

Case Study

Developing Strategies for change for women workers in African Horticulture

Working Women Worldwide | January 2019



Organisational overview

Please give a brief overview of your company. Size, type, reach.

[Women Working Worldwide](#) (WWW) is a Manchester based NGO/Charity working with women in global supply chains, in many different countries and with many different partners for over 30 years. We were established as a company limited by guarantee in 1987 and became a charity in 2007. We are a founder member of [Ethical Trading Initiative](#). Currently running with two UK staff and two student volunteers and a board of 6 trustees.

WWW work in partnership with organisations around the world, to assist and empower women workers in global supply chains to claim their rights and gain decent wages for their work. WWW work with companies to advocate on behalf of women workers, and we advise companies and trade unions on how best to meet their commitments to gender equality and women's rights.

Please give a brief overview of examples of good practice at different levels internally where company is addressing gender equality such as HR, policies, procurement, CSR, Board and buyers.

As an NGO working on gender – these examples of good practice are woven into the very fabric of our organisation. We don't really have 'levels' in the normal sense. Examples include our procurement – For stationery we actively chose an independent, locally-based woman-run business. Another example would be our IT support – again an independent, locally based

woman-run business. As a feminist organisation, working in women's rights, our board, staff and volunteers are all female. This is to be reviewed in 2019.

Are you signed up to any external initiatives and/or codes ETI, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, UN WEPs or SDGs?

WWW are an NGO and do not really sign up to codes; we help ensure others are following them. We support the SDG's and also work with companies, other NGOs, Unions and the wider general public to ensure these are progressed, along with Base Codes, Fairtrade, Modern Slavery, etc.

Is there a gender dimension in your company supplier agreements/codes?

There is a gender dimension to all our work. This runs through our entire structure but on things like procurement these are contained in our sustainability policy

Do you think there are external drivers encouraging the company to be more gender focused?

Yes, we were, and still are, a part of the driving force of NGOs raising awareness on gender. In the past in the 1980's WWW was one of very few organisations flagging up the awful conditions under which women worked – be that in brick kilns, electronics, garments or horticulture. The Gender Dimension has become mainstreamed into many other NGOs work but WWW remains one of the few NGOs to specialise in women and gender in global supply chains. There is a growing awareness that mainstreaming has actually prevented the issue from being tackled properly. In addition, there are other membership type organisations formed such as BSR and ETI who are working to ensure that gender is addressed in supply chains (amongst other things). ETI has a unique place in this as it is a tripartite with input from NGOs, Unions and Corporates.

ETI gender work has highlighted the fact that many companies – suppliers and buyers – struggle to tackle gender within their organisations and their supply chains. ETI has produced reports, guidelines and tool kits to raise awareness. To implement requires time, resources and experience; some companies are moving away from gender being just a small part of someone's job to setting up dedicated gender staff. Examples of these are where gender staff are situated in ethical buying teams or sustainability teams.

In 2018 the issue of sexual harassment and #metoo and #timesup, have raised issues around SH and GBV in other industries and countries. Campaigns regarding women garment workers and the awful conditions under which they work, culminating in the horrendous Rana Plaza accident where so many women workers lost their lives, have raised awareness of gender issues in the garment trade. Expose of the conditions of garment workers in the UK (factories in Leicester and Manchester) has brought this into focus for many people in the UK.

The Modern Slavery Act, and greater awareness of this within supply chains, has also raised the issue of gender. In the countries where we work there have been some strides in the last 5 years regarding the position of women in society and government. Many of the projects we

have developed with partners in the past have been addressing a shortfall in these laws – this is changing – see the Kenyan Act, appointment of women into gov. positions in Rwanda, Ethiopia etc. Using these in-country drivers are crucial. We also recognise that many countries still lack full/any rights for women, and all countries are at different stages on this journey.

October 2018 update – the mass walk outs by Women Glasgow civil servants (equal pay), Macdonald staff (sexual harassment) and google staff (sexual harassment), shows that gender is gradually becoming an issue that is main stage.

Specific Gender Initiative Case Study: Developing Strategies for change for women workers in African Horticulture

When was the initiative introduced, does it have a time frame, what were the costs and scale?

2009 -2011

Year 1 £129,030

Year 2 £138,085

Year 3 £111,755

Total £378,870

Please give a brief description of the initiative and its key goals

The aim of this project was to sustainably improve the working conditions of women workers on horticultural farms in Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. The project combined 3 core activities:

- Action research;
- Worker education programmes and empowerment through training and trade union organising; and
- Advocacy activities

What drivers, internal and external, encouraged you to introduce this initiative? Did the political and cultural landscapes influence your initiative?

Consumers in Europe benefit from low prices for both groceries and luxury items such as roses, many of which are imported from East and Southern Africa. In the horticultural sector in Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia, women comprise the majority of the workforce, however many experience dire working conditions ranging from excessive or forced overtime, exposure to pesticides, low wages, sexual harassment and limited or restricted access to unionisation.

Poor working conditions are exacerbated by the use of casual labour meaning workers are unable to challenge working conditions as they fear losing their jobs if they speak out.

Much work has taken place by African and international stakeholders to support women workers in their struggle and significant improvements have been seen on many farms- particularly a reduction in casual labour. This combined with stronger working relationships between unions and employers, as well as more empowered workers through rights-based training programmes, has meant working conditions are improving. However, there is still much work to be done in order to see sustained progress and the empowerment of workers.

What key issues in the workplace was the initiative designed to tackle?

- Increased understanding about workers' rights
- Convert casual workers to seasonal or permanent
- Increase in salary
- Increase in women accessing unions
- Increase in women's committees
- Improved and increased protective clothing
- Provision of Health and Safety policies
- Improved maternity leave provision and working conditions for pregnant women
- Improved child care provision
- Set working hours and no forced overtime.

The project addressed many of the ETI base code standards (the ones 'missing were 'employment is freely chosen' and 'child labour' as these were not seen to be problems in the farms. It did cover: Freedom of Association is allowed, Working conditions are safe and hygienic, Living wages are paid, working hours are not excessive, no discrimination is practised, regular employment is provided and no harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed.

Were other organisations involved in this intervention (companies, buyers, NGOs and/or Unions) and what were their roles (eg. funder, implementing partner, advisory role)?

Comic Relief funded this project. Partners included:

- Tanzania Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (TPAWU)
- Uganda Workers Education Association (UWEA)
- Ethiopia National Federation of Farm Plantation Fisheries and Agro-industries Trade Union (NFFPFATU)

Were women involved in designing and developing the initiative?

The project built on the learning from the project '[Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture](#)'. Women were central to the development and planning of this project and the learning gathered from the 'Promoting' project shaped the design of the 'Development' project. The inputs came from union workers, women workers on the farms.

Partnerships and working relationships were developed between the project partners and farm managers and government officials in all three countries.

*“It is great to be involved in further work promoting women worker’s rights in African horticulture. We, along with our partners, want to build on the achievements of the last project to create positive, meaningful and sustained change for women workers” -
Flavia Amoding (Project Coordinator, UWEA)*

Were you monitoring the wider impact of your initiative?

This wasn’t part of the project

Have you evaluated the initiative?

In the first year of the project over 1,000 female workers were trained in their labour rights, rights as women, and role in the production of horticultural products for the global population. This empowered women to ask for improvements in their working lives, including:

- Improved income for many workers through a) 10-13% increase in pay for workers on 13 farms in Tanzania and Uganda (affecting approx. 2,000 women workers) b) increase in permanent work c) access to new savings and credit schemes in Tanzania
- Improved conditions for pregnant mothers (maternity leave, lowered work load, rest breaks). Up to 35% more women now represented in unions that are fighting for improved conditions in agreements with farm managers
- a strong movement against the widespread practice of sexual harassment
- compliance with national law regarding working hours across almost all farms in Tanzania. Access to protective equipment leading to improved health and reduction of burns and fertility problems
- Increased awareness about the prejudice suffered by women in accessing better paid work and the lack of recognition for the skill and effort put into the work that they traditionally carry out
- Increased confidence amongst women to express their views in the workplace

During the second year of the project awareness was raised amongst over 20,000 workers of their rights as workers and the need to organise. As a result, over 5,000 women workers organised themselves and started negotiations with employers to improve their rights at work-assisted by the advocacy campaigns of project partners. Income was also improved for many workers through:

- 12-25% pay rise affecting workers in over 30 workplaces across all countries
- Approx. 5000 women workers converted to permanent contracts

- Access to new savings and credit schemes in Tanzania and Uganda
- Increased protection from sexual harassment through the introduction of policies on farms
- Payment for overtime and reduction of forced overtime in Uganda and Tanzania (where there seems to be compliance with national law)
- Improved access to protective equipment and medical care

The third and final year of the project saw all farms in Uganda and Tanzania covered by a collective bargaining agreement negotiated between the unions and employers. In Ethiopia 21 farms were covered by a collective bargaining agreement. This meant that a sector which previously suffered from big problems with both working conditions and allowing unions onto farms has changed radically with big improvements shown in all countries. All workers on these farms were now represented and had negotiated improved conditions with their employers- a great achievement. 235 individuals were trained as trainers to deliver awareness raising workshops on the farms on topics such as:

- New Labour Legislation
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Savings and Credit Cooperative Society
- Sexual harassment
- Women and their participation in trade unions
- How women can access better job roles
- Union Women's Committees
- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- HIV/AIDS

As a whole, the project was successful in raising awareness amongst over 20,000 workers of their rights as women and as workers, as well as the need to organise. Each partner continued to work with influential stakeholders in different ways. In Tanzania, good relationships with farm managers and local government officials continued to be instrumental to improving conditions. This was also the case in Ethiopia, where partners were able to influence key government ministries for the adoption of high-level policies. In Uganda, the advocacy work of NGOs and unions (WERN) created an essential pressure to support organising and negotiation activities for improved conditions.

The project also produced a 6 key demands poster and an education manual for workers was produced, printed and distributed to key trainers in the project.

See attached reports:

- [Developing Strategies for change for women workers in African horticulture - poster](#)
- [Promoting Workers' Right in the African Horticulture: Labour Condition in The Ethiopian Horticulture Industry](#)

- [Overview of research into workers' conditions and industrial relations in the Ethiopian horticulture sectors - Executive Summary](#)
- [Action research report on Workers' conditions and industrial relations in the Ethiopia horticulture sectors](#)
- [Action research report: factors affecting labor conditions in horticulture industry in Tanzania](#)
- [Overview of research into factors affecting labour conditions in horticulture industry in Tanzania - Executive Summary](#)
- [Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture: The Case of Uganda - Executive Summary](#)
- ['Developing Strategies for Change for Women Workers in African horticulture' - The case of Uganda](#)
- [Learning Together: an Education Manual for workers on the flower and vegetable export farms of East/Southern Africa](#)

Please describe what you feel has and has not worked?

Easy to see and understand information such as infographics for the projects would have been useful.

Briefly explain how the initiative has improved:

Agency – trade union representation, individual/collective voice and role in decision making

35% more women now represented in Unions

Aspiration – opportunities for advancement, promotion and training

Increase in permanent employment and contracts

Dignity – treatment, behaviour, attitudes

Women engaged in negotiations with employers through unions and women's groups to improve their conditions

Reward – benefits e.g. wages, maternity, childcare, etc

Increases in pay

Improved conditions for pregnant mothers and maternity leave

Safety – sexual harassment/violence, safety to and from work, at work

Improved access to protective clothing

Development of a movement against sexual harassment

Security – job and income security

Access to new savings and credit schemes

Reduction in casual work

Has the learning been shared?

The learning has been shared through presentations at conferences and in own articles and newsletter. The reports have been printed and distributed both in the UK and in the countries participating. The resources are available to download on WWW website. The research has been cited in numerous articles and books.

Has the intervention continued?

Sexual Harassment and a decent Living Wage were two of the main areas that this project highlighted as requiring further work. Therefore, this project helped shape the next 2 projects WWW undertook to tackle these issues one aimed specifically at SH on Kenyan flower farms and the other at Living Wages across East Africa.

Future work

What additional support, if any, would you have liked to have had to help you promote gender equality?

As the project is about tackling this issue this doesn't apply. Whilst it is obvious that great strides have been made in the flower and veg industries to address gender issues it is clear, even now in 2018, that there are still areas that need to be addressed by suppliers and there are deeper 'cultural' issues that are being tackled in country that also need to be factored into the development strategies of future projects.

What additional strategies have been implemented, and by whom, to both promote respect for women's rights and to mitigate rights violations?

The farms/companies involved in this project are part of a continually evolving improvement programme to address women's working conditions on flower and veg farms. This gender work has grown over the last 10 years and also led to ETI tackling this issue in the last few years.

As a result of the learning from this initiative what actions would you recommend that companies, unions, NGOs or other actors in the tea, banana and flower sectors take to ensure respect for women's rights in other workplaces?

I think the Innovations fund project will identify and reiterate the steps WWW has been taking for many years, namely:

- Partnership working with those on the ground
- Working with companies/unions and NGOs
- Engaging with women workers – ensuring voice is heard and is shaping delivery
- Education and literacy
- Tackling the domestic burden on women
- Including men in solutions as well as the women
- Delivering training to both management and workers on – worker's rights, SH, gender bias, negotiation, communication, leadership, etc. etc.
- Help with policy and strategy development
- Peer networking – both in country across farms and industries and across countries
- Engagement with buyers and suppliers
- Capacity building for those working on the ground; unions, women's groups and NGOs

And from this project in particular an understanding that financial security and access to savings is crucial for women's empowerment and gender equity.

This case study was produced as part of the **Comparative analysis of work towards gender equity in the banana, tea and flower sectors project** funded by the ETI Innovations Fund.