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Following introductions, participants conducted an icebreaker in which teams built a small tower using dry spaghetti, matches, tape, and a marshmallow. The icebreaker was intended to provide an example of how to improvise and use the tools at hand to overcome obstacles by creatively working together as part of a collective or cooperative enterprise. Discussion of the icebreaker emphasized teamwork, participation, the difficulty or impossibility of arranging things on one’s own, and the need for teamwork to achieve what cannot be done individually.  The workshop leaders noted that influencing national policy important to workers and trade unions is a daunting task. Achieving that task involves addressing a variety of challenges. There are different methods and needs involved in doing this both within a country and also between different countries. How do other countries and groups deal with these challenges? How can we adapt what is used in other countries to struggles in our own country? A good way to start is to define our principles and values, which will help guide us in our own situation as we begin to address these issues.  A Parliament and Advocacy Toolkit in pamphlet form developed by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was handed out. The ZCTU uses the toolkit to assist union activists in developing and planning advocacy activities.  In a discussion of public policy and advocacy strategies, Mushongera noted that policy is a big word and can have different meanings. It can be a mysterious concept. Often it is unclear exactly who is forming or determining policy. Sometimes a country’s president can just make policy. Or a community can develop a policy through practice. For instance, an individually or privately implemented policy can become acceptable over time through common usage. On the other hand, policy can be an empty thing if it is not connected to something else and its meaning is not generally known and accepted. Participants discussed examples of different policies in Zimbabwe, China, and elsewhere involving a variety of issues where ideas are picked up by others and then become self-perpetuating.  Mushongera named the four “Ps” of policy development and advocacy: People, Policy, Position, and Participation. She asked: “What people are affected? Who are the key people?” She illustrated this concept with an example from Zimbabwe: A banker, who had many roles, who owned land, and was also a farmer, ended up losing his land because of the racial policies of the Zimbabwe government.  Policy and practice are not always the same, said Mushongera. There is no specific policy that dictates that people remain poor. But there are poor people. Poverty exists and is accepted, not through a poverty policy, but through economic and educational policies that contribute to and perpetuate poverty. Certain policies on religion and other issues can have a long-term and profound impact on traditional peoples. Gaps between rich and poor are affected by specific policies.  Participation involves people working together on a project, she said. In every situation where there is a problem, a position needs to be developed to address the problem, based on the values of the people participating in the project. This position and the activities of the people involved will sometimes be used to change, shift, or implement a policy, she explained. For example, in one case the government decided it was going to use a particular area as a dump. A bulldozer was brought in to prepare the site and plow under existing structures and land. However, demonstrators at the site stopped the bulldozer. Then the military and police were brought in to push the demonstrators off and to stop them from blocking the bulldozer.  The ZCTU’s toolkit includes a problem tree analysis, which can be used to analyze problems and develop a solution. The more time and effort put into analyzing a situation, the more sophisticated the analysis will be. Choosing and breaking down the problem to be analyzed are important in determining approaches to policy development and advocacy. It was pointed out that sometimes only symptoms end up being treated, so nothing gets changed because the core problem is not addressed. On the other hand, sometimes simply making a statement makes a point and helps further progress. A problem analysis or SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis is a way to address and solve problems.  For instance, informal workers often need adequate space to sell their wares. Why can’t they get this space, or why must they pay or offer bribes to get it? An analysis is needed in order to develop a campaign aimed at influencing these policies in favor of the workers.  It is important to watch interactions and developments in countries, said Mushongera. We need to follow events, such as economic issues, because they are often connected. We need to watch investments, how people are affected by different developments, and how policies influence these developments. But we also need to understand that policies that come out of these developments are interconnected.  In the broader economic picture, she elaborated, while Zimbabwe might have a higher GDP growth rate than that of Great Britain, Zimbabwe is much poorer. Zimbabwe might be a big country, but the British population is much higher. China has a fast-growing economy, and Chinese companies are coming to Zimbabwe, but they are not treating people in Zimbabwe well. These types of concerns need to be analyzed.  In Zimbabwe, the president stays in power against the will of the people, she went on. The powerful get to make the policies, even if the people don’t support them. The Zimbabwe opposition has chosen not to fight back with violence and guns because its leaders don’t believe in taking such actions. The forces that hold onto power want to maintain the status quo; the powerless and the weak want change. In Turkey, legislation was introduced to increase the price of bread to limit competition between big and small bakers. Progressives tend to support the informal workers who make the bread. The bigger bakers don’t care and don’t want competition. In other industries there is a similar situation, which exacerbates the income gap between rich and poor.  Participants then engaged in an exercise in which each named an important person, someone of great influence. The people named President Barack Obama, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, the head of Citibank, wealthy conservative industrialists the Koch brothers, Cambodia Prime Minister Hun Sen, Nelson Mandela, and Rupert Murdoch, among others. Discussion centered on analyzing who has real power and which of these individuals and which groups have the power to achieve their goals.  In Zimbabwe, for instance, workers and unions can exercise their power and rights through going on strike. However, powerful people and employers can go to the government and government ministries and request that the strike be declared illegal. Workers then have to go back to work or be fired. So the situation must be analyzed to determine where the power is and figure out what level needs to be influenced to achieve change, whom to target, and how to influence that person. To achieve a paradigm shift, we need to understand the power relationship and find out how to influence it. In Zimbabwe, a program for change campaign was developed. The word “change” was used in a different way and in different circumstances as a means of shifting the paradigm. A way needs to be found to shift the power relationship, to address fear, and to make the process more accessible.  Fear is a major factor, said Mushongera. Work needs to be done to get people to want change. Research is needed to provide the capacity and tools to negotiate and address power. For trade unions, using International Labor Organization (ILO) core standards is a viable method. We need to understand these standards and to be able to use them in negotiations, in dealing with power structures, and in empowering workers, she said. There cannot be justice without power, and the capacity to communicate among different groups and people is vital for the empowerment to innovate and achieve change.  Participants then discussed aspects of a “rights-based approach”: Are rights accessible even when they are given? For instance, if 15 percent of a budget is given for healthcare, it may not all be used effectively. It is one thing to have a right; it is quite another thing to achieve that right and actually enforce it. The Zimbabwe Parliament has a parliamentary information center. This center is supposed to be used to obtain constituent grassroots information and input. However, if the information center is located in a political party office, then people who are not part of that party will not be able to access or use the information center. Thus while many rights may be given to different people, if people don’t have access to those rights, they will not be able to get them enforced. For instance, rights are granted under the World Trade Organization. However, if people don’t know how to exercise those rights, they won’t really be able to use this instrument to achieve their policy goals.  Often, unwritten policies determine who gets big international loans and how power is exercised in this regard. As a result, the standards within this system will discriminate against some. Page 6 of the toolkit has a good description of what constitutes a good law.  The workshop concluded with a general discussion of the issues that had been covered. If informal workers are not paid, how do we go about getting them paid, since informal workers are not well organized? One example was an informal method of dues collection that was developed to encourage greater organization. Savings clubs are sometimes used to gather contributions as part of a larger group in order to accomplish the goals of informal workers. Since banking and financial systems are sometimes not adequately regulated, getting them regularized will help in obtaining payment.  Participants discussed the situation of informal fishermen in South Africa and elsewhere to determine:   * How the fishermen’s rights were being violated and how to resolve this problem. * The need to adapt and adopt laws aimed at regularizing benefits for informal workers. * How to develop a means of contributing and establishing a connection to a movement.   The way to increase the organization of informal workers is for them to passionately support this goal and for them to share in these values as a benefit to them, as opposed to a charitable approach, which will not encourage them to organize.  There was also a discussion of the large Chinese investment in Zimbabwe and Africa, how the ZCTU has reached out to Chinese workers, and what the reaction has been. A study was done on Chinese workers in Zimbabwe in several sectors to find ways for unions to become more involved. In some cases, political party agents have interfered and violated union rights. The ZCTU has tried to address this issue in parliament in order to apply pressure on those violating worker rights. Additional evidence of these worker rights violations is needed in order to pursue this matter at the ILO and other international organizations. | |  | | http://www.solidaritycenter.org/images/1px_spacer.gif | | |
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