

**Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining  
working with trade unions**

**ETI**

**Biennial Conference 2005**

## **Trade Unions**

- **Legitimate representatives of the workers**
- **To understand a sector or industry you have to understand the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of trade unions**
- **Where there are strong and constructive trade unions operating- usually find the best labour standards**
- **Essential when undertaking audits and remedial work**
- **Are a good source of information**
- **If working effectively, trade unions allow continuous resolution of problems as they occur, rather than the usual 3 year snapshot (they are the ultimate auditor)**
- **Avoiding trade unions in ethical work can undermine their credibility in the workplace, especially if positive changes are made at a poor site.**

## Initiating work with trade unions

- **Do your homework**
  - understand the country politically, socially and economically
- **Work down through ETI-trade union contacts**
  - International, national, regional and site
  - Find a level at which interaction is positive for both unions, suppliers and yourselves
- **Meet with IUF regional advisor**
  - Communicate at the time and afterwards-keep in touch
  - Build trust –not just 1 visit
    - Their job is not to help ethical auditors
    - Two-way relationship
- **Meet with the site or branch official**
  - Transparent with who you are meeting
  - Provide ETI annual reports and contact information and explain the tripartite structure
  - Discuss union-employer mechanisms for resolving issues
  - Get a feel for how the union operates, understand it

## Premier's UK site audits

### Premier Foods conduct our own internal ethical audits:

- Senior Shop Steward (S.S.S.) communicated with prior to audit
- Involved in opening and closing briefings
- 1st and most important interview is with the S.S.S.
- Independence of auditor discussed with S.S.S. and grievance channel communicated
- S.S.S. assists auditor to collect and brief people for interviews
- S.S.S. is the communication channel for the workers post audit
- S.S.S. gets copy of report

## East Africa

- **ETI contact at IUF**
- **IUF Geneva –provide contact details of IUF regional office Nairobi**
- **IUF organised and facilitated meeting with General Secretary Plantation Union**
- **Thereafter met with IUF representative a number of times over 4 years-**
  - built trust
  - didn't waste her time
  - Two- way
- **IUF Regional representative provided me with much practical advice and union contacts in-**
  - Tanzania
  - Uganda
  - Kenya
  
- I went to the IUF office when convenient for the regional representative
- I send ETI annual report and newsletter on Premier's ethical programme (same one we send to suppliers)
- I divulge non company specific information

## Examples of working with Unions in East Africa

### ➤ **Supplier 1:**

- **strong local-central organisational connections**
- **Regional, and site union officials- very capable, intelligent and well informed**
- **gender aware/balanced union**
- **Excellent site and company channels for communication between management and union**
- **Union included in most site and company activity**

**Unsurprisingly excellent standards at supplier 1**

- **I can talk and discuss with the unions at regional or/and site level**
- **Audits are easy-we learn from the experience- its 'good practice'**

## Examples of working with Unions in East Africa

### Supplier 2

- Shop steward had weak support from central /regional union functions
- Union official mostly marginalised from site activity
- Regional/site communication channels informal/haphazard only

**Unsurprisingly site had abysmal standards throughout**

- **Union Shop Steward interview:**
  - knowledge was excellent; aware of everything
  - had brought issues up with management
- **Manager in our opinion:**
  - good knowledge and attitude
  - hamstrung by number of operational issues
- **We included them both in concluding meeting -empowered them together to make change**

**1 year later- significant improvement in standards**

- **Local formal systems put in place to ensure issues are discussed and resolved**
- **At that supplier we miss out national and regional level and work direct with site level**

## Examples of working with unions in India

- **Did my homework**
  - Significant caste, political, religious and tribal based unions
  - Maze of possible pitfalls
- **IUF Geneva –provide contact details with IUF regional office India**
- **IUF regional office**
  - Advised on the main unions and persons to talk to
  - Communicated who Premier were, what we were doing and our approach
  - Provided communication thereafter
- **Presently**
  - Union shop stewards included in interviews
  - Met with regional representatives
  - I have not experienced any caste, tribal, political or religious issues in our work
  - Very transparent in our approach

## Working with trade unions- a fine balance

### ➤ **Limitations:**

- It is not my job to improve capacity and strength of trade unions
- Companies have to tread a fine line between being a customer, working with suppliers and getting involved with union activities

### ➤ **However what we can do is improve interaction and attitudes at local level:**

- Encourage formal interaction such as site -local works council
- Health & Safety: Inclusion of union officials on committees and in training
- Strengthen and validate in audits or ethical work their place as the representative of the workers- they can provide feedback to workers
- Get the union involved with management in solving not just compliance issues but the structures around it.

## **In summary**

### **Unions are the legitimate representation of workers**

- **Do your homework know the sector**
- **Work down through the correct channels**
- **Develop relationships and go out of your way**
- **Be transparent**
- **Include them in audits**
- **Include unions in structures that are put in place to facilitate change**