



# Promoting the RIGHTS OF WORKERS

KENASVIT members  
at an outdoor market  
in Machakos, Kenya.  
KENASVIT helps traders  
gain access to rights, as  
well as the information,  
skills, and assets needed  
to build a better future.



Credit: 2007 Johanna Chao Kreilick/UUSC

## **Economic Justice: Work as a pathway out of poverty**

Decent work is essential for reducing poverty and strengthening economic stability and global security. Yet around the world, safe, stable jobs that pay a living wage are getting harder to come by. As a result, millions of people face dangerous work conditions and inadequate wages that trap them in poverty, rather than lifting them out of it.

Workers in the informal economy – including workers who sew our blue jeans, process the chicken we eat, and grow our coffee – are increasingly at risk, with women and children workers among the most vulnerable.

Today, few countries have policies that respect the needs or rights of informal workers. In spite of this, workers around the globe are organizing to compel their governments and employers to recognize their rights and contributions.

**In the workers' rights movement change is possible and innovative solutions are underway that build on local experience, apply new knowledge, and create effective alliances.**

## **Decent work is a human right.**

*All people have the right to work, to safe and healthy working conditions, to equal pay for equal work, and the right to organize, ensuring for themselves and their families an existence worthy of human dignity.*

*—Adapted from articles  
23 and 25 of the Universal  
Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*

# Women workers: Huge contributions, unique challenges

Credit: 2008 Ariel Jacobson/UUSC



STITCH members at an annual Labor Advisory Group meeting in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, Guatemala.

## Connecting women workers in a broader social movement

Around the globe, women are at the heart of the economy: working, earning, spending, and providing essential goods and services. At the same time, women and girls hold the majority of jobs with poor work conditions and meager earnings.

UUSC addresses these unique challenges by supporting organizations led by women that promote gender-based programs to educate and mobilize female workers.

Through our partner in Mexico, the Center for the Promotion and Defense of Human and Labor Rights (CEPRODEHL), UUSC is helping maquila (factory) workers organize for safer working conditions, better wages, and gender equity.

We also support STITCH, which has created a Women, Labor, & Leadership curriculum that is building awareness, skills, and capacity among women workers in Central America and immigrant women workers in the United States.

In China, UUSC is building relationships with grassroots, nongovernmental organizations that are empowering women migrant factory workers through training in labor law, occupational safety and health, trade union principles, and women's workplace rights.

# Informal workers: On the margins of Main Street



Credit: 2007 Johanna Chao Kreilick/UUSC

Singing "I Am No Longer the Same," Rock Women Group leaders and members welcome UUSC staff during a partner visit to Nairobi, Kenya.

## Supporting child workers through training and education

UUSC partners with two groups in Kenya: the Rock Women Group and the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT). Through these community-based organizations, street vendors and child workers are creating a base of power for mobilizing and strengthening policy that protects and benefits informal workers.

The Rock Women Group improves the lives of children and their families by training child workers in safe, sustainable trades. They also place child workers in alternative off-hour schools, where they can gain an education and move towards better-paying jobs.

In the aftermath of Kenya's post-election humanitarian crisis, the Rock Women Group is modeling how to organize across lines of ethnicity, gender, and age to secure vital economic and educational support for orphans, the internally displaced, single mothers, and widowers.

"My vision is to become self-employed," explained 13-year-old Eda Musila, a head-of-household for four siblings. When Eda stopped going to school, her teacher, a member of the Rock Women Group, noticed and sought her out. She was provided with care, support, and access to alternative-trades training and education programs. Eda is now fully trained in sewing and tailoring children's clothes, filling a market demand and earning a safe, sustainable income for her and her siblings.

# Right to a Living Wage

Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition organizer speaks in support of raising the minimum wage at a January 2008 press conference at the Georgia State Capitol.



Credit: 2008 Georgia Minimum Wage Coalition

Justice Roll's "\$10 in 2010" campaign to provide working families in America with a minimum standard of living. Join us!

## Workers' centers: Labor-faith-community alliances

Worker centers are community-based organizations that build power among workers of different races, ethnicities, and genders with shared goals.

Our partners MPOWER (Mississippi Poultry Workers for Equality and Respect) and the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center organize workers in one of America's most abusive and dangerous industries: poultry processing. The U.S. poultry industry is known for widespread

and chronic labor, environmental, and human-rights violations. Noncompliance with workplace safety regulations exposes many poultry workers to severe and sometimes fatal injuries.

MPOWER helps poultry-processing workers in Mississippi to combat abusive labor practices, while building leadership and solidarity among African American and Latino immigrant workers. UUSC is supporting the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center to build a broader social-justice movement at the intersection of workers' rights, immigrant rights, and women's rights.

For both centers, forging connections with faith-based communities is a key strategy for cultivating networks of support and forming alliances in a broader movement.

Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center members call for better wages and work conditions outside the Tyson Foods headquarters, in Springdale, Arkansas.



2008 Rachel Townsend/NWAWJC

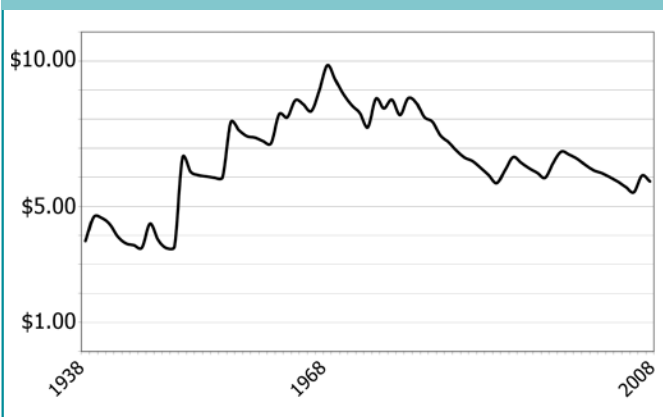
## Raising the minimum wage

Raising the minimum wage above poverty level is one of the most effective ways to combat poverty and protect the human rights of children, women, and people of color in the United States. Yet, an astounding 30 million Americans – 1 in 4 adult workers – are employed in jobs that pay poverty wages and provide minimal or no benefits. More than 60 percent of adult workers are women, often raising children.

In the United States, UUSC has played a leadership role in the movement to set a living wage for workers through its partnership with Let Justice Roll, a faith- and community-based coalition uniting people across wide divides. Together, using outreach and education, the coalition helped to raise the minimum wage in 13 states in 2006 and the federal minimum wage in 2007.

And we're not stopping there! We see the new \$7.25 federal minimum wage that takes effect in July 2009 as only a way-station on the road to a living wage. UUSC is rallying faith-based activists to engage in Let

Real Value of Federal Minimum Wage, 1938-2008



# The UUSC Coffee Project: Connecting cooperatives and consumers through fair trade

## Taking fair trade activism beyond the coffee cup

Rural communities and enterprises, particularly those owned and run by women and people of color, are often marginalized and isolated – without access to markets for their products or resources for their professional development.

Through the UUSC Coffee Project, congregations link with small farmers, producers, and their families by using fairly traded coffee, tea, cocoa, pecans, and other products in their congregations, schools, and communities.

For every pound of fair trade products sold through the UUSC Coffee Project, Equal Exchange donates 20 cents to UUSC's Small Farmer Fund. With the fund, UUSC builds long-term relationships with small farmer cooperatives, which are owned and controlled by the farmers themselves. Through these partnerships, cooperative members develop leadership and management skills and gain strength and confidence from their new business associates.

One of UUSC's Small Farmer Fund partners is the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative (SAAC), a women-led pecan-processing cooperative in rural Georgia. SAAC helps anchor the local economy by securing safe, sustainable living wage jobs for all of its members.



UUSC Program Director Aterna Eclai (left) with leaders of the Southern Alternatives Agricultural Cooperative, a UUSC Small Farmer Fund partner, in Leslie, Georgia.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- ▶ **Become a member of UUSC or renew your membership** at [www.uusc.org/become\\_a\\_member](http://www.uusc.org/become_a_member).
- ▶ **Join UUSC's e-Community** and check Economic Justice as one of your special interests. We'll send you updates and action alerts on relevant issues.
- ▶ **Enlist your congregation.** Support small farmer cooperatives by purchasing fairly traded products in the UUSC Coffee Project at [www.uusc.org/coffee\\_project](http://www.uusc.org/coffee_project).

- ▶ **Participate in a JustWorks camp or JustJourney delegation that explores Economic Justice.** Several opportunities are offered throughout the year. To learn more, visit [www.uusc.org/learn\\_by\\_doing](http://www.uusc.org/learn_by_doing).

Visit our website [www.uusc.org/economicjustice](http://www.uusc.org/economicjustice) for more information.



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