

# SOLIDARITY CENTER

PROMOTING WORKER RIGHTS  
WORLDWIDE

**2013 ANNUAL REPORT**

**The Solidarity Center is a non-profit organization that works with unions, nongovernmental organizations and community groups worldwide to advance worker rights and achieve equitable economic development in countries where globalization has made the lives of vulnerable people even more precarious. It supports programs and projects—among them, trainings, education campaigns, legal aid, research, transparency initiatives—that help workers understand and exercise their rights, improve their working and living conditions and build independent unions. From July 2013 through June 2014, the Solidarity Center trained more than 150,000 working people, the majority of them women, in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.**

**The Solidarity Center’s mission is to help build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent and democratic unions.**

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ON THE COVER: Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU) member plants cabbage seedlings on a farm in Rustenburg, North West Province, South Africa. Photo: Jemal Countess.

At the Solidarity Center, we believe that all people who work should receive the rewards of their work—decent paychecks and benefits, safe jobs, respect and fair treatment. We believe that economic and social injustice around the world are neither intractable problems nor acceptable byproducts of a global economy where some can win at the expense of many. Rather, we believe working women and men can collectively improve their workplaces, call on their governments to uphold laws and protect human rights, and be a force for shared prosperity and inclusive economic development.

Our 221 professional staff work in 64 countries with more than 400 labor

unions, pro-worker nongovernmental organizations, legal aid groups, human rights defenders, women's associations, advocacy coalitions and others to support workers—in garment factories, home service, seafood processing, mining, agriculture, informal marketplaces, manufacturing, the public sector and beyond—as they exercise their rights, including organizing for safer worksites, demanding living wages, improving laws (and the enforcement of existing laws) that protect working people, and fighting exploitation and abuse.

We stand with workers as they defend their right to freedom of association.

We support them as they build representative unions and bargain for higher wages. We provide training that can help them take on societal ills such as child labor, human trafficking, unfair labor laws, infringement of women's rights, dangerous workplaces and exploitation. We link them with workers sharing similar struggles. We boost their advocacy efforts so that their campaigns resonate beyond borders. And we cheer when they score victories, changing their workplaces, livelihoods and communities for the better. Standing in solidarity with social-change activists, we strive to build a global network of worker rights defenders. This is our vision of democracy and justice.

## In 2013–2014, the Solidarity Center worked with allies in more than 60 countries.



# WHERE WE WORK



Around the world, workers face locally specific but often very similar challenges. Their ability to earn a decent living, exercise their rights and contribute to public discourse are increasingly constrained in an interconnected economy that values rock-bottom wages over a strong and participatory middle class. Four often interrelated trends in developing and developed countries are shaping work, often to the detriment of the people who do it:

**Informalization**, in which workers have no single employer, no contract, no set wage and no health care, pension or other benefits. The practice has turned good jobs into precarious work—and unstable employment into exploitation. Informalization disproportionately affects women, minorities and people who migrate, temporarily or permanently, in search of a better life.

**Anti-worker laws and local practices**, which effectively deny working people their rights, enshrine discrimination and

protect business interests over the safety, security and dignity of workers. Labor codes that permit poverty-level salaries, forbid freedom of association and tacitly or explicitly allow abuse are increasingly common and leave workers unable, or afraid, to seek redress.

**Gender inequality**, which relegates women to second-tier footing, with fewer rights and greater risk of abuse, destitution and violence. Millions of women live in poverty: They account for 70 percent of the world's poor.

**Labor migration**, which can offer important economic opportunities to workers from countries or regions where good jobs are few but can also be the path to exploitation, forced labor or human trafficking. More than 232 million people, nearly half of them women, are migrant workers, according to the International Labor Organization.

To tackle the political and economic inequality that arises from these

global forces, we partner with trade unions to support workers through organizing, bargaining, advocating and building collective voice. We are on the ground, providing technical expertise to workers and their unions, as they take on quality-of-life and life-threatening issues. For example, we assist unions trying to strengthen internal structures, including achievement of gender parity. We provide training in fundamental rights and local labor law. Our legal assistance programs help workers recover stolen wages or gain medical benefits when they are injured on the job. We help workers communicate with their elected representatives to advocate for pro-worker legislation and its enforcement. We help migrant workers connect to protective networks, decreasing their vulnerability. We provide health and safety trainings. And we work with women as they challenge the systems and organizations that deny them voice.

The following pages provide a look at our programs from July 2013 through June 2014.

Julia Carter, a domestic worker in Monrovia, Liberia, supports herself and two children with her wages. Photo: Bill E. Diggs



## Vulnerable Workers Get a Voice

The decline in formal jobs is a global trend. Working women and men in the informal economy—among them, day laborers, domestic workers, kindergarten teachers, sugarcane cutters and call-center workers—now comprise the majority of the workforce in many countries. But their numbers do not bring power. Instead, the informal economy often strips power and legal protections from workers, denies them decent pay and constrains their ability to demand decent, safe and secure work.

The Solidarity Center is part of a broad-based movement to help workers gain the knowledge and confidence to assert their rights and raise living standards. In 35 countries, we provide trainings and programs to help precarious workers better understand their rights, organize unions to mitigate job vulnerabilities, and learn to bargain for improved conditions and wages. We connect workers with unions, legal services and pro-worker

organizations to challenge exploitation. And we arrange exchanges among workers so they can share ideas and gain from experience.

In Mozambique last year, the Solidarity Center brought together organizers from Brazil's *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* (CUT) with the Mozambican national association of informal market vendors—*Associação dos Operadores e Trabalhadores do Sector Informal* (ASSOTSI)—to train organizers. Within months of the training, ASSOTSI organizers launched a membership campaign, fanned out to all 10 of the country's provinces and the capital city, and signed up more than 9,700 new union members, ensuring their right to decent work. They also formed 30 new committees at unorganized markets. ASSOTSI will represent vendors in disputes with government, mediate conflicts among vendors, assist with financial negotiations and organize

educational workshops. Women vendors will receive support though childcare, training and credit.

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At the Qalqilia Gate, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) reached out to workers crossing into Israeli and West Bank settlements, including women traveling for agricultural or domestic service jobs. Through round-the-clock availability and an onsite office supported by the Solidarity Center, PGFTU organizers provided workers with a variety of services, including job counseling; legal referrals for unpaid wages, medical treatment and employer reimbursement for workplace injuries; and education about labor rights.

A market vendor displays her produce at the central market in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Market vendors here are organized and represented by a Solidarity Center partner, FENAVEMER (National Federation of Market Vendors). Photo: Ricardo Rojas



## Legal Programs Level Playing Field

The law underpins economic, political and social spheres. Through its existence or absence, it governs the way people are treated on the job, how (or if) they seek redress and whether they can engage their government to improve working conditions and social benefits for all workers. The legal system can enshrine rights, regulate workplaces, provide the framework for bargaining and negotiating, and establish codes that protect workers and ensure their seat at the economic table. And in a global economy, workers also are often subject to rules that transcend borders, including international human rights law and trade and investment agreements.

Through our rule-of-law programs, we forge critical links among workers and labor and human rights lawyers at the

country level to develop cases that expand or better define laws covering worker issues, help workers navigate the legal system to resolve abuses such as wage theft, provide legal clinics for migrant and other workers, and support a country's legal community as it advocates for human rights and more just societies. Around the world, Solidarity Center legal programs help workers gain a more equal footing in dealings with powerful interests, to the benefit of all workers.

In Bangladesh last year, following the deadly collapse of the Rana Plaza building, we worked with Bangladeshi lawyers to file a civil case on behalf of the family of one worker killed in the incident. This first-of-its-kind lawsuit, currently winding its way through the court system, seeks just compensation

for the irreparable loss of the family's husband, father and chief breadwinner. It is a test case that could have long-term impact on vulnerable workers put into harm's way by employers.

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And in South Africa, we joined with the University of Witwatersrand's prominent law school and the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) to conduct litigation on domestic worker rights and work toward remedying the problem that South African domestic workers are not covered by occupational health and safety law in the same way as other workers.

Workers in Bangladesh protest on the first anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse, in which more than 1,100 garment workers died. Photo: Sifat Sharmin Amita



## Working Women Build Power

Women have long represented the majority of teachers, health care workers and public-sector employees—services fundamental to people's well-being. Less recognized is their essential role in the informal economy. Toiling as domestic workers, vendors, home-based piece workers or artisanal miners, women are paid low incomes and have few rights, even as their labor makes up a significant portion of national economies. At the same time, women retain primary responsibility for the care and survival of their families. In the home, at the workplace and even within union structures, women face persistent and pervasive discrimination. Achieving women's worker rights is essential to ending such discrimination, and gains for women, in formal or informal sectors, improve workplaces for all workers.

The Solidarity Center helps women workers build power to confront and challenge global systems that exploit

and discriminate against them in the workplace. Through Solidarity Center programs, women are joining and leading unions, advocating for themselves and their families, and standing up for the rights of all workers worldwide. We provide training and foster the leadership skills needed to give women a voice in their unions, in their workplaces and in the global economy. Tens of thousands of women have participated in these trainings in recent years.

In Mexico, the Solidarity Center launched a joint program in 2013 with the Border Committee for Workers (*Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s*, CFO), to connect women factory workers so that they could address common concerns, collectively strategize and eventually raise their voices to effect change in themselves, their homes and their workplaces. Over the course of the training program—Gender and Women's Empowerment for Action (*Género y el Empoderamiento*

*de las Mujeres para la Acción*, GEMA)—women discovered their collective power and took on inequality at home and work, facilitating mini-workshops, creating space for trust building and spearheading initiatives such as petitions to improve workplace conditions. One factory petition resulted in the company ensuring buses took women to their homes when they finished their shifts, instead of leaving them to walk for miles through darkness, as they had been doing.

Last year in Algeria, the Solidarity Center and the National Autonomous Union of Public Sector Workers (SNAPAP) trained a network of 32 women activists and formed the Regional Algerian Women's Legal Empowerment Network (RAWLEN). The women conducted study circles on fear, exploitation and women's legal and human rights in 12 provinces, reaching more than 600 marginalized and vulnerable women.

At a Gold Corp. mine in Mexico, massive mining trucks were painted pink to highlight the women operators who work there. Photo: *Mineras de Acero* (Women members of Mexico's National Union of Mine, Metal, Steel and Similar Workers, *Los Mineros*)



## Vulnerable Migrants Gain Global Support

Labor migration feeds the global economy. The overwhelming majority of the world's migrants travel in search of work—as domestic workers, construction and agricultural laborers, factory and service-sector workers, teachers and professionals. They often travel long distances and across borders in search of decent jobs that will allow them to support their families. However, as many countries have come to rely on migrant workers and their remittances, government officials and corporate interests have sought to “manage” the movement of migrants like everyday commodities. This maximizes profits over people, diminishes wages, worsens working conditions and limits the rights of migrant workers. And it increases the vulnerability of many migrants to human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage and involuntary servitude.

Through anti-trafficking and migrant worker rights programs, the Solidarity Center assists migrant workers before they leave their home country and after they arrive in another for a job. We raise awareness of the prevalence and causes of forced labor and other forms of labor exploitation, and join with partners from numerous sectors to combat the problem. We provide information on laws and rights in destination countries and bolster workers' access to justice. We support migrant worker networks that educate, organize and advocate. And we connect support groups across borders to increase protection for migrant workers en route and after arrival.

Last year in Bangladesh, a major origin country for low-wage migrant workers, we worked with unions and NGOs to foster understanding among potential migrants and their families of safe migration practices and ways to access assistance if needed. In destination

countries such as Jordan, we worked with organizations that assist trafficked migrant workers and networks that advocate for reform of the labor recruitment processes which lead to exploitation of workers. In addition, we coordinated with unions to identify trafficking victims and brought together migrant domestic workers to identify and support trafficked workers.

Ensuring that migrant workers are safe and well-informed also was a focus of our efforts in Kyrgyzstan, where we helped establish a unique legal clinic at the Kyrgyz National University's law school. The clinic, staffed by junior professors and promising students, provided free legal advice, language classes and information on legal rights and labor law in Russia, the most common destination for workers seeking jobs abroad. Last year, a hotline answered by two lawyers was added, providing a new level of support to families.

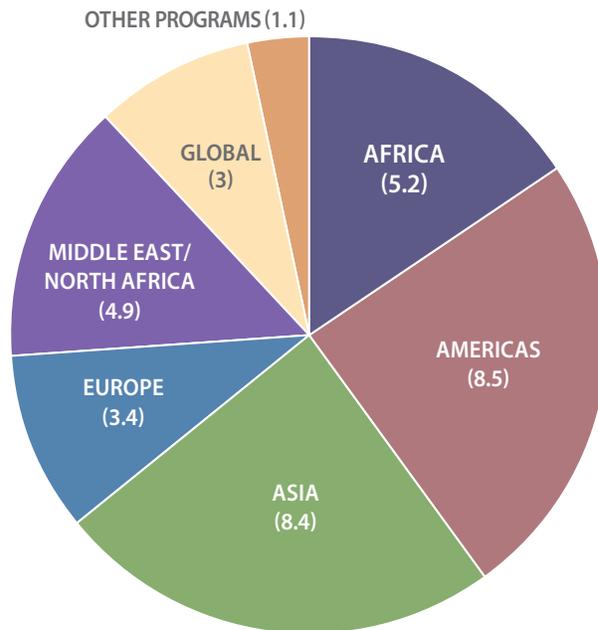
Burmese migrant dockworker in Mahachai, Thailand. Photo: Jeanne Hallacy

# Solidarity Center

YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2012, AND 2013

| SUPPORT AND REVENUE                                       | 2012                | 2013                |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| Federal awards  | \$31,247,492        | \$32,140,740        |
| In-kind contributions for federal awards                  | \$1,306,067         | \$1,233,113         |
| Other contributions (AFL-CIO, foundations and affiliates) | \$554,174           | \$678,140           |
| Other revenues  | \$197,194           | \$268,825           |
| <b>Total support and revenue</b>                          | <b>\$33,304,927</b> | <b>\$34,320,818</b> |

## FY 2013 REGIONAL SPENDING (\$ in millions)



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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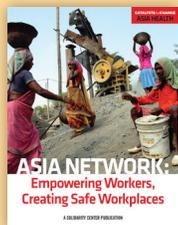
Lisa Humphries, Human Resources/Information Technology Officer

Michael Lawrence, Controller

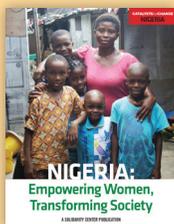
Lystia Santosa, Director of Finance

Darcy Wertz, Director of Operations

In 2013-2014, the Solidarity Center published two titles in the *CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE* series:



**ASIA NETWORK:  
Empowering Workers,  
Creating Safe Workplaces**  
*English, Spanish*



**NIGERIA:  
Empowering Women,  
Transforming Society**  
*English, Spanish*

In 2012–13, the Solidarity Center and its partners produced eight new studies under a multiyear research project focused on vulnerable workers and the informal economy, migration, gender and rule of law. The reports were funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

**Bringing Back the Heart: the Gender at Work Action Learning Process with Four South African Unions** (WIEGO)

**Restriction and Solidarity in the New South Africa: COSATU's Complex Response to Migration and Migrant Workers in the Post-Apartheid Era** (Rutgers University)

**Labor Movement Responses to International Labor Migration in Sri Lanka** (Rutgers University)

**Irreconcilable Differences? Pursuing the Human Development Approach within the Global Governance of Migration** (University of Guelph, Canada)

**Collective Bargaining in the Informal Economy: Street Vendors** (WIEGO)

**Precarious Work: the Case of Bolivian Women Workers in the Apparel Sector in São Paulo** (University of São Paulo, Brazil)

**Still Searching for Transformative Equality: A Comparative Study of Maternity and Work in South Africa and Ukraine** (Solidarity Center)

**Trade Union Leadership Taking Responsibility for Transforming Gender Relations** (Gender at Work)

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

**Africa Trade Unions and Africa's Future: Strategic Choices in a Changing World** (Solidarity Center)

**The High Cost of Low Wages in Haiti: Living Wage Estimate for Export Apparel Workers** (Solidarity Center)

**Current State of the Informal Economy in Tunisia as Seen through Its Stakeholders: Facts and Alternatives** (*Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail*)

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