

up front

women at work

The vast majority of the world's poor are women. Whether on farms, plantations or in factories, women are more likely to suffer from poverty wages, as well as deplorable working conditions and physical abuse on the job. The global economic crisis has taken a particularly harsh toll on women, many millions of whom have been plunged into unemployment.

War on Want believes that the fight for women's rights is a vital part of the war on global poverty. In the world's poorest countries, War on Want and its partners are challenging the structures and institutions that have driven millions of women into poverty. Led by factory workers, small farmers and political activists, the women's rights movement is waging a global struggle against inequality. September 2010

**WAR ON
WANT**
FIGHTING GLOBAL POVERTY

War on Want works in partnership with the National Garment Workers' Federation for better working conditions in the Bangladeshi garment sector. Find out more about their work at www.waronwant.org/ngwf



War on Want works directly with women's rights groups across the globe.

Women make up roughly three quarters of the world's poor. Despite often having to perform the duties of both a breadwinner and head of household, women earn a mere tenth of global income. Subjected to the most precarious jobs in cities and rural areas, women are also far more likely than men to be unemployed.

In the factory and on the farm

Although the gender gap in wages is a global phenomenon, the differences are particularly acute in the developing world. In export-based economies like Bangladesh, Honduras and Sri Lanka, women account for the bulk of the workforce in garment factories, including those producing for the UK high street. In these factories women earn far less than their male counterparts, who are employed more often as supervisors or floor managers.

In addition to earning poverty wages, female factory workers are often exposed to physical and verbal abuse. For example, a survey of the Bangladeshi garment sector carried out by the National Garment Workers' Federation, a War on Want partner organisation, found that 90% of all women workers reported having been abused on the job. Women also comprise the majority of workers on plantations producing for export, cultivating wine, cut flowers and tea in the developing world for shipment

to the UK and other Western countries.

To keep salaries low, many plantations hire women workers on temporary or seasonal contracts. By being denied permanent status, many farm workers are unable to access vital benefits like maternity leave and sick pay.

Women working in all sectors are responsible for the lion's share of household tasks, most notably child rearing. Faced with the dual role of raising children and earning an income to help support them, millions of women across the developing world work a staggering number of hours each day. *A Bitter Cup*, our new report on tea workers in Kenya and India, shows how female plantation workers rise at dawn to cook, clean and tend to children before heading out to work in the fields.

The twin crises

The global economic meltdown has decimated poor communities worldwide, casting millions of women into poverty. Denied education and training that often is available to men only, women are hindered from finding meaningful, well-paying employment in a volatile job market.

Free trade policies have made it even harder for women to secure decent work. Promoted by the European Union and institutions like the World Trade Organisation, these policies have enabled multinational companies to profit from



Members of Codemuh gather at a rally to protest against the coup in Honduras

For more information on Codemuh's struggle for democracy and women's rights, visit www.waronwant.org/codemuh

The women's rights movement in Honduras

For the past two decades, the women's collective Codemuh has been waging the struggle for workers' rights in Honduras. A War on Want partner organisation, the collective has secured a range of social benefits for women workers in the country's large *maquila* (sweatshop) sector. In May 2009, Codemuh became the first social movement to secure a meeting with Honduran government officials on the need for more robust health and safety measures in the *maquilas*.

Just one month after that landmark meeting, Honduras experienced a military coup, which has undermined many of Codemuh's hard fought gains. Following the coup, which led to the ousting of President Manuel Zelaya, the new regime has placed severe restrictions on freedom of expression and cracked down on dissent. Nearly one hundred people have been killed and thousands more have been detained for speaking out against the coup, including trade unionists and women's rights activists.

Honduras's sweatshop workers, especially women, have suffered greatly since the coup. Conditions have deteriorated in factories, with many *maquila* managers forcing workers into unpaid overtime

to make up time lost due to curfews. Honduran *maquila* workers earn on average around 3,700 lempiras (£128) each month, well short of a living wage.

In the face of escalating repression, Codemuh has joined up with a coalition of civil society groups to take a stand for the rights of all Hondurans. Representing the country's 125,000 *maquila* workers, Codemuh is working with the coalition to restore democracy to the country, and to hold to account those responsible for the coup. The country is currently being led by Porfirio Lobo Sosa, who in late 2009 was elected president after a vote marred by fraud. Since taking office Lobo has granted immunity to those involved in the coup, while also keeping in place many of the repressive measures enacted by the military.

In solidarity with our partner, War on Want is campaigning in the UK to raise awareness of the human and labour rights violations occurring in Honduras. We also support Codemuh's grassroots struggle to bring those involved in the coup to justice, and for a peaceful and democratic Honduras.



Members of the Landless Workers' Movement take part in a rally for women's rights near São Paulo

the exploitation of overseas workers. The free trade agenda has had a devastating impact on women, who predominate in the sweatshops and plantations that supply large corporations.

Women are also bearing the brunt of the fallout from the global food crisis, which has seen the price of food skyrocket to record levels. Shockingly, even though they grow most of the food consumed globally, women make up 60% of the one billion people in the world who live in hunger. The uneven impact of the crisis is the by-product of women's lack of control over resources, most crucially land. In many countries women are discouraged or even prohibited from owning land, and as a result a mere 1% of all property worldwide is owned by women.

Changing the system

To close the gender poverty gap, the structural barriers to women's control over the world's wealth and resources must be eliminated. Increased levels of ownership over land, farms and inputs like seeds will enable women to better cope with the food and financial crises. These efforts need to be matched by a global commitment to addressing the exploitation of women in sweatshops and on plantations. It is imperative that corporations that source goods from overseas are regulated and held to account for abuses in their supply chains.

Women taking a stand

War on Want and its partners in the developing world are at the forefront of the women's rights movement. Representing over 4,000 wine workers in the Western Cape province of South Africa, the women-led trade union Sikhula Sonke has won collective bargaining agreements guaranteeing higher salaries and improved safety protections.

In Bangladesh, the National Garment Workers' Federation is leading the struggle for a living wage for the two million women who work in the country's garment factories. And in Brazil, where women make up the majority of the country's 15 million landless people, the Landless Workers' Movement and the Movement of Women Babaçu Nut Breakers are fighting to grant women greater control over crops and land. War on Want also works in tandem with other grassroots organisations fighting for women's rights in Colombia, Kenya, Palestine and Sri Lanka.

War on Want continues to press for equitable trade policies to protect the rights of women and men working in farms and factories across the globe. This includes challenging the free trade agenda of the European Union, which benefits multinational corporations at the expense of women's rights. To find out more about War on Want's campaign for trade justice, visit www.waronwant.org/trade

Representing workers across a range of sectors, our grassroots partners are leading the fight for women's equality.



Women tea pickers in Kenya, one of the world's top tea-producing countries. *A Bitter Cup*, our new report on conditions facing tea-workers in both Kenya and India, can be downloaded at www.waronwant.org/abittercup



Donate to War on Want

War on Want relies on the generosity of its supporters to continue its work empowering poor people around the world. Every pound counts in our fight against injustice and inequality and we are grateful for your support.

Please fill in the whole form using a ball point pen and send to: Freepost RSKC-UCZZ-ZSHL War on Want, 44-48 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7JP

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NEWS

War on Want has moved!
We're now located at 44-48
Shepherdess Walk, London
N1 7JP. Our new phone
number is 020 7324 5040.
Please update your records,
and feel free to drop in to
say hello at our new space.

War on Want's partner organisations in South Africa and Brazil earned crucial victories recently. Sikhula Sonke, the South African trade union for farm workers, was part of a coalition that successfully petitioned for a 13% increase in the minimum wage. This rise in salary will benefit roughly one million farm workers across the country. In Brazil, AS-PTA, an organisation fighting for food justice, helped force the company Bayer to cease selling its brand of genetically modified (GM) corn. AS-PTA has been campaigning against GM products for over a decade.

War on Want has recently launched War of Words, a new blog featuring radical commentary from staff, partner organisations and guest experts. Updated daily, our blog covers everything from labour struggles in the global South to community activism in London. Visit the War of Words at www.waronwant.org/blog

War on Want works with some of the bravest and most inspiring groups in the world. In plantations and sweatshops, conflict zones and on the margins of society, we fight to make a lasting difference to people's lives. By leaving a gift in your Will, you can support this work for generations to come. To find out how you can leave a lasting legacy, call Natalie on 020 7324 5040 or email us at legacies@waronwant.org. To request a copy of our free guide to leaving a legacy, tick the box on the donation form overleaf.

6 Billion Ways is back – save the date! Join us on 5 March 2011 in East London for a full day event featuring exciting speakers and activism workshops, as well as art, films and music. The event was a huge success in 2009, attracting over 1,500 people from across Europe and the UK. Next year's event promises to be just as inspirational. For more information on 6 Billion Ways, including a short film on the 2009 event, visit www.6billionways.org.uk

War on Want is involved in organising the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, to be held in London on 21-22 November. With expert witnesses and jury members, including the writer Alice Walker and John Dugard, former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, the Tribunal will expose corporate complicity in Israel's Occupation of Palestine. War on Want will be leading the session on the arms trade and how it sustains the Occupation, resulting in grave human rights abuses against Palestinians. Visit our website for information on how to register for this event.

In August, one month after the end of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, the Poor People's World Cup held its final game in South Africa. Organised by our partner the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, the free tournament drew thousands of fans and helped raise awareness of how South Africa's poor were shut out of the FIFA World Cup. The previous issue of Up Front exposed how thousands of South Africans were evicted from their homes in the lead-up to the FIFA World Cup, which cost the country billions to stage.



The Poor People's World
Cup football kit, provided
by Unite the Union

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www.waronwant.org



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