

# Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on the Caribbean



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## Summary

*Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on the Caribbean* is part of a global overview report on the economic aspects of gender issues in the banana sector. Based on desk research of a dozen recent studies, this Report presents the key issues for women workers and small farmers in the Dominican Republic, considered as the region's new banana exporting “superpower”. The relevance of the key issues that women small farmers are facing arose during a workshop organised by the Windward Islands Farmers' Association in late 2014. On this occasion, the most relevant issues were presented together with further recommendations to the World Banana Forum.

In the Dominican Republic, the percentage of women workers employed in the banana industry is estimated to be slightly above the average for Latin America at 15%, whilst the percentage of women small farmers is around 12.5%. The region also presents two other exceptions to the general rule of low participation by women in the industry: the remaining percentage of small farmers in the three Windward Islands is 45% women, whilst in the Surinam banana industry it is reported that 40% of workers are women, although the latter needs to be substantiated by research.

The cross-cutting issue of the migrant status of the majority of all workers in the Dominican Republic industry means that the few Haitian women employed face lower wages than their Dominican counterparts. They have no job security, limited access to decent housing and cannot exercise their freedom of association. Additionally, the high level of violence to which women in the country are exposed has currently become an issue of national concern.

Despite the multitude of issues that women are facing in the Caribbean, this report aims to emphasise that the potential for change exists if stakeholders are mobilised.

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## Introduction

This report is one of three regional reports on the economic aspects of gender issues in the banana sector (the other two reports respectively focus on Latin America and West & Central Africa). This exploratory research was commissioned by the World Banana Forum's permanent working group on Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues, as part of an on-going process involving data collection, analysis and action. These three reports will be presented at the second Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives, which will be held in conjunction with the Third Global Conference of the World Banana Forum in 2016.

The need for this research was identified during the first Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives in 2012 by its participants who believed that further information on the issues below was essential in order to drive forward the creation of strategies to increase the provision of Decent Work for women in the banana sector. This information includes:

- Key issues for women workers and small producers in the local banana industry;
- A particular analysis on the issue of women's employment (including percentage representation of women, variations between region/company, analysis of causal factors);
- Identification of the key roles carried out by women in the workplace and any perceived associated productivity and quality benefits;
- Any advancement that has been, or could be, made through local, regional and international multi stakeholder dialogue and collaborative projects.

## Methodology

As for the methodology adopted in this report, the first chapter entitled *Women workers and farmers in the Dominican Republic banana industry* is almost entirely the product of desk research even though some elements of observation from the field have been included after a field visit by Banana Link staff in 2012. It has to be noted that this is the national banana export industry that has the most detailed and recent documentation of the situation facing both women field and packing station workers as well as women farmers, so there was less need to mobilise local researchers to help complete the investigations. The key points in the information and analysis presented below have been successively submitted for oral validation (during telephone and skype conversations) to industry observers and participants in the Dominican Republic.

## Acknowledgements

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We would also like to acknowledge the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for financing this publication.

## Background I: Historical & Cultural context

Due to the region's historical background, the Caribbean economies were largely built on slavery. Almost all indigenous populations were killed, mostly inadvertently through exposure to European and African diseases but also through marginalisation, as fertile land was taken over for plantation agriculture. The population who managed to survive was mostly composed by people with West African origin, some Europeans and the subsequent offspring of liaisons between the two ethnic groups.

In the past, British and French colonists, in the greatest numbers, used to transport and send slaves to the Caribbean islands to primarily work in the sugar cane estates of their island colonies. However, the blockade of French ports by the British during the Napoleonic wars encouraged the French to begin to develop a sugar beet industry. This example was later emulated by several European producers. The sugar cane industry began its slow process of decline in importance, while slavery itself increasingly fell into disrepute (in the British Empire, slavery was abolished by a Parliament Act of 1833, implemented in August 1834). The Caribbean sugar industry did struggle on into the mid-twentieth century, although the great majority of the crop has now been replaced by bananas that command better prices and are less labour intensive.

Among the island countries in the Caribbean archipelago, four of them are actively involved in the banana export trade. In the north of this archipelago, the Dominican Republic, the eastern part that Columbus named Hispaniola, produces 'conventional' bananas even though in the last ten years it has been increasingly involved in the more lucrative (primarily) European Fairtrade and Organic markets. Although the country has some fairly large plantations (the largest comprising 1,500 hectares), there is also a great number of small banana farms measuring only 3 hectares or even less. Spanish is the principal language of the country and the nation is culturally similar to Latin America in many respects.

As for the banana industry in the Dominican Republic, this sector is largely dependent on migrant labour from neighbouring Haiti, which has a markedly different colonial and post-colonial history and which has remained extremely poor compared to the Dominican Republic (DR). In fact, Haiti does not export dessert bananas (although it does export some plantains). While many Haitians are keen to gain employment in DR banana plantations, DR laws forbid enterprises from employing more than 20% of Haitians in their workforces at any one time. However, it has to be noted that very few Dominicans want to work in the banana plantations. In practice, the DR industry is heavily dependent on Haitian migrant labour, and the DR NGOs working with the migrant population estimate that banana plantations often employ as many as 80% Haitians.

In line with the overall policy of controlling immigration from Haiti, the DR restricts Haitian immigrants from holding DR identity cards, which would allow them to have the usual legal rights and benefits, and indeed the corresponding duties of paying taxes and contributing to the health and social security system. While Haitian labour force dominates the industry therefore and while this is widely known, Haitians are mostly and only able to work illegally or clandestinely. It is extremely challenging for women who have children to expose themselves to this kind of hazardous and dangerous life and this is the reason why women only make a very small percentage of the overall population of Haitian banana workers in the DR.

As for the other three main banana exporter islands in the region, namely Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (often collectively referred to as the Windward Islands, in spite of the fact that geographically Dominica is part of the group called the Leeward Islands), the picture is very different. However, there are other two major islands producing bananas in the North and South of Dominica, which are Guadeloupe and Martinique respectively. These two banana producing islands are legally and politically classified as *départements d'outre-mer* – overseas departments – of France. Thus, they are technically an integral part of Europe and are consequently subject to E.U. employment law and other regulations. For the above reason, these two islands are not included in this Caribbean regional report.

The three Windward Islands share with each other a broadly similar history. Indigenous populations were largely decimated, as it happened in the other islands, even though nowadays a small pocket of Caribs still survives in Dominica. All three islands were populated by slaves, primarily working in the sugar industry. The islands were the subject of territorial disputes between France and the UK and changed hands between them several times, according to the exigencies of naval conflict, until when all the three islands finally became British territories. All three countries eventually gained their independence in the 1960s.

Plantations survived until independence but had mostly shifted between the two World Wars from sugar to banana production (and in some cases to other crops such as oil palm). After independence almost all estate lands (which occupied large parts of the fertile non-mountainous regions) were broken up and sold to citizens as small plots (usually 1-2 hectares, though only few larger plots of up to 10 hectares still exist today and they often are the results of family mergers or further purchase from neighbours).

As in other societies with a history of mass slavery, the original cultures of the enslaved populations (predominantly from West Africa) were largely lost. In spite of this, some cultural continuity remained and this might partially help to explain the particular position of women in the island cultures.

It would be very difficult for any visitor coming to the Windward Islands today to leave with the impression that women are in any way subservient to men or to a patriarchy. While it is true that, as in most of the European countries, only few women occupy the highest political positions or the pinnacles of power in the largest Companies, conversely women appear to have an equal status compared to men. As it will be seen in the case of the banana sector, roughly half of the banana farms in the islands are owned and managed by women.

## Background II: The Caribbean Banana Export Industry today

The Caribbean region of the banana exporting world has been defined by the historical linkages of banana exporting countries to former colonial powers of Europe (the UK and the Netherlands), initially through the preferential banana trade policies of different member states of the European Economic Community in the framework of the Lomé Convention of 1975<sup>1</sup>.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 1993, the European Union's Single Market for Bananas and the subsequent reforms of its Common Organisation of the Market for Bananas have perpetuated the definition of the Caribbean region through a preferential trade regime that was the object of a long and complex dispute in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and, from 1995, in the World Trade Organisation. From 2003, *the Cotonou Agreement*<sup>2</sup> (replaced the Lomé Convention as the policy framework in which Caribbean banana exports were given duty-free access to the market of the European Union<sup>3</sup>).

Since 2008, the Caribbean banana exporting countries are defined in the framework of the Caribbean Economic Partnership Agreement, signed by 15 country members of the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (CARIFORUM) and the European Union (EUROSTAT and CIRAD-FLHOR).

In practice, in 2013 the banana exporting countries of the region, in descending order and by export volumes were: the Dominican Republic, Suriname, Belize, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Jamaica.

Around two thirds of the total Caribbean banana exports in 2014 came from the Dominican Republic, the vast majority of which were imported by the EU-28 (McIntosh, D. 2014). Belize and Suriname accounted for 30% of the total exports, with small volumes coming from the three Windward Islands. Jamaica had not exported bananas outside the region since 2008, following a series of devastating hurricanes, although small shipments were restarted in June 2014 (McIntosh, D. 2014). In late 2014, Haiti, a major dessert banana producer that has not been exporting outside the region since the 1940s (Charles, J.H.2014), announced that investments were in progress to develop extra-regional organic banana export capacity.<sup>4</sup>

It has to be noted that the two large islands of the French Antilles, Martinique and Guadeloupe, are also geographically located in the Eastern Caribbean and, arguably, they could have been included in this regional report. However, they are politically, administratively and commercially attached to the Metropolitan France, and their significant volumes of fresh dessert bananas' production are all shipped to France.

However, as these volumes are not considered to be 'exports' from the Caribbean, the situation facing women working in the French Antilles' banana industries, which taken together produce about the same volume of marketing in Europe as the Dominican Republic currently does, has not been included in this report. Nevertheless, it would certainly be of great interest for the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.eurostudium.uniroma1.it/documenti/cooperazione/Lome\\_convention.pdf](http://www.eurostudium.uniroma1.it/documenti/cooperazione/Lome_convention.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The Cotonou Agreement was signed between 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and the European Union in Cotonou, Benin, in June 2000, document available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:r12101>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the EU trade policy, see <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.haitilibre.com/en/news>

international banana community, and in particular for women involved in the industry, to have an analysis of gender issues in these two Caribbean islands.

This report focuses on the information and analysis gathered by Banana Link desk studies of recent literature, complemented by analytical reports from stakeholders in the Dominican Republic and the Windward Islands. Little or no information is available on the role and situation of women in the banana industry in Belize (see Table 1, p. 24). Even the EU country strategy documents for the Banana Accompanying Measures (BAM), from 2013 to 2020, do not refer to the specific role or situation of women in the Belizean industry (EC, 2012), whilst the country's Banana Growers' Association has been unwilling to share such information, even with the European Commission (author's personal communication during regional workshop on BAM in Santo Domingo, November 2013).

In the case of Suriname, the two export plantations currently owned by the Belgium-based Univeg apparently employ a very high proportion of women, which is 40% (EC, 2012). The situation of women employed in the manual and administrative sector in the Surinamese banana industry would be important to research further research through interviews with the newly privatised company, such as SBBS/Univeg Katopé, with the trade unions, and the local Government, but unfortunately the Banana Link team did not have the required resources to permit such detailed verification and analysis.

As for Jamaica, women play an important role in the Jamaican banana industry, as hired labour in the plantations, as small farmers and even at Government level. In addition, the only all-women multi-stakeholder delegation to the Caribbean regional workshop on the EU's Banana Accompanying Measures in 2013 was from Jamaica. However, the fact that Jamaica ceased its banana exports in 2008, and that it had to face the need to deploy limited research resources elsewhere in the banana exporting world, led to the decision to not include interviews with Jamaican stakeholders in this report.

The two main sections of this report therefore focus on the Dominican Republic, as the new regional exporting 'superpower', and on the predominantly small-farmer based banana economies of the three Windward Islands, which respectively are Saint Lucia, Dominica, and Saint Vincent & The Grenadines.

The last section of this report draws some general conclusions concerning both women farmers and workers in the Caribbean industry on the basis of the four countries so far analysed. A small summary of the scant information on the Belize industry has been also included in Box 1, p.27.

# 1. Women workers and farmers in the Dominican Republic banana industry

## 1.1 Background information on the industry

The Dominican Republic (DR) has become far and away the largest banana exporting country in the Caribbean, exporting more than all the other countries of the region considered together (Suriname, Belize, Jamaica and the three Windward Islands). The country's export volumes overtook the total volume exported from the Windwards over a decade ago and now exceed it by a factor of close to 10 to 1. In recent years the growing industry has also overtaken Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, Africa's two main exporting countries, and Panama, a very major player in the world banana trade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In common with Ecuador, by far the world's largest Cavendish banana exporter, the Dominican Republic has a very diverse producer typology, with small-scale growers alongside medium-sized plantations, as well as a handful of large plantations. Unlike Ecuador though, the majority of these bananas are certified either as Organic or as Fairtrade and at least one of five exported is certified both as Organic and Fairtrade.

The Dominican Republic banana industry has steadily grown in the last 15 years, benefitting from the country's duty-free access to the EU single market as a member of the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) group of countries. The United Kingdom is far and away the most important market for its conventional, Fairtrade and organic bananas, importing 56% of all exports between 2009 and 2013 (see table in Annex 1).



*Photo 1 (Banana Link): A typical 'batey' housing migrant workers in Montecristi province*

Despite two decades of increasing volumes, there are still widespread non-compliances with both the company agreed and, indeed, international ethical standards; and typical take-home wages are around half of what has been calculated to be a living wage for rural DR. (Centro de Inteligencia para Mercados Sostenibles, 2013 & 2014; Anker, R. & M. February 2014). Long-running concern about the lack of legal status for at least half of those working in the industry, for migrants from neighbouring Haiti, and the consequences for their employment conditions together with their access to healthcare, has proved to be entirely justified by recent studies and during several visits to the country made by Banana Link staff from 2011.

The majority of the estimated 20,000 Haitian migrants regularly employed in the industry are still without papers, which would give them access to the country's social security system. Some of the more progressive Dominican producers have pre-empted government efforts by supporting the regularisation of their own, almost exclusively male, Haitian workforce. However, good practices by employers in providing support for regularisation to their Haitian employees and financing alternative arrangements to access healthcare, schooling and other important services are too few and far between to yet constitute a critical mass. Nonetheless, this situation is foreseen to change during 2015.

The current Government's plan to regularise the legal status of Haitian migrants, announced in 2014, coupled with the efforts by the rural workers' section of the largest Dominican trade union confederation at organising workers and initiating dialogue with growers, have created an unprecedented opportunity to secure improvements. Efforts by DR stakeholders and external certifiers will be far more effective if they are made in collaboration with other economic stakeholders along the chain, especially with the industry's customers in the UK and the rest of Europe where over 90% of Dominican bananas are currently marketed.

## 1.2 Some facts and figures on the industry

**World exporter ranking:** DR was the world's eighth biggest banana exporter in 2013, having overtaken both Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire as the biggest exporter amongst the former ACP group of banana exporting countries.

**Hectarage:** In 2010, Government sources reported that over 26,000 hectares of bananas were harvested; but export production probably comes from less than half this area. 4,000 hectares were reported to be Fairtrade certified in 2012, which suggests an export banana hectarage of 12-13,000.

**Growers:** In the absence of any recent Agricultural Census, it is impossible to give an exact figure for the number of growers involved in export production. The last Census traces back to 2003 and the 2014 Census ordered by President Medina has not yet collated its results. Government sources reported the figure of 713 growers in 2003. Ten years later, published estimates varied between 1,200 and 1,900. A joint UN programme to improve banana competitiveness<sup>5</sup> cited 1,800. It seems that this last figure may be the most reliable since it has been often cited in various sources, including by the national producers' Association.

The majority are small farmers with less than 3 hectares (66% according to the UN programme in 2013). In the South (Azua province), almost all growers have less than 2 hectares. The largest single grower, *Plantaciones del Norte*, is estimated to have some 1,500 ha. Only 7.5% of growers are able to farm more than 6 ha. Moreover, there are some 20 small-scale producers' associations together with the national growers' association, Adobanano, which regroups most producers of all sizes.

**Exporters:** Also in this case, there is no exact data, but there are some 20 established exporting companies; most of the volume is traded by 6 companies, some of which have their own production.

**Organic and Fairtrade certified production:** In 2012, 58% of banana exports were certified Organic. Fairtrade International's figures show that 112,200 tonnes of bananas were sold as

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<sup>5</sup> 'Dominican Republic: Strengthening the banana value chain through the growth of inclusive markets' funded by the MDG Achievement Fund (participating UN agencies: FAO, ILO, PAHO / WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP)

Fairtrade between 2011 and 2012, which makes around 35% of total exports. Moreover, in DR 16 small farmers' organisations and 12 plantations are Fairtrade certified.

**Numbers of workers:** It is estimated (European Commission, 2013) that there are 51,000 directly employed banana workers, although up to half of these may be working on farms that do not export regularly (or not at all). Other sources (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014) quote a figure of 28,000 direct full-time employees and 26,000 temporary workers. The Labour Ministry estimated in 2010 that 300,000 people's livelihoods were dependent on banana income.

**Haitian migrant workers:** Anecdotally, many growers in the main exporting region in the Northwest cite a figure of 80% Haitians and 20% Dominicans, inverting the notorious government legislation that requires employers (in all sectors) to employ 80% Dominicans. The Labour Ministry study of 130 farms in 2011 (*Ministerio de Trabajo/OMLAD*, 2011), gives an overall figure of 66.3%, but also states that the bigger the farm the higher the proportion of Haitian migrants – 75% in farms over 30 hectares.

When it comes to field work, the same study reveals that the figure is around 80% and even higher near the Haitian border in the Northwest. Only in the very small farms in the South the proportion is less than 50%. Overall, a reasonable estimate would be that banana farms employ approximately 30,000 Haitian migrants, over half of whom are involved in regular export production.

### **1.3 Living and working conditions for men and women employed in the industry**

The sample of 370 workers – 100 Dominicans and 270 Haitians - interviewed for the Labour Ministry study in March-April 2010 (Charles, J.H. 2014) gave detailed information that helps give a clear - but non-gendered - picture of the working and living conditions of both Dominican and Haitian workers as well as of the level of discrimination in the workplace faced by many Haitian migrant workers. 56% of the Haitian workers and 32% of the Dominican workers involved in the study were under 30 years old; over 80% of all workers were less than 40 years old. More specific gendered information collated in a Women's Ministry study the following year is presented in section 4 below. The key findings of the Labour Ministry study are as follows:

#### **Migrant status**

- 35% of Haitian workers had been working in industry since before 2000, 42% since between 2000 and 2004, 23% since 2004. Only 7% considered Haiti as their home and that their stay in DR was temporary.
- 30% cannot read or write (Spanish or Creole); another 35% can only read and write Creole.
- 92% make regular visits to family in Haiti
- One third of Haitian migrants have a Haitian ID document, less than half have a birth certificate.
- 70% have no document giving them formal permission to work in DR.
- Over 90% send remittances, 70% at least monthly.

#### **Social status**

- Dominican workers have on average 2-7 children, Haitians 2-1.
- Haitian workers have on average 3-5 dependents, Dominicans 2-4.
- Average length of schooling for Dominicans is 7 years, and for Haitians is 4 years; one third of Haitians have no schooling at all.

- 55% of Haitians live in collective housing, 72% in rented accommodation; 25% have housing provided by employer. Average monthly rent is 486 DOP<sup>6</sup>.
- 50% of Dominicans have running water in their house, but only 11% of Haitians; more than 10% use (polluted) water from open water-courses.
- 55% of Haitians share toilet facilities v 15% of Dominicans.
- 55% of Dominicans have a motorbike v 9% Haitians.

### **Working/employment conditions**

- Works report an average of 6-5 years in banana employment.
- 65% worked in just one farm over the previous 12 months, 5% in more than 5 farms (with similar figures for Dominicans).
- Only 12% of all workers have a written contract, although two thirds say they have a steady job (verbal agreements).
- Less than 10% are sub-contracted by an intermediary.
- 69% of workers are paid weekly, 24% fortnightly.
- 51% have a fixed weekly/fortnightly wage (more Dominicans); 39% have a fixed daily wage (more Haitians).
- 99% of all workers are paid in cash, with no pay-slips.
- 72% work 6 days a week, 5% work 7 days.
- 65% work an 8 hour day; on average 177 hours/month, but Haitians have an average working week of 42.6 hours, Dominicans 37.8 hours.

### **Wages**

- The average wage of the 370 Dominican and Haitian workers interviewed in 2010 was 5,548 DOP per month. (At the time of the study 48 DOP = 1 Euro).
- 18% of workers receive less than 4,000 DOP per month; 75% earn less than 7,000 per month.
- There is a disproportionate number of Haitians in the 4-6,000 bracket: 57% of Haitians and 30% of Dominicans earn less than 6,000/month.
- The average wage differential for the same job between Haitians and Dominicans is 14%.
- There are very few Haitians in the best paid supervisor jobs; when Haitians reach these posts, there is a 28% wage differential.
- In relation to UN poverty levels, 75% of workers earn less than US \$2 per day per dependent.
- Although still very low, the median banana wage was 63% above the legal minimum wage at the time of the study.

### **Health, safety and social protection**

- 43% of Dominicans and less than 10% of Haitians are affiliated to the public or a private healthcare system.
- 26% of Haitians reported receiving sick pay for work-related health problems v 59% of Dominicans.
- Haitian workers reported a higher accident rate than Dominicans.
- Only 4% of Dominicans and 1.2% of Haitians have a pension scheme.

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<sup>6</sup> Dominican Peso

## **Freedom of association**

- Only 1.9% of Dominicans and 0.7% of Haitians are trade union members; only Haitians with legal residential status can join a trade union.
- Until then, no trade union had been openly organising banana workers, so there are no reported cases of discrimination because of union membership.
- 24.7% of Dominicans and 17.3% of Haitians are members of religious associations. Workers' committees exist in larger Fairtrade-certified farms, but these have no status in national legislation.

## **1.4 Methodology and further opportunities for research and action on women's role**

As has been stated before, this report is almost entirely derived from desk research, although elements of observation during a visit by Banana Link staff in 2012 have been incorporated. As the national banana export industry has the most detailed and recent documentation on the situation facing both women field and packing station workers as well as women farmers, there was less need to mobilise local researchers to help complete the investigations. The key points in the information and analysis presented below have been submitted for oral validation (during telephone and skype conversations) to industry observers and participants in the Dominican Republic.

Resources did not allow for more detailed field research but this could relatively easily be arranged ahead of – or immediately following - the third Global Conference of the World Banana Forum (WBF) to be held in Dominican Republic in 2016, which should be deemed a priority by the WBF stakeholders.

The fact that the Dominican Republic has enjoyed – and will continue to enjoy at least until 2019 - very considerable external multilateral and inter-UN agency funding for improvements in its banana industry, presents the diverse stakeholders, notably women smallholder farmers selling to the international markets and Dominican and Haitian women employed in the country's farms, with a golden opportunity to develop greater women's participation in the increasingly productive banana sector and to significantly contribute to genuinely sustainable rural development in three of the country's poorest provinces.

## **1.5 Women whose livelihoods depend on the industry**

### **Women employed in the industry**

As previously demonstrated, available figures vary very substantially. The European Union sources report a figure of 15% for the proportion of women in the overall banana export workforce (EC, 2013) whilst a non-gendered representative sample of 370 workers interviewed for the Labour Ministry study from 2010 gives a figure of just 5.5% of the total Haitian and Dominican workforce.

Part of the divergence in figures for the proportion of women employed in banana production overall may come from a certain amount of confusion in relation to two important factors:

- a) occasional and irregular informal workers are probably not counted as part of the workforce;

b) the studies undertaken may just refer to workers in farms that export.

In any case, the latter factor is particularly more complex since the majority of small and medium scale growers use to sell some to the national market and some for export; for this reason, the national market is being quite well organised and structured compared to many other exporting countries.

A joint UN agency programme report of 2013<sup>7</sup> states that 7% of field workers and 20% of packing station workers are women, but without citing detailed sources for this information.

However, the reality of the observation *in situ* reveals, as it is shown in the photograph below, that Haitian migrant workers are predominantly men. Women and girls may be present in the Haitian households in each of the three exporting provinces, but very few of them work in the banana industry. Conversely, the latter may be employed in other agricultural sectors that exclusively supply the national, but also Haitian, markets with rice, vegetables, fruit, etc.



Group of Haitian workers from a typical Haitian banana worker's residential area  
Photo: Banana Link, 2012

Analysing information from both written and oral sources, it would appear that less than 5% of the total number of Haitian migrant workers employed full-time or on a regular part-time basis in the banana industry are women. The European Commission's own country banana strategy paper cites a figure of 20% for the proportion of the total regularly employed Dominican workers. These Dominican women work almost exclusively in packing stations and farm administration. This leads to an estimated figure for the total proportion of the regularly employed banana workforce of around 15%.

Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that this figure has been estimated without taking into account the factor of occasional and irregularly employed workers who may or may not work on bananas that are finally exported. Given the total absence of data for these workers, it is impossible to say in which proportion there are women among them, although it likely seems that the great majority of them is made exclusively of Haitian men. In this case, the proportion of women who are active in the banana production for worldwide export (mainly European markets)

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<sup>7</sup> 'Dominican Republic: Strengthening the banana value chain through the growth of inclusive markets' funded by the MDG Achievement Fund (participating UN agencies: FAO, ILO, PAHO / WHO, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP)

is likely to be a few percentage points less, taking it down towards the average 12.5% figure estimated in this report by Banana Link for the Latin American industry.

### **Women farmers**

In 2011, the proportion of women who used to own or head banana farming households in the three main banana exporting provinces of the Dominican Republic was around 12.5% according to a sample of 1,361 producers from seven associations interviewed for a very detailed study by Juan Quiles Abad (Quiles Abad J. 2011) also cited in a Women's Ministry study (*Ministerio de la Mujer*, 2011). Of the 169 women members of these seven associations, the proportion per association ranged very significantly: from 2% in the association with the smallest number of women up to 20% in the association with the greatest.

These figures, both for the proportion of women heading small farmer households and their participation in producers associations are similar to those reported in the interviews' sample for the Ecuador study, even though this Ecuador sample is even much smaller (see *Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on Latin America*). Nearly 70% of the women producers, interviewed for a separate DR government-commissioned study in 2011 across three provinces, own and farm between 0.1 and 3 hectares of banana plantations.

In the Quiles Abad's study, the seven associations accounted for the vast majority of small farmers involved in banana exports, so they were likely to reflect the overall national proportion of women running farms, whereas in Ecuador the interviews' sample considered only a small minority of the several thousands of small farmers who regularly sell their bananas for export. It can also be likely that the proportion across the Ecuadorian small farmers' sector is lower than the 14.7% shown in that sample since associations like UROCAL (a regional organisation of rural small and medium producers) and the women-run exporting company Novamerc have made proactive efforts to increase the participation of women farmers and have, thus, introduced a bias in the Ecuadorian sample.

A revealing statistic in the Women's Ministry study (*Ministerio de la Mujer*, 2011) shows that only 8 of the 101 women producers, interviewed in detail, were members of the Executive Committees of their associations. It appears then that women not only form a minority of the farmers in their organisations, but that they are also under-represented in the organisation's management structures. This may not be necessarily seen as a proof of discrimination *per se* but, instead, it may equally reflect a sort of unwillingness of women to spend extra time in meetings or other related tasks, mostly because of the 'double burden' which many of them have to carry, which is looking after the farm and at the same time home and family. Indeed, the fact of being an active member of a farmers' association's management structure would inevitably require a great amount of time and significant efforts resulting in an additional work load for women. The same holds true for women who want to take on responsibilities in trade unions or in other kinds of workers' associations.

## **1.6 Key issues faced by women workers and women farmers**

### **Diagnostic study methodology**

The diagnostic study on women farmers and workers carried out by a team from the Women's Ministry in 2011 analysed the interviews conducted with 101 Dominican women farmers and 109 women workers in seven small producers' associations in the three main banana exporting

provinces of the country. Owing to the temporary nature of contracts and the mobility of workers around different farms, it was not possible to establish in advance the numbers of women working in the farms of the associations' members. The research team therefore interviewed those women whom they found working on the days of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in focal groups from 5 to 15 women farmers and women workers separately.

## **Main findings**

Nationality: All 101 women farmers were Dominican, whereas nearly 15% of the 109 workers were Haitian, ranging from no Haitian women workers interviewed in Montecristi province to nearly 25% of the total interviewed in the neighbouring Northwest province of Valverde. However, because of the necessarily random nature of the selection of interviewees, the researchers do not consider that these figures in any way reflect either the total proportion of Haitian women working as part of the overall employed workforce or as a proportion of all the women working in any one association's farms.

Age and civil status: The farmers were concentrated in the 35-44 year old range (60%), whilst the workers were younger, half of them being in the 18-34 year old range. Only one worker in 14 against one woman farmer in four were 45 years old or more.

One quarter of the women workers were single and a very high proportion of the rest living with a companion, and almost none were married. Whereas between one third and a half of the farmers in the two main exporting provinces were married and a high proportion of the rest were living with a companion. Nearly 20% of the women farmers were single heads of household.

Internal and external migration: A strikingly high number of the farmers – nearly 50% - had family members who had migrated within the country, mainly in search of better opportunities in the two big cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago. The proportion of workers who had family members who had moved to other parts of the country was around 25%.

Nearly 50% of farmers and over 20% of workers had family members who had emigrated; 70% of these family members had gone to live in the USA.

Education and training: More than half of all the women workers and 37.5% of farmers had only completed primary education, whilst 11% of both had not completed even the primary stage. On the other hand, one farmer in four had been to university or had university level professional training. For workers however, this figure was less than 5%. One quarter of all 210 women interviewed were nonetheless following a training course of some description at the time. Over 20% of women had participated in trainings organised by the Women's Ministry on reproductive sexual health, and 25% on domestic violence.

Housing: Over 50% of women workers and over 75% of farmers live in their own house. The other 50% of workers either rent accommodation or lived in housing provided by their employer, 15%.

Participation in community organisations: The proportion of both workers and farmers who belong to some form of local organisation – around two-thirds - is very high in all three banana exporting provinces. The most frequent organisations cited were neighbourhood associations (around 40% of all women) and religious organisations (over 40% of farmers and 20% of workers), whilst one third of farmers belong to credit union or other types of cooperative. The other types of associations cited were housewives groups (15%), mothers' centres (10%) and political parties (10%). Trade unions were not cited by any of the women workers interviewed, this is for the simple reason that no trade union was present or organised in these rural communities at the time of the study.

The Labour Ministry study, carried out the previous year and cited above, (*Ministerio de*

*Trabajo/OMLAD*, 2011) found that less than 2% of their sample of men and women working in the banana industry were members of a trade union. For Haitian workers this figure was just 0.7%.

Women's leadership in banana farmers associations: The gulf between association membership (all farmers interviewed) and women's participation in leadership positions – just 4 women out of 101 – is very striking indeed. The researchers refer to a significant 'gender gap' when it comes to access to decision-making. One of the contributing factors cited is the fact that, although the land title may be in the woman's name, it is often the men who take the farm management and marketing decisions.

The interviewed women told researchers that most of the land distributed in the agrarian reform programmes in the current banana producing areas was given to men, unless women could show, at the time of the reform, that they were widowed or single. Only in some cases, where the man has conceded a couple of hectares to his wife for her to farm, women are then formally registered as producers by the associations. However, as cited in the study, the other main reason for not becoming involved in the running of the associations is the so-called *machismo*, that is the general chauvinistic attitude of men towards women.

Income: When it comes to the income earned from their principal banana activity there is a sharp contrast between farmers and workers employed in the associations to which the farmers belong. 70% of the workers interviewed earned less than 5,000 DOP per month, slightly below the national minimum wage at the time of the study.

On the other hand, only 10% of farmers earned less than 5,000 DOP per month, while 27.5% earned in the range of 5,000 to 19,000, 18% in the range of 20,000 to 34,000, 38.5% in the range 35,000 to 150,000 DOP per month, and nearly 5% earned more than that. No worker earned more than 19,000 per month and 83% of women workers had no other source of income at all.

When it came to the total household income, the same figure of 70% of workers lived in households with a monthly income in the range of 5,000 to 19,000 DOP, whilst 53% of farmers had a monthly household income in the range of 50,000 to 150,000 DOP.

Violence: As for the **Ministerio de la Mujer's** statement: « *Violence against women constitutes, without any doubt, the biggest challenge facing gender policy in our country at present, which is why we could not have expected a different result in this social diagnostic study on the living and working conditions of women banana producers and workers in the provinces of Azua, Montecristi and Valverde*».

The results showed that 40% of women (almost identical for both women workers and farmers) have experienced violence against them as women or domestic violence at some point of their lives. Some 43% of women farmers and 38% of women workers also said they had been victims of violence against them as women in the previous 12 months.

In Montecristi province, where most of the new investments in larger-scale banana production for export is currently located, both 59% of farmer respondents and 45% of worker respondents said they had experienced gendered violence in the previous year.

In descending order, respondents described the type of violence against them as emotional (a staggering 87% of cases), physical, sexual and verbal. The main distinction between workers and farmers concerns physical violence: 32% of the 109 women interviewed described the kind of violence they had suffered in the previous year as such, compared to 14% for farmers.

Gender stereotyping: The final section of the diagnostic study draws some conclusions from a series of questions posed by the research team on gender stereotypes. The results of their questions to the women interviewed show that, even if workers and farmers tend on the whole

not to question traditional masculine stereotyping of their role in relation to women's responsibility for child-birth and child-rearing, and of their own role in decision-making within the household, women farmers are more likely to question traditional masculine attitudes and practices concerning power in the household or family than women workers. The authors note that this bears out other studies that revealed how younger women use to question less than women of one generation above them the masculine stereotypes of women, in particular regarding the recognition and awareness of violence towards them.

It would therefore appear that gender stereotyping in the case of women in the banana industry has more to do with age, experience and, indeed, exposure to education and training than it has to do with the distinction between being employed and being in charge of one's own livelihood as a farmer.

## **1.7 Initiatives under way with women workers and small farmers**

This section briefly summarises the initiatives that different stakeholders in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and in the international marketing chains are taking - or could take - in the near-term future on a number of issues regarding women workers and small farmers. It draws on documentation from institutional stakeholders, such as the Women's Ministry, the national producers' association Adobanano, and various inter-governmental bodies. It also draws on Banana Link's regular dialogue, over the preceding 12 months, with key stakeholders in the Dominican Republic: Europe-based banana trading companies, food retail buyers and Fairtrade certifying body, such as Fairtrade International/FLO-Cert.

### **Regularisation of migrant workers' status in the country**

In the framework of a bi-national dialogue between the governments of the Dominican Republic and Haiti initiated in January 2014, there has been agreement on a plan to regularise the status of Haitian migrants living and working in DR. A bi-national High Level Commission is in a permanent process of dialogue over the implementation of a regularisation plan. In May 2014, Law 169-14 established a «Special Regime for Persons born [in DR] who are inscribed irregularly in the Civil Register and for their Naturalisation»<sup>8</sup>.

A new multi-stakeholder agency, *Instituto de Migración*, had been created in 2014 to expedite the regularisation procedures for the million or more Haitians living or working in DR. The government, with international donors' support, established 12 new local offices receiving Haitians wanting to regularise their situation, although, as of February 2015, these are not yet fully operating in the three main banana exporting provinces.

Some leading banana companies and the newly emerging trade unions in Montecristi and Valverde are taking the initiative to try and accelerate the process of 'legalisation' of their workers of Haitian origin, whilst the Haitian authorities have committed to facilitating the necessary paperwork, again with international donors' support, especially birth certificates (or their equivalent) for their citizens who regularly work in DR or have been living there for years. The costs of the necessary paperwork and its processing have been reduced very considerably thanks to the support from the Organisation of American States (OAS). This whole complex process needs, however, to be encouraged and facilitated if the DR Government wants to achieve the target of registering 'illegal' migrants within the 18-month time-frame that it was set.

Due to the ongoing political instability in Haiti, coupled with some resistances from senior officials in DR with access to the national media, together with frequent conspiracies from the latter, is making the process much slower than what progressive banana employers, rural workers' union leaders and many sections of civil society would wish. However, it is likely that 2015 will start to see major moves towards regularisation in the banana sector and other industries that depend on the Haitian migrant labour.

Although this is the case that the great majority of those working full-time - or on regular daily contracts in small-scale banana farms and plantations - are Haitian men, this sea-change in public policy, and at industry level in the case of the banana sector, will benefit Haitian women workers as well. The gathering pace of change, with support from major buyers of DR bananas, a potentially very positive catalytic factor, spells potential progress for women, provided, indeed, that forms of gender discrimination do not start creeping into the regularisation process. Companies and farmers' associations, producers' association, public authorities and the workers' own emerging independent organisations, all have a responsibility to ensure that the process of change will benefit women as much as men.

### **Trade union organising in Montecristi, Valverde and Azua provinces**

After more than two decades of rapid industry development during which trade unions in the Dominican Republic have not prioritised work in the banana industry, the country's largest trade union confederation CASC has decided to engage on the ground with workers who, in many cases, have never been offered the opportunity to join a trade union. In the case of Haitian men and women who are working with or without temporary residency papers (the majority), they are unable to join a trade union until their situation is regularised, so the rural workers' federation affiliated to CASC has been organising embryonic worker associations with Haitian members, who face this problem. These associations are in the process of being registered with the government authorities as trade unions in the two main banana exporting provinces of Montecristi and Valverde.

This process has been entirely voluntary, without external support from any donor, and has been accompanied by a process of engagement by union leaders with bigger banana companies and some small farmers' organisation leaders. The success of this dialogue-building work with industry players, who see the interest in changing labour contracting and other practices, will be determinant in defining the impacts that this will have on all workers in the industry, whether they work in small farms or medium-scale and large-scale plantations. The gender sensitivity with which programmes of education, awareness-raising, training and organising are carried out will, of course, determine the impacts that these changes have on women workers and women farmers.

### **MMUJER takes a public policy lead in supporting women in the industry**

As it can be seen from the detailed diagnostic study of the social conditions and status of women in the banana sector commissioned four years ago by *Ministerio de la Mujer* (MMujer), the Women's Ministry, and highlighted in this report, there is real political commitment to support women whose livelihoods depend on the burgeoning industry. This commitment was made very tangible in 2013, when MMujer signed a Memorandum of Understanding with national producers' association Adobanano and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to establish a 'Pro-Women' Committee in Adobanano, to conduct training and awareness-raising workshops for women farmers and workers, including women's leadership training in the prevention of violence, the dissemination of educational materials on gender-based violence, training of men and women on equality with both banana farmer association members and the wider community, and legal

and psychological support to women victims of violence through MMujer's local offices in cooperation with Adobanano (UNFPA-MMUJER-ADOBANANO, 2013).

The MMujer materials on gender-based violence are already produced and being used (*Ministerio de la Mujer*, 2012).

### **Other initiatives in the areas of education, health, diversification and empowerment**

A host of other initiatives, some led by producers' organisations like Banelino and funded by European retail buyers, such as Edeka and Tegut from Germany and the UK's Cooperative Group, provide health and community services which stand out as examples of excellence in otherwise poor rural areas in Montecristi and Valverde provinces. A school for mentally handicapped children in Valverde is one of these exemplary initiatives which the State would not have been able to provide without investments by stakeholders at the end of the banana marketing chain.

Fairtrade premium committees have also been responsible for investing the tens of millions of dollars that have come into banana exporting communities from sales of Fairtrade certified bananas since the late 1990s. The health clinic at Banelino's headquarters in Mao is a particularly impressive example of an accessible community facility funded by the benefits of banana trade which is used by thousands of women who depend on the banana industry. The work that small farmers' association Asexbam is undertaking with former drug addicts in their communities in Montecristi is explicitly designed as a route to reducing high levels of drug-related violence (predominantly by men) that have plagued households in the area.

Another Banelino-led initiative launched in late 2013 benefits a group of banana farmers' wives, daughters and sisters through the creation of artefacts and merchandise made from the fibre of banana plants. The potential income from agro-tourism is another area being explored by small farmers.

In the critical area of education on the rights and responsibilities of women and men workers, Dominican NGOs, such as CIAC and INCAP are building on the many years of rights-based work by organisations like Solidaridad Fronteriza and their Haitian workers' association ASOMILIN. Producing and disseminating educational materials, in Creole as well as Spanish, is a task that is already under way. This work, which necessarily takes a gender-sensitive and anti-racist form in the context of the DR banana industry, is set to benefit from a boost from external civil society funding in 2015.

## **1.8 Lessons emerging for 2015 and beyond**

It is clear from the plethora of inter-governmental support from the EU and a range of UN funding bodies that the Dominican Republic's banana industry could potentially and enormously benefit from the considerable financial resources being made available to make the transition to a sector that offers decent work to all those it employs and that provides sustainable livelihoods to all those who devote their working lives to producing bananas for export.

In this transitional phase, the relatively well developed body of research on women's specific situation and role in the industry should be taken into account to implement this transition in the spirit of gender equality. There is great potential for the development of a gender-sensitive banana industry, especially in a country where some of the key stakeholders at the government, industry and civil society level are taking very promising leads.

### **A typical industry in terms of women's participation?**

From the figures available it is not possible to make any conclusive assertion about the proportion of Dominican or Haitian women working in the industry. The overall proportion of women workers appears to be similar to the 12.5% average for Latin America. It is also likely to prove that the proportion of Haitian women employed is lower than the proportion of Dominican women, once some clarity has been achieved around the numbers of informally employed Haitian women involved in the sector.

As far as producers themselves are concerned, Dominican women have benefited more than elsewhere in the banana world from land reforms and they represent a higher proportion of small-scale farmers than in Ecuador or Colombia. In Peru, very few women have titles to land as a result of land reform in the country that has become another major source of organic fresh bananas for the world market.

A leading small farmers' organisation and a leading plantation production and export company are both headed by women (albeit of European origin) and both are influential in the industry as well as with government and international buyers. One is also the Chair of the Board of Fairtrade International and Chair of the Latin American Fairtrade Producers' Coordinating Body (CLAC). If their differing visions can be reconciled, the Dominican Republic banana industry could forge ahead as a leader in the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and decent work for women.

The role of the Women's Ministry shows that the political lead being taken by women in Government on sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence and power-sharing in collective organisations, has the transformative potential that would let those women working in the industry alter the course of history and move towards an industry where gender equity would finally become a reality.

### **Organic and Fairtrade leadership brings opportunities and responsibilities**

As the world's largest supplier of Organic and Fairtrade certified bananas, the Dominican Republic has a golden market opportunity to secure remunerative prices on a long-term basis. On the other side of the same equation, though, the country and its international partners have the rather onerous responsibility to make very substantive improvements for those women who work to produce the required fruit.

Although Organic standards are less than specific about the social content of the production system which they seek to define (and say nothing specific at all about women), Fairtrade standards do set out specific expectations in this regard. The wider international Fair Trade movement certainly has the expectation that gender equality, decent employment for women workers and sustainable livelihoods for women producers would be inseparable elements of a fair world food system.

Certifiers and those on whom they bestow certifications have a major joint responsibility to try and meet these ambitious but even reasonable expectations. The expectations are shared not only by women involved in banana production, but also by the millions of consumers who pay a decent price in Europe or North America for Fairtrade Organic bananas.

## **Public policy making to support the development of a model industry**

Positive changes are currently energising the local industry, which has now become the country's top export income earner. The new political will to change the course of the burgeoning industry's history, which emerged in 2014, needs to become the focus of public policymaking for the years to come. This holds particularly true as regards the regularisation of the legal status of the Haitian migrant labour force, on which the industry has grown up to depend, and to their access to the public services enjoyed by the majority population that need to become the focus of public policymaking for the coming years.

## **Smart value chain leverage is vital to continuing on an accelerating path of change**

In late 2013, in consultation with stakeholders in DR and with funding from Fairtrade International and Social Accountability International (SAI), international labour and nutrition experts Richard and Martha Anker developed a living wage benchmark for banana workers in rural Dominican Republic. Their living wage estimates are much higher than the statutory minimum wage in agriculture at the time (DOP 5,577) and indeed the prevailing wages in Fairtrade plantations (DOP 5,944).

Following the publication of the living wage study by the Ankers, Banana Link's international coordinator wrote in a briefing for market players at the European end of the Dominican Republic's banana chains: « *Closing the large gap between actual wages and the living wage benchmark of around double typical current wages is only likely to be achievable if those employed in the industry have the opportunity to bargain fairly with their employers. Unless Haitian workers are legalised and therefore able to exercise their right to organise independently, the process of bargaining towards a living wage will remain no more than a theoretical aspiration.* » (Banana Link, 2014)

The wage issue is one of the issues that effects women very directly indeed, as this report has shown, but this is far from being the only important factor in creating greater gender equality in the Caribbean region's dominant banana industry. As long as low wages and other uncounted social costs, such as the access to decent healthcare, are not internalised and paid for from the value generated along the chain, the DR would be considered by some of its smaller Caribbean neighbours, who have an industry that is founded on much more active participation of women at most levels of responsibility, as competing unfairly.

Smart use of the leverage of buyers, who have become very dependent on the DR as a source of supply (see Annex 1) for increasingly demanding consumers, is therefore another crucial element required to develop a model banana industry. Many of these buyers now want to 'do the right thing' and work for companies who put ethical trading principles into practice. Their participation from the market end in encouraging and, where appropriate, helping to facilitate positive change, is a vital counterpoint to smart public policymaking in the Dominican Republic.

## **2. Women farmers in the Windward Islands banana industry**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The Windwards are composed of the islands of St Lucia, Dominica and St Vincent & the Grenadines. There were approximately 4,000 banana producers in the Windward Islands in 2011 - the majority in St Lucia - with a total of 3,702 hectares of land under cultivation; the average farm is therefore a little under a hectare. Approximately 45% of the small producers who remain in the industry today are women (see Table 1).

The majority of farms are Fairtrade certified and some 80% of all bananas produced in the Windwards are sold in the UK. The farmers sell their fruit for export via Winfresh, an export company owned by the islands' governments, in the form of shares. Almost all the farmers are members of the umbrella organisation WINFA (the Windward Islands Farmers' Association), a non-governmental organisation that represents, protects, and promotes the interests of small farmers.

The vast majority of the 25,000 Windwards banana farmers who were involved in the industry in the early 1990s have gone out of business over the last two decades. Low retail prices for bananas, coupled with increasing competition from cheaper Latin American bananas (due to ever lowering import tariff levels for non-ACP bananas entering the EU), have spelt economic disaster for producers. Producers have also been hit by regular natural disasters including hurricanes and droughts which have temporarily wiped out production and halted exports. These issues have had a significantly negative social and economic impact on families, communities and the overall economies of the islands, including an increase in unemployment (over 30% in most islands) and related social problems. There exist significant pockets of poverty in rural communities across all islands and this is most acutely felt by single female-headed households and their families whose livelihoods depend totally on income from bananas (Farquhar, I. 2010).

### **2.2 Methodology**

The key input for this section of the report came from a workshop conducted by the Windward Islands Farmers' Association (WINFA) in December 2014 with 20 women banana producers from St. Vincent & the Grenadines, St Lucia and Dominica. The workshop was organised by Kozel Peters, WINFA Coordinator, specifically to feed into the research for the World Banana Forum, and this report was based on the analysis of this participatory activity. Desk research and existing information resources were then used to complement this *in situ* action-research.

### **2.3 Women's representation in the industry**

The table below (see Table 1) demonstrates that across the Windward Islands there is currently little disparity in terms of male versus female involvement in the industry. The women producers felt that while the situation of male dominance existed in previous years, the decline in the industry has meant that a lot of men have migrated from the sector to other productive sectors of the economy such as construction, transportation and tourism.

**Table 1: The number of women (vs male) small producers per company/association/farm**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Female Percentage</b>
Saint Vincent	152	84	68	44.7%
Saint Lucia	450	248	202	44.8%
Dominica	150	83	67	44.7 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>752</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>44.8%</b>

*Source: WINFA women's workshop, Kingstown, Saint Vincent & The Grenadines, December 2014*

In comparison, women have tended to stay in the industry because they are less 'mobile' due to family responsibilities and also due to limited employment opportunities in other sectors compared to men. This is partly due to the lack of education and, in some cases, literacy levels. For most women therefore, banana production continues to be their only local source of income. Women also felt that they are more resilient than male producers to economic pressures.

The women felt that both male and female producers are treated equally by other industry stakeholders - such as their association, hired labourers, buyers and certification bodies - so there are no perceived negative impacts of being a female (rather than a male) producer.

### **The roles of women producers**

Within the Windward Islands, women are involved in all aspects of banana production. This includes the more labour intensive roles in the field as well as less intensive roles such as packing, washing and deflowering.

The majority of these women producers (70% of the participants to the workshop) run the farms on their own and receive no help from their partner or from any other member of the family. However, they might employ external help on their farms (88% of the workshop's participants) consisting of, on average, two additional labourers who are mainly men (only 7% of workshop's participants used to employ women labourers). These labourers, both men and women, undertake all tasks associated with production and harvesting.

Historically there were more employment opportunities available to casual women banana workers on the farms, but the down-turn in the industry has resulted in a loss of female employment.

## **2.4 Issues faced by women workers and small producers in the workplace and at home**

The key problems highlighted by women in the producers' workshop were mainly in the workplace with no indication of any problems at home. Most women felt that even though economic issues related to banana production are of course reflected as financial problems at home, they do not consider this to result in wider 'domestic problems'. Therefore, the key issues identified by women producers in the workshop include:

- 'Praedial Larceny' – the theft of agricultural products from farms;
- Access to financing/credit systems;

- Pest and disease management, and lack of government support to deal with this issue;
- The lack of a consistent and reliable labour supply.

WINFA has also highlighted additional issues which have been personally reported by women producers:

- Childcare issues for single parents, leading to children being pulled out of secondary and tertiary education;
- Lower wages for women casual labourers compared to men;
- Lack of social security;
- Decreasing income from bananas and subsequent lack of job security and poor living conditions, in particular poor housing;
- Low literacy, education and training, limiting livelihood diversification opportunities.

The above issues still persist in all the three Windward Islands' banana industries.

## **2.5 Innovations towards Decent Work for women workers and small producers**

Within the last year, there have been some attempts through governmental programmes to address the financial constraints in the sector as well as important pest and disease issues. Specifically, in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Government has recently established a credit facility through the Farmers' Support Company that lends at a very low interest rate to both male and female farmers.

Similarly, in St. Lucia, a loan was granted to the national WINFA's member organisation by a marketing agency to address the credit problem. In the case of Dominica, however, the access to credit is one of the biggest challenges for women relating to decent work and sustainable livelihoods and there have been no initiatives developed so far to specifically address this issue.

The women producers also felt that there had been recent improvements through initiatives implemented by WINFA and through Fairtrade certification. These include improvements in occupational health and safety standards, in particular protection from chemicals (which has, indeed, also impacted on male producers) but also in terms of improvements in maternity rights for women producers and workers.

WINFA is working to address the concerns and issues for women workers at all levels and mainstream gender-related issues in all WINFA programmes. Particular attention is shown to the rights and needs of female farmers, many of whom are single parents. Programmes of exchanges for women between islands and farming communities are carried out; women are encouraged to participate actively in assemblies and exchanges as well as various international and regional fora to help establish gender-sensitive policies and improve women producer knowledge on the wider industry realities. (Prince, J.D. 2010).

## **2.6 Recommendations from women banana farmers in the Windward Islands**

The main recommendations from women producers include:

- The establishment of credit facilities towards the development of the industry and to ensure sustained livelihood opportunities for women;

- The strengthening of crop insurance facilities for producers;
- Improvements in farm roads and infrastructures;
- Support with casual labour costs and facilitating the availability of labour;
- Training for women small producers to enhance their skills in the use of new technologies for production, processing and marketing of bananas.

### **Box 1. Belize: a research vacuum**

In Belize, where no recent gender-specific information on the banana export sector is available at all, it can only be surmised that the situation that faces all workers is even worse for women. According to reports from several visits by Honduran banana workers' union leaders and educators between 1997 and 2002, the vast majority of workers are Northern Central American migrants (from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in the main). According to reports dating back over a decade<sup>9</sup>, there is little or no employment security and very limited freedom of association. The only attempt to create an independent trade union, following a wildcat strike in 1995 over unacceptable living and working conditions, was immediately repressed (Anne Sutherland, 1998) and dissolved after the woman leading the union, for health reasons, went into exile in the USA, where she died a few years later.

The little information published in official inter-governmental reports suggests that the social and economic situation facing many employees in the banana industry is rather critical.

*« The main problems of the industry and the population are a lack of available financial support on the local market, inefficiencies in the production, inadequate socio-economic infrastructure and high poverty rates. » (EC, 2012)*

*« Bananas have played a key role in the development of Stann Creek and Toledo districts located in the south of the country where the incidence of poverty is relatively high. [...] conflicts over workers' rights in plantations are not creating a positive image of Belize bananas, potentially affecting their preference among European consumers (Moberg 2000)». (FAO, 2003)*

The last outdated information obviously requires new research before drawing any conclusion on the role of workers in general and on the specific situation of women in the Belizean industry. However, nothing leads the current researcher to believe that any serious intervention has been made on the social front since the FAO's report of 2003 had been written or since any information gathered by both Irish civil society and Belizean trade unions operating in other sectors had been published at around the same time.

The lack of easy access, due to the unwillingness of the industry associations to open their doors to visitors, would nonetheless tend to suggest that the situation facing all workers, has not really and significantly improved, especially because of their migrant status. Nor is there any reason to suppose that, from a socio-economic point of view, women fare any better than their male colleagues.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://lasc.ie/content/2-ireland-and-banana-trade-fyffes>

### 3. Conclusion: summary of women's situation in the Caribbean banana industry

#### Higher levels of women's participation

From a gender perspective it is clear that the Caribbean region is quite advanced towards greater equality. However, without much more in-depth research, it is not possible to give a full analysis of why this is the case, whether it is for primarily economic, primarily socio-cultural, or for a mixture of these and other reasons.

The overall percentage of women producing export bananas in their own farms is higher than in Latin America, since there is a small proportion of women small-scale farmers in Ecuador and a handful of women-owned farms in Colombia. In both Suriname and Belize, there are no small-scale farmers exporting bananas either women or men.

As it has been highlighted in the previous section, in the three Windward Islands nearly half of all the producers left in the export banana industry are women, although they employ predominantly male external labour force, mainly during harvest days. In 2011, in the Dominican Republic, one small-scale banana farmer in eight was a woman according to a study published by the Women's Ministry (**Ministerio de la Mujer 2011**).

As for the employment rate by farm owners in the Caribbean's largest banana export industry, the Dominican Republic, there is a similar overall proportion of women as in Latin America. However, the industry's very high dependence on migrant labour (almost exclusively men) from neighbouring Haiti, reduces the above percentage, down to the same as the Latin American continental average. The best estimate available is that there is one woman for every seven workers employed.

What has been poorly reported is the number of informally hired Haitian women working as day labourers in banana farms in the Dominican Republic. This is due to their current illegal status in the country, which makes them invisible in official statistics (or indeed from the authors of the relatively numerous recent studies). The proportion of Dominican women is higher than the average in Latin America, approximately equal to the African average. However, it is possible that the overall proportion of women in the DR industry is higher than the Latin American average, if the 'invisible', informally employed Haitian women were to be counted.

In Suriname, and possibly in Jamaica, only field research and detailed interviews - which were not possible in the limited terms of this study – would reveal why there is, seemingly, this much higher proportion of women actively involved in the banana industries supplying respectively the international and Caribbean regional markets with fresh dessert bananas and the national markets with processed fruit, as in the case of Jamaica.

A good opportunity to start exploring the details behind the figure of 40% women employed within the 2,300-strong workforce in Suriname, as cited in European Commission sources, would be with the two main trade unions operating in each of the plantations respectively, the women involved in SBBS management and with the Project Management Division of the local Ministry of Finance. In Jamaica, the woman who heads the Project Management Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Chair of the All-Island Banana Growers' Association (also a woman) and the trade union UAWU would all be good actors with who it would be possible to start the same process of investigation.

## **Violence, harassment and discrimination still facing many women**

It has to be noted that greater women's participation, in numerical terms, does not automatically mean either that conditions for women workers are getting better than elsewhere or sustainable livelihoods are easier to achieve for small-scale growers than in other regions of the world.

The high levels of domestic and other kind of violence to women in the Dominican Republic are particularly shocking and appear to be suffered equally by workers and small farmers, but employed workers do not yet have any independent trade union organisation to which to turn to support them to challenge and overcome violence perpetrated by men at work. Many women belong to local community organisations, some of which are indeed tackling violence done to women, but sexual harassment at work in banana workplaces appears to be one of the many areas, especially in the absence of independent (and gender-aware) trade unions, where no organisation has sought to bring any systematic attention to bear.

The very high level of informal contracting prevalent in the DR industry for women (and men) also means that it will take time before the relatively young national producers' association has any influence in this domain, even if Adobanano were to make this a central policy priority tomorrow. Nor can the Women's Ministry on its own, even with generous external funding for its programmes, expect to make rapid headway if other relevant Ministries of Government are not mobilised to the same cause of reducing and eradicating gender-based violence in society generally or in the banana industry in particular.

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<http://www.fao.org/economic/worldbananaforum/wbf-aboutus/en/>

## List of Acronyms

- ACP** African, Caribbean and Pacific countries

<b>ASOMILIN</b>	Asociaciones Solidarias de Obreros Migrantes de la Línea Noroeste
<b>BAM</b>	Banana Accompanying Measures
<b>CARIFORUM</b>	Caribbean Forum of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
<b>CASC</b>	Confederación Autónoma Sindical Clasista
<b>CIAC</b>	Centro de Investigación y Apoyo Cultural
<b>CIRAD-FLHOR</b>	French research centre working with developing countries to tackle international agricultural and development issues; Fruit and Horticultural Crops Department
<b>CLAC</b>	Latin American Fairtrade Producers' Coordinating Body
<b>DOP</b>	Dominican Peso
<b>DR</b>	Dominican Republic
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUROSTAT</b>	European Commission: European statistics
<b>FLO</b>	Fairtrade Labelling Organisation International
<b>FLO-CERT</b>	Fairtrade global certification and verification body
<b>INCAP</b>	Instituto de Capacitación y asesoría
<b>NGO</b>	Non governmental organisation
<b>OAS</b>	Organisation of American States
<b>SBBS</b>	Stichting Behoud Bananensector Suriname
<b>UAWA</b>	University & Allied Workers' Union, Jamaica
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UROCAL</b>	Unión Regional de Organizaciones Campesinas del Litoral, a regional organization of rural small and medium producers on the Ecuadorian Coast
<b>WBF</b>	World Banana Forum
<b>WINFA</b>	Windward Islands Farmers' Association

## Annex 1

### Importance of the UK market to the Dominican Republic and the importance of the Dominican Republic as a source of supply to the UK market

<i>Year</i>	<i>Direct exports to UK in metric tonnes (% of total direct imports)<sup>10</sup></i>	<i>Total exports in metric tonnes (% of DR exports going to UK)</i>	<i>Supplier ranking of DR in UK market</i>
2009	127,246 (14.0%)	280,717 (45%) <sup>11</sup>	3
2010	152,069 (16.6%)	341,079 (45%)	3
2011	206,859 (21.9%)	330,111 (63%) <sup>12</sup>	2
2012	203,996 (21.3%)	296,300 (69%) <sup>13</sup>	2
2013	201,099 (20.0%) <sup>14</sup>	351,750 (57%)	2

**Source:** Banana Link, 2014

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<sup>10</sup> **Source :** DEFRA, London

<sup>11</sup> **Source :** OTCA, Santo Domingo

<sup>12</sup> **Source :** FAO

<sup>13</sup> **Source :** CEI, Santo Domingo

<sup>14</sup> **Source :** EUROSTAT