

Strategies to Empower Women Workers in the Philippine Economic Zones*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizing women workers has not been an easy task in the Philippines. Notwithstanding laws that guarantee the right to self-organization and collective bargaining, there are many obstacles to unionization. Union organizing is therefore often done clandestinely, particularly in export processing zones (EPZs) which are perceived to be enclaves of companies with anti-union policies. In fact, many firms relocating in these zones are attracted by the promise of industrial peace by the state, and this is interpreted to mean an environment without unions.

Some observers trace part of the problem to prevailing gender relations. Women may be able to make breakthroughs in the often male-dominated world of work. When they go home, however, they are still confronted with housework, childcare, and other customary domestic obligations from which men are exempt. Gender ideology reproduces unequal relationships between women and

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men not only in the workplace but also in the trade union movement. The alienating nature of union procedures and the frequent informal decisions made by men on occasions when the women are not present compound the situation further (Redcliff and Sinclair, 1991:18).

Unorganized women workers in export processing zones are left without the rights and benefits provided by the protective mantle of trade union organizations. Thus, while industries in these zones exploit the labor power of women to produce world class export products, what women get in return are a mere pittance compared to the profits that accrue to their employers. They have to undergo apprenticeship and probationary employment, before they finally get to be regularized – if at all management decides to do so.

This particular project therefore seeks to address the issue of organizing women in selected export processing zones and find out the extent to which this has been successful or unsuccessful. It describes the context of such organizing by providing a brief backgrounder on the EPZs as well as on the trade union situation in the zones in relation to the state of the labor movement as a whole and the participation of women in the movement. It examines various initiatives of trade unions as well as women organizations and other non-government organizations (NGOs) to empower women workers in the EPZs. It also looks into forms of cooperation between trade union and non-trade organizations.

Undertaking the research is the School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR) of the University of the Philippines in Diliman, assisted by the Women and Development Program of the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD) of the same University. It was done in collaboration with the CNV and FNV partner organizations in the country, namely, the Federation of Free Workers (FFW) and the National Federation of Labor (NFL).

The EPZs: A Brief Background

The Philippine government anticipates many benefits from the operations of EPZs. These include diffusion of technology, development of entrepreneurial and management skills, creation of a skilled labour force, increase foreign exchange earnings, and accelerated employment generation. In addition, EPZs are expected to

attract foreign investment and thereby spur economic growth by increasing the demand for labor and raising wage levels.

On June 21, 1969, then President Ferdinand Marcos signed Republic Act 5490, creating the first free port in the municipality of Mariveles in the province of Bataan. The Free Trade Zone Authority was initially set up to plan and manage the zone. This was later replaced by the Export Processing Zone Authority (EPZA) by virtue of Presidential Decree 66 (November 20, 1972), and currently, by the Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA) under the Ramos Administration, through Republic Act No. 7916 (the Special Economic Zone Act, signed 24 February 1995).

With this law, practically all the major growth areas in the country are to be the sites of economic zones (or ecozones). The concept of an ecozone embraces both the four regular, state-owned and operated export processing zones managed by the PEZA and the 44 (as a January 1, 1997) special zones which are privately-owned and developed. Ecozones cover a total area of 7,659 hectares located all over the Philippines. There has been a dramatic rise in zone investments, jumping to P52.5 billion in 1995 and P65.3 billion in 1996. The biggest investors are the Japanese, accounting for 68.9 percent of investments in 1995, and 47.2 percent in 1996. Filipinos place second, with 18.8 percent in 1996, followed by the Malaysians (10.7 percent), Koreans, (9.9 percent), Taiwanese (6.7 percent), American (2.6 percent), British (2.3 percent) and others (1.8 percent). The biggest share of investments went to electronics (74 percent in 1995 and 57.7 percent in 1996). The rest went to transport equipment (11.6 percent in 1996), fabricated metals (7.9 percent), food (6.4 percent), garments and textiles (5.4 percent), precision instruments (3.2 percent), furniture and fixtures (2.3 percent), electrical products (1.2 percent), and others (4.3 percent).

The PEZA law offers incentives to both ecozone developers and export enterprises. For ecozone developers or operators, these include exemption from national and local taxes, or in lieu thereof, five percent gross income tax rate; additional deduction for training expenses (labor and management): 1/2 of value; permanent resident status for foreign investors and their families; and employment of foreign nationals. Export enterprises, on the other hand, have the following inducements, among others: income tax holiday; exemption from duties and taxes on imported capital equipment, spare parts, materials and supplies; and tax credit for import substitution.

The implementing rules and regulations of RA 7916 further defined the allowable deductions given to ecozone economic enterprises for raw materials used, goods in process, finished goods, supplies and fuel used, depreciation of machinery and equipment, financing charges associated with fixed assets and rent utility charges. The zones likewise offer standard factory building with electricity, water and communication facilities.

Given these incentives, it is not surprising that the number of enterprises in the economic zones is rising. As reflected in Table 1, some 354 firms were already operating in the regular zones and 118 in the special zones as of May 31, 1996. A total of 637 firms have been approved by PEZA, so this means that some 165 more firms are still preparing for their transfer to the various EPZs, 105 of them in the regular zones.

Table 1. Number of Firms Registered and Operating in the Export Processing Zones, May 31, 1996

Zone Area	No. of Registered/ Approved Firms	No. of Operating Firms	Difference
A. Regular Zones:	459	354	105
Bataan	85	69	16
Baguio	15	12	3
Mactan	112	92	20
Cavite (Rosario)	247	181	66
B. Special Zone	178	118	60
Overall Total	637	472	165

Regular zones have in their employ 95,596 workers, compared to 37,231 in the special zones as of May 31, 1996. the Cavite zone has the largest number of registered companies (181 out of a total 354 in regular zones). It also has the biggest number of workers (40,177) as of the same reference period. Mactan ranks second in terms of number of firms operating (92) and workforce (30,190). Baguio has the least in these two categories.

Women comprise the main bulk of workers in the government-managed zones. As can be gleaned from the latest sex-disaggregated data on employment (Table 2), men accounted for 27 percent to 30 percent of the total workforce. In contrast, women's share in the employment pie was from 70 percent to 73 percent. Many of the work activities done in the zones, which are simple and repetitive assembly-type operations requiring utmost patience and manual dexterity are considered more appropriate for women.

Table 2 Workforce Composition in Export Processing Zones by Gender, June 1995

Zone Area	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Bataan*	4,921	30.0	13,334	70.0	18,255	100
Baguio	954	29.7	2,242	69.8	3,196	100
Mactan	7,576	27.0	20,200	73.0	27,776	100
Cavite	10,836	27.0	29,508	73.0	40,344	100

Source: PEZA. Data for Bataan are for April 1995, since June 1995 data are not sex-disaggregated. As of June 1995, total workforce in this zone numbered 18,787.

Overview of the Situation of Women in EPZs

The study benefited from a review of literature prior to the field research, and some of the more relevant sources are cited here.

Mechtild Rosier (1993) documented the results of the first part of the joint CNV-FNV project on "new trade union perspectives" under the auspices of the Women in Development Program. Among the many findings on the EPZs, the following apply to the Philippine case:

* The latest data on direct employment in the zones showed a total of 152,250. The private zones accounted for 47,155. Bataan employed 22,118, Baguio, 3,718; Mactan, 32,111; and Cavite, 47,148.

1. Jobs in EPZs are perceived to be occupied for the most part, by young, unmarried women entering the salaried labour force for the first time.
2. There is reason to believe that enterprises choose to employ women workers because they are supposed to be cheaper, more docile and less likely to be organized. Employers regard women's wage as secondary both to their unpaid domestic labor and to men's wage labor. Therefore, they are considered as more flexible and more expandable.
3. Attitudes towards women's participation in trade unions constitute an obstacle to the improvement in their position in the labor market.
4. Long work hours and overtime work make the daily workload even heavier for women who are saddled with household, family and child care responsibilities.
5. Many EPZ women are working at night. They are also subjected to a major psychological problem —stress— which is common in EPZs, because of job dissatisfaction due to low wages and subordinate positions, socially disruptive shift work, compulsory overtime and extreme fatigue, or a combination of these factors.
6. Women are exposed to all kinds of hazards peculiar to the industry they belong to. Various health complaints are observed.
7. Male trade union leaders consider labor consciousness to be the first priority of the trade union movement, and do not perceive women's issues in employment as important trade union issues. The trade union movement is nevertheless becoming increasingly aware that it must pay attention to these issues, if it is to recruit an important and growing sector in the labor market.
8. There are signs that gender-sensitive and women-friendly activities are already being undertaken by some trade union organizations.

The country report presented during the Concluding Conference on Women Workers in Asian EPZs held in Hongkong March 26 to 30, 1996, revealed that hiring policies in the zones are discriminatory to women (EPZ Report-Philippines, 1996). There is a preference for single, young and college-educated women. The same report indicated that upon hiring, workers are made to agree to desist from joining unions. It also stated that employers usually favor members of a certain religious sect, the Iglesia ni Kristo (INK or Church of Christ), since they are not allowed by their faith to join and can serve as a foil attempts at unionization.

Remedio (1995) noted that apprenticeship agreements are abused by some EPZ firms to keep wages low and that subcontracting arrangements have created certain problems. It was likewise reported that workers who spoke about their unsatisfactory working conditions faced the threat of dismissal, and therefore preferred to remain silent.

In a paper presented during the Seminar on "Organizing Thru Workers' Education at the Export Processing Zone", held under the auspices of the ITGWLF and TWARO on August 22, 1994 in Quezon City, Philippines, Aganon identified problems confronting women workers in garments industries in the EPZs. These include: low wages, long hours of work (with forced overtime), no job security, violation of the right to self-organization, repetitive and monotonous work, health and safety risks, little or no fringe benefits, oppressive quota system, and little or no participation in decision-making.

The latest employment showed an increase in ecozone employment from 23,750 in 1986 to 152,250 in 1996. Most of those employed are women, and in this sense, they are benefited. Having a formal job in a firm is better than having an unprotected job in the informal sector or having no job at all. Being employed and receiving a clear wage gives women a degree of economic empowerment and social mobility. As explained earlier, however, such employment is caught with dangers and difficulties.

Problems, needs and interest of women in the EPZs covered by the study have many commonalities, although some issues are more emphasized by women in specific zones. These are presented on a per zone basis and summarized at the end.

At the Bataan EPZ. In a group interview with women workers at the Bataan EPZ, they articulated the following problems:

low wages, especially the starting pay; non-implementation of labor standards; delays in SSS (social security) remittances, and difficulties in availing themselves of SSS benefits; high production quotas, which are increasingly difficult to reach; and health and safety problems in the workplace.

In addition, workers were often disparaged by management. Supervisors showed favoritism in assigning work and schedules, as well as in promoting workers and assigning forced leaves. This was a cause of negative competition among the women.

Married women workers highlighted their domestic problems, saying they lacked house-help and baby sitters.

Aggravating factors are the shortage of public transportation within the zone area and lack of affordable lodging facilities near the zone.

BEPZ women workers aspire to have additional sources of livelihood, finish schooling, work overseas, and move up in terms of pay and position.

At the Baguio City Zone (BCEPZ). Many women workers find their jobs boring, mechanical and tiresome. Routine night shifts make life difficult for some women. They sleep during the day and miss family gatherings and social functions which are important to them. In one garment firm, women were asked to sign a contract with the company indicating P129 per day, exclusive of cost living allowance (COLA). In practice, they receive the same amount inclusive of COLA. Most workers, however, receive a daily minimum wage of P119 plus P10 COLA or an average of P1,000 per week. Overtime work is prevalent among workers in garments and textile firms. Refusal to work overtime leads to warnings from supervisors which can result in one week to 15 days' suspension. Absence from work requires advanced scheduling. Workers often avail themselves of fabricated medical certificates to justify their absences and avoid penalties.

Subcontracting is legal at the BCEPZ and firms carry permits to do this from the PEZA. This is prevalent among garment firms and big companies which avail themselves of the cheap labor of women in nearby communities. Many women are also victimized by the non-regularization practices of firms, and therefore security of tenure is another problem for them.

At the Cavite EPZs. Women workers interviewed are encountering the following problems: low starting wages (about P90 per day), and no job security because some firms hire them first as apprentices, then as probies, (probationary employees) with no assurance of continuity in employment. They are also consigned to repetitive work, long hours, and little rest.

Terminations due to various causes (such as decline in demand, replacement with lower paid workers, buyer backing out, and production downswing) affect them considerably. An example is the case of Philips Export Industries which laid off more than 200 workers supposedly because of reduction in orders.

In another instance, management changed the payment system from a daily basis to piece rate. Women felt powerless in their situation, and could not ask the help of their union — a company dominated one.

Reproductive rights are ignored. In one case, according to an official working for a trade union-related NGO, a woman who was having a miscarriage right in the workplace was not even allowed to seek medical assistance outside the company.

Apart from these, some women workers in this particular zone suffer from sexual harassment. In fact, the National Conciliation and Mediation Board (NCMB) Director himself reported that the Department of Labor and Employment had received some complaints of sexual harassment by Korean employers, but not a single case had been filed yet.

Labor organizers also shared stories of sexual violence victimizing women workers who were raped and murdered.

Women workers want to organize unions in their workplaces, but fear of management reprisal prevents them from doing so. Married women are particularly careful, since many of them are the sole breadwinners of their families. But some are brave enough to face the odds, confident that they will be able to find other jobs elsewhere.

At the Mactan EPZ. In March 1996, a survey of 57 workers and their conditions at MEPZ conducted by the Cebu Labor Education, Advocacy and Research Center or CLEAR, revealed that 83 percent received pay rates equivalent to the minimum (P3,501 to

P4,500) and above (P4,501 to P5,500). Only four (seven percent) reported a pay rate below the minimum. Wages may appear to be higher for most women in the zones, but even DOLE and PEZA attribute this to longer work hours and overtime (Remedio, 1996;26).

CLEAR cited the DOLE inspection report of 56 MEPZ companies in 1995, which revealed that 23 firms (41 percent) were paying below the minimum rate. DOLE findings also showed that 46 out of 56 companies violated health and safety standards. Subcontracting is also beginning to be a problem at the MEPZ. Production efficiency is used to justify the practice, threatening the security of tenure of workers.

As can be gleaned from the information obtained in the EPZs covered in the study, there are many women workers in these zones who are suffering from low wages, no security of tenure, and neglect of their health and safety. Many of them are in dead end jobs where conditions dictate that they start at the bottom over and over again. They are victims of casualization and prevented from participating in the decision-making processes which affect their working life. They do not get a just share of the fruits of their labor which are appropriated by investors, many of them foreign. Yet, the demands of globalization and the attendant trade liberalization will lead to the employment of more women workers in the economic zones, by firms which need their expertise, manual dexterity, and patience.

EPZs and the Trade Union Movement

The state of unionism in the EPZs leaves much to be desired. In a sense, this reflects the weaknesses of the overall trade union movement in the country, particularly when it comes to organizing and empowering women workers. There are, however, indications of increasing gender sensitivity among some federations.

The **Bataan Zone (BEPZ)** was the first to be set up in 1972. According to labor organizers, the level of unionization in the zone reached as high as 85 percent shortly before the downfall of the Marcos regime in 1986. This is a remarkable record, compared to the national average of about 20 percent, and Mactan's and Baguio's zero level.

The FFW was among the first to break ground in the BEPZ, having organized a substantial portion of the workers there. In the

eighties, the BEPZ was dominated by more militant unions like the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), and even small enterprises were unionized during the period. Then, the support of leftist groups to strikes gave workers the confidence to continue their actions. However, when management resorted to lockouts, workers began to be apprehensive about challenging the status quo, even as numerous problems regarding wages and work conditions were still rampant. There is now a perceived decline in militant activities and even in unionization, attributed among others to the establishment of Labor-Management Councils (LMCs), the creation of the Industrial Relations Division at the BEPZ, and the unsustainability of militant class action.

The **Baguio EPZ** was created in February 1979, its cool weather conditions and low humidity attracting a good number of investors. In its 18 years of existence, however, the EPZ has never had any union, despite organizing attempts by various federations. Pursuant to the city's industrial peace policy, labor management councils (LMCs) are encouraged. Of eleven companies operating in Baguio, four have LMCs, while others have productivity or quality improvement teams. The biggest investor, Texas Instruments, is also the leader in the Philippine electronics industry when it comes to wages, benefits, working conditions and HRD (human resource development) practices.

The **Cavite EPZ** commenced in 1987. The province was then declared by its past governor as an "industrial peace zone," which in reality meant "no union zone." Its present governor wooed the workers' votes in his election campaign by advocating unionism, but informants say he has not been successful in implementing this because of "political pressures." Organizing unions in the zone is still difficult. Many companies shun unions like the plague, and they would rather relocate somewhere else than face unionized workers. Management therefore resorts to all types of strategies, including utilizing the services of consultants and forming labor-management consultative mechanisms like LMCs.

The 119-hectare **Mactan Export Processing Zone (MEPZ)**, located in Lapulapu City in the province of Cebu, was created in January 1979. Despite its rapid expansion in recent times, the MEPZ has no union operating in its premises. Five organizations help maintain industrial peace within the zone: the Mactan EPZ Chamber of Exporters and Manufacturers or MEPZ-CEM (1987), the Human Resources Association or HRA (1989), the Mactan EPZ Traffic Association (1989), the Association of MEPZ Controllers and Accountants (1993), and the Mactan EPZ Security Council (1995).

The rather slow and uneven development of unionism in the EPZs is symptomatic of the national picture. Although unions claim to have 3.597 million members in 1995, those with collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) numbered only 204,000. Including those not registered or in the process of registering, workers with CBAs would total about half a million, which represents roughly 20 percent of the organizable private sector workers, only 4.2 percent of the 9.6 million wage and salaried workers, and only 1.8 percent of the total employed.

The process of unionization itself is a difficult one. There is a long list of labor laws and procedures to be observed. Union registration requires the signature of 20 percent of the covered employees. But the recognition of a registered union as the collective bargaining agent may be challenged by other labor groups and by management itself. Thus, union certification elections (CEs) are oftentimes bloody and prolonged, sometimes taking one to two years to complete. The lack of unity in the Philippine trade union movement is naturally exploited by employers.

Once the representation issue is settled, the process of collective bargaining may be commenced. However, employers, using the services of lawyers, can make the process very difficult and time-consuming. Thus, some collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are concluded in one to two years. If there are bargaining deadlocks, these can lead to strikes and lockouts, and a series of legal actions involving the DOLE regional officers, Office of the Secretary of Labor, the National Conciliation and Mediation Board, and the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC). Decisions of the Secretary of Labor and the NLRC may be appealed to the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court, which means CBA cases can take three years or longer to settle.

Unions not only have a rather narrow base which to operate. They are also at a disadvantage, given the large numbers of unemployed and underemployed, estimated at 9.5 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Thus, when it comes to hiring and retaining workers, management can afford to be choosy. If it smells trouble brewing from workers who are trying to organize unions, it will not hesitate to find means to obstruct their efforts. Termination for various concocted reasons is a common recourse. Working in export enclaves may not be different from toiling in other worksites. But workers in EPZs bear the brunt not only of investors who shun unions at all cost, but also of local government officials who interfere in labor relations affairs to protect their turf.

Compounding the problem is the long history of trade union disunity in the country, punctuated now and then by short-lived efforts towards trade union unity. Even in the EPZs, inter-union rivalry is apparent. Nevertheless, in Cebu, existing federations are attempting to unite just so the workers in the union-free MEPZ can at last be organized.

As is well known, the trade union movement was suppressed during the 1970's which was the decade of martial law. However, in the 1980s, the trade union movement emerged as a national force when it led numerous strikes and protest actions against the despotic Marcos regime and later, against some perceived anti-labor policies of the Aquino administration.

In the first half of the 1980s, the trade union movement was dominated by the newly-formed but radical Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) and the moderate and officially-recognized Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), an affiliate of the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICTU). About one third of over a 100 labor federations in the country were affiliated with either the KMU or TUCP. In between these two centers were the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), an affiliate of the World Confederation of Labor (WCL) and which has a dozen "trade federations" under its wings; the Philippine affiliates of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), composed of TUPAS, NATU and KATIPUNAN; and various independent labor federations. It should also be pointed out that almost half of the registered unions are not affiliated with any of the labor centers or big federations.

In 1986-87, the KMU, FFW, WFTU affiliates and the newly-established Lakas ng Manggagawa Labor Center (LMLC) formed the Labor Advisory Consultative Council (LACC). With the formation of the LACC, the government has been inviting representatives from both the TUCP and LACC for purposes of tripartite consultation and making appointments to tripartite bodies.

The LACC had been very active as a labor coalition from its formation till the early 1990s when practically all the centers in the Philippines experienced debilitating factional squabbles. The splits that hit the KMU and the WFTU affiliates in the 1990s were obviously partly a consequence of the ideological debates that zizzled in the ranks of socialist-oriented activists as a result of the collapse of Eastern Europe and the changed political situation in the Philippines. The KMU, which was hailed as the biggest labor center in the 1980s, got

divided almost four ways – the “KMU” headed by Crispin Beltran, who is identified with the “reaffirmist” wing of the “national democratic movement”; the “rejectionist” Metro Manila-based Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) associated with Felimon Lagman, the alleged head of the breakaway branch of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) based in Metro Manila and Rizal; the independent-minded National Federation of Labor (NFL) and the National Association of Free Labor Unions (NAFLU), both of which spearheaded the organization of the new labor center dubbed as the National Confederation of Labor (NCL); and the individual KMU unions, which decided to opt out of the KMU and remain independent of any labor federation. Many BMP unions are also active affiliates of the federations aligned with the NCL.

Today, the trade union movement is comparatively less strike-prone than it was in the 1980s. This is accounted for by a number of factors, among which are; moderate recovery of the economy; the institutionalization of tripartism and voluntary modes of disputes settlement; the high cost (from the union’s point of view) of conducting a strike, particularly a wildcat or “illegal” one in the sense that it does not meet all the legal requirements (since 1987, an illegal strike is sufficient justification for dismissal of union officials); and the decline in influence and number of the radical labor centers such as the KMU). There is also the eroding base of unionism due to the downsizing and subcontracting efforts of local industries that have to face stiffer competition under a globalized and liberalized national economic order.

These developments have made the tasks of labor organizing and maintaining memberships doubly difficult. But these have also forced labor federations like the FFW and the NFL, both of which belong to the top five federations in terms of membership, to undertake creative “adjustment” measures such as initiating programs to organize union cooperatives and welfare projects; lobbying for safety net programs for displaced workers such as skills upgrading and retooling; cooperating with management on productivity and other similar programs so long as the job security of the workers is assured and gains are equitably shared; and exploring ways of organizing workers in the informal sector and those working on a “per project basis” such as the construction workers. An area of concentration for both FFW and the NFL is the “growth areas”, particularly the emerging and expanding government-run export processing zones and the privately-managed industrial parks. These are dominated by women workers, who have not been given as much attention by the trade union movement as they deserve. Consequently, women’s participation in labor unions,

especially as leaders and organizers, leaves much to be desired.

It is not surprising that more men than women choose to join unions or be actively involved in union affairs. Women, as of 1993, comprised 42.9 percent of total union membership in the Philippines. (NCRFW/ADB, 1995:30). Despite the increasing number of women unionists, male dominance in union leadership has prevailed. This is true even in service industries where women abound, and in sectors where females outnumber men as union members (such as wholesale and retail trade as well as financing, insurance, real estate and business service). It is also the case in individual manufacturing firms where majority of the workforce are women (such as electronics and garments). Thus, while male union Presidents lord it over union organizations, women play minor roles as members of the Board of Director, as second in command or as treasurers or secretaries — traditional sphere of women even in business and other organizations. This is true not only at the level of the local union but also at the level of the federation. In 1993, only 20.7 percent of 314 unions surveyed by the Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics had women presidents. (Ibid)

Organizing and Empowering Women in the Economic Zones

There is a general consensus among all concerned — women workers, trade union and NGO officials, and others — on the urgent need to organize workers in export processing zones, particularly the women. Women workers in the EPZs are considered victims of exploitation and abuse by employers. They are susceptible to all forms of flexibilization and various other management strategies to contend with globalization. Women are considered powerless because labor laws are often circumvented to deny them their rights. They are exposed to all kinds of health and safety hazards as well as to substandard conditions of work. They need to be organized to improve their chances in the world of work and to empower themselves both as workers and as women.

Considerations for Joining Unions

Women workers in the EPZs have various considerations in forming and joining unions. Interviews with them highlight their belief that they can be stronger in fighting for their welfare if they are organized. The union can provide the countervailing force against management's rampant violation of workers' rights. It can help workers improve the quality of their lives. At the same time, it knits the

members together in quasi-familial relationships, which enable them to help each other in times of need.

In **Cavite**, the women interviewed feel that unions can help them get higher wages over and above what they usually receive (from P95 to P103 per day) – wages way below the minimum wage of P155. Some women do not have formal employment contracts to speak of. Others are made to sign a contract good for two to five months, renewable at management's pleasure. Having a union, in their opinion, will allow them to work toward security of tenure and the general improvement of their socio-economic situation. They can avail themselves of leaves and benefits above those granted by law. Furthermore, they can get medical benefits for themselves and their families.

At the **Bataan EPZ**, some of the women interviewed attribute their union activism to conditions such as: non-implementation of minimum wage orders, non-remittance of SSS benefits affecting maternity leaves, job insecurity, forced leaves and forced overtime, and the non-stop increase in production quotas. In other establishment, women pin their hopes on the union to help them overcome problems such as management abuses (i.e., shouting at workers), management's more favorable treatment of relatives, province-mates, apprentices and lesbian workers, unjust termination and suspension, casualization, non-remittance of SSS benefits, forced overtime, and non-payment of overtime work. The union's image as a protector and representative of workers to management has served as a come-on to the members. Moreover, some informants say that they experience camaraderie and solidarity (as among brothers and sisters in a family) in times of need. They learn about their rights and how to fight for them from the union.

Women's considerations for joining unions in **Baguio** and **Mactan** echo those in other export processing zones. Added to these are the conflicts arising from cultural differences between employers and workers, especially in Mactan (Remedio, 1996). These result from varying expectations regarding proper behavior towards employees. When the latter are offended by what they feel is abusive treatment by their foreign employers or managers, they try to seek redress. Given the conditions of women in export processing zones, organizers believe that women will consolidate their forces through the union only when company practices are blatantly exploitative and they need a venue for their complaints. Women know from experience the risk they face with union organization. Even

while some organizers perceive them to be passive and easily cowed by threats of dismissal, many women workers do persist in forming and joining unions. It is true, however, that some just leave the company, as was the case with a group of women workers at the Baguio EPZ.

Considerations for Joining Cooperatives

Some women join cooperatives to improve their economic situation. This means additional income earned through cooperative business ventures. This also means members' access to badly needed loans to be used for various purposes: financing individual business ventures, medical expenses, school fees and the like. In Baguio City, women workers in the zone are members of the Baguio-Benguet Credit Cooperative. They avail themselves of housing loans offered by the cooperative.

In many cases, coops are initiated or at least encouraged by other sectors; i.e. management and NGOs.

In one company producing CD-Rom equipment in Rosario, Cavite, a management representative (an acquaintance of one researcher) even asked the research team doing field work in the area to teach their workers about cooperatives in a two-day session. Taking this as an opportunity to interact with the women in the said company, the researchers agreed to do so. They noted the enthusiasm of the workers to form a credit cooperative in the company. The company is noted for paying higher wages in the area, but nevertheless, the workers wanted to have ready access to credit facilities. Later, they expressed their desire to open a multi-purpose cooperative so that they could take over the management of the cafeteria, which they surmised was earning a lot. They also hoped to open a store where employees can buy basic goods at reasonable prices. They said that in the future, the cooperative might even be a sub-contracting agent, supplying the company with needed materials or equipment. Since managers were also to become members, the women in this electronic company thought that the cooperative would serve as a venue where they could interact with management to improve working relationships in the firm. They therefore believe that the cooperative would improve not only their economic position in the company but also their access to decision-makers.

Initiatives to Empower Women in the Economic Zones

These are diverse, depending on the type of organization doing the initiating. Union organizing is usually the domain of the trade unions. However, the Church as well as NGOs can go into it indirectly through their affiliate organizations. Direct initiatives by NGOs consist more of educational and research activities geared toward advocacy work. NGOs, including the church-based ones also lend their assistance to women workers who are victimized by alleged "downsizing" trends as well as other forms of exploitation or harassment in the workplace.

Trade Union Initiatives

It is worth noting that of the 159 registered federations nationwide (DOLE Employment and Labor Statistics, 3rd Quarter, 1995), only a handful have actual initiatives to empower women in export processing zones. Organizing workers is their main thrust but this has been successful only in the Bataan and Cavite zones. It is only in these two areas where unions have won recognition and have sustained themselves.

In **Bataan**, there are 19 out of 60 companies which are unionized. However, it appears that even in Bataan where unions have been in existence for a long time, collective bargaining negotiations are proving to be difficult. Only nine companies in the area have CBAs.

According to interviewees from the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) and the February Six Movement (FSM), the major trade union groups competing with each other at the BEPZ are:

1. Associated Labor Union (ALU, a TUCP affiliate), with 2,251 members;
2. Associated Democratic Labor Union (ADLU, a Kilusang Mayo Uno affiliate) with 4,197 members, 2,000 recently displaced due to closure of their firms;
3. Trade Unions of the Philippines and Allied Services (TUPAS) with 1,747 members (TUPAS later split into two, with one faction retaining the name and the other forming the February Six Movement or FSM);

4. Confederation of Free Workers (CFW), with 590 workers; and
5. Independent local unions with 1,463 workers.

In Rosario, **Cavite**, there are nine registered unions, but they still have to enter into collective bargaining negotiations. Three of them won in the certification elections. The rest still have to overcome barriers posed against them by management and its allies as they struggle to win the certification elections. They are found in the following worksites:

1. A Korean-owned firm producing rubber shoes employing 3,377 workers, mostly women. The Alyansa ng Malayang Obrero (AMO) organized the workers. While the certification election (CE) results were pending, management terminated some 300 workers allegedly due to "reduced order." Many of them had, on the average, three to five years of service. They were told that this was not a termination move, just a temporary lay off.
2. A garments factory, also owned by Koreans, with 633 workers, 69 percent of them women. AMO also organized the local union in this company, but up to now, it still has win in the CE (pending as of the time of writing).
3. Another Korean garment firm employing 452 women (77 percent of the total workforce). Organizing here was also an AMO initiative. The union did not get a majority in the CE. AMO filed a protest with the DOLE alleging harassment by management who did not allow the qualified voters to report for work on the day of the election.
4. A Korean textile factory with 316 (72.8 percent) women workers. Likewise, this was the site of an AMO organizing attempt. This time, the union won in the CE, and is certified by the DOLE as the bargaining agent for the workers. It manifested its intention for collective bargaining with management but elicited no response. The union filed a notice of strike in this regard.

5. A British-owned garment company (making shorts, sweaters, lingerie, etc.) composed of 378 workers, 84.4 percent of them women. Organizing was at the initiative of the FFW. Management quashed the union in its bid for certification election.
6. A Taiwanese enterprise making jackets and employing some 800 workers, mostly women. They put up KASALO, an independent union. It has a pending CE. The union had a strike in March 1996, lasting half a day, to protest union busting by management and the termination of 41 workers, including union leaders. Five of them did not get their separation pay.
7. An Australian firm in the non-ferrous basic metal sector, with mostly men (only 10 are women) in the 151-strong workforce. This was organized by the Philippines Federation of Labor (PFL), an affiliate of TUCP. It won in the CE. A woman officer of the federation revealed that it took the federation six months to unionize the company, but this is a relatively short period compared to the experience of others. All kinds of tactics were used by management to block the entry of the union. It went on a house-to-house campaign to convince the workers not to join the union. It threatened the officers. During the CE, management tried to withhold the list of eligible voters. Then they tried to find various loopholes in subsequent processes, questioning the registration, or otherwise absenting themselves during hearings. The informant alleged that the mayor was often in collusion with management, and that when any organizing venture was in the offing, the mayor's men would call the organizers to a conference. She explained that the reason why, it took so long for the CE to happen was that management often filed for a petition for certiorari, and this had to be resolved first.
8. A Japanese corporation making speed boats, employing 30 workers, mostly male. NFL organized this small company and the union won in the re-

cently held CE.

9. An American garments factory with 378 workers, 84.4 percent of them women (relocated from the Metro Manila area). The Associated Labor Union (ALU), another affiliate of TUCP, organized the workers there. Management dismissed the officers, leading the union to file a notice of strike. Threatened thus, management voluntarily recognized the union, even without a CE.

Only one labor federation was able to organize in the First Cavite Industrial Estate (FCIE). This is the February Six Movement (FSM), which unionized the workers of a Japanese-owned firm making golf gloves, without opposition from the owners. In fact the company voluntarily recognized the union, according to a zone official and a labor organizer from another group. An informant revealed that the company was formerly based at the Bataan Export Processing Zone, and could have learned a lot from the unionizing experience there. It is also the first company with a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in the Cavite EPZ.

Although technically not yet a labor federation, Kristong Manggagawa (KM or Christian Workers) has also organized a number of firms in the private industrial estates in Cavite province. This will be discussed in greater detail in the section on church-based organizing.

In **Baguio City**, there are only two EPZ-based unions listed and they are both inactive. (DOLE-CAR List of Existing Registered Unions, June 1996): one with 800 workers affiliated with FSM, and another with 120 members affiliated with PLAC. Both had certificates of registration. It is not clear, however, why they bowed out of the scene. There were earlier attempts to unionize other companies in the zone. However, these were squashed by management action or met with defeat during certification elections with "no union" votes.

Accounts of the Cordillera Women's Education and Resource Center (CWERC) and the Women Workers' Program (1994) cite the attempt of the Kilusang Mayo Uno to organize a union in one enterprise through its affiliate, the ADLU (Association of Democratic Labor Unions). In this case, management countered by forming the "People to People Group," which encouraged company loyalty. Threats of lay-offs and the implementation of a profit sharing scheme by management averted union organizing activities.

In 1986, TUPAS succeeded in organizing a union in one company. A one-month strike was held, forcing management to recognize the union. Zone police harassed the workers. A year later, all its workers were laid off, and a new company came in and used the machines of the old company. In 1986, the CAFFCO Employees' Union was formed. Workers struck when management decided to lay off 134 workers. This postponed the re-trenchment, but management pushed through with the closure of the vinyl department. Again, the union's strike forced management to concede by withdrawing the re-trenchment and offering bonuses for the workers to return to work. CAFFCO, however, closed a year later, displacing its 457 regular workers plus more than 1,000 subcontractee workers.

A case of voluntary recognition of the union took place in one factory. However, the factory later transferred to Manila when its building was damaged in 1994 by the killer quake that shook Baguio City.

Mactan is another example of a no-union zone, despite attempts by federations like NFL and FFW. NFL's organizing did not prosper because at the point when the certification election was about to be conducted, the organizing workers were locked out. They filed a case against management and won after two years, with DOLE's issuance of a return-to-work order. Many did not do so however, fearing management retaliation. If only they had stayed, this would have represented a significant breakthrough in union organizing at the MEPZ. FFW had four tries at unionization here. The FFW Coordinator in Cebu tried to organize a supervisor's union in a company where he used to work as supervisor, but failed. Nevertheless, the leaders of the unionization attempt were re-trenched. Organizing women in an electronics firm also proved futile because the male organizer attracted suspicion and there were no obvious problems for the workers to complain about.

The Associated Labor Union (ALU-TUCP) twice tried to organize workers at MEPZ, but lost in the certification elections. ALU currently has an experimental pilot project involving the organization of cooperatives in neighboring communities (barangays). Promotional and organizational activities are being undertaken, including dialogues with the Parent-Teachers Association in areas where workers are concentrated.

Some labor organizations focus on specific zone areas. AMO (Alyansa ng Malayang Obrero or Alliance of Free Workers, affiliated with the Lakas Manggagawa Labor Center-LMLC), has made Cavite its area of concern. TUCP federation affiliates are concentrating on the Cavite and Laguna areas, in response to the rapid industrialization taking place in these locations. In fact, TUCP has established offices in Rosario, Cavite and in Calamba, Laguna. TUCP also extends legal services to workers in these areas, and because the federation affiliates do not want the center itself to do the organizing (and collective bargaining), what TUCP organizes instead, are cooperatives. Since cooperatives address the need for increased sources of livelihood, some federation officials think that this is a good starting point for empowering workers in the export processing zones. According to one of them, some government authorities tell them that establishing cooperatives rather than unions would be more acceptable to the investors.

In Rosario, Cavite, the TUCP set up its Labor Education and Counselling Center (LECC), in conjunction with the Asian American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI), with funding from the USAID. LECC offers free teach-in sessions, training, and other forms of labor education. Topics discussed include: labor standards, labor relations, occupational health and safety, environmental impact and pollution control, dispute resolution, SSS, medicare and cooperatives. LECC also conducts paralegal training among workers in the zone. It often makes representations with management to allow workers to attend seminars. It also gives free legal counselling or consultation, representation, and other paralegal services to workers with labor-related problems. A family planning clinic is in place, likewise to serve the need of the workers. These services are not meant to be gender-specific, and any worker can just drop in.

International organizations such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) does not have direct union organizing activities. Officials of the ICTU are however, as much concerned for the welfare of workers in EPZs. Such concern has led to the decision of top ICFTU officials (such as the General Secretary and the Senior Officer of the Economic and Social Department) together with the President of TUCP to visit the Cavite Export Processing Zone in February, 1995. This was after the "National Conference on Jobs, Justice and Development in the International Economy," held under the auspices of the TUCP. During the trip, the group held a dialogue with local government and zone representatives.

NGO Initiatives

Church-based Groups. Among the four economic zones studied, church organizations are involved in labor affairs in only two areas: (1) Mactan, with the Cebu Archdiocesan Rural Labor Apostolate giving minimal support to walk-in EPZ women because its mandate covers only rural labor, and (2) the Cavite area. Despite minimal engagement in the Mactan EPZ at this stage, the potential role of church-based organizations in linking with trade unions for community and sectoral organizing of EPZ workers is recognized by labor groups.

Cavite, in contrast, is a place where religious organizations are observed to be heavily immersed in labor affairs, particularly in lending assistance to workers who encounter problems in the workplace and in some cases, leading to their unionization. Two church groups are active in helping workers in the EPZs; the Workers' Assistance Center (WAC), established by the parish priest of Rosario, and the Kristong Manggagawa (KM), an initiative of the Diocese based in IMUS.

WAC has a four-pronged program:

1. Education and training to mold individuals in the social teachings of the church, and create awareness regarding rights of workers;
2. Formation of workers' organizations and support groups like the Solidarity of Christian Workers, and Friends of Workers;
3. Establishment of livelihood programs, including development of cooperatives, to help augment the earnings of the workers; and
4. Networking with different organizations of the church and the workers that could support the needs of the workers.

WAC conducts religious rites and other undertaking for workers at the EPZ. These include workers' mass every Saturday evening; prayer meetings held either in church or in the residence or boarding houses of workers; retreat and recolle-

tion; organization of workers' choir and cultural groups; Bible studies and discussions on the social teachings of the church; and training on workers' right. WAC personnel also visit the workers in their homes to get to know them on a personal basis and to extend them assistance.

WAC believes that there can be industrial peace only when justice reigns. It does not organize unions. However, realizing the difficulty of unionizing workers, especially women, and the need for them to have a voice in the export processing zone, it spearheaded the formation of the solidarity of Christian Workers (SCW) as an alternative to unions. SCW consists of individual members and is envisioned to be a mechanism toward unifying workers at EPZ, men and women alike. Through this, WAC seeks to uphold the rights of workers, spread the teaching of the Church regarding these rights, and lay the foundation for genuine trade unionism. Consciousness-raising regarding environmental concerns is part of its agenda. The workers' main consideration in joining this group is to find a solution to their labor problems, according to WAC personnel. Women workers feel free to drop by the WAC premises (adjacent to the church) anytime. The researchers actually witnessed five women union leaders come in to ask WAC for assistance after losing in the CE.

The Kristong Manggagawa (KM) which is also called Kristiyanong Manggagawa (Christian Worker), is a church-based organization similar to yet very different from WAC. It is actively engaged in organizing workers in the first Cavite Industrial Estate (FCIE) and in neighboring sites. Despite constraints posed by the foreign owners, it was able to organize in the FCIE, in the Gateway Industrial Estate and in companies outside the zones. KM is not affiliated with any labor federation or center; it does not have any relationship with WAC. It wants to maintain its independence from any labor group, claiming an entirely different approach to unionism. It goes by the motto: "tunay na palaban, makabayan, ngunit responsable at Kristiyanong unyunismo" (roughly translated as truly militant, nationalistic but responsible and Christian unionism). It lays stress on responsible unionism, aware of the negative impact of earlier attempts at unionism in Cavite. A KM informant for instance cited the cases of the Sanitary Steam Laundry and the Meridian Leather Company in the 1980's. Both companies closed shop when the unions were organized, leaving the workers jobless.

KM is like a labor federation, and is actually part of the social action program of the diocese in Cavite. This program has three com-

ponents: (1) the Diocesan Labor Center (DLC), which helped organize and support KM; (2) the Community Integrated Development Program (CIDP), which makes use of health as an entry point and assist the community to be self-reliant in response to the rapid industrialization of Cavite; and (3) the parish-level social action center. The diocese helps in union organizing by sharing its resources for meetings and union activities. It is inspired by the church's vision of organizing basic ecclesiastical communities (BEC), which requires conscientization regarding the situation of workers in EPZs. In these efforts, links are forged with the NASSA (National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace). The Diocesan Labor Center deals with the workers, while the CIDP works with the communities to promote the BEC vision. An integration of the two programs is yet to be achieved. A parish priest in a town near Rosario has headed the diocesan social action center since 1992, and has inspired the formation of Kristong Manggagawa. In an interview with this priest, he divulged that he was already involved in the worker's struggle since the eighties.

KM makes use of church teachings, particularly *Rerum Novarum* and *Laborem Exercens*, in its value formation and leadership training. It emphasizes the faith dimension or the moral and spiritual approach to intensify commitment, to strengthen internal values, and uphold human dignity. KM's long-range goal is to create worker-led communities in pilot areas with the cooperation of parish priests. This is based on the view that the Church in the totality of the community, bringing in the marginalized groups (workers, urban poor, indigenous people), as evangelizers who contribute to, rather than receive from the community. The parish priest likewise acts as mediator between the union and management and believes that the Church is effective in this role because it has no vested interest. This is done through dialogues with the parties involved, or through face-to-face approaches, with union and management representatives sitting together around one table.

Organizing by KM started in 1994, initially at a firm manufacturing wire harness for cars and employing 3,600 workers, mostly women. It is located outside EPZ premises. Organizing through "super secret" means was done from May to December 1994, culminating in a general assembly at the Diocesan Social Action Center in Imus, attended by 2,000 workers. There were four previous attempts at unionization in this company, including KM's. One KM organizer claimed he was threatened by an IRD officer associated with the former Cavite governor. The officer allegedly took him aside, asked him to spy for management, and offered him an allowance —

all the while brandishing a gun. Management also filed disciplinary cases against the union leaders. Consequently, the union went on strike for five days to protest this action.

Today, the union has a CBA. During the collective bargaining negotiations, it tried to integrate gender-responsive provisions in the CBA, such as menstrual leave and child care. Management refused, alleging that there was no budget to sustain such provisions. The union is composed of men and women. But because of cultural stereotyping, according to one female organizer, the officers are mostly men who are perceived to be stronger.

Another initiative of KM is unionization at a Japanese company producing ladies belts and handbags at the FCIE. Before this, workers have always been on temporary lay off for at least one month and subjected to forced overtime. KM competed against the firm's employees association, a company-favored union allegedly organized by a rival federation. According to one FCIE Zone officer, the CE elicited an overwhelming "yes" vote for KM. Some 100 out of 135 eligible voters stamped their mark of approval for the union. This caught management by surprise, because it was quite confident that the contending union would win. As a result, the management lawyer resigned due to embarrassment at the turn of affairs. A man heads the union, although eleven women are strategically located in the top union structure: five of them sit in the Council of Leaders; six are in the Executive Board. There are also five women acting as shop stewards.

The union at a Japanese firm with around 400 workers, also at the First Cavite Industrial Estate, was likewise organized by the KM. Workers in this firm went on strike over the preventive suspension and dismissal of eight union officers, two of whom were women. The cause was a disagreement with management in a hearing regarding the CE. KM claims the the strike was not illegal, having conformed with the required cooling off period. It was held 20 days after filing of the strike notice. Workers believed that they complied with the temporary restraining order issued by the court and tried not to block the gates while they were picketing the premises. Women in the pickeline were nevertheless sexually harassed by the police and security guards, who touched their breasts in order to dismantle the picketline (their arms were locked at the time). Some of the women were arrested, and were placed under the custody of the parish priest. The incident led the KM to file a case with the Commission on Human Rights, and also the illegal dismissal of union

officers is still pending at the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC). The workers had no strike funds but survived through the help of other KM workers who conducted a fund drive, and who smuggled food and other supplies through unguarded walls.

At a Japanese electronic firm located in the Gateway Industrial Estate, which produces headphones, KM run against an alleged company union. Some 1,000 workers were involved, 70 percent of them females. KM won by 95 votes in the certification election. The list of voters was contested, however, with the Department of Labor and Employment stating that 65 of the 95 voters should be invalidated. This and other experiences has led KM members to conclude that the government is an ally of management in its bid to quash unionism in the zones.

NGOs (Not Church-Based) and Women's Organizations. NGOs are not usually into direct union organizing for many reasons. NGOs have distinct mandates to operate in specific areas. Their activities are often "fund-driven;" i.e. they engage in these activities provided they have funding for them. Union organizing needs training and experience, and people who manage the NGOs may not be able to engage the services of organizers without the needed resources. Apart from their specific mission objective, they would not be allowed to compete with the many labor organizations engaged in the unionization of workers. If they do, they do so indirectly, through their allies in the labor movement.

FENGOR (Federation of Non Government Organizations) is based in Rosario, Cavite. It is a multi-sectoral group composed of 40 organizations engaged in education and training on such topics as organization building, SSS remittance, and cooperatives as well as in conscientization through theater arts. FENGOR does not yet have a program or initiative for EPZ women, and the informant thinks that it should address this concern. FENGOR offers livelihood opportunities (through grant of loan assistance with five percent interest per annum) and participation in its various seminars. It also helps in raising the consciousness of women regarding their rights, especially against sexual harassment. Like others, the FENGOR respondent believes that women are fearful of unions because they are afraid they would be laid off from their jobs as a consequence of unionization. But they need to be organized to effectively address their problems in the workplace.

Cebu Labor Education, Advocacy and Research Center (CLEAR) is the only NGO which has an active initiative for workers in the Mactan zone. Established in 1987 to organize grassroots workers, it also provides education, training and technical assistance to independent labor unions. CLEAR recently conducted a study on the working conditions at MEPZ. A multi-sectoral conference was called to discuss the results of the study, with invited representatives from various labor groups, PEZA, DOLE and the LGUs. CLEAR had earlier attempts at organizing workers in a furniture factory, but failed because management countered with a training program called LAMPARA (Labor Management Partnership for Relational Attitudes — which emphasized labor management cooperation and unity). Workers were later retrenched among whom were the bulk of workers (60 to 70 percent) who signed in favor of the union. CLEAR is now experimenting with women-specific approaches to organizing, but in firms outside the zone.

Women's Resource Center of Cebu (WRCC) is linked to GABRIELA and the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU). Its target clientele are the fisherfolk and the urban poor women. It plans to start research on women workers at MEPZ with the end in view of providing them support services together with other women's organizations.

Baguio City is an area where an NGO — the **Lesbians for National Democracy (LESBOND)** sought to organize lesbian workers in the zone. Right now, there are 15 members who serve as initial contacts in different factories as well as other worksites. It conducts focused group discussions among lesbian partners, theoretical discussions and seminars, and regular basketball games. Public fora on women and lesbian workers' rights were held. Other NGOs with initiatives for women workers at the BCEPZ are: the Cordillera **Women's Education and Resource Center (CWERC)** and the **Women Workers' Program (WWP)**, two organizations with a joint research undertaking on the situation of women workers in the zone, along with the Center for Labor Organization and Research (**CLEAR**). The result of the collaboration of the three NGO's is the organization of **SAMAKA (Samahan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan ng Adriste - or Association of Women Workers at Adriste)**.

At the national level, the **CARL (Center for Applied Research and Library Services)**, a unit of EILER (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research), has an ongoing study on women workers at EPZA and an educational undertaking at the Cavite EPZ. At the same time, the EILER staff, upon request of EPZ workers (from Baguio and Bataan), conducts workers' education programs for them or teach them what they want to know about their rights as workers.

As an organization working for the economic empowerment of women, initiatives of **WID (Women in Development)** include: a micro enterprise program for women (since 1981), and a WID-WOW program for overseas women workers. In March, 1996 it passed a resolution to organize workers in the Cavite EPZ. For women with labor problems, WID tries to look for lawyers to help them or facilitates the entry of other organizations to assist them.

GABRIELA has quite a line-up of programs for women, though not particularly directed at women in EPZs. Examples are : education/consciousness raising regarding women's rights; redress in case there is violence against women; counselling; provision of health services; advocacy or political campaigns on issues like oil deregulation and privatization; provision of legal services; and socio-economic empowerment through cooperatives. It addresses the organization needs of women in EPZs through contact or core building and the conduct of labor education regarding their rights.

Defending the Rights and Interest of Women Workers, Improving their Socio-Economic Situation

Women workers cite the following positive effects of unionization: (1) upgrading of piece rate to daily wage; (2) attainment of pay adjustment; (3) willingness of management to listen to workers; and (4) ousting of abusive management personnel. In addition, some unions managed to have disciplinary actions against workers stopped or dropped; to arrange the scheduling of overtime on a selective basis or stopping outright the use of forced overtime; to have a union-management agreement regarding quotas; and to guarantee remittance of SSS payments. Women workers also reported having become more self-confident in dealing with what used to be considered male-associated concerns, and in facing up to management.

In the group interviews with women union officials, they claim that the union has helped improve their socio-economic status in society. They are assured some job security, participation in important areas (e.g., dispute settlement through the grievance machinery), increase in wages every year through the CBA, and economic empowerment. As a matter of fact, they say that the union has enhanced their ability to do the following : (1) buy things for themselves and their families for daily sustenance; (2) get loans from union funds; (3) move up the socio-economic ladder; and (4) have a better or more stable relationship with management.

Specific experience in the union have helped women acquire gender consciousness. An example is the case in Bataan where women helped put a women president in place of an impeached male officer. Through this, they were able to compare his actions with those of his successor.

Federation representatives claim that with their organizing initiatives, the following rights and interest of women workers were defended: 1) the right to self-organization and collective bargaining; 2) security of employment, due to their interventions in the form of legal assistance to workers dismissed for unjust causes; 3) equality of pay and work conditions; 4) high observance of maternity benefits and processing of social security benefit claims; and 5) speedy settlement of cases brought to conciliation, mediation, and voluntary arbitration.

Those whose organizing attempts were not completely successful; i.e., where the union lost in certification election, admit that no substantial gains have been reaped yet. Some workers even lost their jobs in their unionizing attempts.

Successful union organizing attempts give women workers in the zone some degree of participation in the decision – making processes in the firms. In addition, because of unionization, federations claim that company rules and regulations have been revised to reflect observance of due process. Management's treatment of workers has also changed for the better.

Policy Intentions : Goals and Aims

Most labor federations have no specific statements directed toward the organization of women in export processing zones. Some labor leaders even react very strongly when asked about specific policies meant to empower women workers. They believe that gender distinctions should not be highlighted because both sexes are subjugated to systems of labor control and exploitation in the workplace. Other federation leaders say that unions often take a practical approach in organizing. This means going for firms that have a large workforce or would present greater chances of success, which is linked to the issue of cost-effectiveness. Since firms in the economic zones have a reputation for being extremely difficult to organize, and the enormous costs of organizing plus the slim chances of success are not outweighed by possible gains in terms of the numbers that could be unionized, the normal reaction is avoidance.

TUCP at least has a general policy addressed to organizing workers at the EPZs. NFL and FFW are still in the process of formulating such a policy. NFL plans to start with a data base on which to plot its policies and programs. Right now, many federations are too preoccupied with consolidating and expanding their membership. Most are also trying to address the issues and problems brought about by globalization and trade liberalization among their affiliates. In the face of massive lay-offs, the mass base of many federations is rapidly eroding, throwing them into a crisis of sustainability.

Federations with distinct gender and development policies aim to push the equality issue in their ranks. Invariably, this involves: 1) setting up women's desks to attend to the needs of women members (i.e., through training and other capability-building activities); and 2) affirmative action programs to increase the representation of women in the executive boards as well as ensure their participation in training programs and conferences.

The creation of women's desks is a concrete manifestation of the growing awareness in some federations of the need to integrate gender and development in trade union affairs. Initial resistance from the male leadership is expected, but this is later overcome with persistence and persuasion. Some funding agencies require the setting up of women's desks as a precondition for granting financial subsidy to the federation. Nevertheless, FFW and NFL were much ahead in establishing a body in charge of women's concerns in their organizational structures.

FFW's efforts date back to sixties. These have culminated in the formation of a women's network, a national organization of FFW-affiliated women's organization, with regional coordinators nationwide. FFW held a National Women's Conference at Imus, Cavite in 1994 to identify a plan of action geared toward the attainment of its goals for women workers: organization and institution building, education and training, economic empowerment, and advocacy and networking. **The FFW Women's Network (FWN)** is in charge of coordinating plans and programs nationwide, and of monitoring and evaluating activities for women.

The **FFW Women's Desk** was likewise created to provide support services to women and women workers. Programs of the FFW were previously focused only on women in development (WID). Later, these shifted to gender and development (GAD) with equal

emphasis on male and female workers. FFW believes that development can only be attained with the recognition that both women and men are victims of social injustice, but women nevertheless are more oppressed than men because of gender inequity.

The FFW is an affiliate of the **World Confederation of Labor (WCL)** which also has some women-oriented initiatives.

As a result of continuing advocacy by its gender-sensitive members, NFL already has a Women's Committee. This Committee is preoccupied with giving gender-sensitive training (GST) to leaders of the federation's member affiliates. It is also in charge of creating women's committees in the local unions of NFL, especially those where women predominate in the membership. These are expected to help the federation mainstream gender issues at all levels, and to organize women in certain activities (e.g., education and training). Local officials in unions where there is a low percentage of women are also given GSTs. In NFL's experience, GST has a significant impact on male unionists. After exposure to such training, they become very supportive of GAD concerns, and even make gender education a top priority in their worker's education programs. NFL is also moving towards having set quotas of women leaders in various levels of its organizational structure.

TUPAS likewise has a Women's Committee, composed of 30 women union presidents. It aims to develop and strengthen programs for women workers among its affiliates. Since TUPAS is just starting to focus on women's concern, the only gains reported so far are the few capability building seminars held specifically for women members.

TUCP's counterpart organization for women is the DAWN (Development Action for Women in TUCP). DAWN's vision is: "full development of women and their integration as equal partners with men in the trade union movement and at all levels of society." Toward this end, it seeks to do the following: (1) create awareness among women on policies, issues, problems, decisions and developments affecting them; (2) ensure that their suggestions and aspirations are considered in policy-making; (3) effectively involve women in major development projects; (4) assist in the organization of women's unions in both private and public sectors; (5) set up women's committees at all levels in every federation or local union; and (6)

integrate gender issues in trade union activities. Programs include: leadership training for women, organizing (women's committees and women's assembly), and awareness-raising on structural adjustment and its impact on women.

TUCP has 13 Women's Committees at the federation level, and has implemented the resolution to provide a special seat for women at the center and federation levels. It has seen to it that women must at least have 35 percent representation in all trade union activities. There are two women officials in the Board of Directors — in accordance with the gender parity policy of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), to which it is affiliated.

Strategies Being Used or Explored

Organizers take advantage of crisis situations to speed up union organizing. Such would include delays in SSS (social security system) remittances, and victimization by management in the form of dismissals or harassment. National trade union leaders therefore think that the first step is identifying firms with such crisis situations. The next is to look for the informal leaders in the area, those who appear brave enough to withstand whatever trials are in the offing. Then these leaders are invited to some kind of an informal meeting.

Sometimes, a brewing crisis situation pushes the women workers themselves to go to the federations for organizing assistance. The pros and cons are weighed before organizers take any action. This is done because it could be very expensive to organize, according to one labor official. Usually therefore, the organizers look for signatories among the would-be unionists, and if it is assured that a substantial number want to be organized, the federation then pursues the unionizing efforts.

In most cases, however, organizers have to come up with some novel ideas to get in contact with the target workers.

For example, during the first year of the LECC's operations, it organized discos to attract the workers to come to its premises. Asked why LECC was doing this, the legal officer answered that this was TUCP's way of attracting the workers at EPZ to visit the center — a first step towards possible unionization. But success directly stemming from this effort is still in the offing. According to the LECC officer, TUCP affiliates are likely to organize unions in two electronic

companies; one with 2,971 workers, 83 percent of whom are women; and another with 1,585 workers, 61 percent of them women.

Many labor groups make use of social occasions as excuses to get the workers together. One federation organizes parties as a come-on for the women in Rosario, Cavite. The organizer, through the contact person, invites them to come to a "birthday party" and urges them to bring along some friends. The friendship network is utilized to facilitate assembly of workers in a designated time and place. Others bring the women to picnics in the beach or excursions to a nearby spot. Still others use occasions like funeral wakes to commence the organizing activity.

Such camouflage activities are resorted to, according to some informants, because if one says outright that the meetings are being set for unionization purposes, women will not come. They are afraid. Often, even when they attend the parties, they back out as soon as they realize the intentions behind these occasions. They worry that there could be spies among them who could inform management about these organizing activities.

As soon as union organizing reaches the certification election stage, more difficulties are encountered as management continues to employ all available tactics to see to it that the "no union vote" prevails, or a company union wins in the election. This may range from manipulating the list of voters, to buying workers, or dismissing them for various reasons, to even influencing government officials and the police to be on the side of the company. Here is where federation assistance is mostly needed. At the FFW, the women's desk lends assistance to this certification election activity in the form of mobilizing organized unions under its umbrella to give solidarity support to the particular union being organized. All of them are ready with legal assistance to enable the organizing workers to pursue their ends, because experience dictates that surely, cases have to be filed with appropriate government agencies.

Some unions are exploring a more intensive use of the community approach to organizing zone workers. They believe this approach would be more facilitative than the traditional union organizing method, since the whole community would be made aware of the exploitative conditions in the EPZs. New ways of partnering unions with the community would be sought to make organizing more feasible. This would make the union relevant not only to the workers but to the community as well. If the union is trusted within the

community setting, it would be more credible because "you make their problems your problem, and the leverage is to a higher level," according to one male official. A KM leader feels that community-based approach is more realistic because a purely sectoral approach tends to separate workers from the rest of the community, thus depriving them of much-needed support. Operating with worker-residents in communities would also have a more lasting effect than trying to organize transient workers who live in boarding houses and who may be displaced anytime because of globalization.

Since establishing unions straight-away elicits antagonism and resistance from management and its allies, NFL is at the moment contemplating a non-confrontational approach to address problems of women workers in the EPZs in a more productive manner. This time, it is thinking of allying with women's organizations which can attract women workers into their fold. These organizations would tackle women's problems first and then perhaps move on to labor problems at some appropriate time, when the foundation is set. NFL organizers in Cebu specifically mentioned Lihok-Pilipina, a feminist group that has pioneered in community-based programs to address domestic violence. It is well-established and has undergone gender sensitivity training. An FNV-supported NFL project to train local union women for leadership is scoring modest gains.

The new thinking in NFL is proof of an emerging realization among federations of the need for gender-sensitive organizing, a departure from the old macho ways of doing things. The usual pattern has been that of male organizers targeting male workers for initial organizing. The approach, in this case, is simpler, more direct, and easily facilitated by drinking sessions. With men, no major problems are encountered, compared to women who cannot just be made to attend meetings at night. Organizers have to look after their safety. Furthermore, persuading men to attend a series of organizing meetings is not too difficult because there are no major obstacles (i.e., the need to attend to housework) to their attendance.

If male organizers need to organize female workers because they comprise the majority in the area, it would help if they are good-looking, presentable, and credible. But they have to be careful about their behavior, too because "some of the women could fall for them." Their sex could also be a disadvantage because parents and boarding house operators are immediately suspicious of strange men visiting young women in their homes.

Given the difficulties encountered by male organizers and the perceived lack of gender sensitivity in their approach, there is increasing realization, even among them, that female organizers are the best people to organize female workers because of easier interaction, identification and empathy. Women organizers could make a significant impact on the women workers who could see them as role models in their struggle. AMO obviously sees this is an advantage because it has three full-time women organizers assisted by a mixed team of men and women who work in shifts in the zones and outlying areas. TUCP realizes the need not only for women organizers but also for young women organizers who would be able to speak the language of and relate better with workers who are of the same age as themselves. Other federations still use male organizers to do this job, sometimes with the help of female assistants (contact persons in the zones who are themselves workers in the area). NFL once used the services of a female organizer in Bataan, but found out that this posed some limitations because of threats received. There are also instances when women would listen more to a male organizer than to a female one. Therefore, some unionists feel that using female organizers to unionize women in the zones should be on a case to case basis.

At this stage therefore, gender sensitive organizing (GSO) strategies (e.g., employing female organizers to organize female workers) are hardly prevalent. By these are meant to be strategies which give due regard to the situation of women and their gender-related problems, needs, and interests vis-a-vis men. Such strategies depart from the old position which sees both male and female workers as equally oppressed, being part of the same working class, and therefore there is no need to approach or treat them differently. GSO strategies stand from the recognition that women workers are clearly at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts and have to deal with gender-specific problems such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, demands of housework and child care, discrimination in the workplace, etc. It is true that in labor organizations, such gender issues are integrated in some training programs for union officials and organizers. Nevertheless, gains in terms of heightened gender awareness have not yet been fully translated into convincing organizational practice. For example, there may be women's desks in some federation, but they are encountering problems because of resistance from male officials. Mention was made of two organization that had funding for pursuing gender-related activities, but release of financial resources to the women's desks is proving to be difficult because the top leadership had other priorities.

Obstacles Encountered

Obstacles fall into several categories: (1) the general situation in economic zones, where government policies and officials play important roles; (2) pre-emptive and coercive tactics of employers and management personnel, some of which stem from their desire to be globally competitive; (3) intra- and inter-union weaknesses and conflicts; (4) hierarchical and undemocratic forms of organizing mixed with gender discrimination, preventing women from experiencing leadership roles; (4) other real or perceived difficulties associated with women organizers and women workers themselves because of gender stereotyping and other gender-related problems; and 5) lack of opportunities for workers to mix and socialize outside the work situation.

Belonging to the first category are the policies and programs of some zones, which have the effect of discouraging unionism, even if officials categorically deny that this is intentional. Union leaders, however, claim that such policies and programs implemented for the sake of industrial peace are covertly anti-union. Examples are (1) seminars sponsored by PEZA officials, as well as joint undertakings of DOLE, PEZA and the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry); (2) encouragement of LMC formation in the firms; and (3) referrals to a third party for the settlement of labor cases (e. g. mediation, conciliation and arbitration).

All twelve labor organization officials interviewed, as well as local union and NGO informants, concur with the view that the ecozones are not union-friendly. The workers' right to self organization as enshrined in an ILO convention is virtually contravened by what is interpreted to be a government policy to attract investors to the ecozones no matter what the cost. The tacit understanding is that such zones would be free of labor troubles. Given such an interpretation of an unstated but discernible policy, it is not surprising that peace and order operatives are sometimes used to check the initiatives of workers to unionize. In a few cases, some government officials even issue a direct warning to the workers "to lie low, not to be unruly, aggressive or militant in pursuing their union rights."

Some informants revealed that unionists even had conciliatory dialogues with concerned officials. These resulted in agreements granting labor organizers the go signal to pursue organizing activities. But when actual moves as agreed were initiated, all sorts of countervailing actions took place, blocking the workers from pro-

ceeding with their organizing. Federation leaders claimed that PEZA and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) officials seemed to be consistently filtering communications with the zone investors. They expressed the belief that if government officials would only allow the trade union officials to communicate directly with the investors, the latter would realize that unionists are "not patent trouble makers, that they can easily be communicated with, that they listen to reason, and are not ignorant to laws and policies." Direct communication with investors is considered a basic precondition before any organizing strategy could even be thought of, much less carried out — regardless of whether such strategy is for women or for male workers in the ecozones. Interviewees believed therefore, that the problems seem to lie not only with the investors, but "with our own kind."

Union organizing in the zones is therefore much more difficult than outside the zone. In the latter, organizers have only management to think about. At the ecozones, they have to contend with the zone police, the security guards in the target companies, and the local police force of the particular town or city where the zone is located. It is said that some local government officials are making Bataan an example they want to avoid, claiming that because of unions, many firms closed in the area.

Local government officials starting from the governor or the mayor intervene because they see themselves as protecting the interest of the state and upholding the government policy of attracting foreign investments, even at the expense of the workers. The informant from AMO related that he was once warned by the former governor of the province of Cavite, and later by the present official, regarding his organizing activities in the Cavite EPZ. A woman federation official frankly agreed that local government officials are in cahoots with management to obstruct the entry of unions in the zone. She narrated an experience similar to that encountered by AMO. One TUCP informant could not understand why the local government harasses its organizers, considering the federation's reputation for moderation.

According to an official of ALU (TUCP) in Cebu City, union leaders of one company in neighboring Danao City were arrested for possession of drugs, a form of harassment directed against the union. TUCP later filed a case against the Philippine government before the ILO, alleging that the local government officials in Danao City tried to interfere by asking members of the union to discontinue their membership. Furthermore, the same officials allegedly declared Danao

City union free and strike free when it was announced that a special economic zone would be set up in the area.

Aside from government, employers and management personnel can be difficult antagonists. Interviewees talked about investors who are hard to contend with. Koreans, Taiwanese, and other owners of Chinese descent have a particular reputation for being anti-union. They resist organizing attempts or they just simply pay those who are organizing to stop doing so. Nationals of other countries, even those where unionization is strong, prove to be as inflexible in their no-union posture. This is due to pressures from organizations of investors which favor union-free zones. Generally, management regardless of nationality, would present the threat of closure or transfer to other sites to foil unionization attempts.

There are other management strategies which are not union friendly. These include resorting to flexible work arrangements like subcontracting, use of agency hires and casual/contractual employment which results in non-regularization of workers. Women comprise the bulk of these workers and under such employment arrangements, they cannot be unionized. They have to start from the bottom over and over again in various work places.

Union organizing could be laborious or frustrating because it is met by management initiatives such as the formation of pseudo-unions or alternative unions (i.e. company unions), labor-management partnering organizations (such as LMCs or employees' council or committees which aim to bind the interest of workers and employers), and even cooperatives. These bodies make worker-initiated unions superfluous or nip the latter in the bud. They also foster employee loyalty and commitment to the firm. Management personnel can set up the alternative union themselves, or they can place labor organizers on their payroll on orders that they put up the contending union.

Internal conflicts within trade union organizations themselves can be problematic. Often, they are wracked by rivalry among leaders. Competition among federations for the unionization of certain companies is yet another factor to contend with. Such is observed particularly in organizations which have split into two factions. An example is that of a firm in Baguio where one faction believed it already had a stronghold over the workers there. But the other faction entered the scene, using "guerilla tactics." Both, however, failed in their unionization attempts.

An even more pressing issue is the negative image of some unionists who can allegedly be bought by management, abandoning their organizing effort and the workers they organized just when they are about to succeed.

Wavering loyalty and commitment on the part of union organizers is another concern. Chances are, they leave the union in a few year's time, unless the federation is able to provide them with skills upgrading and opportunities for income augmentation.

Part of the problem, too, is the hierarchical and undemocratic forms of organizing which some federations are used to. Such organizing, which is often dominated by men, prevents women from asserting and developing themselves as women.

Consequently, unions lack women organizers who are conceded to be more effective in organizing women workers. This is not surprising considering that majority of federation officials believe that women cannot withstand the physical strains of organizing; that they cannot be exposed to the rough and tumble of trade union organizing, which involves going out late at night, drinking with men, etc.; and that they can neglect their husbands and their household duties which may lead to the breakdown of their families. In fact, many male respondents still adhere to the view that unionizing is men's work. Unionism is perceived to be a matter "for men only" because unions have been their traditional domain. The fact, however, is that there are now women organizers who can actually do what used to be considered a male job, because they were persistent, they were trained, and they were given federation support. Gender, therefore, is not an insurmountable obstacle.

Also gender-related is the widespread belief that ecozone women themselves are very susceptible to anti-union propaganda. They are said to be docile and fearful. Moreover, respondents say that organizing women is very difficult because they are so preoccupied with their reproductive roles at home. The multiple burden of factory work, housework and child care prevent women from engaging in any determined effort against their employers. They cannot just attend meetings because of culture-dictated roles in the home. They have no time to devote to learning activities. They get tired of doing productive as well as domestic work. Their husbands and other family members can complain if they become active in union work.

While in general, trade union and NGO officials say that organizing ecozone women is difficult, those at Bataan claim that in their case, female workers are easier to unionize than males. As proof, they point out that there are more women organized in the zone. This contention is supported by the experience of one NFL organizer (a man) who maintains that this is especially the case among young, single women who will brave the picket line to the end. Women can be convinced without much effort because of their many problems in the workplace. They have high hopes for unionism and see it as an opportunity to get out of their precarious situation. Women are therefore seen to be more persistent and brave in union struggles than their male counterparts. If in the first instance, they seem to be terrified of unionizing, once they are organized and they are taught the rudiments of unionism, they can overcome these fears and stand up bravely to fight for their rights.

Another obstacle encountered is the lack of opportunities for workers in the economic zones to mix and socialize outside the work situation. This is partly gender-related, because "free time" for most women workers is usually spent on domestic chores, especially if they are married.

Elements of Success Facilitating Factors

Women union officials at the BEPZ claim the following factors are important in maintaining active unions: attitudes which are pro-active, which unify workers and encourage mutual give and take; active day-to-day solving of problems; discipline among members and other positive personal, environment and social factors.

Federation support is another positive factor cited, especially if the organizers are workers in the zone. This may be in the form of legal assistance, financial aid, and making contacts with government officials and legislators to get them on their side.

Timing is just as important to organizing. Federations know how to take advantage of this factor as they read the crisis situations in target firms while at the same time monitoring other factors that include the entry of rival organizations, be they other unions or quasi-unions.

Federations also attribute success in organizing to the persistence of their organizers and their commitment to goals regard-

less of constraints. Therefore, informants see the need to upgrade organizers' skills so that they would be able to think of novel ways to overcome the obstacles presented by the anti-union environment. Officials also see the need to have unity among the organizers and a unified position of federations, instead of each having its own strategy to make organizing a success in the zones. After all zone investors have their own associations and these have to be matched by labor unity efforts.

Assertiveness training can help in developing women organizers. According to one woman unionist, the top officials themselves should be made gender sensitive by undergoing GSTs. Women emphasized that the women's desks among federations can be a big boost to organizing women in the zones, if they could get more support from the top leadership. The officials of these women's desk should however take a more active role by setting up specific programs for women workers in their work sites. Some organizations like the FFW, TUPAS, NFL and the TUCP see the advantage of having women who are themselves active in union affairs (as workers and officials of unions) run the women's desks.

A community based approach is another factor considered contributory to successful organizing. Local government officials oftentimes involve the community in their activities related to the promotion of "industrial peace." Therefore, this approach can lead to a better understanding of the situation of workers in the zone on the part of the community, as well as a more balanced view of their plight.

Success factors attributed to union organizing by church-based organizations are : good relationship with the workers, the rigorous education and training given leader-organizers and workers regarding unionism and workers' rights, persistence of organizers, and the moral and spiritual inspiration given by union officers/organizers.

One trade union informant sees networking with the church and religious groups as an advantage, because they easily facilitate organizing efforts through their moral authority over the laity. One representative of a women's organization mentioned linkage with territorial organizations or alliances as a facilitating factor in the organization of EPZ women.

Elements of Failure (Constraining Factors)

Women workers in the zones put forward the following elements contributing to union failure: workers' competition among themselves to get closer to management (*palakasan*); undemocratic union leadership; the politico-economic effects of globalization which result in unpredictable firm transfers, closures and union busting efforts; old-fashioned (retrogressive) ways as well as corrupt, undisciplined, reactive and procrastinating attitudes of some union officials.

On the other hand, factors which hamper the organizing of EPZ women as experienced and observed by federation officials and organizers, may be categorized as follows: those which have to do with the plans, priorities, attitudes, commitments, human and material resources within the unions themselves; and those pertaining to the influences of or relationships with outside forces.

Those internal to the unions points to a lack of appreciation and concern for the gender-specific needs and interests of women workers in the EPZs. Most federations do not consider them a priority for organizing, which is why they do not have concrete plans for this. Many use a general, gender-blind framework for union work, finding no need to distinguish the need and interests of women workers from those of men. There is a lack of commitment in setting up women's committees at various levels, and if these are already in existence, there is not much support for their initiatives. In terms of human resources, there are not enough organizers, especially female ones, to do the needed work. Some male organizers are not as zealous or committed about organizing female workers, they are prone to sexual adventurism, and they do not know how to adjust to the needs and interests of their targets. The research base for effective organizing strategies is scanty and most federations do not have the means to develop this capability. The funds required to cover the cost of organizing in far-flung areas may be beyond what can be provided by federations which are mostly based in Metro Manila. Even if women workers are already organizing in their work sites, some experience lack of support from the federations. Such a situation makes the workers vulnerable to management reprisal.

Federations have to contend with outside forces, which hamper their initiatives. Government officials connive with employers to defeat the unions' organizing attempts. The zone investors' associations reportedly pressure individual employers to resist the entry of unions in their premises. Organizations of human resource or personnel managers serve the ends of the investors' association by

introducing various mechanisms to transplant or pre-empt unions. Private consultants are hired to advance the no-union policies of some firms. Federations have to compete with rival federations, especially those which split away and formed new groups, often at the expense of the workers being organized. Cultural variables also come into play in the organizing process. Parents, guardians, or landladies of young women workers tend to be protective of them and generally do not favor their meeting or going out with male organizers.

Cooperation Between Trade Unions and Other Organizations

Cooperation can be between trade unions, and between trade unions and other organizations. It can be on exploratory level of rhetoric, dialogue, and discussion, or on the concrete level of activities, programs, and projects done together or with mutual support.

Labor Unity Initiatives

Regarding cooperation between trade unions, the Labor Unity Forum in Cebu is an exploratory initiative worth mentioning. Formed four years ago, it is a caucus with the following convening organizations : National Federation of Labor (NFL), Federation of Free Workers (FFW), National Union of Workers in Hotel, Restaurant and Allied Industries (NUWHRAIN), the Cebu Alternative Workers' Assembly (CEAWA), the Cebu Labor Education, Advocacy, and Research Center (CLEAR), the Mandaue Eveready Battery Labor Union (MEBLU), the Aboitiz Shipping Employees Association, and other independent unions. Also part of the broad-spectrum Forum are the Associated Labor Union - Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (ALU-TUCP) Southern Philippines Federation of Labor-Kilusang Mayo Union (SPFL-KMU). Convenors and members adhere to the "Covenant to Unite and Uphold Workers' Right." The Forum was meant to get labor's act together, especially in organizing MEPZ workers. But this did not materialize, according to a key FFW leader, because there was no concrete program of action to follow up the intention.

To pursue the Labor Unity Forum initiative further, CLEAR invited representatives from trade unions and other labor organizations to a conference on the results of its MEPZ study on June 14, 1996. Representatives from NFL, FFW, NLM-Katipunan, and Local Alliance of the Cebu Alternative Worker's Assembly Participated in a workshop where they suggested the following interventions which

can respond to the prevailing conditions in MEPZ: "massive, appropriate and continuous education and the value formation to allay the fears of employees regarding organizing;" unity in advancing alternative forms of organizing; "sustained multi-sectoral 'dialoguing' with the presence of MEPZCEM"; revival, through the labor representatives, of the Lapu-lapu Tripartite Industrial Peace Council; organizing MEPZ workers with the support of other organizations.

Through these interventions, they hope to make MEPZ workers more aware of their rights, enjoy job security, receive benefits and privileges, develop as individuals, and attain justice. They also look forward to a more harmonious but principled relationship with management, and a more effective channel for raising, discussing and resolving issues affecting labor.

Among the steps they proposed to realize these interventions are : forging an agreement with the government as regards the conduct of workers' education with MEPZ, and situating experienced organizers within the zones.

These suggestions from the trade unions benefited from previous inputs by representatives from the PEZA, DOLE, local government units, and academe, who attended the multi-sectoral conference called by CLEAR the day before (June 13). Although invited to the conference, MEPZCEM did not send anyone.

The proceedings of the June 13 meeting highlighted certain key points which are important to consider in the light of the need for dialogue among the various sectors involved in the MEPZ. The limitations of the CLEAR study were openly discussed and critiqued mainly by academics, principally its very small sample (57) composed mostly of married males 31 years old and over. This is not representative of the MEPZ workers who were mostly young unmarried females. Furthermore, the researchers were already perceived as anti-management, anti-MEPZ, and subcontracting, thus making it difficult for them to obtain data from within the Zone. If there is a follow-up research, lessons can be learned from the previous experience and academe can be asked to help.

As regards violations of labor standards particularly on health and safety, there was recognition that such were taking place. A DOLE representative admitted that company nurses had no formal training in occupational nursing, making this lack of qualification one of the most common violations. Of the reported violations in 1995, 87 percent of the companies involved had already complied with the

requirements. The personnel managers themselves has pushed management to go by the letter of the law. DOLE cannot do anything about unreported violations if the workers themselves do not take the initiative or are reluctant to air their complaints. As regards job contracting, DOLE representatives claimed that this is usual only in janitorial and security services, which is allowed under the law. Furthermore, under the PEZA operating manual, subcontracting is allowed when the skills and resources required are not available inside the firm, and when there is a sudden increase in demand, provided that the subcontractor is registered with PEZA.

It was suggested that both DOLE and PEZA cooperate "to jointly ensure the effective enforcement of labor laws and labor standards particularly those relating to correct and prompt payment of salaries, allowances, benefits, night work for women workers; apprenticeship and learnership programs; as well as occupational and safety standards. They can also set up a system that will ensure the registration of zone enterprises with DOLE" (CLEAR Conference Proceedings, June 13, 1996:6).

It was recalled that DOLE and PEZA signed a memorandum of agreement in 1994 to promote workers' welfare through an educational program. This is aimed at orienting foreign investors on Philippine laws, culture and values, and to "educate both Filipino managers and rank-and-file workers on labor relations, the rights and obligations of management and workers, productivity and the role of supervisors" (CLEAR Conference Proceedings, June 13, 1996:7). It was suggested that the results of this agreement be monitored and assessed.

It was pointed out that the MEPZ is supposed to be run by the administrator, deputy administrator and an advisory group composed of the provincial governor, the mayor of the host local government, MEPZCEM, PEZA and a labor representative. Since there are no accredited labor unions within MEPZ, there is no labor representative. This prevents the establishment of a labor center to be composed of DOLE and representatives from management and labor to oversee human resources and technical skills development. This also hinders the convening of a committee to be composed of DOLE, PEZA, labor and management, which is supposed to come up with a social pact for the promotion of industrial peace (CLEAR Conference Proceedings, June 13, 1996:7).

At the end of the day, those present agreed to continue the process of dialoguing. Holding fora/discussions on workers' condition at the MEPZ on a regular basis was suggested, possibly leading to the formation of a multisectoral advisory body.

At the concrete level of cooperation, some forms of **labor alliances** are noted in Bataan. There is the Alyansa ng Manggagawa sa Bataan (AMBA-BALA translated as Bataan Labor Alliance). This provides advice, contacts, and referrals to its affiliates, and conducts workers' education for its members. Some unions in the area are allied with the Legitimate Alliance for Welfare Struggle (LAWS), which also gives affiliates advice and links them to other unions. Others have informal alliances with militant trade union groups as well as other federations which provide them legal assistance and workers' education. Local union presidents are likewise organized at BEPZ into an association called LUPA (Labor Union Presidents' Association). The latter is however, an initiative of the PEZA Industrial Relations Division in Bataan.

Cooperation With Other Groups

There are a few trade unions which maintain close, informal links with various **women's organization**, NFL, for example, networks with organizations like Womanhealth Philippines and its women's desk is a member of the Women's Action Network for Development (WAND) to integrate trade union and gender issues, and build solidarity. Some find the FFW and the TUCP collaborative arrangements fruitful. Some feel these to be somehow frustrating. A TUCP informant, for instance reported encountering some "leveling off" problems with women's organizations which seem to be "too women-centered."

On their part, women's organizations network with trade unions and other groups for research purposes, for the conduct of workers' education, for mass organizing and for the formulation of union organizing strategies in the zones. There are no problems mentioned in such linkages, so they must find the alliances working toward the fulfillment of their goals.

TUCP's LECC collaborates closely with the **local government** and even requests **management support** to attain its labor education objectives (i.e., to allow the workers to attend LECC seminars).

Some local unions in Bataan link with various **religious groups** like Singles for Christ, Couples for Christ, Born Again groups, the Iglesia ni Cristo and the Saksi ni Jehovah (Jehovah Witnesses). Others try to link with their representatives in Congress as well as media for support for their cause.

The Church-based Workers Assistance Center (WAC) links closely with the religious of the Sacred Heart, the media as well as the local government, national and international groups, and the CTUHR-EILER (Center for Trade Union and Human Rights- Educational Institute for Labor Education and Research). These networking arrangement have been fruitful enough to allow WAC to conduct several activities with some kind of external support. WAC has also received some support from the Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan (Women Workers' Movement or KMK) in terms of facilitation of seminars.

To sum up, cooperation between trade unions is palpable only in the Bataan EPZ, where labor alliances are already in place. On the level of rhetoric and discussion, those in Cebu are aiming for labor unity in order to facilitate the organization of workers in the union free Mactan EPZ. They are also ready for dialogue with PEZA, DOLE, local government and academe to thresh out problems and facilitate the organizing process towards the protection and advancement of workers' rights. These initiatives, however, are for workers in general, and do not mention the particular problems, needs, and interests of the women among them.

Some trade unions also have mutually beneficial relations with women's organizations, which reinforce the integration of trade union and gender issues. Some network with local government religious groups, and media for the latter's support.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Initiatives by trade unions to organize in the ecozones have resulted in the unionization of a relatively small number of companies. Of the four regular zones covered, only two — Bataan and Cavite — have unions. The Mactan and Baguio EPZs have remained without unions, despite organizing efforts of federations like the FFW and NFL.

Trade unions and NGOs may have good policies and programs within their organizations and in their spheres of influence. However, these are not yet ecozone-specific, nor are they oriented to women workers. Gender issues lie beneath the surface and unions still have to tackle them.

Given the organizing difficulties experienced, some trade unionists pose the question; "Why should we organize enterprises in the zones when this will lead to many problems later on?" Organizing women in these zones may be a losing proposition to some labor federations, because this may not be cost-effective. This may entail a lot of time, money, effort, and risks, with little results. It may bring about big problems such as illegal dismissals to bust the union, protracted litigation, and prolonged strike action, which can be very costly not only to the federations but also to the women themselves. Some trade unionists do realize the gravity of women's situation in the zones, but may prefer to organize somewhere else because potential benefits in terms of a wider base for membership (and union dues) are outweighed by the already foreseen costs. Furthermore, the grave threats posed by anti-union local government officials make it only difficult but also dangerous for many unions to embark on organizing workers in some ecozones.

Under the PEZA law, practically all the major growth areas in the Philippines have become the sites of ecozones, catering to both local and foreign investors with export-oriented ventures. More than 150,000 workers are already employed in these zones. If the majority of the labor federations continue to ignore the urgent need to organize women workers in these ecozones, then a fast growing and strategically located segment of the organizable labor force would be lost to them. Some unionists argue that the number of unorganized workers is still very large, and many of them are under subcontracting, in home-based work, and similarly vulnerable and marginalized situations wherein organizing is as difficult and as complex as in the economic zones. Nevertheless, they recognize the urgency and timeliness of organizing women workers in the zones.

The challenge is there and at least some are taking it up. During the Multi-Sectoral Validation Conference convened by the research team on October 16, 1996 in U.P. SOLAIR, representatives from trade unions (principally NFL and FFW) as well as NGOs forwarded the following recommendations:

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Organizing Strategies

1. Start with a solid research base on which to plot organizing strategies. Disseminate the results of the ecozone study to a wider audience, and make use of its findings in the review and reformulation of strategic plans. These plans should be comprehensive and detailed, including characteristics of firms in the ecozones as to type of products made, amount of fixed assets and source of capital.
2. Develop a pool of women organizers and advocates, preferably young women coming from the ranks of workers who were displaced in the struggle to exercise their rights.
3. Organize around gender issues, problems, needs and interests of women workers who are the majority in the zones.
4. Start with neutral activities. Entry points can be skills training, livelihood and entrepreneurship programs, cooperatives, assistance in getting SSS benefits, etc. International Women's Day (March 8) and other occasions can be celebrated with activities such as medical missions, lecture-discussions on occupational, reproductive and environmental health, child care, good housekeeping, etc.

5. Organize women's centers within the zones to provide legal aid, reproductive health services, counselling regarding sexuality issues, livelihood assistance, leadership training and other capability building programs, etc.

6. Organize women outside traditional union structures; e.g., form ecozone-wide women's organization.

7. Use the community organizing approach. Involve the communities where the women workers are staying.

Awareness-Raising and Advocacy

1. Launch educational programs and campaigns to make the women workers aware of their rights both as women and as workers. Raise the gender dimensions of their struggles, and link these to macro-economic trends such as globalization and how this is affecting workers, the women in the zones especially.

2. Advocate for the realization of women's rights and trade union rights as human rights.

3. Pressure the government not to remain neutral and to implement labor standards and other laws that benefit women.

4. Work for the formulation of women-friendly policies and the provision of support services for women workers in the zones (e.g., child care center) to allow them to participate in activities that can empower them.

Cooperation and Networking

1. There must be close coordination among federations, starting with NFL and FPW. They must transcend traditional objectives. There must be unity in providing protection to ecozone women workers.

2. Build networks and strong alliances with other groups/organizations, especially women's organizations.

3. Tap support groups, especially those in the surrounding community or territory.

4. There must be inter-agency cooperation. UP SOLAIR and CSWCD can help in the development of training modules for women workers and organizers, as well as in the conduct of gender sensitivity training. UP SOLAIR can explore the launching of a WILL (Workers' Institute on Labor Laws - a regular program of the school) specifically for women workers and unionists.

To these recommendations, the research team would like to add or highlight the following points culled from the study as well as from discussions with the local steering committee constituted to oversee it.

Gender issues cannot be postponed indefinitely. Male and female workers in the zones may be subjected to the same exploitative conditions, but men and women have different sets of needs. The traditional approach to organizing is to have male organizers organizing women. This approach does not seem to have gained ground, based on the results. In the case of ecozones where women workers are clearly the majority, trade union organizing cannot be separated or isolated from women organizing.

In plotting organizing strategies, the motivations and actuations of local politicians must be factored in. Likewise, there is a need to look into human resource management and other strategies designed to obstruct unionsm. Part of the concern should be the general perception regarding unions. Some companies, for example, promote the idea that labor and management have a husband-wife relationship, and therefore, there is no need for the union.

In places like Mactan which is still union-free, there is need for sustained multi-sectoral dialoguing among labor, management, and government representatives towards more harmonious but principled relations, and policy advocacy toward the realization of the workers' right to self-organization.

Establishment of cooperatives and other non-union organizations can be good entry points, but they must not be considered as alternatives to supplant unionsm entirely.

There is also a need to realize that women workers have commonalities as well as differences based on age, civil status, industry classification, ethnic background, province of origin and sexual orientation. For example, the existence of a lesbian sub-culture in some of the ecozones, sexuality and other potentially divisive issues should be addressed.

The perception that women are always a fearful breed has no basis, gauging from accounts of women who sought to organize themselves into a potent force to fight for the rights denied them. What is needed is more encouragement, more prodding to make them come out of their traditional domain, together with the provision of

come out of their traditional domain, together with the provision of capability building programs and support services for them. Clearly however, efforts to empower women workers cannot be undertaken effectively, unless the gender dimension is addressed by trade union organizations themselves, from top to bottom. There are signs that some labor federations like NFL and FFW have already started programs along this line, but these seem to be progressing rather slowly because of cultural and other constraints.

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