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Spotlight interview with Jardélia Rodrigues (CUT Brazil - Decisions for Life)

"The stories and struggles of the women are strengthening me."

Jardélia Rodrigues is a Training Secretary for the Brazilian confederation CUT, in the Rio Grande de Sul region. She was approached by the CUT Women's Secretary and asked to join the Decisions for Life Campaign. Running in more than 12 countries all over the world from Brazil in the west to Indonesia in the east, the Decisions for Life campaign (<http://www.ituc-csi.org/decisions-for-life.html>) aims to organise young women and make them aware of their rights at work. In Brazil, the main issues are salaries, gender inequality and lack of access to the labour market for young women.

What kind of activities have you been organizing for the Decisions for Life Campaign?

- I have been active in organising workshops and trainings for young women in Brazil. The activities we have been organising for the Decisions for Life campaign are somewhat different to the normal activities we do. These are much more tailored to suit the needs of young women. At a national level, CUT has not fully joined the campaign yet. But I am happy to say that there is now an interest within CUT also to make this campaign national. We decided to start with the services sector for Decisions for Life. We asked unions and organisations for applications, and we got so many we had to choose! There was interest from many different sectors.

What has been the focus for your workshops and training?

-The topics have mainly been around salaries and gender inequality and other questions related to conditions and rights at work. We have developed a "My Wage" website in Brazil, and we have included training in how to use it in the workshops. This is one of the specific outcomes of the Decisions for Life campaign.

-In the workshops we have been focusing on explaining the different conditions for men and women in the workplaces. We use statistics as a base for discussion, and this always provokes a heavy debate. They are shocked when they learn the differences, and they want to know why the gender gap in salaries, for example, is so big. And now we have seen yet another issue coming up, the fact that there is a big difference in salaries also for black versus white women, where black women earn the least of all.

What are main struggles young women face in Brazil?

-Regarding the labour market it is mainly about working conditions and pay. The unions still need to bargain for equal pay between men and women.

-It is really difficult for young people to get a job. And it's specifically difficult for young women. Many young women work in the informal sector, and they struggle to get a decent job in the formal sector. Another problem is the skills of many young people who don't do any

education beyond the secondary school, and this doesn't make them attractive in the labour market, and they cannot be self-supporting.

How do you reach the young women outside of the workshops?

-I don't think so many of them would go to the websites specifically to look for information from Decisions for Life, but we can reach many through the social media applications. This is a really effective way of reaching people.

-In Brazil the traditional social media website has been Orkut, but now more and more people are using Facebook, so this is where we will focus our efforts. Orkut is no longer recruiting new members, but Facebook is. I am a member of the Decisions for Life Facebook page, and I can now easily inform myself about what is happening in the campaign. Facebook also has some features that don't exist on Orkut, like causes for example. Other social media we use are YouTube, Twitter and MSN.

What has Decisions for Life brought you personally?

-This campaign has brought me possibilities of working with women in training sessions. I now know the women's stories and struggles. These stories are strengthening me, and that includes being capable of taking informed decisions about my own life.

Now that you have been in the Decisions for Life conference for three days here in Amsterdam, and met with some hundred other women, what are you taking with you from here?

-Again, the stories about these women, and the decisions they make - all these women that struggle on a day-to-day basis. I will especially remember the story of the South African woman who is HIV-positive. Her story really touched me; her story is very, very important also to see how she deals with it. She seems to be a woman who is able to change other women's lives.

Interview by Kristin Blom

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