

VidaViva holds its first International Trainers Meeting in Mozambique

Between August 24 and 26, 2009 the VidaViva network of TIE Global organised its first international trainers meeting in Xai-Xai, Mozambique. Around 40 Participants came from Brazil, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Germany. Globally, the health of workers is not getting better but worse because of deteriorating working conditions. The participants of the conference shared their experiences, successes and difficulties in their efforts to change this situation.

Jointly new strategies were discussed to strengthen rank and file activities to achieve a life with dignity. "It has been an exciting conference for all of us to meet and exchange with VidaViva activists from several African countries, Brazil and Germany and learn about the various successes of the network to improve the work places", says Helder Consolo, member of the union federation OTM and national coordinator of VidaViva Mozambique.

In December 2009 VidaViva will hold its fourth trainers meeting in Brazil, to which trainers from Mozambique will participate. Here participants will exchange experiences to help evaluate existing project tools in the on-going effort to improve efforts at the shop floor level.

Mozambique

In Mozambique both union federations of the country OTM and CONSILMO and the independent union SNP and SNJ are part of the project. At the conference participants of the Maputo and Centre region presented their experiences of health mapping in mining and schools. The results showed serious health problems like malaria or lung diseases and numerous accidents caused by inadequate working conditions. In the past there had been a series of health mappings in Maputo and the Centre region in various sectors as rail, cement factory, security, mining, schooling and others. Real work place improvements such as ergonomic improvements, construction improvements, safety measures, food allowance have been won through union actions. In addition to mapping, a photo exhibition about the life and work of workers has been produced. And a health workshop for union committee members and an audio-visual seminar program are being developed.





Germany

Even though unions and workers representation in Germany still have a strong infrastructure around health, occupational disorders, stress and strains have dramatically increased over the last 20 years due to the decreased control of union and workers over their working conditions. Works Councils are now using use VidaViva activities as one step to change this. Several health mappings were presented including the one of Freudenberg, a German car supplier, where health mapping is used by the European works council in several European countries.

Brazil

Here, VidaViva has been in place since 2003 in 8 states. More than 300 trainers have been trained using mapping, Raio (an audio-visual tool for education), expositions of life stories, a health workshop for union and health activists, and several other tools. The participants talked about various examples of how VidaViva activities have raised the consciousness of workers and union leaders. Unions created shop floor committees and took action to intervene at the workplace and to negotiate workplace changes that have been proposed by the workers.

South Africa

Naledi, the research institute of COSATU in a joint project with German DGB, introduced VidaViva mapping methodology in German companies operating in South Africa. In about 8 factories, among them Bosch, DEMAG and MAN Truck, the mapping approach was used to find out about workplace problems and motivate workers to act together with their union. Additional methodology was used to track the obstacles to upward mobility among black workers and various actions have been proposed.

Nigeria

In Nigeria VidaViva started late 2008. Since then several educators have been trained and the first pilot health mappings have been implemented in Lagos in the construction and textile industry and even with self-employed workers (tailors). "Already the first experience has been a major success in motivating workers. It seems that this method has no limits" says Afolabi, educator of the NLC in Nigeria.



The first international trainers meeting in Mozambique opened up a variety of new perspectives to help strengthen the network in South Africa and Nigeria. In South Africa the activists from Naledi will continue their research within companies. They will publish their experiences and think about how to root it locally. In Nigeria by the end of 2009 health mapping will be implemented in about 10 work places. In early 2010 those experiences will be documented. In February 2010 an exchange seminar will be organised, where the experiences will be presented and shared with others to evaluate which further steps to take. "This method shows great potential to organise and vitalise our union activities" says Valentine Udeh, in charge of the education department of the NLC in Nigeria. Beyond that, possibilities for the network in Zwaziland will be explored. All participants expressed a great interest in developing an African Network of VidaViva activities as part of the Global network. Hopefully in 2010 this can be realised.

"For us in Mozambique, the union movement of Mozambique responded very positively when we created the VidaViva network. The network uses participative action research at various work places to identify occupational disorders and their causes. It encourages work place interventions of workers and their unions to achieve a healthy work place. To come to the international trainers meeting in Xai-Xai, Mozambique, has been an opportunity to exchange experiences and to develop strategies. We now see how VidaViva can continue to develop into an instrument of union struggle beyond our country and into South Africa and Nigeria", says Helder Consolo, national coordinator of VidaViva Mozambique.