

MONDIAAL STORIES

2025 #4

A close-up portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair and a red bindi. She is wearing a white sari with red and yellow patterns on the shoulder. A blue sash is visible on her left shoulder. She is holding a large, wooden-handled hoe over her shoulder with her right arm. She is smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a soft-focus green field.

Indian Seed Project
Makes a Big Impact

LISA Empowers Young
Leaders in Uganda

Mondiaal **FNV**

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A NEW GENERATION IS FUTURE-PROOFING UNIONS

In Uganda, through the LISA training programme, we are helping to develop young union talent into effective union leaders. Young participants return to their organisations with greater confidence: they take initiative, write speeches, chair meetings and hold leaders accountable for missed opportunities. They gain tools to not only strengthen themselves, but also their communities.

Two stories, one message:
international solidarity works.

Enjoy the read!



Marjan van Noort
Acting Director
Mondiaal FNV

DEAR READER,

We are pleased to present the fourth edition of Mondiaal Verhaal, in which we showcase stories from the field. This is both the first and the last time I will be writing this foreword. Over the past six months, just as I did 2 ½ years ago, I have served as acting director of Mondiaal FNV, and I will hand over the role again on 1 January 2026.

Once again, I am struck by the positive changes we can achieve together with our partners. Results aren't always immediate, as they are when building of a school, yet the impact of the projects we support over the long term on people's lives, working conditions, laws and policies is impressive.

BIG IMPACT WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Take the example from the first story about the agricultural workers' union in India. Acting as a bridge between the government and agricultural workers in the seed sector - who struggle every day to make a living - the union manages to achieve significant results with modest resources. In 2023, for instance, a solidarity project worth € 64,000 generated over € 1.5 million in additional government support and services, providing greater economic security for more than 500,000 families.

MONDIAAL FNV: WHAT WE DO AND WHY

Mondiaal FNV is the organisation for international solidarity and support affiliated with the Netherlands' largest trade union, the FNV. We believe that everyone has the right to a living wage, social security, decent working conditions, and collective bargaining. In other words, the right to decent work. We want prosperity to be achieved in a fair way, not through exploitation elsewhere in the world.

We support trade unions around the globe. Why? Because trade unions can improve work and life at the grassroots level for many people. We strengthen the capacity of our partners, conduct influential advocacy, and connect local trade unions with the international labour movement. Our focus is on global supply chains in the garment, agriculture, and palm oil sectors.

Cover photo

Mondiaal FNV, with the involvement of FNV Agrarisch Groen and in partnership with the Indian trade union federation NAAwU, works to improve working conditions and ensure safer work for farmers and agricultural workers in the seed sector in India. It is often women who do the most physically demanding work, but receive lower pay than men.

Photo: Roderick Polak



SEED PROJECT IN INDIA

TRADE UNION FEDERATION NAAWU SHOWS HOW
LIMITED RESOURCES CAN DELIVER MAJOR CHANGE

Dutch vegetable and horticultural seeds have a close connection to India. Few people understand how that relationship works as well as Wilma Roos. From Mondiaal FNV, she has spent many years working with the Indian agricultural workers' union APVUU, which has recently merged into the influential trade union federation NAAWU. With minimal resources, the federation is achieving maximum change. In this story, Wilma takes us into the fields, the villages and the lives of people behind the seed sector, showing what collective organising can mean for the very poorest.

Wilma Roos has been closely involved for many years in the seed project that Mondiaal FNV launched in 2018 together with FNV Agrarisch Groen. The aim is to promote decent work in the production chain of vegetable and horticultural seed breeding - a sector in which the Netherlands are a major global player. However, the history of trade union organising in this sector goes back even further, to the 1990s. At that time, a government programme in India freed bonded labourers. In their villages in the state of Andhra Pradesh, they set up committees that later grew into the agricultural workers' union APVUU. As the union expanded into several more states, this resulted in the formation of the National Alliance of Agriculture and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU). Today, the federation organises some 850,000 members across four states.

DEVASTATING DROUGHT

Growth did not come without a struggle. Around 2005, the region was hit by severe

The union reclaimed government land that had been illegally taken over by large landowners and allocated it to landless members.

drought. As a result, many small farmers lost their land, sank into severe poverty and moved to the cities in large numbers to find work. The impacts on farming communities were devastating. To give agricultural workers a better future in their own villages, APVUU developed bold strategies. First, they reclaimed government land that had been illegally seized by large landowners. In villages, plots of land were occupied and, through legal procedures, allocated to landless members.



MONDIAAL FNV AND NAAWU

Mondiaal FNV, with the involvement of FNV Agrarisch Groen and in partnership with the Indian trade union federation NAAWU, works to improve working conditions and ensure safer work for farmers and agricultural workers in the seed sector in India. The Netherlands play a key role in vegetable and horticultural seed breeding. The so-called Seed Valley in the west of the country is home to the main seed multinationals and much of the international seed breeding takes place there. The seeds are then produced in India and other South Asian countries. Around 200 million agricultural workers and small farmers work in India and the vast majority struggle to make ends meet from their farming activities, living at or near the poverty line. This is also the case in the seed sector.



ABOUT WILMA ROOS

Wilma Roos is a policy officer at Mondiaal FNV and has been involved for many years in projects across the international agriculture and horticulture sectors. She works closely with the Indian agricultural workers' union NAAwU, supporting them in organising, research and advocacy, and acts as the link between the workers in the seed sector and FNV members and companies in the Netherlands. In this role, she tracks and connects developments throughout the seed supply chain, from villages in India to boardrooms in the Netherlands.



A VITAL LINK

Equally important is the way in which the agricultural workers' union has become, and continues to be, a vital link between the government and village communities. India has numerous social security and employment programmes, yet the very poorest often do not know they are entitled to them, or they struggle to navigate the digital and bureaucratic barriers. This is where NAAwU steps in.

For example, in villages, the organisation identifies who qualifies for the employment programme, which provides for 100 days of paid work per year and makes an inventory of the projects that could be carried out under it - such as land reclamation, road construction or building water wells. The union then presses local authorities to ensure both implementation and payment of the minimum wage for both men and women. Food support schemes are also made more accessible: families living below the poverty line are entitled to thirty kilograms of rice each month.

The union is embedded into the very fabric of society, able to organise and gather information quickly, even in the most remote villages.

ENORMOUS IMPACT

Behind the union's work lies a finely tuned structure, Wilma explains: for every twenty members there is a leader, and for every

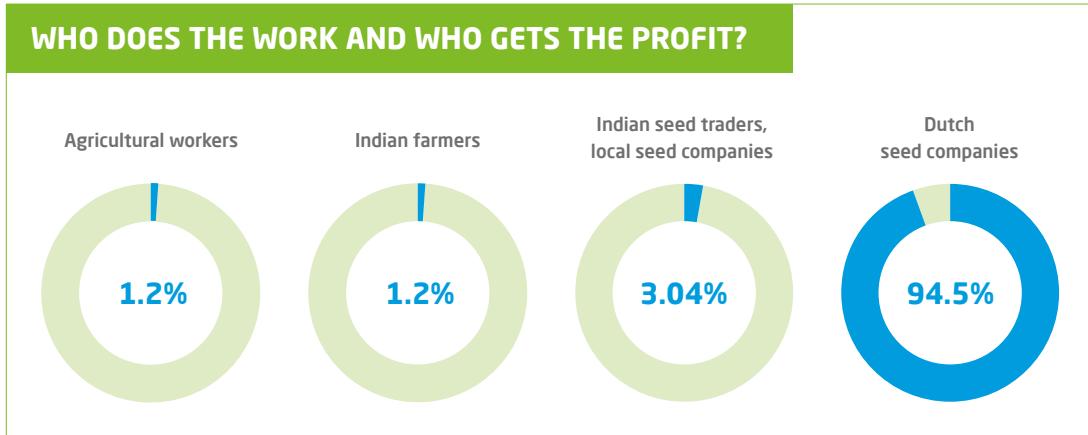
twenty leaders there is another layer, and so on. This makes sure the union is deeply rooted in society, enabling it to organise and gather information quickly, even in the most remote villages. Members carry out much of the work themselves, with costs covered by a modest membership fee and support from organisations such as Mondiaal FNV. That small contributions can have massive impact is clear from NAAwU's detailed reports.

Land titles are registered in the name of women, as they tend to manage land and resources more carefully than men.

For instance, a solidarity project of € 64,000 in 2023 generated over € 1.5 million in additional government support and services, plus € 124,000 in paid workdays for members - benefiting more than 500,000 families.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Women are central to NAAwU's interventions. Wherever possible, land titles are registered in women's names, as they tend to manage land and resources more carefully, to the benefit of their families and the wider community. The risk of money being lost to gambling or alcohol is far lower than it is for men. As a result, the majority of members, and 64 per cent of leaders, are women. NAAwU also focuses on protection against violence, both from large landowners and within the home. Together with local leaders,



systems have been established in villages to identify and address child marriages, abuse and other forms of violence.

THE NECESSITY OF TRADE UNION WORK

Research by Mondiaal FNV into wages and price structures reveals a stark imbalance: local agricultural workers sometimes earn as

little as € 1,50 per day, while the revenue from the same seeds increases by a factor of 6,037 along the supply chain, reaching tens of thousands of euros for the Dutch multinationals. "This clearly shows that trade union work remains essential," says Wilma, "to push for further improvements along the supply chain." ■



HEAVY WORK

While Dutch multinationals earn billions in the global trade in hybrid vegetable and fruit seeds, workers in India are often poorly paid and endure appalling labour conditions. Producing seeds requires extremely precise pollination. Much of this physically highly demanding work is done by women. Bent over in the fields, they harvest the male stamens of the flowers by hand, grind them into a paste and use a finger to apply this to the pistils (female parts) of the flowers in the fields - flower by flower, all day long.



LISA PROGRAMME STRENGTHENS YOUNG TALENT

TRAINING PROGRAMME IN UGANDA SUPPORTS
A YOUTH AND LEADERSHIP MOVEMENT

In Uganda, the trade union movement faces a double challenge: while its membership is progressively getting younger, leadership positions are often held by the same people for decades. Board roles rarely rotate and young people are forced to watch from the sidelines how decisions about their future are made without them. Yet they are the ones who feel the daily impact of climate change, digitalisation and precarious work.

The two-year LISA programme is working to change this entrenched reality step by step. It brings together a new generation of young trade union talents - young people who are not willing to wait until a seat happens to become available, but who create space for themselves at the table. Through an intensive programme, they work on leadership skills and building strong networks, both within and beyond their own unions.

A DIFFERENT STANCE

The atmosphere in the training room is anything but formal. Participants practice, laugh and sometimes confront one another head-on. Through role-playing, they experience how emotions come into play during negotiations. Personality assessments help them discover their own

leadership style: am I the one who takes the lead, the builder of bridges, the listener who gives others room to tell their story? This self-awareness is important, as many



The LISA programme gives us the knowledge and the skills to engage more effectively, enabling us to take on leadership positions in the future.

Mariam Buteme

Central Women's Coordinator,
Plantation and Agricultural
Workers' Union



young people are used to staying in the background, especially in a culture where respect for older leaders is deeply ingrained. LISA helps them adopt a different stance: respectful, but no longer silent.

ENERGY TRANSITION

In the LISA programme, leadership development always goes hand in hand with substance. A central theme is the just transition: the shift from fossil fuels to sustainable energy and its implications for jobs, incomes and working conditions. In Uganda, young trade union members witness up close how one sector contracts



The LISA programme pushed me to step outside my comfort zone. I used to be a quiet, introverted person. Now I am much better able to show my leadership qualities.

Ibrahim Maweje

Vice-Chair, Youth Committee,
Transport Workers' Union



LISA AT A GLANCE

The LISA programme (Leadership, Influence, Sustainability and Alliance-building) strengthens the position of young trade union members in Uganda. It specifically targets active, talented and engaged young people under the age of 32, with the aim of rejuvenating and future-proofing the trade union movement. Through training sessions, coaching and practical assignments on just transition, membership recruitment and digitalisation, young participants gain the tools to strengthen not just themselves, but also their communities.

while another emerges. When the aviation authority replaced polluting diesel buses with electric ones, for example, bus drivers risked losing their jobs. The new buses arrived with drivers already trained to operate them. Ibrahim Maweije of the transport union intervened: "We entered into talks with the management and secured training for existing drivers. That way, they were able to keep their jobs."

CLIMATE CHANGE

Young people also see the impact of climate change directly in their workplace. Higher temperatures on farmland and plantations, increased health risks, longer periods of droughts or, conversely, heavy rainfall. Within the programme, these experiences are translated into concrete



The LISA programme has changed me as a person. During the presentation module, I learned how to keep my nerves under control.

Wazir Miuwa

Secretary of the Print, Paper and Plastic Workers' Union

action plans: awareness-raising on safe working in extreme heat, proposals for protective equipment, or a resolution on climate and work to be introduced within their own unions. Trade union officer Dorcas Akulli persuaded her boss to dedicate one hour of radio airtime every Thursday to climate change, agriculture and shifting weather patterns. "In this way, I have already invited several experts to speak on the impacts of climate change, and I call on everyone to stop cutting down trees and instead to start planting them."

DIGITAL

Equally innovative is the way in which LISA invests in digital skills. Young people are



LISA is the best thing that ever happened to me in my life. The programme taught me a great deal about myself, about what trade union work entails and how to effectively apply myself as a leader.

Dorcas Akulli

Women's Representative, Media Workers' Union

often already active on social media. Through the programme, they learn how to strategically deploy those skills for their union. With the help of AI tools, they experiment with short videos, striking visuals and online campaigns on issues such as sexual harassment, decent work and climate change. Where recruitment once relied on meetings and printed leaflets, they now reach colleagues via their phones. This makes the union visible in places where young people actually are.

A NEW GENERATION

As the programme progresses, relationships within the unions are starting to shift. Young participants return to their



We now focus more on stubborn employers who want nothing to do with trade unions, to make it clear to them that we are not a threat but want to work together.

Timothy Musoba

Sector Chair, Textile and Leather Workers' Union

organisations with greater confidence, take initiative, write speeches, chair meetings and dare to challenge leaders on missed opportunities.

In this way, LISA is developing into more than a training programme. It is becoming a network of young leaders who continue to connect, share experiences and join forces in campaigns. They demonstrate how the trade union movement in Uganda can renew itself without losing its core values. Through their leadership, they ensure that the transition to a sustainable economy is also a just transition, leaving no workers behind. ▶



Through the LISA programme, young trade unionists can acquire an enormous amount of knowledge and skills, enabling them to represent workers more effectively.

Geofrey Musanje

Mentor and Coach to LISA Participants

Does decent work matter to you?

Join us and support Mondiaal FNV.

Scan the QR code



Or make a donation to FNV Mondiaal's bank account:
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Colophon

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