

Learning Activity 7.1

Making the arguments for a Sexual Harassment Policy in a garment factory or on a tomato farm

Overview

This Learning Activity helps participants identify the arguments for drawing up a workplace policy on sexual harassment. It uses World Café, a well-tested methodology to host constructive conversations over matters of common concern.

Suggested time

60-90 minutes

Target group

Representatives from:

- Stakeholders involved in developing and implementing workplace gender-based violence programmes;
- Programme managers, factory/farm managers and supervisors;
- Representatives from global, national and local employers and trade unions;
- Representatives from local, national and local NGOs and women's organizations.

Aims

- Appreciate the different perspectives of managers and workers and the steps that need to be taken in developing a workplace sexual harassment policy.

Preparation

- Prepare the activity by collecting sources of information for the group work session, including relevant case studies.
- Provide contextual information and tips about the issues that can be discussed.
- Elaborate a different version of the scenario in the hand-out which may be appropriate to the group, if needed.

Setting

A room with tables set as if in a café (see materials below).

Materials

- Flip charts, or paper tablecloths, or large sheets of paper to cover the “café” tables
- Post-it cards
- Markers

Time/Steps

Step 1: Preparation (suggested time: 15 minutes)

Read and/or distribute the scenario and the quotes from workers and managers about sexual harassment (See Resources).

Step 2: World Café (adapted) (suggested time: 45 minutes = three rounds of 15' or 4' rounds of 10')

Participants are brought together around café-style tables that are set in conversational clusters. Each table is hosted by a 'facilitator' which introduces relevant questions on the subject matter topic. The host visualizes together with the table members all the key ideas writing right on the table (which is covered with flip chart paper), or on a flip chart.

For this activity, it is suggested to have three (or four) tables, one hosted by a workers' representative (or by a participant or a facilitator who is knowledgeable about workers' issues), one hosted by a manager (or by a participant or facilitator who is knowledgeable about managing issues), one hosted by a representative of a retailer company (or by a participant or facilitator who is more knowledgeable about the point of view of buyers/retailers). An additional fourth table could discuss the views of consumers' associations, or of farm/factory owner.

The objective of the conversations at each table is to develop arguments in favour of a workplace sexual harassment policy and/or other practical initiatives in the workplace to prevent sexual harassment, keeping into account the various perspectives of the different actors.

The activity is organized in "conversation rounds" of about 10'. During which the host takes notes of the key points of the discussions (key arguments for instance). Upon completion of one conversation round, the host remains at the table and the members (ambassadors of meaning) travel to another table. The host welcomes them and briefly updates them on the ideas collected by the previous group. After successive rounds of discussion new interesting conversation patterns may arise.

Step 3: Plenary discussion (suggested time: 20-30 minutes)

After a three or four rounds of conversation, the hosts are asked to summarize in plenary the held at their tables in plenary.

De-briefing questions could include:

- What are the key commonalities in the arguments from the various tables?
- What do views diverge?
- What could be done to work in partnership?

How to adapt it

- This activity can be run as a shorter, less complex activity based on a discussion about the scenario.
- The activity can be adapted to different sectors or groups of learners.
- Encourage participants to use the relevant quotes, followed by a short discussion of each quote and how the problem can be resolved.
- Variation of Step 3: At the end of the world café the hosts, instead of presenting the results individually, can be asked to enact a very short role play, presenting to each other their arguments on why and how to prevent sexual harassment to happen in the factory/farm. This brief role play should be then followed by plenary discussion, guided by the lead facilitator.

Tips

- The scenario can be summarized and/or read to participants.
 - If groups are sitting with friends/ colleagues ensure all participants are mixed.
 - If time is short, or if participants have literacy difficulties, read out or summarize the text of the scenario and quotes.

Resources

Printed copy of the scenario and quotes (below) for participants to read.

Scenario

The factory/ farm has a fast turnover of young workers, many of whom are migrants from rural areas. Their accommodation is about 3 kilometers away from the factory/farm. There are several nearby competitor factories/farms that often employ former workers of the factory. The majority of the workforce is female and all but one of the supervisors is male. The factory/ farm is owned and managed by an influential local man and his son; his son recently returned from studying abroad and assists him. The manager of day-to-day operations has worked in the factory/farm for several years. His main concern is to ensure that orders from retailers in Europe and America keep coming to the factory/farm and that orders are completed to the tight deadlines imposed by the retailer. In particular he needs to make sure that last minute changes to orders are complied with. If he doesn't meet these (often unreasonable) demands the retailer may take their orders elsewhere.

There have been rumours for several months about sexual harassment in the factory/farm. It is rumoured that two women have been raped when 'chaperoned' home after a late shift but details are not clear. No one has made a complaint or spoken publicly about it and it is common gossip that one of the managers often spends a long time in his office with younger female workers, who also seem to be the ones who get allocated the best shifts. No one knows exactly what happens behind the closed doors but there is lots of gossip. Recently sexually offensive graffiti appeared outside the toilets used by women workers – the toilets are near their production lines but men work there on the night shift. The place where orders are packed has only male workers - women sometimes have to take things there but feel uncomfortable because they feel the men 'stare' at them and they often hear comments and laughs after they leave. Women production workers are embarrassed and offended by the graffiti. Women are also uncomfortable when they walk through the security gates of the factory/farm as there are often groups of men who 'stare' at them standing outside the gates.

Quotes of managers and workers

The quotes below are based on real-life quotes from managers and workers.

Quotes by managers

“I have been to the farms. The women looked very safe there.”

“I have never seen or heard anyone being abused or yelled at. When I was in the factories, the workers all smiled at me. This is an indication that they are not harassed.”

“I thought sexual harassment is something in the 30s. It has already been eliminated, right? Why do you want to address such an old issue?”

“Our supplier was founded by the person who brought the idea of microfinance to Bangladesh. I don't think the problem of violence against women is relevant to his factory.”

“If my workers are happy then it is going to benefit my business. They will work in the factory for long time and I will have a stable workforce. AHC meetings have helped my workers in coming forth with problems although these problems are of very practical nature like excessive heat in their room or a co-worker bullying another worker.”

“I agree that rape, murder, beating up women, etc. are violence against women. But yelling? No, no... Everyone yells in Bangladesh. Especially at work, something was done wrong. One yelled at the other. It is normal. If you call this harassment, then I cannot manage a factory.”

“There is no way for affected workers to convey complaints. Without any system in place to what could the complaint of the worker possibly lead to, if not to more sexual harassment?”

Quotes by workers

“The tailor would slap them, prick them with his needle and even kick them, for no reason at all.”

“Management calls us names throughout the time we are working. They call us ‘stupid’, ‘lazy’, ‘useless’, ‘bastard’s child’. They say, ‘you don’t deserve any better’. There is physical abuse as well. Our ears are often pulled, and managers yell directly into our ears.”

“Garment factories are places of dirty language and abuse. Those who have done a lot of sinning come here for penance.”

“Pretty girls in the factory are harassed by male managers. They come on to the girls, call them into their offices, whisper into their ears, touch them (...) bribe them with money and threaten them with losing their jobs if they don’t have sex with them.”

“The supervisor at the farm often spoke to me in obscene language, called me names and asked if I had any desires. If I asked him for leave, he would tell me that I needed to ‘adjust’ with him for leave. He told me that even to go to the bathroom, I needed his permission.”

“According to the Honduran government’s Public Ministry spokesman Casco, a foreman in a banana company pack-house, had a number of women workers under his authority and regularly harassed two in particular, telling them if they did not have sexual relations with him, they would lose their jobs.”

“A woman worker at a dairy company in Malawi was suspended because she refused to let a manager touch her breasts. It was the manager’s habit to touch the breasts and behinds of the women workers as he did his routine inspection of the production area each morning.”

Sources: AWAJ Foundation and AMRF Society (2013); Fair Wear Foundation; Better Work.

To know more about the World Cafe and for additional resources, real stories and material in different languages go to <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>