issues and to
make sure that women are adequately represented and included both as decision makers and beneficiaries. Together with the gender specialist of the project, the gender focal points appointed within the social partners themselves make sure that there is proper gender analysis and planning throughout all stages of project implementation and that gender equality tools are adapted to local conditions.

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