

**FEDERATION OF FREE WORKERS**  
**POLICIES AND PROGRAMS RELATED TO DECENT WORK**



Philippine Social Institute  
Federation of Free Workers  
FFW Bldg., 1943 Taft Avenue, Malate 1004  
Manila, Philippines  
Tel. (++632) 5259801; Fax: (++632) 4006656  
Email: [acasper1951@yahoo.com](mailto:acasper1951@yahoo.com)

*September, 2006*

# FEDERATION OF FREE WORKERS

## POLICIES AND PROGRAMS RELATED TO DECENT WORK

### Background

Established in June 1950, the FEDERATION OF FREE WORKERS (FFW) formally adopted in May 2001 on the occasion of its 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention the theme **“Promoting Decent Work in a Borderless World”**, to guide its policy and action program for the period 2001-2006.<sup>1</sup>

The theme encapsulates more than five decades of struggle to improve working conditions, in the beginning through unionism, collective bargaining, legislative action, social action and tripartism in the formal sector.

In the latter years, starting in 1978, the FFW expanded its membership among non-traditional trade union sectors beginning with the youth, when the Young Free Workers (YFW) was founded.

Revitalizing the women program came next as a succession of women’s group initiated and strengthened the integration of women workers in trade union activities. This culminated in 1994, when the FFW Women’s Network (FWN) was permanently established. Since then, the gender dimension in FFW’s trade union activities was enconced as a policy, resulting in the increasing participation of women workers in local, industrial and national structures and activities of the FFW.

At the same time, since 1978, the FFW went back to its original structure as a grouping of industry-wide unions, to reinvigorate industry-based common activities of its local membership. By the 1980’s, eight trade federations or industry wide groupings of unions were re-formalized and were given permanent representation in the highest structures of the Federation

With equal intensity like that in the sector of women and the youth, FFW started to consolidate its membership in plantations and forestry then widened its coverage to include farmers and fisherfolks. Currently, FFW enlists into its membership some 10 community-based women’s workers’ association and cooperatives and 10 province-wide association of farmers and rural cooperatives in 6 provinces.

---

<sup>1</sup> In its 22<sup>nd</sup> National Convention in May, 2006, the FFW adopted the theme: “Affirming a Legacy: Building the Capacity of a Trade Union-Social Movement for Decent Work”. The new theme absorbs the uncompleted plans and programs of the past National Convention and emphasizes in the new cycle strengthening the capacity of the FFW to act as a trade union-social movement.

## Reverses

However, economic restructuring, corporate closures and losses in certification elections decimated its membership in the forestry sector while plantation unions, primarily in sugar, was whittled down by the continuing economic slide of the industry.

Meantime, when the Philippines acceded to the WTO in 1995, followed by the Asian financial crisis in 1997, FFW's dues-paying membership in the traditional and formal sectors of the economy began to slide downwards. Corporate closures, down-sizing, outsourcing and relocation were primarily responsible for this decline.

## Revitalization

The reverses provided the impetus for FFW to accelerate its expansion among the informal sector workers and in the rural areas, incorporating into its trade union membership and structure, as fast as possible, the displaced formal sector workers who started to flock into the informal sector of the economy on account of the scarcity of jobs in the formal sector. In a parallel move, associations of farmers and fisherfolks in rural communities, women included, were consolidated while new members from these sectors started coming into the Federation.

To all these challenges the FFW responded, and actions finally found their structural basis when in 1998, the FFW Constitution and By-laws was radically amended to formalize its character as a trade union-social movement, accepting into its fold workers not only in the traditional and formal economy but also among workers in the non-traditional and informal sectors.

The FWN was recognized as a basic sector organization and was given permanent representation in the FFW Governing Board equally with the eight trade federations. Other basic sector organizations – farmers and fisherfolks, the youth and organizations of informal sector workers can now have equal representation as soon as they achieve the requirements of a basic sector organization.

## Moving Forward

During the 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention, in May 2001, the old programs were strengthened and new ones were launched, under the theme of promoting decent work. In that National Convention, the four pillars of ILO's Decent Work concept found expression in the FFW's trade union policy and program of action.

In the next year, a new workplan started to evolve, which was finalized in late 2002. The new workplan focused on capacity building for the grassroot member-organization up to the apex structures of the FFW to make result-oriented plans that are defined, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the members themselves.

This result-oriented planning, monitoring and evaluation (ROPeME) mobilized the grassroot members to undertake activities that would improve the levels of 'decent work' in their workplaces; that would marshal the available resources of the FFW in promoting the four pillars and six dimensions of decent work in the policies and programs of the nation.

## **POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ON DECENT WORK**

### **Sector 1: Promotion and Realization of Core and Priority Labor Standards**

In this sector, the FFW:

- is part of the Decent Work Country Programme: Philippines,<sup>2</sup> a common program of the social partners that focuses on promoting the various dimensions of decent work in national policies and programs.
- is promoting greater awareness of core and priority international labor standards among its members and applicant members through seminars, conferences and research studies, as well as defining gaps in their implementation, thus making ratification more congruent to the letter and spirit of these core and priority conventions.
- joins the social partners in advocating for the ratification by the Philippine Government of ILO Conventions related to forced labor, rural workers, migrant labor, seafarers and maritime, employment, occupational health and safety, human resource development, social security.
- is an active partner in the IPEC-sponsored program to eliminate child labor in the Philippines and has working arrangements with the IPEC for FFW's project in the elimination of child labor in a mining area in Diwalwal in Mindanao and in promoting awareness among its members to combat the ill-consequences of domestic child labor.
- is an active member of civil society networks that promote awareness of core and priority labor standards and that undertake actions for implementing specific activities along the decent work framework, such as with: the Labor Agenda Group, an inter-union grouping focusing on synthesizing a coherent labor agenda around the decent work framework; the Asian Labor Network on IFIs (ALNI), a trade union-led civil society group focusing on lobbying the IFIs to adopt and promote core labor standards and decent work in all their policies, programs and projects.
- lobbies for the amendment of the Labor Code of the Philippines to align it to international labor standards and to the six dimensions of decent work, guided by the

---

<sup>2</sup> The FFW is part of the original group that adopted and implemented the first Decent Work Country Program in 2002 and the second cycle program of 2005-2007. The second cycle program has been adopted by the Tripartite Industrial Peace Council as its own, where FFW is represented.

*12 Propositions for a Cooperative Labor Relations* that was adopted by the 21<sup>st</sup> National Convention

## **Sector 2: Creation of Greater Opportunities for women and Men to Secure Decent Employment and Incomes.**

Other than through collective bargaining in 250 enterprise-based unions nationwide and 40 cooperatives, the FFW has initiated and formalized programs and projects to secure decent work for its members, such as:

- The formation of the National Employment and Enterprise Development Association (NEEDA) and the establishment of the FFW Employment and Enterprise Development Services (FEEDS). The former provides the organizing framework for informal sector workers to associate themselves in order to promote their economic and social interest. The latter is a structured office that provides new services connected to developing employment opportunities and entrepreneurship training for displaced or to be displaced workers as well as for union members who are establishing family-based micro and small scale enterprises. The services are also open to accession by farmers and fisherfolks and for their families as well.

FEEDS also started a program for employment placement of displaced workers, including employable family members of unionists and unemployed or informally-employed workers. This has been upgraded in February 2006 into a Public Employment Service Office (PESO), a program on employment facilitation of the Department of Labor and Employment.

- An operational garments cooperative run by women workers who have been displaced in a particular garment company that closed shop, currently producing and engaged in subcontracting work for low-end and locally-marketed garments,
- To further support these efforts, the FFW maintains a two-million peso Social Credit Fund (SCF)<sup>3</sup> that lends capital to member-organizations which are initiating or have established livelihood and micro-lending projects. This Fund is open to organizations of unions and cooperatives within the fold of FFW, which credit they can access at lower-than-market interest rates. The SCF has a built-in common guarantee and reserve fund whose proceeds are invested to enlarge the fund and to protect it from incidences of default payments.

For the informal sector, FFW has accessed a project of the DOLE in the amount of five hundred thousand pesos, which is used in re-lending without interests to members of the NEEDA who are displaced workers and who are into livelihood projects or micro and small enterprises. This will be enlarged from a fund raising program of the NEEDA from which amount an interest-bearing lending program is to be developed.

---

<sup>3</sup> The seed capital of the Fund was contributed by the World Solidarity Movement (WSM). FFW member unions and cooperatives also access micro-credit from the Kaunlaran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc. or Workers' Fund, where FFW officers sits as Board of Trustees together with trade union officers of YUCP and LMLC.

- FFW-Philippine Social Institute's (PSI) training for prospective call center agents, making use of a 100-hour, TESDA-approved training regulation, in cooperation with the *Kaunlaran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc. (KMPI)*<sup>4</sup>, including the placement of graduates in call center companies. Additionally, FFW-PSI links union members and the members of their families to available public facilities on technical education and skills development.
- Meantime, the Inter-Trade Federation Council continues to promote collective bargaining, particularly in respect to responding to the challenges of contractualization in the workplace, to promoting productivity and preservation of jobs, to improving occupational safety and health (OSH) and adjustment measures in case of mergers and acquisitions or corporate closures. This is done through capacity building of local unions, particularly in respect to the training and exposure of union negotiators and para-legal advocates where militants gain competences to negotiate collective bargaining agreements and handle legal cases on their own that do not need the specialized skills of lawyers.

In respect to promoting productivity,<sup>5</sup> a research study has been undertaken with the assistance of the ILO on the best practices of FFW-unionized establishments, which results are now being used to increase awareness of workers and unions on the need for improving productivity at firm level in aid to preserving jobs, and increasing the competitiveness of firms from which better economic and political benefits can be negotiated.

### **Sector 3: Social Protection**

- Collective Bargaining remains the main plank of FFW's program to improve social protection for its members. CBA clauses on occupational safety and health, retirement plans, life and accident insurance, health insurance and death benefits have become standard CBA provisions that are improved every time a CBA is renewed.

Economic constraints and financial affordability of firms limit the amount of benefits but FFW deems it important that CBAs should incorporate these schemes in the clauses of negotiated collective agreements of its local affiliates in the formal sector. Further, extension of these benefits to workers displaced by corporate restructuring has been negotiated, although for limited duration of from three months to two years.

- For the informal sector workers and farmers and fisherfolks, a link-up is being established with the PAKISAMA Mutual Benefit Plan, a Social Reinsurance program developed by PAKISAMA for its farmer members. The benefits, although much lower

---

<sup>4</sup> The FFW has accessed the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority's (TESDA) training vouchers under the PGMA Training for Work Scholarship Program

<sup>5</sup> FFW is also a founding member of the Philippine Employer-Labor Social Partnership, Inc. (PELSPI), an Ngo devoted to establishing Social Partnerships for Decent Work, Productivity and Competitiveness.

than what CBAs provide, nevertheless, give a modicum of health and death benefits for insured members.<sup>6</sup>

- Through the social housing project of the KMPI where FFW officers sit as Board of Trustees, a number of FFW members have acquired houses and lots, making use of their housing credit privileges under the *Pag-Ibig Fund*, a national public provident fund.
- FFW is also running program on work-life balancing through reproductive health and responsible parenthood. Orientation and awareness seminars are carried out in respect to reproductive health and responsible parenthood within the framework of balancing work and family responsibilities.
- In the area of occupational safety and health, collective bargaining agreements and labor management councils have established health and safety committees. To improve union capacity for OSH, an inter-TF program on Basic Orientation on Safety and Health (BOSH) has been undertaken in cooperation with the Occupational Safety and Health Center of the DOLE. To support and sustain this program, the trainees have been organized in a Federation-level OSH Advocates that monitors the re-entry plans of trainee-participants and evaluates their needs for further training. The OSH Advocates forum also serves as a medium for exchanging experiences and as a policy-formulating body in support of FFW's broader advocacy for OSH.
- At national level, FFW alone or in conjunction with other groups, continue to advocate for improvements in established social protection schemes in respect to their coverage, benefits, premium payments and governance. FFW leaders have been appointed to the Social Security Commission since 1998.

#### **Sector 4: Tripartism and Social Dialogue**

- Training of local union negotiators, shop stewards, grievance handlers, para-legals, and union administrators continue unabated from a program that was started in 1965 and sustained all through the years. Basic courses or orientation on trade unionism is conducted every Saturday for members.
- FFW has a 40-year-long running program of promoting tripartism and social dialogue. Established in 1965, its Philippine Social Institute (PSI) has developed a structured training program for labor education and trade union-related skills training for unionized workers in the formal sector. Year in and year out, FFW orients members on the general aspects of unionism emphasizing both rights and responsibilities of workers in the workplace and as citizens. Officers and activists are trained in the various skills of unionism: organizing, collective bargaining, shop stewardship, grievance handling, trade union administration and leadership.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> FFW officers also sit as members of the Board of Trustees of the Center for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (CARRD), an NGO specializing in agrarian reform and rural development.

<sup>7</sup> FFW also runs basic courses and orientation on unionism for its members and prospective members every Saturday under its program of *Aral at Gabay para sa Obrero tuwing Sabado* (AGOS).

In addition, FFW is often invited to send participants to training programs conducted by Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the Department of Agriculture (DA), as well as by the academe, such as the UP School of Industrial Relations (UPSOLAIR), the Ateneo School of Government (ASG), the Institute for Social Policy of the Ateneo de Manila University, the Institute of Social Order (ISO) and the Angelo King Institute of the De La Salle University (AKI-DLSU).

A new aspect of this training program is the effort to put these “social skills” under a competency-based training, assessment and certification scheme, together with the continuing training of labor educators in order to increase the capacity of grassroots leaders and organizations to respond to their own training needs.

This long-running program is partly supported by solidarity links with the WCL and BATU on one hand and with the ILO on the other. In both respects, selected members and officers benefit from international education and training programs of the WCL, BATU, ILO, KAF, USAID, AUSAID. Thus, FFW officers are fairly exposed to international issues and how these are resolved at the global, national and local levels.

- Tripartism has the FFW involved in policy, planning and implementing bodies bearing tripartite character and composition. FFW officers sit as labor sector representatives in permanent national and regional tripartite bodies such as the Tripartite Industrial Peace Council (TIPC) and its regional and industrial bodies since 2001, Social Security System (SSS) since 1998, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA: national, regional and provincial) since 1994, the Regional Wage and Productivity Boards since 2000, the National Peace and Order Council (NPOC) since 2003. Too, FFW has been an annual participant in the International Labor Conference (ILC) since 1954, either as worker delegate, alternate or observer.<sup>8</sup>
- In respect to social dialogue, FFW maintains its links with groups of employers, civil society organizations, academe, and labor groups. FFW is invited and participates in meetings, conferences and training conducted by a variety of global and national public and private sector organizations on topics generally concerning labor and social policy but also in social dialogues concerning economic and social development in general, and in trade, finance, governance, peace and order in particular.

FFW has participated and expressed its views in various global fora called by the United Nations’ bodies and international non-governmental organizations conducting parallel conferences during these events. In the local scene, the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) involve the FFW in their consultation meetings, either for the purpose of determining their country assistance strategies or to undertake consultative meetings required by their respective charters.

---

<sup>8</sup> Other tripartite bodies where FFW Officers sit as labor sector representatives include the Technical Working Group and National Coordinating Council of the Decent Work Country Program since its inception in 2001 until it was transferred to the TIPC in 2006; the National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC) since its establishment in 1965 until it was merged in TESDA in 2004, The WTO-AFTA-APEC Commission since 1996 until it was demobilized in 2003, the Philippine Association of Voluntary Arbitrators (PAVA)

At national level, FFW is invited and attends summits, high-level meetings, conferences and other fora called by public bodies, which result in social accords, framework agreements or memorandum of understanding by the participating organizations to carry out action programs or define social and economic policies for the country.

This aspect of FFW activities is consolidated by the Research, Project Development and Advocacy Office (RPDAO) that increasingly engages the FFW in the formulation of social and economic policy, programs and activities for its own implementation or as basis for advocacy and cooperation with the social partners.

## **Conclusion**

FFW finds that the Decent Work concept is an active framework that can define comprehensively a trade union program for engagement with the social partners. It is a concept whose dimensions are congruent with FFW's basic principles, particularly in promoting human dignity and realizing dignity at work.

While FFW will focus on specific aspects or dimensions of decent work in the future, its policies, programs and activities will be underlined by the precepts that decent work stands upon, always with the thought that the realization of decent work will engage it in the continuing struggle of workers and their trade unions to defend and promote their economic and social interests and to ever realize both the subjective and objective purpose of human work.