

THE BANDANA PROJECT

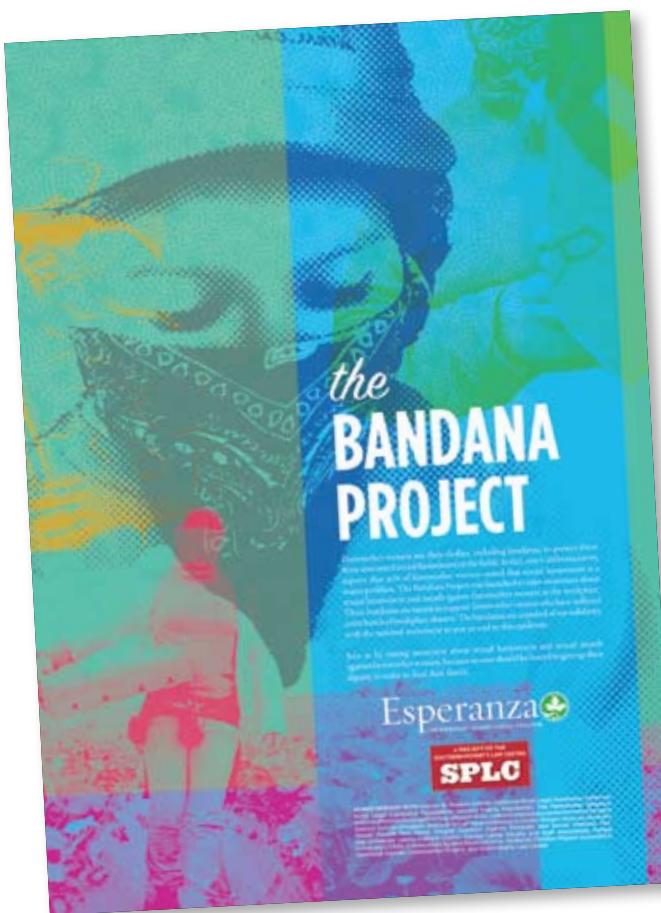
Unmasking sexual harassment in the fields

On April 25, 2006, more than 200 farmworkers gathered in the Beth-El Farmworker Ministry in Wimauma, Fla., to honor Olivia Tamayo, a field laborer who endured six years of sexual violence and harassment at the hands of her employer.

Tamayo sued her boss, and her case ultimately became the first suit brought by a female farmworker ever to reach a federal jury. That lonely statistic raises the question: How many more Olivia Tamayos are out there?

A study done for California State University found that 90 percent of farmworker women reported sexual harassment on the job as a major problem. Hundreds, if not thousands, of women in California alone have been sexually abused in the workplace, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Female farmworkers often dress to appear as men — baggy pants and shirts, long hair tucked under ball caps, and bandanas to cover their faces. They dress this way, even on the hottest days, as a way to conceal feminine features and fend off harassment and unwanted sexual advances.



Nearly two years to the day after the gathering in Wimauma, Fla., farmworkers joined with community organizations and schools to launch the “Bandana Project” in 40 cities across the country. Farmworker women and their allies decorated simple white bandanas and organized displays in museums, community centers and schools to raise awareness about sexual exploitation of women in the fields.

“With the help of our partners around the country, we will shed light on this serious problem,” said Mónica Ramírez, the project’s organizer. “It is our goal to send the message to workplace abusers that we will fight to stop the abuse of women, because no one should be forced to give up their dignity in order to feed their family.”

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