



Educating and empowering workers and their union to improve livelihoods in Cameroon

Progress Report February 2013

This project commenced in June 2012 in partnership with the Fako Agricultural Workers Union (FAWU). The aim is to improve the livelihoods of banana workers and their dependents in Cameroon, through the education and empowerment of union members and their representatives.

Achievements so far

Better health and safety

- Training of staff representatives to raise awareness of health and safety issues using education materials provided by UNITE, the TUC and the IUF.
- Raising awareness amongst workers of the importance of using personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling and applying toxic agro-chemicals.
- Encouraging management to understand the need to provide adequate PPE to all workers—many of whom currently have to provide their own.



Living wage research

- Field research conducted last summer revealed that wages only cover a third of basic living costs with workers trapped in permanent debt and unable to afford school fees.
- Banana workers were empowered to establish a family budget for themselves and their dependents to best manage their very limited income.

Awareness raising in consumer countries

- Awareness of industry stakeholders was raised through the presentation of this research at the 'Towards Cooperate and Social Responsibility' conference in Prague, 2012: [Social Impacts of the Banana Supply Chains](#)

- Mbide Kude, the General Secretary of FAWU visited the UK to raise awareness amongst consumers of conditions in Cameroon. Some of the media coverage of his visit includes:
[Radio Labour interview](#)
[Online Labour Interview](#)
- During the visit [Documentary: Portraits from Cameroon](#) exposing 'modern slavery' on banana plantations was shown, sparking wide ranging international media coverage.
- FAWU believe this media coverage has for the first time forced management to acknowledge the poor working conditions and low wages of plantation workers.

Understanding the role of the union representative

- Training of 138 staff representatives in the role of the trade union and union representative.
- Management's response to grievances has improved as a result of the staff representatives better understanding their role.
- Just one example of is that of Ngueni Marie, a worker suffering from long term infection due to her exposure to toxic agro chemicals in the field, who was immediately relocated to work in a health clinic to prevent further exposure.
- Empowerment and awareness raising has not yet tangibly improved conditions or wages however the union believe that this ongoing programme of empowerment and education can achieve this



What's Next..

- Plans for further training of FAWU staff representatives to better understand their role and build their self esteem to raise grievances with management.
- Gender awareness training for all FAWU staff.

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