

Voices

STITCH TRAINING WORK IN CENTRAL AMERICA: REAL RESULTS!

STITCH'S CURRICULUM TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Identifying how we have been impacted by globalization in our unions, our labor relations and as women.
- Reflection on power and how we lead others
- Our union identities and struggles
- How men and women live sexist roles in our unions
- Alternative models of leadership
- How can we challenge agents of globalizations with our unions
- Changing accepted ideas of power

Women, Labor and Leadership Training Curriculum

Over the past four years, STITCH has spoken to our friends, allies and supporters about our training curriculum project. Leadership trainings (especially with a focus on women) are often dismissed as an activity that is not connected to union leaders' daily struggles and their actual labor rights work on the factory floor or in the fields. However, this project has had a profound impact on the women and unions that we work with in Central America. As we move on to the next stage of the project, organizing labor schools in each country, we think it is important to celebrate the successes of this important project.

History and Content

The project has been discussed for many years in STITCH but was truly launched at a meeting in February of 2004, when a group of our partners from Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala (representatives from El Salvador joined later) met to discuss what

they wanted to see in the curriculum. The group identified important topics including: Gender, Globalization, Women's Leadership and New Visions of Unionism. Once the staff had the topics, they built a training methodology that was unique and



Honduran women prepare their presentation on results of their collaboration with STITCH

used the best of popular education techniques from Central America to build a project and curriculum that included women's experiences and allowed our partners to have feedback at every step of the process. This time consuming method was vital to the success of the project, as STITCH wanted to ensure that we wrote a training that would be relevant and utilized by our partners. As we wrote the curriculum, we invited the labor

advisory group to meet with our staff periodically, test the trainings and make changes to the exercises. Then STITCH went to communities to test the trainings with rank and file workers to ensure that the trainings would have the impact we wanted.

STITCH also created resources on training methodology so our partners could write their own trainings in the future. Now that the curriculum project is complete and we are moving on to the next stage, STITCH

asked the labor advisory participants about the impact of their work with STITCH. Below is a direct quote from the participants and country reports follows.

In their own words...

"This project has helped us to learn to value ourselves as women. We have been able to use this information to integrate ourselves in the leadership structures (including the boards of directors) of our unions. We have inserted specific clauses in the collective bargaining

contracts that have benefited the women of our union, for example, permissions for paid time off for education, increased maternity leave, and equality of wages, salary adjustments and others. We have acquired knowledge that allows us to face and to solve a diversity of problems in our work, in our families and in our unions and organizations, for example to share tasks in the family and to have a voice and a vote in the assemblies of our unions.

We have built identification between women – sorority amongst women. Also, we have been able to train others on new topics. We have strengthened our ability to develop workshops by applying the theories of participatory methodology. “

Nicaragua

One of the most exciting developments from the curriculum project is the organizing of a new union during a STITCH training, in fact the union is named after the date of the meeting! In addition, the two members of the textile union federation that have attended the focus group meeting have reported that they have strengthened women’s voices in their union. They have both risen in the leadership of their union. They have also used the STITCH training in conjunction with their union’s literacy programs.

Guatemala

The women of the banana unions in Guatemala have been greatly influenced by the curriculum project. They have stated that the project gave them the skills to speak up in public, in their unions, and private spaces for their rights. Because of their participation, they have created a women’s committee at one plantation. One member of the labor advisory group is now on her union’s bargaining committee. In addition,

the last round of bargaining included a clause to either create a second women’s committee on another plantation or to set aside spaces for women leaders. The union has also begun to study how to include childcare in their next contract.

Honduras

The women of the banana and agricultural sector of Honduras have always been powerful in their unions and on their plantations. The women reported that they

were thrilled with the curriculum because it not only allowed them to build power individually but it also led them to increase their power collectively. The women, especially, in the banana sector, have long had women’s committees in their unions. They credit this training program with

The Power of Women is Union Power. Together we are able to fight.

Quote from Honduran Union Women

allowing them to strengthen networks regionally and nationally. The women of Honduras have felt that this process has allowed them to build their train-

ing programs for their full union as well as strengthening the base of their union. This process has also helped the union reach out more to the community. This year, the union women held marches in their communities to fight domestic violence. They have also worked hard to educate their members about breast and ovarian cancers and hold radio shows to educate their members. They plan on using STITCH’s materials on immigration to educate members

about immigrants experiences in the United States.

El Salvador

The team from El Salvador joined the curriculum project later in the process than many other countries, however, they are committed to building their union strength and increasing women’s leadership. The participants noted that because of their participation in STITCH they have felt confident enough to file a grievance against the owners of a sweatshop in their country. In addition, one woman who was recently elected as the president of her health-care union credits these trainings with making her take her leadership position more seriously and taking a stronger position with management.

United States

While women unionists from the United States were not a part of the labor advisory committee, through our immigrant rights program in the U.S. STITCH will use the curriculum with women Latina labor leaders—expanding its impact across borders and continuing our commitment to solidarity.

Next Steps

Stay tuned for from the country-wide training schools for women and stronger regional and global alliances.