

# seko i världen

presenting a sample of Seko's unionisation development cooperations worldwide



Democracy Unionisation Education Fighting poverty



# Mission *impossible?*

*In a world, and in a labourmarket that's getting more and more globalised, union development collaborations stretching over borders are more relevant than ever.*

Seko conducts multiple union development projects in different parts of the world. The foundation of these projects is solidarity with fellow workers in poorer countries and also serves to secure our members' rights at home. In this way, Seko's international operations go hand in hand with the union's work for safer employment and living wages.

The union work conducted within Seko sectors in developing countries is not about charity. In these projects, focus lie on support by unionisation, when workers are in need of changing their situation.

Our purpose with this brochure is to highlight a few of the Seko development cooperations where working conditions have improved through international union collaboration. For instance, we present our projects within the telecom sector in Colombia and Nepal. In Nepal, the project reached a 99% level of unionised workers resulting in the signing of collective agreements. This project has been ongoing since 2009

and shows the value and effectiveness of persistent unionisation work despite adversity. In Colombia, which is one of the world's most dangerous countries to be an unionised worker, unionists face considerable risks. Supporting the workers in Colombia is crucial.

To achieve the primary objective of these projects; to build stable unions within Seko sectors in developing countries, working widely and inclusively is of utmost importance. Operating strategic when strengthening women's positions and preconditions on the labour market is apparent for instance in the Seko collaboration with female bus conductors in India. Other focus areas in our projects can be climate-related work and to provide union information by radio to illiterate fellow workers.

I hope you will find this presentation engaging and that you will have the opportunity to see the exhibition and the videos connected to this brochure. We are proud of the work Seko conducts throughout the world.

**Jens Saverstam**  
*International secretary, Seko i världen*

# PROJECT *Madagascar*

Seko initiates and supports unionisation development projects within the telecom sector in East Africa, focusing on Madagascar, Niger and Guinea Bissau. The objective of the project is to promote and support the forming of strong unions and signing extensive collective agreements within the French-owned telecom company Orange. The collaboration also aims to support a regional network of local unions within the Orange business group on the African continent.

Madagascar is one of the world's poorest countries, marked by political instability, corruption and increasing criminality. The majority of the country's labour force is extremely underpaid, and the labour market is characterised by uncertain employment and low levels of unionisation.

Seko in cooperation with the global union UNI acknowledged the importance of initiating union development cooperation within the East African telecom sector. The telecom employees in this geographic area are very exposed and hence tricky to organise. Union members are often regarded as troublemakers by their employers, and unionised workers risk losing their employment.

In the early stages of the development project, no union existed at Orange. According to company employees and local experts, unionising at such a vast and centralised telecom company would be almost impossible. Seko and UNI hosted an initial seminar on trade union organisation for a group of Orange

employees located in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. In addition to the seminar, recruitment of members was carried out which enabled the union to detect more employees with interest to engage in trade union work.

A year later, 40% of the Orange employees in Madagascar had become members of the newly formed telecom union, the S.M.O.M.A. Now, the aim was to support the S.M.O.M.A in their ambition to reach the legal right to sign collective agreements, which requires a membership percentage of 50% of the workers.

During the second year of the project, 2015, another seminar was carried out together with an unionising campaign with the intent to prepare the S.M.O.M.A for the upcoming collective bargaining. In 2016 the preparations to sign the telecom union's first, historical collective agreement continued.

When this goal has been achieved, the S.M.O.M.A will proceed its work within the project and serve as an excellent example of how unionising can be initiated both in Madagascar as well as in other African countries.

In Niger and Guinea Bissau, a level of 50% organised employees at Orange has been reached and collective agreements have been signed. The regional network of local African trade unions within the Orange business group is worthy of imitation when it comes to knowledge transfer between the unions. Another objective is to assure compliance with the signed agreements, as negotiated. 





At the top of their lungs, the street vendors are calling out their offers, trying to out voice the roaring traffic. In the middle of the street small children are playing, apparently unaware of the cars and the scooters surrounding them. The traffic is unpredictable, and it seems to be just as natural to honk the horn, as it is to shift gears. Timeworn but colourful houses climb the steep hillsides of Antananarivo. Where the hills flatten out, and the city centre begins, islands of shantytowns spread out. Along the riverbanks, women line up with huge piles of laundry in the water. Seemingly effortless the piles quickly transform into clean clothes.

The tranquil countryside surrounding Antananarivo fills the scenery with terrace cultivation mixed with lush jungle.

Rice is the primary export and stands for 70% alongside coffee, vanilla, cacao, tobacco and sisal. The scents, vibrating colours and sounds make the senses spin. But in the midst of the rich spectra of colours, poverty reveals itself. Ninety percent of the population lives in poverty.

Like many other African countries, Madagascar lacks union tradition. Only three to four percent of the employees are unionised, and most trade unions are powerless. Still, pioneers are striving, either openly or secretly, to make a change for the future. Fiery spirits, who are devoted and committed to making that difference. Amanita Kieta is one of those fiery spirits. She originates from Côte d'Ivoire and is working for UNI Global in supporting newly formed unions by providing education and

# "We're building for

seko i världen



workshops. Today, she engages in the new trade union at Orange, a French telecommunication company.

– Women need to take their place, at all levels, both in society and within the trade unions. When women undertake essential missions, they inspire young women to stand up and fight for their rights, she explains.

Amanita believes in the democratic power of trade unions, and its relevance for enabling a positive development in Madagascar. Setting a good example, S.M.OMA, the newly formed trade union at Orange, managed to unionise almost 50 percent of the 850 employees, in quite a short period. A few more members and the possibility

for collective bargaining opens since the Madagascar's Labour Act states, that a trade union can only be active in a company once it has achieved a rate of unionisation of over 50%.

The new trade union at Orange receives support from Seko and UNI, including organising education and workshops and by providing recruitment strategies. Quite a few doubted the unionisation project, initiated by Seko and UNI at Orange. Most people thought it to be impossible to organise and recruit members to non-established trade unions in Madagascar. But it succeeded beyond all expectations. >>>

# the next generation”



The traffic is roaring around us, in an exhausting and choleric manner, and we feel the urge to relocate. The tallest building in Antananarivo is visible from all over the city and is also our next stop. On this particular day, a union recruitment workshop will take place in the skyscraper, and as we enter the orange and brown coloured lobby, the coldness of the air condition is much-needed.

Jesse Wilderman from North America leads the workshop. With hands-on questions, the workshop moves forward at high-speed, and Jesse mixes lectures with group work and role-playing, all in a pedagogical rhythm. When the training ends, the trainees spread out in the crowded company canteen, and sit down at different tables, ready to recruit. The rookie recruiters change tables regularly, and each time passionate debates arise. During an hour and a half, the rookie recruiters

manage to recruit members correspondingly to an impressive 48%. Only two more percent and S.M.OMA will be able to proceed to the next step: collective bargaining negotiations.

After the success at the company canteen, the rookie recruiters return to the lecture hall. Their next task will be to develop a collective agreement and practice different negotiation strategies. Proposals are discussed in smaller ensembles, and then analysed in front of the whole group.

When role-playing, the team have the opportunity to fine-tune their methods, as they meet with "sharp business leaders" played by Jens Saverstam a representative from Seko, and Alex Kolback, Jesse Wilderman and Amanita Kieta, representatives from UNI. The group play the part of being a delegation from the union with the intent to negotiate. In no time "the sharp



leaders” dismantle the arguments of ”the delegation”, and the group learns a valuable lesson.

– We still have a lot to learn, Holy Fanjarahimanana stresses. Holy is the vice chairman of the S.M.OMA and fought well with her arguments in the role-play.

– We have to start somewhere. Me, for instance, I joined the union when I realised that we have to be together to achieve equality and democracy in our workplace. Amanita Kieta agrees:

– We don’t just fight for ourselves, but for the next generation. We want to speak for all those people that don’t have a voice of their own. Holy Fanjarahimanana nods in agreement.

Jesse Wilderman wraps up the workshop by cheering: ”Well done, everybody!”. It has been a remarkable day, and as we exit the most significant building in Antananarivo, heading off into the heat and the traffic once again, the one sentiment that seems to embrace us all, is faith in the future.

#### Facts Madagascar

- Approx. 24 million inhabitants
- Capital: Antananarivo, (2.6 million inh.)
- Life expectancy: 67 yrs (women) 64 yrs (men)
- Population growth: 2.5%
- Healthcare costs amount to 3% of GNP
- Trade union index: 3 (scale 1-5); union rights are regularly offended.

# PROJECT *Colombia*

The objective of the Seko developing project in Latin- and South America is to support trade union formations in the telecom sector. The project also aims to strengthen the regional network for unions within multinational telecom conglomerates Telefónica, América Móvil, DigiCell and Liberty Colombia.

The workforce in the telecom sector in Latin and South America faces many challenges. A familiar and frequent phenomenon is how workers' right to unionise is systematically undermined by major companies. Often, trade unions are refused admittance to the workplaces.

Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists and one of the most challenging countries to pursue trade union work. Union members often face reduced benefits, lower pay and worse working hours, and harassment of union members outside the workplace is very common.

In Colombia, Seko cooperates with Ultraclaro, a union representing various occupational groups in the telecom sector. Through its composition of different trade unions, Ultraclaro operates throughout the entire country. The biggest trade union under the umbrella organisation of Ultraclaro is Claro Colombia, which organises workers at Claro, a telecom company owned by the Mexican corporation Telmex.

With approximately 700 members, Claro Colombia has more than doubled its membership since the development project was launched. Claro Colombia's number of members could have been enlarged, only Claro methodically gets rid off any subcontractor, whose employees unionise.

Claro Colombia's members have to deal with the fact that the company management consistently declines all collective bargaining processes. All union activity is thoroughly sabotaged. Rather than negotiating collective agreements with Ultraclaro, the company management has signed an agreement with a so-called "yellow union" which consists of a few people from the own management. Whenever companies sign agreements with yellow unions, the workers' unions are offered the same terrible terms and conditions. Therefore, in its attempts to negotiate better deals, Claro Colombia has to face up to a lengthy and costly process for a long time to come.

To be a unionist in Colombia is both demanding and dangerous, and personal sacrifices are often made. The unionists at Claro Colombia are compelled to pursue their work with perseverance and endurance. Within the development project, Seko offers a comprehensive support, to give Ultraclaro means to operate in Colombia. This trade union support, despite numerous and challenging setbacks, has led to union achievements. 



# Unionist *and vulnerable?*



Being a unionist in Colombia is associated with personal risks, but Yulie Igelda couldn't have chosen any differently. Yulie is the President of Claro Colombia, the trade union at the Mexican owned telecom company Claro. Today, Claro Colombia has reached over 700 members all over the country.

Yulie Igelda is currently working with customer relations in the television and Internet sector. Her working duties include gaining new customers, as well as providing telecommunications services to already existing customers.

Yulie experienced how the employment conditions got worse when the Mexican corporation Telmex became the owner of Claro. The new management wanted the employees to work longer hours, but with decreased wages. The working environment worsened rapidly.

Finally, a group of employees initiated a meeting. There was a great need to discuss the untenable situation, and soon a union was formed. Yulie was one of the first to become a member. It didn't take long before the union was thwarted and the company management had fired all union leaders.

– Then, people got scared. Many of the employees don't even

know what union work means, and it has made them suspicious. It is a common belief that union organisations are violent and supportive of armed conflict, but in reality, it's the opposite. Yulie gestures while she speaks, and there's no hesitation in the way she expresses herself. It is important not to keep silent, but to tell the story.

After the union was formed, Yulie engaged in informing the employees about labour rights and what the union could do. She was elected to the union board as Chief Information Officer, then as Secretary-General and finally as President. Everything went very quickly, and Yulie felt the urge to learn more about union work and what she was supposed to do, being the President. Yulie read anything she came across about trade union work and union activities. It was essential for her to be able to shoulder her presidency, in which her co-workers had put their trust.

She was vulnerable. The first set of union leaders were fired without motivation, and employees were bribed with 60 dollars to sign an agreement, saying they would never unionise. The global trade union UNI came to Claro Colombia's support, in making an effort to reverse the dismissals. The matter has now become a legal case and reached all the way to the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, labour disputes in Colombia usually are lengthy processes, and most legal outcomes give the ►►►

#### Facts Colombia

- Approx. 47 million inhabitants
- Capital: Bogotá, (9.8 million inh.)
- Life expectancy: 79 yrs (women) 72 yrs (men)
- Population growth: 1%
- Healthcare costs amount to 7.2% of GNP
- Trade union index: 5 (scale 1-5); union rights are regularly violated, and it's dangerous to be a unionist.

employers right and not the employees.

Previously, Yulie had to commute two hours to work and was therefore in desperate need of changing her place of work closer to her home. When the company didn't offer her any possibilities, Yulie decided to move her home instead. Soon, after she and her children were becoming acquainted with their new neighbourhood, the company informed Yulie that they had redeployed her, to a workplace nearby her former place of residence.

– It's apparent that they tried to provoke me, but I was supported by UNI, and I'm still working at the same workplace, Yulie explains.

The company management has banned all union activity during working time, which complicates the possibility to pursue union work. With many employees having long commuting times, life is often stressful and with little or no time left for the family. The ban makes it very difficult for Yulie and her fellow unionists to find any time available to meet. The management at Claro is doing everything

it can to impede the growth of a strong union.

The average wage at Claro is 250 US dollars a month, and the union fee is two dollars each month. The union membership fees are not sufficient when it comes to visiting employees in other cities, carrying out union education or covering the costs to print flyers.

A constant ongoing recruitment process is very important and crucial to have, Yulie says. The primary goal is to associate as many as possible, but also to keep existing members still believing in the union. The Ministry of Labour approves collective bargaining agreements, and so far the union at Claro is still lacking one.

– It's all about getting people to rethink. The more pro-union, the easier it will be to make the necessary changes, in this fragile democracy of ours. The union could be a strong force to be reckoned with in our society, leading the way on how to make changes for the better. And not only for unionists, but for everybody, Yulie emphases.



“ I dream that one day, I’ll be a lawyer and I’ll be defending workers’ rights. I would support them, and it wouldn’t cost them a single peso. ”



# PROJECT *India*

India is a patriarchal society by tradition and women's rights are very limited. Two out of three men in India have stated that there are times when "women deserve to be beaten".

In the Indian labour market, 45-60% of women report that they suffer different types of harassment on a daily basis. Particularly vulnerable are female public transport workers, who often endure threats, violence and sexual harassment by employers, co-workers and passengers. Severe cases of aggravated assaults and rapes are rife, especially for evening workers.

Often, when women report to the police, the response of the police is to harass the women themselves, and the cases very rarely lead to prosecution, since the general view is that "the woman is to blame in any case".

Since 2013, new legislation in India, The Sexual Harassment Act 2013, requires all employers to establish an ad hoc committee

including employee representatives, to handle cases of sexual harassment in the workplace. At the state-owned bus company in Maharashtra state, the committee has never met, despite numerous reports daily on sexual harassment, and regardless of the new law.

Seko and the International Transport Federation (ITF) are working together with MSTKS, the trade union unionising the state bus enterprise of Maharashtra. The objective is to empower the women bus conductors and strengthen their position within the company, in the union and society, by unionisation, education and through information campaigns.

Since the project launched in 2014, MSTKS has appointed women representatives (Women's Advocates) at 200 out of 250 bus depots. By Indian standards, it is an enormous union progress, and the successful project will soon extend to Nepal and South America. 



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# I'm proud of being *a bus conductor!*

One of the women who receive support from the Women Project is Suman Dhembbar. She is a 35-year-old widow with two children to support. She married at 20 years of age, and the newlyweds left home to settle in Mumbai. Five years later, her husband tragically died of a heart attack.

– When I ran out of tears, I realised that it was all up to me now. If my boys were to survive, I had to provide for them, Suman says.

One day, she saw an ad in the local newspaper, where they were seeking women bus conductors. Suman applied immediately and got the job. There was just one problem.

– I got the job in Puna. That is 200 kilometres away from Mumbai. My waking hours were all about working and commuting. Then finally, I managed to change my place of work to Mumbai, and I was so relieved.

She offers me chai masala, which is Indian for tea with spices, as we meet in her home situated in one of Mumbai's many shantytowns. There is no toilet in her home, and she gets water from a well located in the yard, shared with the neighbours. Besides her children, she also provides for her mother and younger brother.

– My salary is 10 000 Rupees a month, and I can barely make it through. I can never afford to buy meat, and when I have paid the rent, the electric bill and the tuition fees, I spend whatever's left on food and nothing else. Suman lowers her eyes as she corrects her pink and gold sari. The room is kept neatly, although it's simple and through the open windows, the city roars in the distance. Neighbours come and go, and the atmosphere is affable.

The problems didn't end with Suman's new place of work in Mumbai. The new position meant working

hours ending at midnight. Walking home through the night as a woman can be dangerous since rapes and assaults are common in this area.

– My boys had to be left at home, all alone, and I felt very unsafe.

When Suman asked to change her working hours for a day job, her male foreman told her, yes, of course, if only she would comply with his wish to have sex with her. Suman refused and reported him for sexual harassment. Suman's misery didn't end, instead of getting support from her employer, the company's middle managers harassed Suman regularly.

It culminated one day when a female inspector from the company stepped on Suman's bus and claimed that someone had seen Suman steal from the ticket sales. In front of all the passengers, Suman had to undress her sari, to prove that she hadn't hidden any money underneath her clothes.

– At that time, even the passengers protested against the degrading treatment the inspector gave me. They just couldn't bear it.

Suman spoke up and reported the female inspector, and now she is more determined than ever, in claiming justice.

– Today, I have faith in the future, since the union and the union leader Sheila Naikawade support me. I know now that the union stands behind me whenever I'm in need. Being aware of what the union can do, I felt that I had to engage, and now I'm the chair of the women's committee at my depot. With the help of the union, I finally managed to change my working hours to a day job. It is still not perfect; I have to get up at 4 a.m. every morning and prepare the boys' meals and school day, but in spite of everything I've been through, I love my job as a bus conductor, and I'm proud of my profession.

## Facts India

- Population approx. 1.2 billion
- Capital: New Delhi, population: 25 million
- Life expectancy: 70 yrs (women), 67 yrs (men)
- Population growth: 1.2%
- Healthcare costs amount to 4.7% of GDP
- Trade union index: 5 (scale 1-5), union rights are regularly violated, and it's dangerous to be a unionist.

”

***I will fight for women's rights  
for as long as I live.***

”

Sheila grew up under rather simple circumstances, but her parents could still afford to provide for Sheila's education. Sheila chose to be a social worker.

A couple of years ago, Sheila initiated a project with the objective of empowering women employees. Along with the union Maharashtra State Transport Workers' Union (MSTKS), Sheila arranged awareness-raising campaigns all over the state of Maharashtra.

– The project turned out well, and today we have women committees in all of the 35 provinces of Maharashtra state, Sheila says. She is a union activist and works as a clerk at the government-owned bus company Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation.

– Sexual assault and harassment of women are quite common in India, not only in the workplace but at home as well, Sheila says.

Being employed by the bus company, Sheila couldn't help but notice that her coworkers were experiencing different types of harassment at work, and so Sheila started supporting them.

The word got around, and more and more women approached Sheila, sharing their situations.

– I knew that many Indian men see women as second-class citizens, but the stories I was told by these women... I would never, ever have imagined. I never thought the abuse was so common and widely spread.

Sheila refuses to accept sexual assault and harassment of women bus conductors as being part of normality, neither by passengers nor male coworkers.

– Today, most of the bus conductors are unionised, and they do not hesitate reporting abuse and harassment, Sheila says proudly.

Seko and the International Transport Workers' Federation, ITF, supports all training and education within the women project.

– The support has enabled us to develop the project further. The solidarity we receive gives me strength and courage to keep up the good fight!







# PROJECT *Nepal*

For several years, Seko has conducted an unionising project within Telia, in various CIS-countries, Asian countries and Turkey. The objective of the development project has been to create robust and democratic unions within the Telia corporation and to expand the network for the employees in various parts of the world. Through its national enterprise club for TeliaSonera employees, Seko has participated in the global alliance.

The original intention of the development cooperation was to respond to the ambitious strategy of Telia; to become a multinational player within the telecom sector in the Eastern world. Specific unionising efforts were carried out in Kazakhstan, Moldova and Nepal.

When Telia made the buy-out of Ncell, one of the largest mobile operators of Nepal, no union existed at the company. Seko and the global union UNI saw the potential to organise the employees of Ncell. An initialising seminar was arranged for a group of workers who had already started trade union activities.

An unionising campaign accompanied the seminar, and today 99 percent of the Ncell staff are members of Ncell Employees Trade Union (NETU). In just three years, NETU negotiated its first historic collective agreement, and the

union's toil led to the signing of another three agreements. NETU also managed to negotiate an anti-corruption agreement with Ncell and working together with the company management; a joint anti-corruption committee has been created.

Overall, NETU is as a whole self-funded, and functions in most parts as a Swedish trade union with collective bargaining agreements and broad cooperation. In 2016, Ncell was bought-up by Axiata, one of Asia's largest mobile operators with more than 400 million mobile users. The project's objective today is to support union building within the Axiata conglomerate and to increase unionism at the company.

The collaboration between Seko and UNI means continuous support to NETU, in its efforts to liaise with their new employer. NETU in Nepal not only illustrates that it is possible to reach close to 100 percent unionism within a company but also leads the way in sustainable collective bargaining as a newly formed union.

In Moldova and Kazakhstan, the collaborative development project has succeeded in unionising members and building unions within the Telia company, and the new trade unions are part of the Telia union global alliance. 



The unions' development at Ncell has become an undeniable success story. Previously, Ncell was owned by TeliaSonera but has since then been bought-up by the Malaysian based conglomerate Axiata Group, yet the union has stayed stable with continuous activity. Today, 99 percent of the employees are members of the union.

It's a chilly morning as the sun rises in Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. A devastating sight of the rubble of 600 000 houses shattered by a 7.8 earthquake in April 2015, which caused unimaginable destruction and left more than nine thousand people dead. The view is staggering.

Maruti Shandali volunteered as an aid worker when, immediately after the earthquake, UNI and the Youth Committee of Ncell carried out emergency aid in the

worst-hit areas of Nepal. Maruti has worked at Ncell for seven years and is also engaged in the union as Secretary of the board.

– It feels fulfilling to be able to help in a tangible way for those in need. Half our the country was severely stricken, and a lot of people were cut off in areas with no infrastructure, which left them without food, water, medical aid and other supplies. Our union together with the management very quickly ensured that our employees were safe and sound. Many had lost their houses, and so we collected some building material for them, and also cooperated with several health workers such as medical doctors and psychologists, Maruti recounts.

Maruti's own family muddled through without any

# A trade union



physical injuries, but they were fearful of aftershocks for weeks.

– We were terrified. For weeks and weeks, we lived in a tent, afraid of what might happen if we slept in our home. Thankfully, nothing happened, and both my family and our house pulled through.

The Kathmandu sun rises above the magnificent scenery of the majestic mountains of Himalaya. The view is stunning, and accompanied by the chilly air it provides the ultimate refreshing sensation.

Maruti got employed right after she graduated from the University, at a Ncell call centre. Soon enough, she got a position at the head office, where she has been promoted several times, and Maruti wouldn't change her job for

anything. The average wage is 30,000 rupees (≈300 USD), which is quite good by Nepalesian measures. Through the collective agreement, wages are revised yearly.

– Unionism isn't all about collective bargaining. To me, unionism is also about providing social services to the union members, and by that, improving their living conditions and quality of life. I believe that progressive unions are needed to be able to develop a country and for the society as a whole. I'm very proud of being a part of that development, by being a unionist, Maruti Shandali says.

It is almost eight o'clock, and Maruti has got to hurry to work. A new day with new possibilities has awoken in Kathmandu.

# unlike others



Rishi Mani Parajuli is the Vice President of the union at Ncell. He works as an engineer since 2008 and is one of the founders of the union. When forming the trade union in 2009, the founders received support both by Seko and by the global union UNI.

– By that time, trade unions were rare in Nepal. We lacked both social security and labour rights. The corporation management treated the employees very poorly, and the wages were low, Rishi recalls.

Some of the workers wanted to try and do something about the situation. They met and decided to form a union. The new union activity coincided with TeliaSonera being a new part-owner.

– Doubtlessly, our union forming activities had perfect timing, and we could soon enough register our organisation

with the Nepal Labour Ministry. Out of five hundred employees, we have managed to unionise 99 percent, Rishi proudly announces.

It is a unique situation, as Nepal consistently reaches low levels of unionism, with the majority of the unions being powerless. Due to high salary levels, Ncell has become a very popular workplace, with 300 USD in average per month.

– Many unions and workers from other companies approach us, wanting to know more about how we managed to succeed at Ncell. I believe that one reason could be that our union is independent, we do not affiliate with any political party, which is usually the case in Nepal, Rishi reckons.

Shortly after its recognition, the Ncell union initiated collective agreement negotiations, in its ambition to sign the first one as soon as possible.



– Recently, we closed negotiations on our fourth collective agreement. Our goal is to develop and improve the agreement continuously.

Contributing to the great success of the union at Ncell is being supported by Seko and UNI right from the early stage of the unions' formation.

– We have received much valuable advice on how to build and develop an efficient organisation. One of the most helpful input would be that all work relies on functional dialogue between the company management and the union. We have improved the living conditions of the workers, and they feel secure about their employment. I am so pleased with what we have accomplished so far, Rishi summarises.

#### Facts Nepal

- Approx. 30 million inhabitants
- Capital: Kathmandu, (1.2 million inh.)
- Life expectancy: 71 yrs (women) 70 yrs (men)
- Population growth: 1.24%
- Healthcare costs amount to 5.8% of GNP
- Trade union index: 3 (scale 1-5); union rights are regularly offended.

# PROJECT *Russia*

For several years, development collaborations in Russia have been conducted by Seko. As the trade unions of the Soviet era became independent of the national communist party in the early 1990's, a firm conviction to build inclusive and democratic unions arose.

Seko has since then encouraged Russian service and communications unions to continue their work, in a society going through extensive changes. During the Soviet era, the trade unions were connected to the communist party. The unions were strongly regionally based, where the membership fees also were collected. The unions served as social institutions; they administered healthcare and arranged sport and leisure activities at companies and government agencies where the union members worked.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the trade unions have experienced severe challenges, functionally and financially. Today, bargaining processes with companies and national authorities are centralised, where the resources of the unions are meagre. The union's role as a social institution has also changed, which has been a challenge not only for union members but also for local and central representatives. Seko conducts

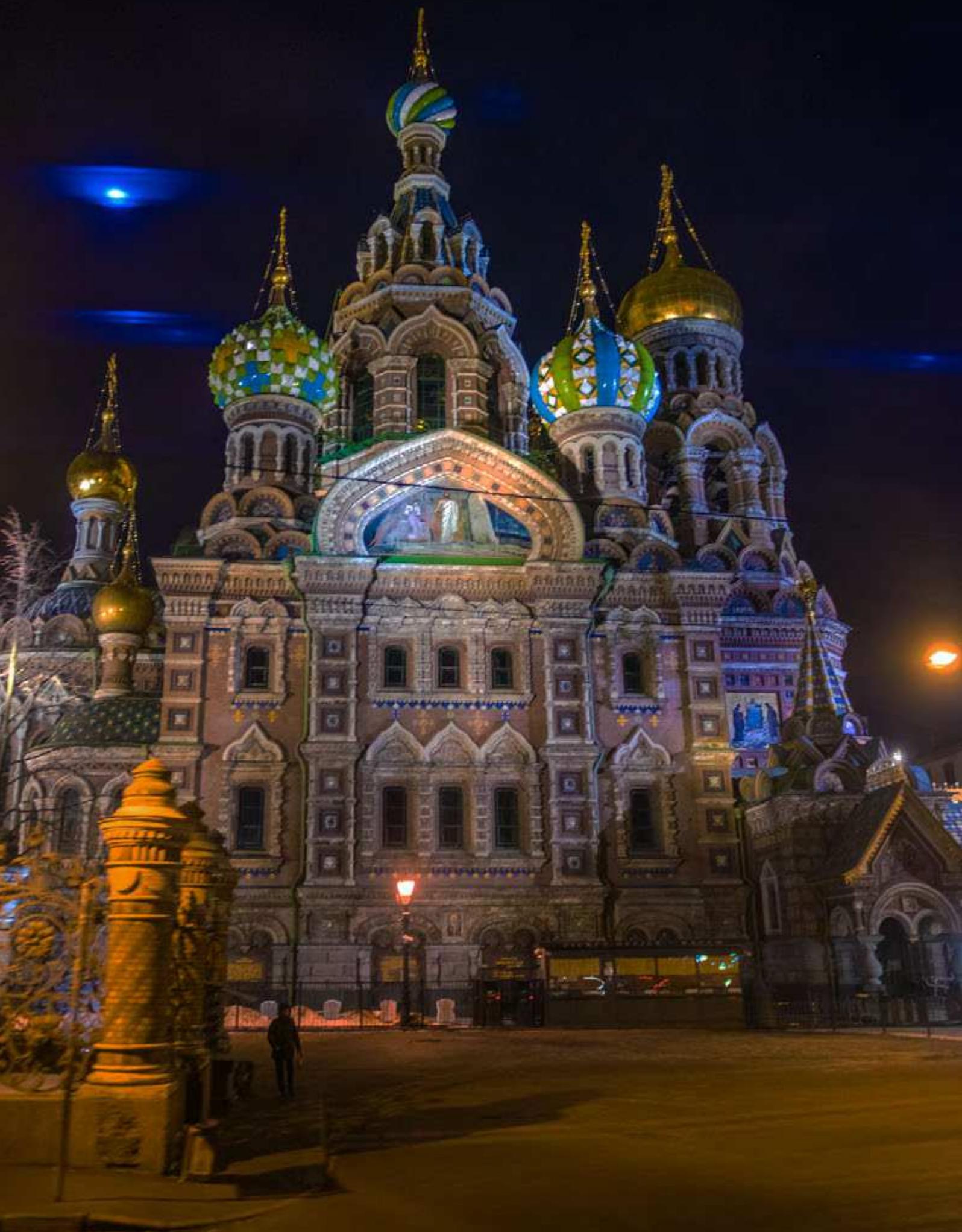
an educational project with the Russian railroad workers' union and host seminars in cooperation with the Russian post and telecom union.

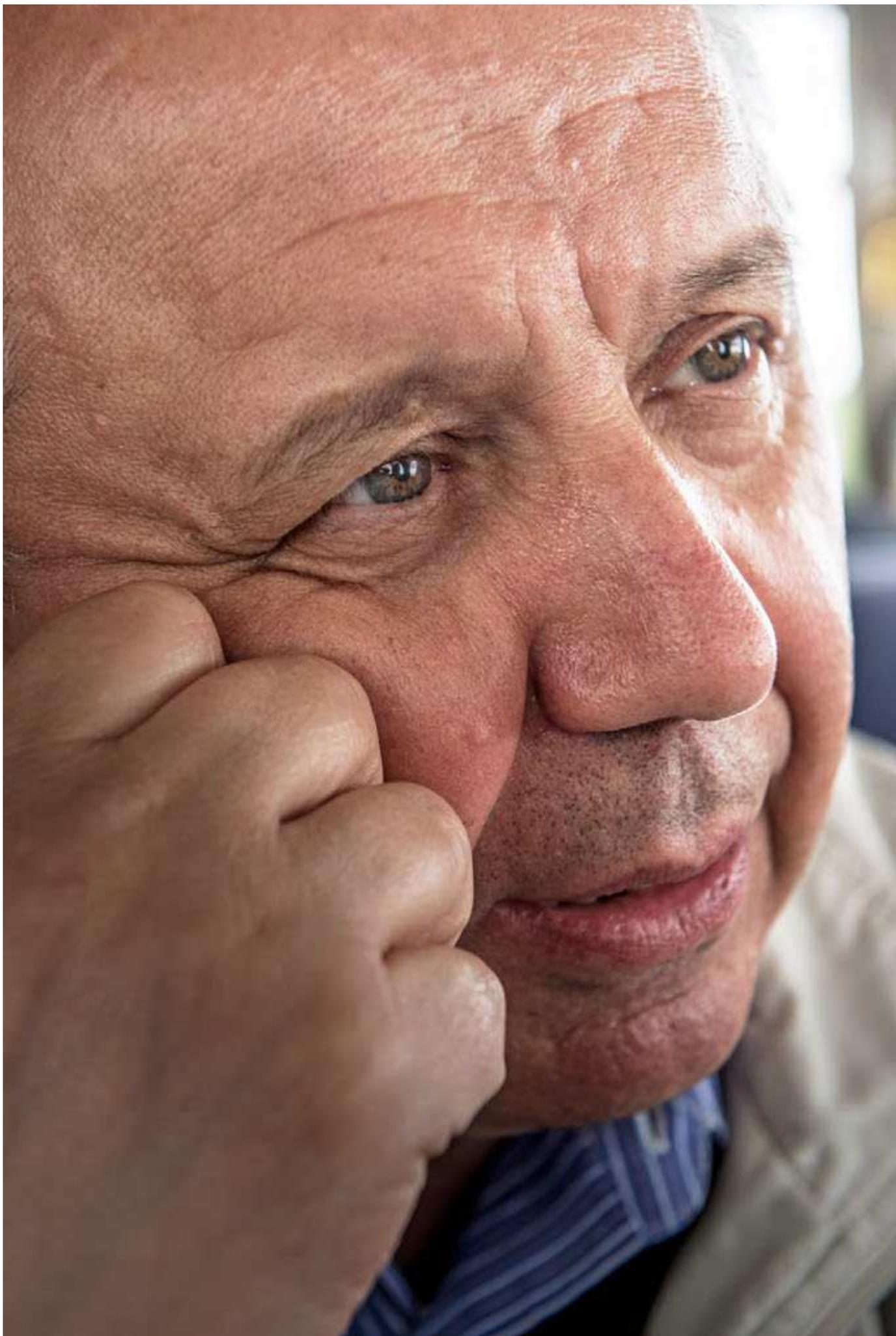
The Russian postal service remains state-owned and employs 42,000 people, with a vast female majority. In the telecom sector, three major privately-owned companies compete with Russ Telecom, of which the state is the principal owner. In both of these sectors, employment rights and working conditions are lagging behind, as well as the wages.

Unionising in Russia is comparatively easy according to Russian labour legislation still employers tend to treat unions with hostility. Hence, the unionised labour force in Russia faces multiple tough challenges.

For Swedish unions, engaging in Russian union development is strategically relevant, since the geographic closeness attract many Swedish companies to situate in Russia. In this respect, cooperation between Seko and Russian service and communications unions is essential to the strain for improved working conditions within these sectors and the labour market as a whole. 







# Step by step in *post-Soviet*

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's brought dramatic change to the entire society. It also meant that all trade unions were dissolved.

– We had to start from scratch to build a democratic and independent trade union movement. The ones before the fall of the Soviet Union were undemocratic unions controlled entirely by the communist party. There was nobody there bargaining for the members' wages or working conditions, says Dimitry Dozorin, Vice President of the Russian communications union.

Apart from his engagement with the union, Dimitry has been a researcher in international relations and has got a PhD in history. His doctoral thesis shed light on social and union issues in post-Soviet Russia. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the situation in Russian universities deteriorated, regarding quality as well as wages. During the 1990's, Dimitry was increasingly active in the trade union.

– Being a Professor of social relations, I was asked to participate in the building of democratic unions, and I accepted. From the very start, this endeavour received backing and encouragement from the Nordic union movement, not least from Seko, Dimitry recalls.

After some time, Dimitry Dozorin was appointed Vice President of the Communication Workers' Union of Russia. He was in charge of international affairs, educational issues, and the union's finances.

The union has got half a million members and local branches in every corner of the country. The Russian postal service alone employs 42,000 people. The members hold positions ranging from telecom workers to security staff.

Approximately 70 percent of the workforce are union members. Unionising is easy, thanks to Russian labour legislation, but a large number of Russian employers refuse to have any dealings with the unions, and in many cases, all union activity is discouraged.

Dimitry is the driving force of the interaction with Seko, and he has been for a long time. Even before the fall of the Soviet Union, he was studying the importance of the trade unions in Sweden. When Dimitry was employed full-time by the union, he was in a position to develop the co-operation with Seko.

– Our unions have a great deal in common, Dimitry observes. It's valuable for us to learn from Seko's working models, especially how they managed to get their members such favourable working conditions and wage levels. We also strive to learn from Seko's social dialogue with the employers, a dialogue we have yet to establish.

Dimitry relates that Russian unionists are much impressed by the fact that in Sweden a trade unionist can become Prime Minister.

– This is something we always call attention to when educating our members. It's extremely inspiring, Vice President Dimitry Dozorin emphasises.

## Facts Russia

- Approx. 143 million inhabitants
- Capital: Moscow, (10 million inh.)
- Life expectancy: 76 yrs (women) 64 yrs (men)
- Population growth: -0.14%
- Healthcare costs amount to 6.2% of GNP
- Trade union index: 3 (scale 1-5); union rights are regularly offended.

# PROJECT *Philippines*

With the temporary work agencies for seafarers in the Philippines, workers involved in union activities get blacklisted. The blacklist is a system where all the temporary work agencies warn each other of unionised workers and workers that have requested union assistance.

Seko initiated in collaboration with the Philippine trade union MARINO, an operation to abolish these agencies. The project thrived due to trade union training amongst seafarers and active lobbying with the ministry of labour and other authorities.

Today, blacklisting of Filipino seafarers that work within the International maritime traffic has lessened. The MARINO union has become a registered and authorised trade union and also a member of the Philippine central trade union

organisation CENTRO.

For the last few years, the project is shifting towards union education and recruitment of seafarers and seamen, professions that belong to the informal sector, which often involves employment in slave-like conditions and where permanent contracts are non-existing.

Workers in the commercial fishing industry are underpaid, work up to 18 hours a day, and can be at sea for many years without nutritious food and clean drinking water.

Pursuing union activities in the Philippines can be both troublesome and at times extremely dangerous. Hence the importance of union cross-border cooperation influencing the approximately 1.2 million workers within the Filipino maritime industry.







### Facts Philippines

- Approx. 103 million inhabitants
- Capital: Manila, (10 million inh.)
- Life expectancy: 73 yrs (women) 66 yrs (men)
- Population growth: 1.6%
- Healthcare costs amount to 4% of GNP
- Trade union index: 5 (scale 1-5); union rights are regularly violated, and it's dangerous to be a unionist.



# Forgotten *by society*

A Filipino fisherman is the poorest of the poor and millions of seafarers and fishers have to work rightless under horrible conditions. This particular day, the fishing port of Manila has been flooded by a massive rainfall. Still, children carry on with their play regardless of being all wet, and rickshaws are pulled painstakingly through the water.

The seafarer Joseph Llanzana is in his mid-twenties and left his home island Palawan for the capital Manila two years ago. Back at home, he attended a seafarers' school and had high hopes of becoming an Engineer Officer in international shipping. After three years of studies, he had to give up his dream. Joseph couldn't afford to finish his degree.

On Palawan, there are no possibilities to make a living, and Joseph started working on the ferry service between Cebu and Manila to help his parents financially. The competition for any job at sea is immense, and Joseph manages to get hired in general seven days a month. He always keeps his phone within-reach, in case of a shipping company's call.

Joseph got to know about trade union work through MARINO and is one of few seafarers who have union training.

– I found out about the MARINO union activities and got curious. Through training, I've come to realise the importance of seafarers and fishers working together to be able to improve our situation. Joseph gazes out over wheater worn ships that stretches to the horizon.

In a tiny house just a little farther away, a father of two, 41-year-old fisher Oliver Dehitta Jr has made a home together with his wife and children. The house isn't much more than a shack and has few facilities. In his home province Surigao, Oliver found himself unemployed and just like Joseph, he had to leave for Manila to look for jobs.

Oliver was lucky and got a job on a fishing ship with two hundred workers, which usually catches tuna outside the coast of Palawan.

– We work seven days a week and stay at sea seven months in a row. I can only afford to stay home for about a month, and then I have to leave for another seven months again.

Salaries are on average 300 USD, which hardly covers the necessities of Oliver's family. Still, he couldn't be more grateful for having a job.

– Without my income, we would have nothing. Now, my children can go to school, and that is most important of all to my wife and me. I only went to school for six years, and I didn't graduate.

Oliver shares that he owns his house, which he has been able to equip with both tap water and electricity, facilities most of his neighbours only dream of having.

All of a sudden, the time has come for Oliver to sign on for another seven months, and he has to leave within the hour.

– It's hard for the family every time I have to sign on for such a long time. Not being able to be close to my family makes me sad, especially with the children. I miss them very much. But I think about the University degrees my children one day will be able to fulfil, and without this job, that dream will never come true.

Oliver wants to be a member of the trade union MARINO. Seafarers and fishers within the Filipino marine are forgotten by society. They lack labour and human rights and stand lawless before their employers.

Seko works continuously with unionisation and trade union training amongst seafarers and fishers, with the ambition to unionise more and more marine workers through awareness raising activities.

Oliver waves goodbye and climbs up a rickety ladder into the home where his family awaits him. A few moments later he climbs down, with one hand carrying his seabag full of clothes and holding his recruitment papers with the other. The time has come for another seven months at sea.

# Seko's global cooperation projects



## COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKER'S FEDERATION (ITF)

### Development of a global program combatting violence against women transport workers

The aim is to develop a global program, to be used as a model by unions when combatting violence against women. Women transport workers is an affected group. Physical, psychological and sexual violence against women has increased

within the transportation sector. The project supports transport trade unions in India and Nepal. (s. 16)

Contact: *Annica Barning.*

### Stable transport unions in Africa and Latin America

The project aims to build stable trade unions and unionise workers in DHL and other global transport corporations in Africa and Latin America.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

### Unionisation within the harbour sector in India

The present government in India are

about to privatise the country's port and dock sectors. This project will collaborate with the All India Port and Dock Workers Federation. The goal is to unionise workers in the ports of India, and through collective bargaining protect the workers' rights.

Contact: *Annica Barning.*

### Build union strength with workers at Avianca Aviation in Latin America

A project with the goal to strengthen the unionisation of workers employed by Avianca Aviation in Latin America.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*



## COLLABORATION WITH UNI GLOBAL (UNI)

### Unionising within MTN in Africa

Union forming within the multi national telecom company MTN in Africa.

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### Global union cooperation within Ericsson

A cooperation project involving the Unionen och Swedish Engineers, as well as UNI och IndustriALL. The focus lies on building a global network, to benefit the employees in both production and networking at Ericsson.

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### Union growth and unionising within the post, logistics, IT and tele sectors in Nepal

A unionising project within the post and tele sectors in Nepal. The focus lies on initiating the forming of a cooperation organisation for nepalese telecom unions. (s.23)

Contact: Annica Barning.

### Strengthen union influence within BRT in Nairobi, Kenya

The implementation of a new bus traffic system (BRT) is being planned in Nairobi. This project strives to strengthen union influence, when planning and implementing BRT, to improve the working conditions for the employees concerned.

Contact: Annica Barning.

### Strategic development of union influence within the IT and tele sectors in Malaysia

The telecom company Digi in Malaysia is owned in majority by the Norwegian Telenor. The aim of the project is to unionise Digi's employees, and support the global network of Telenor unions.

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### Gained union influence within the post and tele sectors in Africa

This unionising project consists partly of union forming within the multi national telecom company Orange, and partly of unionising national post companies and competing operators, such as DHL in West Africa. (s.4)

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### To unionise employees at DHL in Asia.

The aim of this unionising project is to build strong unions within DHL in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### Unionising within the logistics, post, IT and tele sectors in Asia

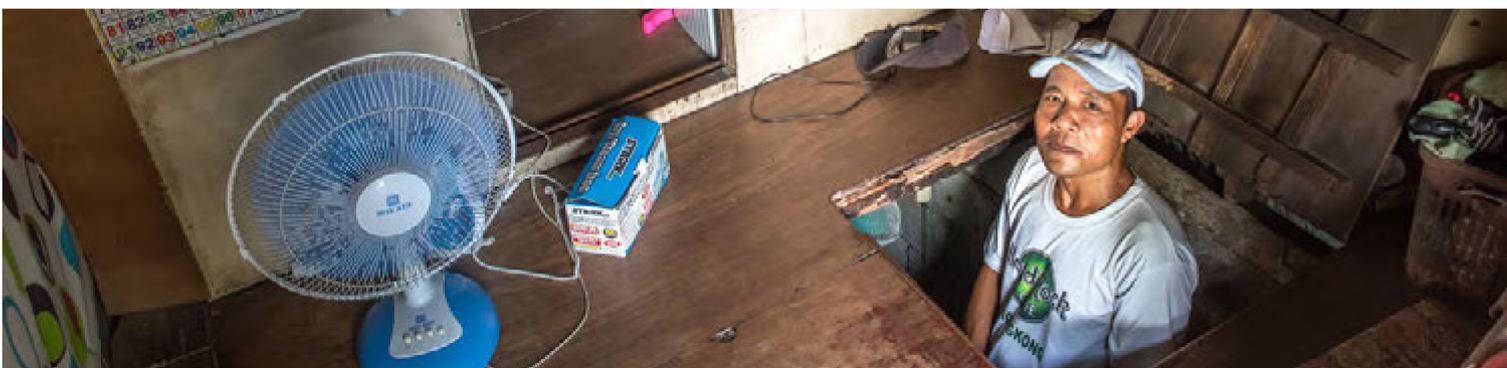
The project strives to unionise employees within one of Asia's largest cell phone operators and within the national post companies in Southeast Asia.

Contact: Jens Saverstam.

### To negotiate and implement global agreements in multi national companies within IT and tele sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean

A unionising project to build stronger unions within the tele sector in Colombia and Jamaica. The project also aims to build a regional network for unions at local multi national telecom companies. (s.10)

Contact: Jens Saverstam.





## BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

### Unionising within the Malawi post and telecom sectors

The project aims to unionise Malawian post and telecom workers and through education enhance the level of unionisation and number of collective agreements within the sectors.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

### Union radio and TV project in Malawi

The radio and TV project in Malawi gives the unions channels of information, which enables them to raise awareness of human and union rights.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

### Rebuilding the union for postal workers in the Philippines (PEUP)

The demand for postal services in the Phi-

lippines has decreased, which has forced the state-owned company PHL-Post to downsize their workforce and close several regional post offices. The union for postal workers (PEUP) has been negatively affected by this reorganisation. This project is launched to support the rebuilding of the PEUP and to encourage unionisation of the country's postal workers.

Contact: *Annica Barning.*

### Unionising seafarers and fishing industry workers in the Philippines

The fishing industry plays a central role in the Philippine economy. In the cities Navotas and General Santos, hundreds of thousands of workers make their living from catching and preparing fish. This project aims to strengthen the trade unions of the sector and raise awareness of union rights among the workers of the fishing industry. (page 32)

Contact: *Annica Barning.*

## INFORMATION PROJECTS

### Seko in the world

The purpose of this project is to produce text and video material, to illustrate Seko union's involvement in different parts of the world in a comprehensible and nuanced way. This project has, among other things, produced the brochure you're now reading. The target groups of this project are Seko members, potential members, trustees and the general public.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

### Strong unions in the global construction industry

This information project highlights Seko's international development work within the infrastructural sector in African, Asian and Latin American countries, as well as in CIS-countries (Commonwealth of Independent States). The target groups of this project are Seko members, potential members, trustees and the general public.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

## COOPERATION WITH BWI: BUILDING AND WOOD WORKER'S INTERNATIONAL

### **Jobs for all – justice for all: Unions make it possible - East**

The strategic objectives of BWI are to contribute to creating independent, gender equal and democratic unions, fighting for union and human rights, stable employment and decent living and working conditions. BWI comprises all building and woodworkers, which is also the overall objective of the global programme Seko and other builder's unions carry out in collaboration with BWI.

Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

### **Jobs for all – justice for all: Unions make it possible - South**

The strategic objectives of BWI are to contribute to creating independent, gender equal and democratic unions, fighting for union and human rights, stable employment and decent living and working conditions. BWI comprises all building and woodworkers, which is also the overall objective of the global programme Seko and other builder's unions carry out in collaboration with BWI.

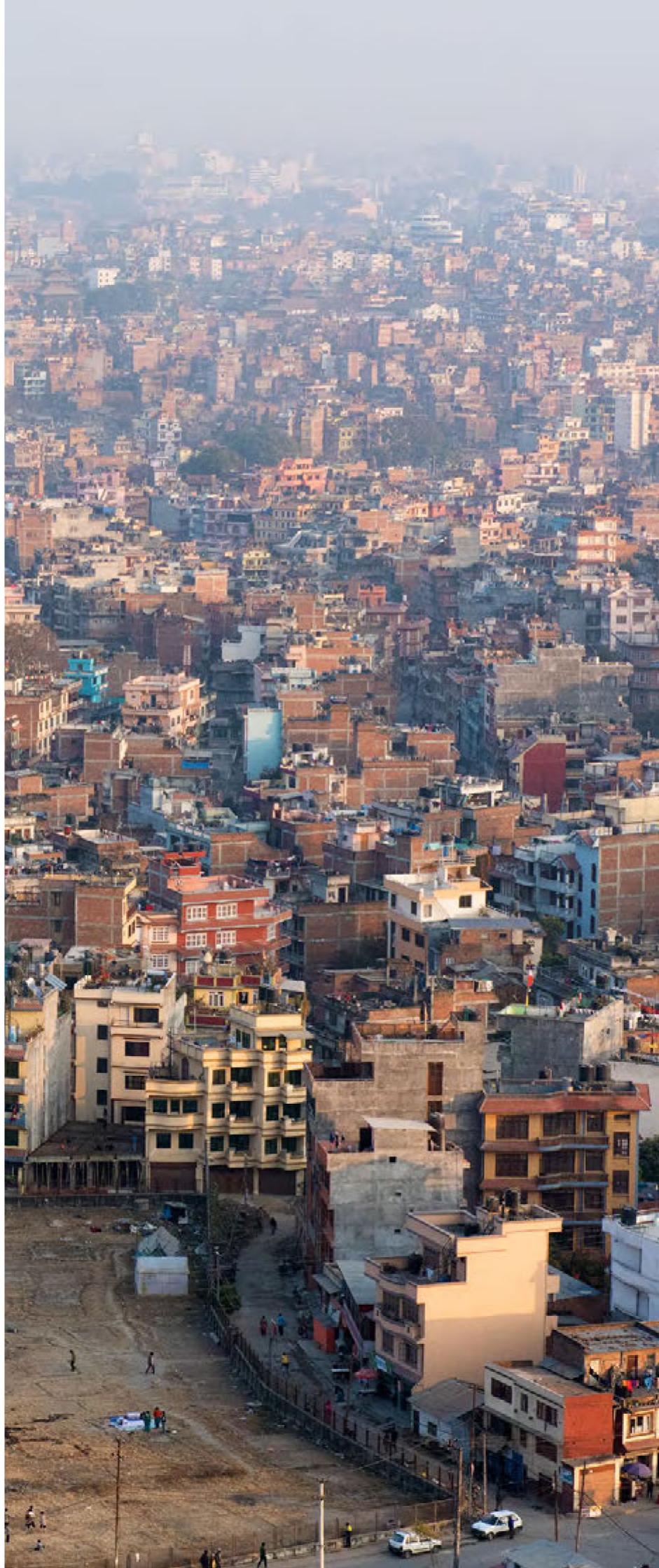
Contact: *Jens Saverstam.*

## COOPERATION WITH THE PUBLIC SERVICE INTERNATIONAL (PSI)

### **Invigorating the rights and working conditions for public servants in India**

This project aims to unionise workers within the Indian public service sector. Another objective is to support the unions' efforts to invigorate the rights and working conditions for public servants in India and to have public servants recognised as an occupational group.

Contact: *Annica Barning.*





## CONTACTS

### SEKO I VÄRLDEN

Box 1105,  
111 81 Stockholm, Sweden  
[www.seko.se](http://www.seko.se)

Jens Saverstam  
[jens.saverstam@seko.se](mailto:jens.saverstam@seko.se)  
Tel: 0046 8 791 41 08

Annica Barning  
[annica.barning@seko.se](mailto:annica.barning@seko.se)  
Tel: 0046 705 74 97 14

### UNION TO UNION

Upplandsgatan 3  
11 23 Stockholm, Sweden  
0046 8 798 00 00  
[www.uniontounion.org](http://www.uniontounion.org)

### SIDA

Valhallavägen 199  
105 25 Stockholm, Sweden  
[www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se)

### ITF

International Transport  
Workers' Federation  
ITF House  
49-60 Borough Road,  
London, SE1 1DR, England  
[www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org)

**PSI**  
Public Services International  
45 Avenue Voltaire, BP 9  
01211 Ferney-Voltaire Cedex  
France  
[www.world-psi.org](http://www.world-psi.org)

**BWI**  
Building and Wood Worker's  
International  
54 route des Acacias  
CH-1227 Carouge GE  
Switzerland  
[www.bwint.org](http://www.bwint.org)

**UNI**  
UNI Global Union  
8-10 Avenue Reverdil  
CH-1260 NYON, Switzerland  
[www.uniglobalunion.org](http://www.uniglobalunion.org)

**OLOF PALME  
INTERNATIONAL CENTER**  
Box 836,  
101 36 Stockholm  
Sweden  
Tel: 0046 8 677 57 70  
[www.palmecenter.se](http://www.palmecenter.se)



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Sida

## PROJECT FINANCING *and support by SIDA*

Seko's development projects are mainly financed through funds from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, SIDA. In developing countries throughout the world, the Seko projects aim to promote the civil society through union collaboration.

By parliament decision, Sweden supports sustainable community-building in developing countries, through efforts like humanitarian aid and support for infrastructure. SIDA administers part of the parliament's budget for international development cooperation projects.

90 percent of Seko's development projects are funded by SIDA means. The remaining 10 percent is financed by part of the Seko membership fees. The funds deriving from union fees are used mainly for administrating and monitoring the projects.



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MARIJUJA, MATTEOZZI, MATHIAS



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Seko, PO box 1105,  
111 81 Stockholm, Sweden

[seko@seko.se](mailto:seko@seko.se), [www.seko.se](http://www.seko.se)

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