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Internationaal

Stories of Change

*from workers in cashew,
mining and palm oil*

Côte d'Ivoire • Senegal • Cambodia
Indonesia • Vietnam • Colombia

**100%
FAIR
WORK**

Stories of Change

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Story of Change Côte d'Ivoire

Survey results revealed nearly 75% didn't know where to find help in case of digital workplace harassment

**“I didn't know where to turn.
Now I know I'm not alone.”**

In Côte d'Ivoire, workplace violence and harassment increasingly occurs online. Workers face harassment, threats, and public humiliation through WhatsApp and social media, yet many do not know where to turn for help. Silence is common, driven by fear, stigma, and lack of information.

Orange the world

“Many workers didn't know where to find help for gender-based violence, so we combined data collection with awareness-raising during the Orange the World campaign,” explains Dofra Sekongo, member of the Executive Committee of our union partner CISL Dignité.

“He spread lies about me in a professional group with my colleagues and supervisors. My reputation was destroyed in a few hours.”

Womens' testimonies

One shared, “Even when I blocked the number, another one was used. It never stopped.” Others told how “private photos were shared in WhatsApp

groups”. These experiences show how digital violence directly impacts safety, dignity, and work environments.

“I'd heard of help lines, but I didn't know much about them... and I wasn't sure they could help with digital violence,” one worker explains. “This information needs to be shared in our unions and workplaces.”

Support and impact

With support from CNV Internationaal, CISL-DIGNITÉ launched an anonymous digital survey during the 16 Days of Activism in 2025. In just six days, more than 135 workers shared their experiences. The results revealed nearly 75% didn't know where to find help when faced with digital gender-based violence.

Nex step

This evidence instigates the union to integrate awareness, data collection, practical guidance and sharing information on support services.



“The messages started as compliments, then became persistent, then threatening. I was afraid to open my phone. But now I can speak out.”

Story of Change Senegal

From 150 to 27 daily workers at
COGEKA/KIRENE

“Before, just seeing HR was difficult, now we can speak up.”

At Cogeka Kirene, a mining and quarrying company in Senegal, most workers were on daily contracts and had no formal representation. Communication with management was almost non-existent, while working conditions were hazardous, with constant exposure to dust and harmful substances. Workers had no recognised space to raise concerns or defend their rights.

“Many things changed after the training,” a worker says.

In 2025, worker representatives were elected for the first time, and a formal dialogue structure was established. The union now negotiates working conditions, wages, and health and safety.

The number of daily workers fell from over 150 to just 27, with plans to transition these 27 also into permanent roles.

“Since the union was established, communication has improved... it is a real step forward.”

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal supported UDTS to strengthen social dialogue and enable workers to organise, while engaging the company in constructive discussions. Workers were supported to organise, leading to the creation of their first union: SUTIMEXS

Today, 396 workers benefit from stronger representation, improved dialogue, and a safer path towards decent work.



“For the first time, we were able to choose representatives we trusted to speak for us,” union leader **Demba Ndiaye Biavogui** confirms.

Story of Change Côte d'Ivoire

From talking *about* workers to talking *with* workers

Social dialogue becomes a strategic choice in the cashew sector

The cashew sector in Côte d'Ivoire is economically important but characterised by informal labour relations and limited structured dialogue. In many companies, tensions are only addressed once they have already escalated. CILAGRI Cajou now chooses a different approach: Investing in dialogue before conflicts arise.

A turning point in leadership

During a regional training by CNV Internationaal and Dutch employers' organisation PUM, the Managing Director of CILAGRI Cajou realised that effective social dialogue requires real worker participation. Subsequently, she immediately invited the company's head worker representative to the training. The very next day, he joined the session in Benin—at the company's expense.

From insight to action

After the training, CILAGRI Cajou decided to change their approach, now focusing on prevention. They

organised an internal training for HR, team leaders, and worker representatives. Workers shared real-life workplaces experiences in practical sessions, expectations were discussed openly, and concrete agreements were made.

Building trust and structure

For the first time, issues were discussed before frustrations escalated. This resulted in regular dialogue meetings, clear contact points and accessible ways to raise concerns.

Support and impact

Now workers feel heard and better able to contribute, while management has tools to prevent conflict and strengthen trust. CNV Internationaal's training and strategic support strengthened social dialogue in Côte d'Ivoire.



"A sustainable company is built on workers who are listened to, trained, and engaged."

Cynthia Niamoutie, General manager of CILAGRI CAJOU

Story of Change Cambodia

325 workers, including 186 women, gain access to improved welfare schemes

“Now we feel protected at work”

“I used to worry every day,” says a worker (anonymous) at a palm oil plantation in Sihanoukville province. “The work is hard; and if something happened, there would be nowhere to turn.”

For many palm oil workers in Cambodia, uncertainty is part of daily life. Working at plantations located far from health services, they face serious safety risks. Women, in particular, perform physically demanding work without adequate safeguards.

Lack of proper protective equipment

These challenges were visible at plantations owned by the Mong Reththy Group. Many workers lacked proper protective equipment, healthcare access was limited, and coverage under national social security schemes was weak.

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal supported local partner unions to conduct workplace safety assessments and how to use the findings to

engage employers, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, and the International Labour Organisation ILO.

Through continuous dialogue and advocacy, progress followed. In 2025, 325 workers - including 186 women - gained access to improved welfare schemes, including healthcare, protective equipment, social security enrolment, and greater job security.

Change also reached the national level. In October 2025, our partner union CLC joined the National Committee on occupational safety and health, strengthening workers' voices across the country.

The local unions were also supported to train workers and union leaders on safety standards, social protection, and to learn how to write letters to formally request improvements.



“Now we know our rights, without union support, things would not be possible”

(Anonymous worker)

Better conditions and a voice at the table for more than 3,000 palm oil workers

Hukatan's long road to fair, inclusive CBA negotiations

This is the story of Tohonan, Head of Hukatan North Sumatra, and thousands of workers at palm oil company PT Bakrie Sumatera Plantations (PT BSP) in Kisaran. "For years, decisions about our work were made without us," Tohonan says. "That is not how a collective agreement should work." "In the past, collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) at PT BSP were negotiated centrally, without meaningful involvement from plantation-level unions. Despite a 2018 government confirmation that this structure wasn't legal, practice continued." For CNV Internationaal's partner union Hukatan, this was unacceptable.

The right to be heard

Through capacity building, legal awareness, and collective action, the workers mobilised. "We wrote letters; held dialogue, protests, and strikes, demanding one simple right: To be heard", says Tohonan.

"A breakthrough came in 2023 when PT BSP agreed to negotiate directly with Hukatan and other on-site unions. Hukatan retained existing benefits while also securing key improvements, including rice allowances linked to local prices and stronger occupational health and safety provisions, such as employer responsibility for protective equipment."

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal supported the union to strengthen their organising and negotiation strategies.

"For nearly 3,000 workers, the new CBA agreement meant more than better conditions," underlines Tohonan, "it meant recognition, representation, and a voice at the table."

The next step

To further strengthen future CBA agreements CNV Internationaal has developed the CBA benchmark.



"We now have a real seat at the table."

Tohonan, Head of Hukatan union in North Sumatra

Sainudin now travels long distances between many plantations to represent the workers

From trafficked migrant worker stuck in debt, to leader of the first union in the area

When Sainudin migrated from Indonesia to Sabah Malaysia Sabah in 1999, he was promised decent work on a palm oil plantation. Instead, he says “I became trapped in debt. After paying recruitment fees, my wages were cut to less than one US dollar per month. I managed to escape and returned to Indonesia. Only years later did I realise I had been trafficked.”

Life continued to be harsh and uncertain. I survived by taking any job, including bricklaying, selling street food, working in restaurants, and even cultivating seaweed along the coast.

I knew something had to change

A few years later, in 2014, I was working as a harvester at palm oil plantation PT Sebakis Inti Lestari PT SIL in Nunukan, a remote border district on Kalimantan near the border with Malaysia. There I helped establish Hukatan, the first trade union in the area.”

Despite having only an elementary school education, Sainudin continues

his efforts for the union. He travels long distances between plantations to represent the workers.

Dismissed after leading a strike

In early 2025, another leader of Hukatan at PT SIL, Max Bana, was dismissed shortly after leading a strike demanding fair wages, decent housing, and access to clean water. The case has since gone to the Supreme Court.

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal supported the union with training, particularly on Human Rights Due Diligence, which has strengthened their resolve.

Today, Hukatan represents around 1,500 workers across six palm oil companies in the region. At palm oil company PT SIL, workers have secured retirement benefits and compensation rights for dismissed and resigning employees. Union dues are now deducted transparently through the payroll system.



“We often feel unprotected by the state,” Sainudin says. “In the end, it is the workers who pay the price, but according to me union work must be done as worship, because those loved by God are useful to many others.”

Sainudin, palm oil harvester and active union member.

Le Tat Thang strengthens his role as a trade union leader in Vietnam

“Dialogue is about finding solutions together”

This is the story of Le Tat Thang, who has been active in a trade union for more than 11 years. He collects workers’ concerns and represents them in discussions with management. After participating in two social train-the-trainer trainings on social dialogue supported by CNV Internationaal, his approach has changed significantly.

“I am now more proactive in engaging management, better structured in his preparation, and more focused on finding common ground. The trainings strengthened both my confidence and my effectiveness as a union leader.”

The two minute pitch

“One exercise stood out for me: The two minute pitch. I learned to present proposals clearly and convincingly within a strict time limit. This helped me sharpen my key messages, structure arguments, and communicate under pressure. These are skills I missed before and I see many grassroots union leaders struggle with.”

Sharing insights on social media

Inspired by what he learned, Thang now shares insights on social media, reaching a wider group of workers and union representatives.

He is now motivated more than ever: “I want to keep improving and will continue to develop my dialogue and negotiation skills.” Mr Le Tat Thang’s journey shows how targeted training can empower one leader, who in turn, strengthens dozens of trade unions and supports thousands of workers.

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal worked with one of their experienced Dutch union trainers and the VGCL union to carry out several train-the-trainer programmes.

Mr Le Tat Thang’s journey shows how targeted training can empower one leader, who in turn, strengthens dozens of trade unions that support thousands of workers.



“I used to think my task was to make demands,”
Le Tat Thang recalls. “Now I see it is about negotiation.”

Fair Work Monitor: A digital window into the reality of sugarcane workers in Colombia

More than 1,500 sugarcane workers make hidden conditions visible

Workers in Colombia's sugarcane sector face low wages and precarious living conditions, often without visibility or representation. In 2025, this began to change as workers themselves started documenting their reality through digital monitoring. These workers lacked reliable data on their conditions, and many, especially non-unionised and informal workers, had always been invisible. Their circumstances were marked by insecurity and union activity carried risks. Sharing sensitive information was difficult and sometimes dangerous.

Evidence to demand change

CNV Internationaal supported the sugar workers union SINTRAINAGRO with training and digital tools. Together they implemented the first large-scale participatory digital monitoring across Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Risaralda, and Caldas.

Social compliance

Using an anonymous survey and a "snowball" approach: Just 14 trained union members mobilised more than

1,500 workers to participate, more than triple the 2024 figure. They supported each other in using digital tools.

"This monitoring enables workers who were never heard to finally have a voice. We discovered conditions that had always remained hidden."

Worker 1 (anonymous)

Support and impact

CNV Internationaal developed the Fair Work Monitor in collaboration with local sugar unions. Workers and their unions analyse and interpret the data themselves, supported by a dedicated team of data experts. This ensures a participatory, rights-based approach to risk assessments and social compliance.

"This is just the beginning; now we have the evidence to demand change."



"It was a beautiful experience, but also frustrating. We found people earning less than 5 euros a day... even taking their children out of school."

Worker 1 (anonymous)



Internationaal

About CNV Internationaal

100% Fair Work, that is what CNV Internationaal is working for every day in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We do this by working together closely with local partner trade unions and by investing in good cooperation with other partners, such as companies and governments. Fair work means that people can work safely and in all freedom, earning a living wage. Freedom of association and social dialogue are important conditions for achieving this. 100% Fair Work means that women and young people have the same

opportunities on the labour market as everyone else: no discrimination in working conditions (e.g. wages, holidays, etc.) 100% Fair Work also entails that we investigate the safety, health and freedom of workers. For this, CNV Internationaal and its partner trade unions make use of innovative tools such as accessible, digital surveys. To know exactly what is going on with workers strengthens our position at the negotiating tables. Moreover, it enables us to measure improvements and the impact of our work.

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