



LO/FTF COUNCIL IN THE AMERICAS





REGIONAL PROGRAMME

The LO/FTF Council is present in Central America and the Caribbean with the aim of increasing Danish support to the development of existing trade union movements in civil society, in order to support processes of democratisation and poverty alleviation within the region. Today, the LO/FTF Council is partner in several multilateral regional projects and bilateral national projects in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The present paper outlines the regional programme in Central America and the Caribbean and specifically describes work areas and functions of the regional office of the LO/FTF Council.

REGIONAL OFFICE

The LO/FTF Council coordinates activities in the region from a regional office located in Guatemala City. Being present physically is of importance in order to follow development trends in the region closely, to coordinate activities with other social actors at the labour market, to provide technical assistance to ongoing projects and to identify areas for new types of cooperation. Additionally, the regional office functions as a bridge between the trade union movement of Central America and sister organisations in Denmark, coordinating joint interests and securing relevant flows of information between them.

DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE

Seen from the point of view of the labour movement, improving conditions at the labour market in the region is an issue of utmost importance when-

ever working for human rights and democratisation of society. The aim is, then, to contribute to the development of a sustainable labour market and thereby to support processes leading to the improvement of living conditions for the majority of the population. Not only in terms of securing minimum salaries and decent working conditions (poverty alleviation), but also by strengthening the framework of legal rights in the region (democratisation and civil society support). In this context, a democratic society is to be seen as a space for social dialogue, where decision makers recognize that labour rights are a human right.

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

That is exactly the reason why the LO/FTF Council considers the strengthening of the trade union movement (by capacity building of the organisations, supporting processes of unity at national level and joint political platforms at regional level) to be of crucial importance for the development of a labour market where employers' associations, state institutions, and workers' organisations are recognized as equal social partners.

TARGET GROUPS

The intended beneficiaries of the project initiatives are a broad range of workers throughout the region, whose living conditions can be improved by enhancing trade union organisations' capacity to defend their members' rights. The direct target group is the human resources of the trade union organisations in the region, meaning members and potential members of these civil society organisations. The target group (activists / leadership / members) is addressed qua awareness raising and skills development in areas such as dialogue and negotiation, advocacy, alliance building, legal process, information, etc. These people representing their organisations also belong to the majority of citizens, of which one or more sociological characteristics of weakness apply: they are workers, many of them are

un- or underemployed and poor, some are women, others belong to indigenous groups, etc.

SUPPORT TO TRADE UNIONS

The trade union organizations in the region still lack organizational strength and capacity to defend workers rights and to contribute to improved working and living conditions for the majority. Only between 3% (in El Salvador) and nearly 20% (in Honduras) of the economically active population in the countries are members of a trade union.

The movement is not only weak in terms of organizational capacity and member base, but also dispersed due to historical conflicts and a strong tradition for organising in-house unions. Nonetheless, quite impressive progress has been achieved during the last years: The labour movements increasingly cooperate and form alliances, they have increased their ability to represent workers, they have enhanced their capacity for advocacy, and have entered into more alliances in civil society. The LO/FTF Council is supporting these processes with the regional programme. It is assessed by the LO/FTF Council that it is necessary to support the unification of the trade union movement and building of networks and alliances within civil society at both national and regional level, if aims and objectives of improving living conditions by the development of a sustainable labour market are to be achieved. The reason for operating with this two-fold perspective is to be found in the specific socio-economic, political, and cultural context of the region.

WHY A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE?

A significant trend in politics at regional level is that the impact of economic globalisation and neo-liberal policies leads to an increased process of regionalisation in Central America. Among politicians (e.g. in PARLACEN) and civil society organisations an important political process is the revitalisation of political visions for the development of a unified region. Neo-liberal politics at national level also imply the inclusion in global trade flows and processes of economic integration at regional level as a means for development. Integration processes today are being developed around orientation for exports to the North American and European continents. The 'new wave' of free trade agreements (WTO, FTAA, CAFTA, and regionally within SICA and CACM) has huge implications for the generation of employment, the quality of employment generated, the sections of the labour market to be included, working conditions, and labour relations. By December 2005 the national labour legislations in the region will be harmonized (through FTAA) and now a regional common market is a reality among the countries in the region, USA, Mexico, and Canada (through CAFTA).

POVERTY AND CHEAP LABOUR

Apart from the advantage of proximity to prioritized markets, the chief asset of the region today is an abundance of cheap labour. Though the economic growth rate is positive in all the countries of the region, the economy has difficulties in matching the population growth. Un- and under-employment is widespread and the majority of the surplus labour force is comprised of the younger part of the population. A striking aspect of present changes in the labour market is that of the incorporation of women into the workforce, though nurturing and caring responsibilities remain the domain of women (housing, food, clothes, health, education). At the labour market, they are most likely to be employed in unstable and low-paying jobs (e.g. the new industries of the maquilas) or in the informal sector. Additionally, the concentration of income among small national elites is still so extreme that the majority of the populations live in poverty. UNDP estimates that at least 70% of the population in Nicaragua and almost 80% of the population in Guatemala live in poverty.

The situation at the labour markets in the region is characterized by the ongoing debate of a greater flexibilization, as demanded by especially employers' associations. For the workers, though, flexibilization means an increasing instability at the labour market – including even worse working conditions, even poorer salaries, more temporary jobs, increased underemployment, and less employment in the formal sector. Today, more than half of the economically active populations work in the informal sector, having no stable sources of income and no social security at all.

LEGAL RIGHTS VIOLATED

For the majority of workers and employees the experience is that there is a big gap between what the employers and state institutions say about respecting human rights, workers' rights, and the Labour Code and what they actually do. Although formal democracies have been established throughout the region, lack of political transparency, widespread political corruption, and lack of law enforcement are common features. Fundamental labour and trade union rights are constantly violated in every corner of the region. The formal and informal structures of civil society as well as the general political consciousness are still heavily influenced by previous conditions of centralized and hegemonic power structures. In politics it is seen by the fact that the regional process of integration is characterized by a lack of democratic or consultative processes. The voice for inclusion of workers rights in the trade agreements has not been heard. At national level, the lack of democracy is also reflected in the work

of existing tripartite and bipartite labour market mechanisms. According to trade union sources, the impact of these institutions is quite questionable in several of the countries.

REGIONAL STRATEGY

The overall strategy of work for the LO/FTF Council in Central America is:

At National Level:

To promote unity and improve conditions for a strong and democratic national trade union movement, being able to advocate for workers' rights. This can be done through the promotion of joint trade union education and network structures or as specific capacity building projects of one organisation. Education is used as a strategic tool for internal democratisation and development of the organisational capacity, enabling the organisations to influence on development in their respective countries.

At Regional Level:

To strengthen the capacity of existing trade union networks to coordinate and facilitate affiliates and fraternal organisations' work (on e.g. education). Through this strengthen their capacity to influence regional policy issues linked to the regional integration process.

The LO/FTF Council has defined two sub-programmes in the region – one regional and one national – designed to complement the overall strategy in the region.

TRADE UNION COOPERATION

Since 1997 the LO/FTF Council has established contacts with most of the national trade union organisations as well as with the Regional Latin American Trade Union Organisation of ICFTU – ORIT and the International Global Union Federations.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The regional office provides technical assistance to projects of the LO/FTF Council in the region, including:

- 1) Supervision of and support to the implementation of the projects, especially in relation to organisational and educational development
- 2) Facilitation of exchange of experience among trade union actors and support to the development of programmatic platforms for the trade union movement, improving the participation in bi- and tripartite structures, organisational and institutional structures, and alliance building within civil society
- 3) Monitoring and assistance in ensuring that the procedures for budgeting, accounting, and re-

porting outlined in project documents and supplementary provisions are observed

- 4) Administrative and logistic support as agreed between project partners
- 5) Facilitating project cooperation among partners at national and regional level

DONOR COORDINATION

The regional office has become a point of reference for coordination activities among donors working with labour market issues. The LO/FTF Council is cooperating with the following civil society and donor organisations in the region:

- 1) Donor organisations of the international trade union movement (e.g. LO-Norway, LO-TCO-Sweden, FNV-Holland, SASK-Finland, CLC Canada, UGT and CCOO-Spain, AFL-CIO-USA)
- 2) Other international NGOs working for social development in the region (e.g. FES-Germany and the LO/FTF Council have an agreement of cooperation and coordination in the region)
- 3) A cross-national coordination group of donor organisations (including UN organisations) operating within the labour market in Guatemala
- 4) The Danish sponsored regional human rights programme PRODECA

Additionally, the regional office ensures a direct communication with other Danish actors in the region – such as the above mentioned project programme financed by Danida (PRODECA), the Danish Embassy in Nicaragua, other trade union actors such as SID and AIF, and NGOs such as MS and IBIS.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAME

The staff at the regional office consists of one Regional Adviser, one part time Adviser, one Regional Financial and Administrative Manager, and one Assistant to the Executive Consultant. All employees at the regional office refer to the Executive Consultant for Latin America, at the headquarter in Denmark.

The regional office is part of the institutional set up of the LO/FTF Council, and is financed by the headquarter in accordance with regulations for provision of technical assistance to specific projects. Funds for the office are transferred on a quarterly basis upon requests and presentation of disbursement plans and on condition that institutionalised accounting procedures of the LO/FTF Council are followed. Written activity reporting and activity planning for the regional office is requested on quarterly and yearly basis, of which the Regional Adviser is responsible.

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

Within the frame of the regional programme, through different kinds of project cooperation, and



FOTO: ADAM AMSINCK

by the presence of the regional office in the Central American context the LO/FTF Council has:

- social development, poverty alleviation, human rights, and democratisation of society as priority areas whenever working in the region – and has access to a network of professional local resource persons working in the labour market context
- extensive working experience with social organisations – focus areas being capacity building and unification of organisations besides strengthening of democratic structures within labour market institutions
- as core competence to provide advisory assistance to project activities of which the major component is capacity building of human resources by establishment of educational programmes for adults within trade unions (re. legal rights, policy and planning, collective bargaining and negotiation skills, occupational health and safety, history and identities, etc.)
- profound knowledge of labour market issues, based on investigations and local studies
- possibility of supporting processes of alliance

building within civil society and to encourage the development of spaces for social dialogue between actors and institutions at the labour market

- direct access to various social actors at the labour market – i.e. trade union organisations embracing about one million members (app. 2% of total population)
- contact to political actors in the region
- close cooperation with international trade union organizations supporting workers rights
- coordinated activities with other international donor organisations, working for social development, human rights, and democratization

IN DENMARK

The Danish confederations LO and FTF participate in Advisory Project Committees that carry out reviews and evaluations of the projects supported by the LO/FTF Council. There is one regional Advisory Project Committee for Central America covering most projects in the region. Additionally, two project support groups are established – one in relation to a regional project with health sector organisations and one for the national project in Nicaragua.

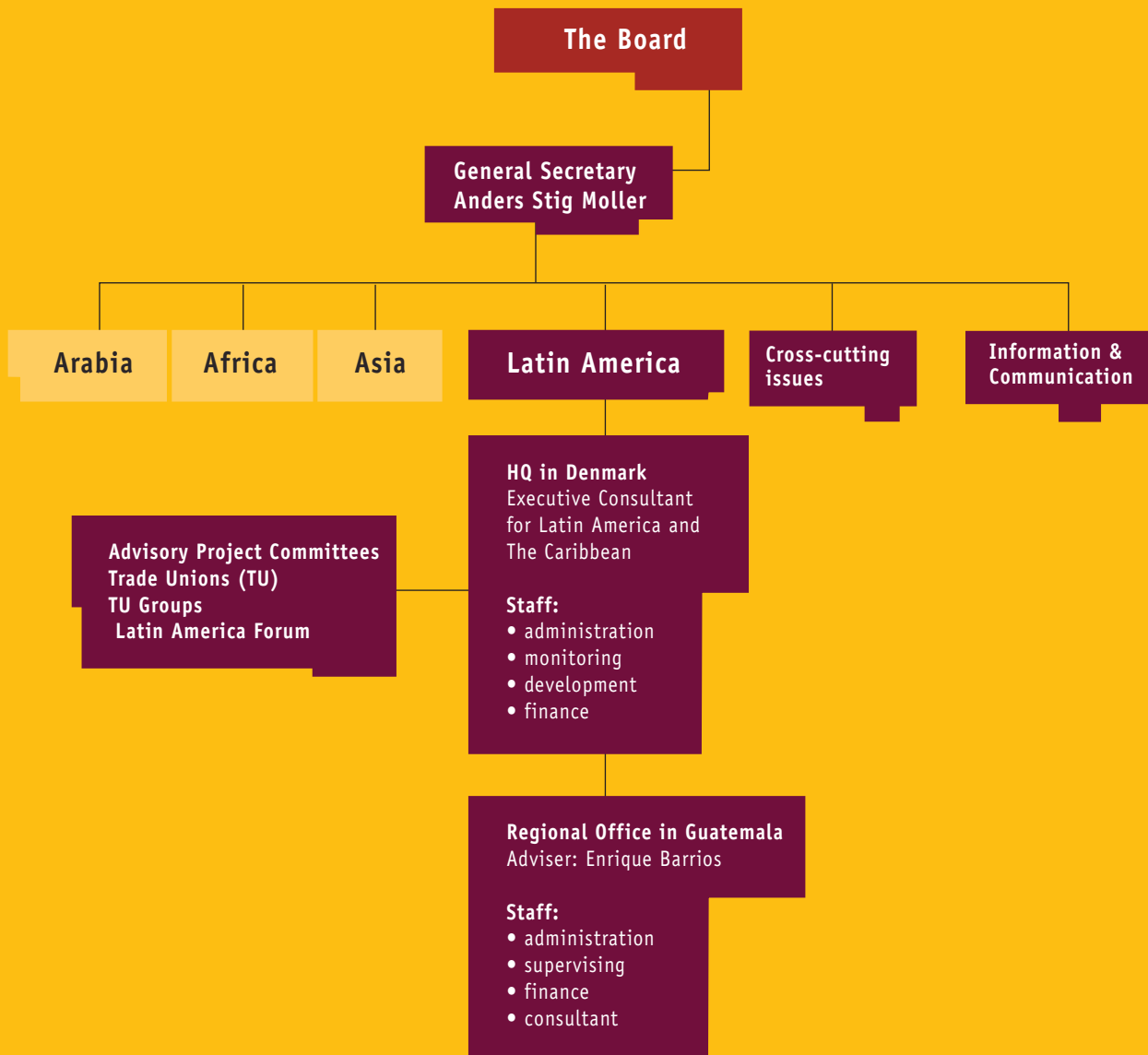
A 'Latin America Forum' for union representatives and workers' organisations has been established in Denmark. Participants meet to debate the development in the region, and also to create new support groups for specific projects, as the one established for the health sector mentioned above.

In 2005 an information campaign about trade and labour markets in Central America is launched in Denmark. The campaign is a result of joint efforts among various Danish trade union federations and related organisations. The campaign proposes to ensure and illustrate that a unified participation among workers' organisations "makes a difference" in civil society – in Central America as well as in Denmark.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labour Congress, USA
AIF	The Labor Movement's International Forum
CACM	Central American Common Market
CAFTA	Central America Free Trade Agreement
CCOO	Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras, Spain
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
FES	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Germany
FNV	Netherlands Trade Union Federation
FTF	Danish Confederation of Salaried Employees and Civil Servants
FTAA	Free Trade Area of The Americas
GUF	Global Union Federation
IBIS	The Development Organisation IBIS, Denmark
ICFTU/ORIT	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions – Organización Regional Interamericana de Trabajadores
LO	Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
LO Noruega	Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
LO-TCO	Swedish Trade Union Confederation / Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees – Secretariat of International Trade Union Development
MS	Danish Cooperation for International Development
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PARLACEN	Central American Parliament
PRODECA	Danish Human Rights Programme in Central America
SASK	Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland
SICA	Institution for Central American Integration: Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana
SID	General and Specialized Workers' Union, Denmark
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores, Spain
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

THE LO-FTF COUNCIL IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN



PROJECT COOPERATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA 2004-2007

	2004-2005	2006-2007
National Sub-Programme		
El Salvador: Trade Union Strengthening Programme – Phase II	• 2004	
Guatemala: Educational Structures and Basic Training for Trade Unions - Phase II	•	•
Honduras: Trade Union Training Programme - Phase I	•	•
Nicaragua: Trade Union Formation – Phase III	•	•
Regional Sub-Programme		
Facilitation of a Regional Labour Market Institute	•	•
Phase II: Project with Building and Wood Workers Sector Organisations	•	•
Phase I: Health Organisations in Central America	•	•

WWW.ULANDSSEKRETARIATET.DK

CONTACT US:

In Denmark:

Ulandssekretariatet
Att. Anders Stig Møller,
General Secretary and Executive Consultant for
Latin America and The Caribbean
Sommerstedgade 7, 4.
1718 Copenhagen V

Tel: + 45 3373 7440
Fax: + 45 3373 7465
+ 45 3312 2702
E-mail: info@loftf.dk

In Latin America:

Consejo Danés de la LO/FTF
Regional Office
Att. Enrique Barrios
Regional Adviser
13 Calle 2-60 Zona 10
Edificio Topacio Azul, 10º. Nivel – Oficina 1003
Guatemala, 01010
Guatemala, Central America

Tel: + 502 2363 1778 / 1788
Fax: + 502 2363 1128
E-mail: ofregional@consejodanes.com