



AUTUMN UPDATE 2004

Women, Labor, and Leadership Curriculum Project

What is the curriculum project?

Throughout our history, STITCH has provided training for women in Central America. These trainings afford them the skills they need to successfully organize labor unions in the factories and fields where they work. While we have been very successful in our training series, because of the limited resources of STITCH, we haven't been able to reach the thousands of other women in the region. That is why we decided to create a training curriculum or a manual for union leaders so they can become the trainers. This manual will allow labor unions or those interested in organizing a union to hold trainings for themselves, in addition to the trainings STITCH will continue to organize. And the workshops are specifically designed to recognize the challenges that face women in the labor movement in Central America.

What makes this training curriculum different from others?

Central American Women Direct It
STITCH knows that women workers know best what resources they need. We are working with a long-time ally, Miriam Cardona, a Guatemalan women's rights activist and twelve workers from Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to create an

accessible, flexible and thorough training manual to broaden women workers' ability to organize for their labor rights and to build their leadership within their unions.

Our labor advisors include women from the banana sector with the Honduran federation, COSIBAH, and the Guatemalan union, SITRABI; former maquila workers with the International Garment Textile and Leather Workers Federation; the coordinator of the Guatemalan maquila workers' center and a maquila worker from Nicaragua and member of Nicaraguan Textile Federation.

STITCH's Director of Central American Programs, Mary Bellman, began the process with some of our regional partners early this year to define the workshop topics. Our partners chose four main topics: Gender, Globalization, Women's Leadership and New Directions in Union Organizing.

It uses a participatory training style

It's not only the subject of the training that matters, it is also how the training is conducted that makes a difference. STITCH is committed to using a training style that respects the participants' expertise and knowledge gained through their daily lives and work. This style allows them to be a part of the training by using exercises and techniques that give them the space to find their own answers.

Not only are we writing the curriculum to utilize this style, we are also practicing this method during the planning process.

STITCH provided all of our advisors with training on popular education methodology, or how to structure a workshop methodologically, starting with a group's social experience with the topic and ending with a commitment to new practices. The participants, even those with more advanced training in education, were very excited about gaining these tools themselves.

“What we're developing with STITCH, well, we've never had this space before” – comment from anonymous evaluation of session

Next Steps for the Project

During our second regional meeting all of partners returned to review the first chapter of the training that focused on gender and how societal views of men and women's roles impact their ability to organize. Our partners will be involved in every step of the way. They have the ability to change, challenge, and mold the curriculum to ensure that it will best fit their needs and the needs of others who are organizing in Central America. Many participants have told us that they have never been so involved in a project before and they have never had their input taken so seriously.

During 2005, STITCH will continue to bring together these advisors to review chapters as they are completed. We will also begin field testing the trainings with unions in Central America.

This curriculum project is a new step for STITCH and will allow us to expand our

reach in Central America. It is also building the leadership of our partners in the region. For more information about the curriculum project, you can email us at stitch@stitchonline.org



Zoila Lagos (former banana organizer and women's rights organizer), one of the labor advisory members takes part in an exercise.

OTHER STITCH NEWS Global Women's Voices

Pushing Back, Women Workers Speak Out on Free Trade

STITCH presents a new publication that explores the impact of free trade on women workers in Central America and the United States. In their own words, these courageous women talk about their lives and their struggle to survive in—and challenge—an economic system that is stacked against them. This publication is bi-lingual (English and Spanish) and includes stories of women working in export clothing factories, healthcare, and agriculture.

To order your copy, go to our website at www.stitchonline.org; email stitch@stitchonline.org or call our office 202-265-3790.