

Wage increased for the young agricultural workers

Wednesday, 26 March 2008

Wage increased for the Young agricultural workers in Kulimathoor

Background of the action

Kulimathoor is an agricultural area in the district of Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, India. In this area, the lands are owned by the upper caste landlords. The village has a population of 500 people. The dalit women (lower caste) work in the farms of the upper castes land lords.

The dalits live in small huts made of coconut leaves. Most of these huts have only one room. There is no toilet in the huts. There are no common toilets for the village. There is no protected drinking water for the village and no transport services to the village.

In this situation, the YCW full-timer started to contact young women workers of this area. He was able to organise 9 young women workers and they came together as YCW group on 26th Feb. 2006.

In a ROLWA meeting on 2nd July 2006, Sharmila (member of YCW) shared about her work and life. She told that she could get Rs. 30 for her work in the farm and with this money she found it difficult to fulfil her basic needs and of her family. Therefore, she said her family was borrowing money from money lenders. Other members of the group said that they too have similar experience. They discussed and discovered the following:

- They work from 7 am to 2 pm
- It is seasonal work and not a permanent work and they could get maximum 6 months work per year.
- The daily wage is Rs. 30 (Euro 0.54) per day per person. However, the minimum daily wage announced by the government for women is Rs. 70 (Euro 1.3) and for men Rs. 80 (Euro 1.5) per day. Here also there is discrimination of the women in the wage
- They discovered that at least they need Rs. 40 to spend for their daily food only. Over and above, they have to spend for other needs such as cloths, medicine, education of the children, and maintenance of the huts (homes they live in).
- While working in the field poisonous insects/snake bite them and this results into serious wounds in their legs
- The pesticides while spraying hurt the body and resulted into serious skin diseases in the body
- There is no medical facility while being sick when working in the fields

Sarmila also insisted that the members should know about the minimum wage for agricultural workers. Therefore, YCW leaders arranged a one day training session to the group members on labour laws on 5th Nov 2007. The resource person explained us about the minimum wage for agricultural workers and labour laws.

The leaders of the base group also participated in the district level one day training session on finance education organised by the district movement on 12th November 2006. The YCW members went back into their group and discussed again about their salary. They came to the conclusion that they could not have good food if they have such a low salary. They also realised that it is their right to have just and decent wage. Therefore, the members of YCW in Kulimathoor decided to take action.

The winners of this situation are the land owners and the losers are workers.

Objectives of the action

- To get a daily wage that could fulfill the daily basic needs. It means to get at least Rs. 40 per day
- Personally the YCW members and young women workers had the objectives of getting an increase of at least Rs. 10 in the wage
- The objectives of the group was to strengthen the group through this action, to develop the leaders through this action and to find a solution for their problems
- To develop the capacity and confidence (in lobby, speaking to other young workers about the action and demand etc) of the members
- The objectives were defined by the members of the group. National YCW leaders and full-timer helped the groups in developing these objectives

The action itself & the Process

YCW members explained to the elders of the village that the Rs. 30 was not enough to meet the daily expenses. Then, with the support of the village elders, they met the landlord and demanded to increase our daily wage from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40. They also presented him a budget explaining how their income was not sufficient to meet their expenses. At this stage of the action, Vins, Josephine, Rajesh, Kaja Ravi and Kumar (members of national informal workers action team) came to the village, met YCW members and other agricultural workers. They also evaluated the process of the action and gave various proposals to continue the action.

Based of their proposals, the group decided to go for a signature campaign and collected signatures from the workers in support of the demands. The collection of the signatures went on from 25th Nov 2006 to 10th March 2007 and they collected 800 signatures. They also explained their campaign to the neighbouring villages and got their signatures also in support of their demand. Since the manager of the farm was not available, they could not present the signatures and the demands to him.

The manager of the farm was willing to meet with the YCW leaders to receive the demands with the signatures and have dialogue with them on their demands

At the same time, YCW Kumbakonam launched a signature campaign on 5th of May 2008 during the May Day celebration at Thiruwaiyaru demanding the government to force the landlords to implement minimum wage for the agricultural workers. We also collected signatures in support of this demand from our village and gave them to the district movement. The signatures with the demands were given to the district collector on 25th of June 2007.

YCW Kulimathoor also sent a petition with the 800 signatures on 25th June 2007 to the district collector demanding to force the landlords to implement minimum wage and to increase the salary of the agricultural workers

The district administration sent officials to investigate the current salary given to the agricultural workers by the landlords. The officials came to Kulimathoor village and YCW leaders explained that the women workers were getting Rs. 30 only as daily wage. The report of the investigation team (the land lords were not implementing the minimum wage) was sent to the district administration for further action. However, still there was no increase in the salary.

In the meantime, YCW members organised the women workers and held a protest meeting and one day strike in the agricultural field on 7th Oct 2007 demanding wage increase. However, the landlords did not respond to our protest.

Then YCW leaders again contacted the manager of the farm over phone and demanded for the wage increase.

Based on the report, the district administration also directed the landlords to increase the salary of the agricultural workers.

Finally, the manager of the farm increased the wage from Rs. 30 to Rs. 35. He also promised that he will raise the salary to Rs. 40 from 2008.

The Actors

The main actors of this action were 9 members of YCW group in Kulimathoor. The women agricultural workers in the village also supported the action. The full-timer, district team leaders and the national informal sector action team accompanied the YCW members in the evaluation and planning of the various stages of this action

Specific Demands of the action

- To increase the salary from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40
- To implement minimum wage

The demands were presented to the manager of the farm (orally over phone since he was not willing to receive the

written petition). The demands were also presented to the Kumbakonam district collector (Administrator)

Means used

- ROLWA meetings
- Group level one day training session on minimum wage and labour laws (5th Nov 2006)
- District level one day training on Finance and personal budget (12th Nov 2006)
- Evaluation and planning meetings of the action with the national informal sector action team on 12th Nov
- Meeting with other workers and village leaders explaining the demands of the action
- Signature campaign
- Negotiation with the manager of the farm over phone
- Presentation of the petition (with the demands) to the district collector
- Meeting with the team of officials (sent by the district collector to investigate the wage given) and explaining about the current wage for the agricultural workers
- One day protest and strike (7th Oct 2007)

Collaboration

The village leaders (local council) collaborated and supported the action

Research

- Research on the minimum wage
- Research on daily needs of agricultural workers

Review

- In the base group meetings (once in a month) each and every step and stage of the action was reviewed using See – Judge – Act method
- The action was reviewed in the district team meeting, full-timers work evaluation meeting, informal workers action team meeting, national team meeting and with Patrick and Teresa in 2007 during their visit

Results of the action

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The concrete result of the action was daily wage of the agricultural workers in the farm has been increased from RS. 30 to Rs. 35

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The farm also provides now 1 free meal or snacks (2 bonda & 1 cup of tea) per day

The reasons for the change

-
YCW members in Kulimathoor are agricultural workers and they were affected by the situation (low wage)

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The ROLWA meetings held once in a month

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The work of the full-timer (motivated the young women workers to reflect about their work situation in the group)

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The finance and budget training organised at the district level and the training given by the national YCW at national level

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The involvement of all YCW members in the action

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The accompaniment, follow up and support from the national informal sector action team in evaluation and planning of the action

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The evaluation and planning and coordination of the action at various stages and levels (base group, district team, informal workers action team, full-timers work evaluation meeting and national team meeting)

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The support of the village leaders and other young women workers

Awakening/Lessons

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Kulimathoor base group members and the full-timer following the area became aware of the minimum wage, issues faced by agricultural workers and labour laws

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They came to know how to analyse a problem and situation before going for an action

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They came to know how to speak with other workers about the problems they face

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They came to know they type action they should develop and how to coordinate it

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They also came to know how to get the support of the people for the action

In solidarity,

Members of YCW group Kulimathoor

