

# **Women in the Banana Export Industry**

## **Global overview**



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## Summary

“Women in the Banana Export Industry: Global Overview” provides a summary of the main findings from three regional reports on the economic aspects of gender issues in the banana sector. Together, these reports consider the experiences of women workers and small producers across three of the main regional centres of production of bananas for export: Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean.

Women's comprise less than a fifth of the global workforce in the banana export industry. The research found the highest participation of women in the industry in the Caribbean excluding the Dominican Republic, where 40% to 45% of workers and small producers are women, and the lowest participation in Latin America (12.5%), the Dominican Republic (12.5%) and the Cote d'Ivoire (11%). A historical and cultural analysis reveals a correlation between levels of gender equality in society, and levels of women's involvement in the banana industry. Migration is also a factor that explains the differences between countries, as both family responsibilities and the dangers of irregular migration mean women are less likely to migrate to work on banana plantations.

Production tasks considered suitable for women vary considerably between regions, and sometimes between countries within regions. Where small women producers in the Caribbean undertake all tasks involved in production, in Latin America, women's involvement is almost exclusively limited to the packing stations. West and Central Africa falls between these two points. This role division based on gender impacts both women's access to work and is the main factor in the gender pay gap which exists across the industry, where women employees and casual workers consistently earn less than their male co-workers.

The research found serious issues in the management of Occupational Health, Safety and Environment for women workers. In particular, pregnant women are normally rotated to lighter tasks only in the final months of their pregnancy and both pregnant and breast feeding women often continue to work in direct contact with pesticides and chemicals, contravening the guidance from the World Health Organisation and putting the health of their unborn/new-born child at risk. Another issue expressed across the industry was sexual harassment. This is a human rights and gender discrimination issue with resulting impacts on health and safety, including stress, particularly in the absence of effective complaints and grievance mechanisms.

The other priority concerns expressed by research participants were lack of education and training, lack of access to childcare, and the difficulty of managing their triple workload. Recognition of the socio-economic importance of women's work in the domestic and care economy, where children are born and raised to become the next generation of workers, producers and consumers, is a necessary starting point for responding to the challenges women face in any part of the global banana industry.

The report concludes with suggested recommendations to be discussed at the Third Conference of the World Banana Forum, and the Second World Banana Forum Global Women's Meeting, which will be held in the days immediately prior to the Conference.

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## Annex 1: Historical & cultural context of the banana export industry by region



## Introduction

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 reports will be presented to 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 2015.

The need for this research was identified in 2012, during the first Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives. Participants of the meeting expressed that in order to drive forward the creation of strategies to increase the provision of Decent Work for women in the sector by participants who believed that further information is required about the issues detailed below was essential to drive forward the creation of strategies to increase the provision of Decent Work for women in the 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 the percentage of women’s representation, 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.

The studies within this overview have been produced from the information gathered by Banana Link through field work and desk-based research complemented by both analytical reports from stakeholders and by the questionnaires filled in by the National Coordinators of the Women’s Secretariats of trade unions representing banana plantation workers. In Ecuador, Ghana, Cameroon, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, St Lucia and Dominica it was possible to hold workshops with small samples of women workers or women small holders to gain direct testimony about their experiences. As the methodology described in each regional report demonstrates, these studies have been carried out with a very limited budget.

Within this context it should also be noted that the banana companies mentioned in this report have not been systematically approached for their feedback and input on the issues raised. The exceptions include Compagnie Fruitiere who control approximately 80 % of banana production and trade in West and Central Africa and were therefore approached for their reactions to the research in this region. The other exception is the case of Ecuador where the presence of a volunteer researcher in-country enabled a more detailed investigation involving communications with the main employers and producers in this country (see Annex 1 in the Latin America regional report).

Both the quality and quantity of information collected thus varies significantly between countries and regions. This overview should not, therefore, be seen as authoritative. Nevertheless, it does provide the best summary of issues faced by women in the global banana industry to date.

Each regional report includes a background section that summarises the important historical and cultural factors that have contributed to shaping the banana export industry in that region and that set the scene for the experience of women workers and small producers today. These background sections are compiled in this overview found in Annex 1 due to their potential usefulness for readers whose knowledge is limited to a single region and as context for any comparison between the experiences of women in the regions considered.

The countries in the three regions in this report, defined by the World Bank as 'low and middle income developing countries', predominantly export to North America and Europe, but also have market in Russia and the Middle East.

Another major banana producing and exporting region is Asia. In particular, the Philippines export large quantities to Japan and China. The Philippines is largely involved in an export market which is independent of the other regional markets and it is not included in this particular study partly for this reason and partly because data is not currently available from the region. When access to data becomes more feasible a similar study should be conducted.

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

## 1. Women's employment in the banana export industry by region

The representation of women employed in the industry varies considerably between regions and between countries within regions. Overall, the highest representation of women for a region as a whole is found in the Caribbean, followed by West and Central Africa with Latin America showing the lowest representation of women employed. This trend is not immediately apparent from a first glance at the figures for individual countries but this overview summarises the reasons for these variations.

Table 1 demonstrates the percentage of women employed in the banana industry for the main banana exporting countries in Latin America (excluding Brazil, for which figures could not be obtained). Ecuador, on the left, is the largest producer accounting for about a third of all global exports from all regions, followed by the seven other producing countries in a descending order. However, the order of each country's market share is not exact as export volumes fluctuate from year to year. Costa Rica and Colombia are well behind Ecuador followed by Guatemala at around 7% of world trade. The countries to the right of this each account for less than 2% of world trade but the exact order of descending production again varies year on year. The smallest producer is Peru, which accounts for less than one per cent of world trade.

**Table 1: Estimated proportion of women employed in key Latin American banana exporting countries**

Ecuador	Costa Rica	Colombia	Guatemala	Honduras	Panama	Nicaragua	Peru
12%	13%	7%	16%	30%	11%	27%	15%

*Source: Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on Latin America, 2015*

Taking into account the size of the industry in each country and the associated absolute numbers of employees for the entire region, women make up 12.5% of workers employed in the Latin American banana export industry. However, it can readily be seen from the table that there are wide variations between individual countries. Five of the countries fall into the range between 11% (Panama) and 16% (Guatemala). These figures appear immediately consistent with the overall estimate of 12.5% (given the different size of the industry in each country). Three of the countries appear to be anomalous, with Colombia showing an unusually low figure (only 7%) and Honduras and Nicaragua showing unusually high figures (30% and 27% respectively).

The reasons for the low level of women's employment in Colombia are examined in the pathways to employment section of the Latin American regional report. They include the widespread cultural perception that women are unsuited to work in the fields, which disadvantage women in formal recruitment processes that require prior knowledge of a broad range of tasks. Further, informal recruitment processes are often carried out by male employees. Women across the region described gender discrimination that affects both their entry into the industry and their experience when employed.

The reasons for the higher representation of women workers in Honduras and Nicaragua are not entirely clear, but remain significant and may result from the presence of unions including women's secretariats that actively promote gender equity. It appears that there are two main contributing factors to these high numbers. Firstly, there is a strong presence of women's movements in both countries, second, there is a

high rate of men migrating from their native countries (where wages are particularly low) to other countries that offer better financial prospects, providing more opportunities for the employment of women. Many Nicaraguan men go to work in Costa Rica where wages are very much higher. Many Honduran men migrate to Belize or Guatemala where the wages are also somewhat higher than in their native country. Women are much less likely to migrate.

**Table 2: Estimated proportion of women employed in West and Central African banana exporting countries**

Cameroon	Cote d'Ivoire	Ghana
20%	11%	18%

*Source: Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on West and Central Africa, 2015*

When the numbers of employed men and women in all three countries are pooled across the region and the number of women as a percentage of all employees is calculated for the entire region, a figure of women making up 16.9% of the workforce is obtained.

As was the case for some of the countries in the Latin American region, it seems likely that patterns of migration play a part in accounting for these differences. In Cameroon, two Companies account for the vast majority of production (90 - 95%). CDC (The Cameroon Development Corporation) is located in the English speaking part of the country to the North of Limbé. This is a region where a number of closely related Bantu speaking tribal groups lived, the largest of which was the Bakweri (Ardener, E. 1969). When the CDC plantations were established the vast majority of workers recruited came from these local tribes. While there has been some migration into the region, the majority of the CDC workforce consists of local people. The pattern of local recruitment may partially account for the relatively high representation of women employed in the company at roughly 24%. The other main Company, a subsidiary of the French Company, Compagnie Fruitière, is primarily located in the French speaking zone and recruits more internal migrants from other parts of the French zone. It has a much lower level of women employed at roughly 11%. A third and much smaller Company, BOH Plantations Ltd, recruits locally and also has a much higher representation of women employed at 58%.

The most striking divergence from the regional average occurs in Cote d'Ivoire with just 11% of women employees. Since the 1950s the country's banana industry has relied heavily on migrant labour primarily from Burkina Faso but also from Mali and elsewhere. In the 1960s, it was estimated that 90% of plantation workers came from Burkina Faso (or Upper Volta as it was then) (Jean Rouch, OUP, 1969). Compagnie Fruitière is the main employer. Its plantations are mostly located some distance to the North of Abidjan, in the direction of Burkina. These plantations have very low levels of women employed, at 5%). On the other hand, 13% of the Elgin plantation workers, located in the southern coastal zone near the capital, are women. This is an area less reliant on migrant labour, and has a greater representation of women in its workforce, closer to the regional average. It is, therefore, not completely clear whether the low levels of women employed can be explained by migration patterns (where again women are less likely to migrate for work) or whether it is something to do with Compagnie Fruitière. However, the company has a policy of trying to increase women's employment, so it is unlikely to be explicable directly by any overt policy decisions or practices on its part.



**Table 3: Estimated proportion of women employed and female small-scale farmers in the Caribbean banana exporting countries**

Dominican Republic	Surinam	St. Lucia	St. Vincent	Dominica
12.5%	40%	45%	45%	45%

*Source: Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on the Caribbean, 2015*

It was not possible to obtain figures for the other regional producer, Belize. Furthermore, there is a lack of certainty on total employment figures in the industry for Dominican Republic and Surinam for reasons which are explained in the regional report. The figures for the three islands to the right of the table, collectively known as the Windward Islands, are likely to be reliable. Nevertheless, the uncertainty regarding the first two countries make it unwise to give a precise estimate for the representation of women employed across the whole region. Nevertheless, it is likely to be in the range between 35 and 40%.

The Dominican Republic (DR) is culturally similar to Latin America and although it is geographically located in the Caribbean, it could have been, with equal validity, considered to be a part of Latin America, as a banana exporting country, for the purposes of the Regional Report. Its overall pattern of women's employment is certainly consistent with this view, affirming the importance of cultural values as a factor in determining levels of women's participation in the industry. However, the DR's banana industry also has features that make it very different from other Latin American producers. The DR, like Latin America was conquered by the Spanish and has Spanish as its official language. Large tracts of its land were distributed to Spanish noblemen who set up extensive *Latifundia*, large farming estates, as in much of Latin America. It also went through a process of land redistribution following independence and similar to Guatemala it underwent intervention from the United States which attempted to reverse this redistribution. Nevertheless, in the long term much of the land was distributed in small plots. Although large plantations currently exist, there remain a large number of small plantations, including plots of less than 3 hectares.

Today, 12.5% of small-scale banana farmers in the DR are women. As discussed in the regional report, the sector is heavily dependent on Haitian migrant labour (the Labour Ministry estimates 66.3% overall, but figures for individual plantations can be as high as 80%). Amongst Dominican workers 20% are women but amongst the majority of Haitian migrant workers, the figure is only around 5%. The representation of women within the industry in Haiti appears to be anomalous for the region.

In the case of Surinam (a former Dutch colony), the 40% refers to women employed on substantial plantations, recruiting primarily from local communities. In the three Windward Islands the figure relates primarily to small-scale farmers who usually employ labour on harvest days. Furthermore, with recent setbacks to the industry, caused by a sequence of hurricanes, droughts and the recent infestation by Black Sigatoka destroying many farms, the employment of labour has fallen to an all-time low.

In spite of variations between countries, at times, it is possible to discern trends in whole regions, countries, as in the cases of Latin America and West and Central Africa. Nevertheless it is difficult to

generalise about small Caribbean countries which (apart from the three Windward Islands, which do share a great deal in common) have strikingly unique histories and are fundamentally different from each other.

In spite of this, it remains noticeable that in the Caribbean the levels of involvement of women, somewhere around 35% to 40%, are very much higher than they are in other two regions. 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. 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 lack of education and, in some cases, literacy levels.

Table 4 summarises the proportions of women working in the Banana Export Industries in the three regions.

**Table 4. Estimated proportion of women in the banana industries of the three regions**

Latin America	West Africa	Caribbean
12.5%	16.9%	35%-40%

*Source: figures compiled from Tables 1 – 3, p. 5-7 Compiled from Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on Latin America; Regional Report on the Caribbean; and Regional Report on West and Central Africa, 2015*

## **2. Roles allocated to women workers in the three regions**

There is a noticeable difference between the three regions regarding the attitudes of women's working capabilities within the industry. Throughout Latin America the general assumption seems to be that women are capable of fulfilling only a very limited range of tasks and these are most often tasks that are performed in the packing stations. In Ecuador and Colombia women were sometimes assigned to a single field task, different tasks in the two countries. In Nicaragua women might be assigned to either or both of these two field tasks.

On the other hand, in the three Windward Islands female small-scale farmers have reported to undertake an entire range of tasks themselves from field work to packing, even (employing hired help when workloads became unmanageable). Information on work roles could not be obtained from the other two (or three if counting Belize) exporting countries in the region; Surinam and the Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, it appears evident from the high representation of women employed on the Surinam plantations (at 40%) that women must be performing a substantial amount of work in the fields, away from the packing stations, since work in the pack houses accounts for only 25 – 30% of overall labour.

Typical roles carried out by women in the countries for which this information could be obtained are tabulated in Table 5, p. 10. This overview should not be considered authoritative for two reasons. First, the information has been provided by women trade union representatives, describing the situation on the

plantations where their members are employed. The fact that a trade union with a women's secretariat has been engaged in negotiation with the producer company suggests that conditions on these plantations are likely to be above industry standard. Second, there were inconsistencies between the information available from the different regions.

**Table 5. Typical roles carried out by women in the field and the packing stations by country**

	Ecuador *	Colombia	Guatemala	Honduras	Nicaragua	Windward Islands	Ghana	Cameroon	Ivory Coast
<b>Field</b>									
Fertiliser application		x			x	x	x	x	x
Maintenance	x				x	x		x	
Cleaning/weeding						x	x	x	x
Pruning						x	x	x	
Fruit care						x	x	x	
Snail picking						x		x	x
Nursery plant care						x		x	
Ribbon counting						x		x	x
Material prep.						x		x	x
Harvesting						x			
<b>Packing station</b>									
De-flowering	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sorting	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Selection	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Washing fruit	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Washing diapers			x			x	x	x	x
Washing bags	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Stickers	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Weighing fruit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Weighing trays	x	x	x	x	x				
Packing	x	x			x	x	x	x	
De-handing									
Post-harvest spraying	x		x	x	x		x		
Cleaning packing station	x	x	x	x	x		x		
Stacking boxes									
Box assembly									
Plant waste disposal									

**Source:** Compiled from *Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on Latin America; Regional Report on the Caribbean; and Regional Report on West and Central Africa, 2015*

\* Ecuador information from medium and large scale plantations

It may readily be seen from the table that assignment of work by gender in West Africa lies somewhere between the two extremes of Latin American practice (broadly confinement of women to packing stations), and the Windward Islands (where women perform all field and packing roles).

Ten discrete types of field work were identified during this study. In Cameroon, in addition to the men, women also perform all of these tasks, except for harvesting as it is considered the very heaviest task. The sequence of tasks begins when banana plants first send out a single 'pseudo-stem' which bears the fruit. Harvesting is then carried out by two-person teams. An individual climbs a ladder and cuts through the pseudo-stem with a single stroke from a machete. The second person takes the weight of the whole fruiting body on one shoulder and carries this directly to the packing station or, more frequently with the exception of small farms, to a cable way which transports the fruit to its destination. The weight of the fruit is considerable and men are usually considered to be more appropriate for this role. Nevertheless, from the experience reported in the Windward Islands, women can manage the task, if required to do so.

Looking at the overall picture, there are two main things stand out. First of all, as the experience of small-scale farmers in the Windward Islands demonstrates, women are capable of all the roles involved in banana production. Second, while this might be the case, there are marked differences as regards which roles are assigned to women in the three regions in practice. In Latin America, a women's role is almost exclusively confined to work in the packing stations. In West and Central Africa, women work in both the packing stations and the fields but in two of the three countries they are generally assigned less work in the fields than men. Moreover, in neither country in West and Central Africa are women involved in harvesting. However, in parts of the Caribbean, specifically the Windward Islands, they perform all roles, including harvesting. Later in this overview, an attempt will be made to understand these observable differences.

The Ecuador case study (included as an annex to the Latin America regional report) allowed a more detailed analysis and revealed that there are two kinds of roles where women are less likely to be employed including tasks that are more physically demanding, and more technical tasks, often located in the packing station. Many of the women interviewed expressed that they felt capable of undertaking a broader range of tasks than were permitted. The tasks they identified include weighing the fruit, making clusters and, in some cases, packing the fruit into boxes. Some of the company management representatives interviewed expressed the view that in their experience, women employees are often more reliable with greater attention to detail than their male colleagues. Several companies that participated in the case study had specific policies aimed at promoting women's employment or valuing women's work. It would be useful to work with these companies to gain a more detailed understanding of their policies to increase women's employment, and the impacts of these policies. This could be shared with other producers through the production of one, or several, case studies.

## **2.1 Roles for pregnant and nursing mothers**

In most of the industry it is broadly acknowledged that pregnant and nursing mothers are potentially vulnerable and that they should not be exposed to either work that is considered too heavy or, as far as possible, to agrochemicals.

The following roles or 'light duties' were identified as being given specifically to pregnant and nursing mothers (the field tasks are not undertaken by women in Latin America except where indicated by an asterisk\* when they do apply to Nicaragua):

- fertiliser application\*
- de-leafing\*

- gathering of plastic waste
- material preparations (such as ribbons and rubbers)
- cleaning
- snail picking
- deflowering
- selection
- weighing
- packing

However, it appears that in most cases, these tasks are only allocated to women when they are at the later stage of their pregnancy. Pregnant women seem to carry out normal duties until the end of their pregnancy and immediately on their return to work after the birth, whilst still breastfeeding. Lack of attention to the need to rotate pregnant women onto different duties was identified as a problem particularly in Ghana and Cameroon (information was not available for Côte d'Ivoire). Women trade unionists in Ecuador and Honduras confirmed the practice of companies sacking women who become pregnant rather than fulfilling their legal duties relating to maternity leave. COLSIBA, the Latin American coordinating body for agro-industrial trade unions, regard this practice as widespread on plantations where there is no trade union to educate women about their legal rights and support them in cases of unfair dismissal. This practice, while and where it continues, creates an incentive for women to hide the early stages of pregnancy from their employers for as long as possible, meaning that they then cannot request rotation onto tasks appropriate to their condition.

A number of the light duties allocated to pregnant and nursing women involve contact with toxic agrochemicals, notably the application of chemicals and the collecting and washing of bags, commonly impregnated with the insecticide Chlorpyrifos<sup>1</sup> (a class II toxin, according to the WHO's system of classification). This is of particular concern in the context of widespread reports of poor provision of personal protective equipment in much of the industry. Such Health and Safety failures almost certainly put mothers and their unborn (and born in the case of nursing mothers) children at risk of serious negative health impacts, including possibly birth defects.

Pregnant women are not given tasks which directly expose them to chemicals in Honduras, Colombia and in most of the larger scale Ecuadorian companies included in the research (nor breastfeeding women in the case of the latter). In Guatemala and Nicaragua, pregnant women are either not expected to work at all in the last three months of pregnancy or they may be rotated to lighter tasks. While this kind of consideration is undoubtedly desirable, it may have unexpected consequences in some cases. The need to treat pregnant and nursing mothers with greater care may make some employers more reticent to employ women. In some countries employers take steps to try to avoid the particular responsibilities which they might face when women employees become pregnant. In Colombia and Ecuador, for example, in some plantations women report having to take pregnancy tests before securing employment or to show a medical certificate, proving medical sterilisation.

## 2.2 Opportunities for women in administrative and management positions

Although the scope of this study did not include the employment of women in administrative and managerial positions in the various companies and countries of production, it was possible to gather some information regarding these roles. In numerous cases women carry out roles such as those of secretaries, accountants, human resources officers and managers. Novamerc S.A., the only exporting company in

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout Latin American and West Africa, chlorpyrifos-treated bags are widely used to protect banana plants from insects and to fulfil product standards.. Reported health impacts of exposure to this organophosphate include suicidal thoughts, respiratory problems and birth defects ([www.bananalink.org.uk](http://www.bananalink.org.uk)).



Ecuador to be founded and managed exclusively by women, is an exception in the world's biggest banana export industry where usually only a few women supervisors or managers are employed.

Although not commonplace elsewhere in the industry, the opportunities for women in Africa also included packing station and plantation supervision. Workers believed that because women carry out both packing plant and field tasks in Africa they have the knowledge and experience of the production process to work their way up to roles that require this broader knowledge of company operations.

Reports from the majority of countries included in these reports, however (although not necessarily from all companies within each country) suggest that men are regularly chosen over women for administrative and managerial positions. Women regularly submit applications for these jobs but very few are successful. This was considered to be both as a result of general gender discrimination within male-dominated companies and the fact that in many countries women often enter employment with low literacy levels and a lack of confidence in their abilities, which is exacerbated by poorer access to workplace education and training.

### **3. Gender and pay**

In all three regions, women banana workers almost invariably earn considerably less than their male co-workers. In Cameroon, for example, on average women earn 15.9 % less than men. This disparity increases to 27.6 % during the peak work season (V. Larsen & S. Watkins, 2014). In Ghana, a significant disparity was also found between the pay of men and women on two banana plantations (O'Hanlon B., 2014). There are two possible explanations for such disparities.

In a limited number of cases, women were found to have been paid less to do the same work as men. In the Windward Islands and in Ecuador, for example, women casual labourers receive lower wages than men for a day's work (although in the latter for different tasks). The Ecuador research revealed cases where women employees are paid less than men for the same tasks on medium to large plantations.

Differential rewards for performing the same tasks are nevertheless fairly uncommon. As previously mentioned, throughout Latin America and to a lesser extent in Africa and the Caribbean, women mostly (indeed almost invariably in the former region) work in pack houses. Work in these pack houses is often paid by results, particularly in Latin America. Nevertheless, whether packing processes are facilitated by conveyor belts or not, it is difficult to disentangle, assess and appropriately reward individual stages on the basis of productivity agreements. In the packing plant, unprocessed bunches of bananas come in at one end and boxes of bananas come out of the other. The only way of assessing productivity is simply by counting the number of boxes which are loaded onto the waiting trucks. This means that all the workers undertaking a particular task, whether women or men, will be rewarded equally for a productive day or suffer equally when, for whatever reason, the day has been unproductive.

Where workers undertake field work, the situation is slightly different. Again, there are often bonuses for productivity. However, in field work, teams are usually small. In the case of harvesting, the work is carried out by two-person teams but for other work the teams tend to be bigger on substantial plantations. It is usually the team that is rewarded for high productivity, not the individual. When men believe, rightly or wrongly, that a woman's rates of work will be slower than the rates they can achieve, this gives them an economically rational reason for discouraging women from being on their team.

Therefore the most common reason for disparities in pay, is not that women are paid at different rates (in most cases) \ rather the tasks that women are assigned are almost invariably less well rewarded than the tasks which are given exclusively or at least preferentially to men.

Tasks which are perceived as being more technically difficult or physically demanding are both better paid and are almost always allocated to male workers. Furthermore, during periods of high or peak production there are often more opportunities for overtime in field work, and this is often the prerogative of men, particularly, as has been seen in Latin America.

When Latin American research participants were asked whether they would like to undertake the tasks normally allocated to men, a clear distinction arose between the different kinds of work. Opinion was divided as to the heavy work in the fields, with around half the women saying no or expressing concern about health and safety impacts. However, many women expressed the desire to undertake the lighter duties from which they are excluded on the grounds that the tasks are too technically difficult for female employees.

This means that socially mediated perceptions, on the part of managers, supervisors and indeed co-workers, as regards the gender specificity of particular work tasks, has a double impact on women. First, as seen above, where women are perceived as unable or less capable of performing particular tasks, they will have fewer opportunities to gain employment on banana plantations. Second, even when they are able to find employment, it is most likely to involve tasks which are perceived as being easier and their work will usually be less well rewarded as a consequence. Therefore, women are likely to either not have access to work or else to have to work equally long hours as men but for considerably less money.

#### **4. Occupational Health, Safety and Environment for women**

Many of the health and safety concerns expressed by women workers, their representatives and by female small holders are shared by both men and women involved in production work in the banana industry. In the case of aerial spraying of pesticides, the risks also affect the communities living near the plantations. Nonetheless, occupational health, safety and environment (OSHE) is an area that requires a gender perspective. There are gendered impacts to some health and safety risks and problems, predominantly or exclusively affecting women including the health risk posed by agrochemical exposure to foetal development during pregnancy.

This overview has already described how the physical differences between men and women are one reason for the gendered allocation of tasks in most parts of the industry, and the exclusion of women from field work that is the norm in Latin American production. There is a clear need for differentiation between the sexes regarding the demands of physical labour. ILO Recommendation number 128 establishes the maximum permissible weight to be carried by one worker, differentiating between men and women. In some countries the Labour Code makes specific provisions for women. For example, in Ecuador a limit is established for the maximum weight considered safe for a woman to bear. The current division of tasks in banana production varies between regions, countries and, indeed, companies. Further research led by workers, trade union leaders and small holders is needed to consider the OSHE implications of women's participation in work on the fields if work is organised in a way that requires all field workers to undertake the more physically demanding tasks.

The triple working day of women means there is a gendered impact to the health issues resulting from excessively long working days engaged in physical work. Women, in comparison to men, work to a greater extent in the domestic economy both before and after their day engaged in the banana export industry, and therefore suffer higher levels of stress and exhaustion. This is highlighted in a training resource produced by Honduran trade union FESTAGRO (FESTAGRO, 2015). Some of the physical health impacts are also specific to women. For example, packing station workers often spend 10 to 12 hours standing and engaged in repetitive movement. The West and Central African regional report found that women

associate abdominal pains and irregular menstruation with these packing plant working requirements. Regular breaks or rotation to a range of tasks are both relevant OSHE management strategies that are rarely employed in the banana industry.

Working with pesticides presents a range of OSHE hazards. Some of the multiple links between chemical exposure and negative health impacts have been documented. Moreover, the ILO, has cited Inter Press Service agency reports of research proving that chemical substances and other toxins in the environment have a “particularly devastating effect on women's health” (Hurst, P & Kirby, P. 2004), Therefore, women are more vulnerable than men to the risks associated with the contact of pesticides routinely used in banana production, especially on medium to large monoculture plantations.

There is considerable scientific evidence demonstrating that the chronic effects of contact with pesticides include reproductive health disorders in both women and men. Many of the pesticides routinely used in the banana export industry are suspected endocrine disrupters. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognizes that pregnant women and children are more vulnerable to the negative health impacts of pesticide use. WHO guidance on the safe use of pesticides stipulates both that “pregnant women should not apply pesticides” and that “particular care should be taken to determine appropriate re-entry times for pregnant women, infants and small children” (WHO, 2012). As described earlier in this overview, while there may be general acceptance of the principle that pregnant women should not undertake tasks that require immediate contact with pesticides, in practice these restrictions are unlikely to be applied until the final months of pregnancy, if at all.

During the field research conducted in Ecuador, a case was identified of a small group of women developing cancer of the uterus after reusing chemically impregnated plastic bags as aprons when they were not given sufficient protective equipment by their employer. Workers in this study also attributed a colleague's miscarriage to her work with post-harvest chemicals. Increased incidence of miscarriage, stillbirth and birth defects are all reported by women exposed to chemicals in banana production (Wendel de Joode et al. 2014). Moreover, toxins from the mother pass through the breast milk to her newborn child (Oaskarsson, A et al, 1995).

Lastly, sexual harassment is a human rights as well as a sex discrimination issue (ILO, 1984) with health and safety impacts that are predominantly suffered by women. Sexual harassment was described as a problem by women workers and their representatives across the West and Central African and Latin American banana producing countries, and women's 'reaction' to this treatment was identified as a factor in job discrimination. The scope of the research in the Caribbean did not provide any information on this issue, although high levels of violence against women in the Dominican Republic do not suggest that women workers and small holders in this area are less likely to suffer violence, harassment, and bullying in the workplace. Sexual harassment can be damaging to women's well-being, can cause stress, provoke fear, and can lower a women's quality of (working) life.

Challenging sexual harassment requires company policies and procedures including both personnel policies that promote a respectful working environment, and grievance and disciplinary procedures for when problems arise. The research process revealed only one example of a policy specifically aimed to end sexual harassment. In Ecuador, Guatemala and Colombia, independent trade unions gave examples of successfully supporting female members to bring grievances against men guilty of sexual harassment. However, the women's secretary of FESTAGRO in Honduras stated that it was rare that a company would punish the perpetrator in a case of sexual harassment and this view was echoed by some participants in the Ecuador research. Women working on plantations where there was no independent trade union described a feeling of powerlessness at the impunity enjoyed by men who engage in sexual harassment. Several examples of colleagues were given who, despite the lack of alternative employment opportunities, had decided that their only choice was to leave their job.

## 5. Problems which particularly impact on women

Common challenges for both women workers and small producers in all regions include:

- The 'double' or 'triple burden' as salaried worker, home maker/domestic worker and carer for family members (plus extra responsibilities in the case of union representatives)
- Lack of access to childcare
- Sexual harassment
- Other forms of unequal treatment and discrimination based on gender
- Lack of education and training

These problems are fairly self-explanatory and require little further elaboration. Nevertheless, some comments will be made on two of the issues in the subsections which follow.

There are of course many other issues that have been highlighted by the various women workers involved in this study, but many of these are of common to both female and male workers – such as excessive working hours, non-payment of living wages and inadequate transport to work. The regional reports look into these issues and the specific concerns reported by women, but here the focus of the analysis will be on the issues listed above which are faced uniquely or most strongly by women workers.

### 5.1 Access to childcare

Lack of childcare provision is a problem facing parents and carers employed throughout the global industry, although responsibility for raising children (and thus childcare provision) is seen predominantly or exclusively as women's work in all three regions that research was conducted in. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that child care was consistently raised as a priority by women research participants. Having to leave children alone, in the care of non-trusted others or young siblings, causes psychological stress, particularly for single mothers. It affects the psychological and social development of children, and some respondents linked the pressures facing single mothers to delinquency and other social problems in their communities. Childcare is also an issue for employers. For example, in Cameroon, almost 90% of workers with children had been unable to attend work due to lack of childcare at least once in the last 12 months (Larsen V. & Watkins S., 2014).

In both Ghana and Cameroon employers are planning the provision of plantation-based childcare provision. However, in Cameroon, 95% of women interviewed would prefer to receive an allowance instead of bringing their children to a childcare facility at the plantation. Dangerous transport to the workplace and regular aerial spraying of agrochemicals means many parents do not believe banana plantations are safe places for their children (Larsen V. & Watkins S., 2014).

National legislation commonly allows for breastfeeding breaks in the working day as recommended in ILO Convention 183 on Maternity Protection. For example, workers are entitled to take an hour in both Ghana and Cameroon. However, the lack of workplace childcare provision makes it impossible for women to access their children and companies have not invested in the logistics properly transport women between the plantations and their homes. In some cases this would be further difficult to implement as some women as far as an hour commute to plantations. Although some women may have the option of finishing work early, the limited transport options available often mean they would have to wait for the same bus as other workers, thus removing much of the benefit potentially derived from earlier leave. This was reported to be an issue in Ecuador where breast feeding mothers have a shorter working day of six hours. In Cameroon, FAWU (the Fako Agricultural Workers Union) has identified a practice devised by a woman office worker in one company enabling breastfeeding women to take the sixth working day off in

lieu of nursing breaks. This practice is being shared as a potential model for other employers to adopt (Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report for Latin America, 2015).

## 5.2. Lack of education and training

A recurrent theme throughout all regions was the need for women to receive adequate training enabling them to have greater chance of secure employment and income generation. Women family farmers in the Windward Islands perceive that '*low literacy, education and training*' limit their diversification opportunities (Peters K. 2014), giving them little choice but to remain in the industry even as their incomes derived from banana production fall (following a series of natural disasters combined with a new disease threat from Black Sigatoka, all of which have conspired to precipitate acute reductions in levels of production and therefore in small farmers' incomes). Female small-scale producers want training to enhance their skills in the use of new technologies for production, processing and marketing of bananas. As described above, informal recruitment procedures coupled with lack of training for women wanting to gain work on medium or large plantations is one factor contributing to the low levels of women's employment.

In Nicaragua, a representative of the trade union FETDECH described that the union and the company have reached an agreement about training. The company does not provide training to employees. Workers participate in training provided by the trade union during their paid working day. Unions throughout Africa and Latin America as well as the IUF (the Global Union Federation, to which most of these unions belong) offer a wide range of training opportunities including those aimed at educating, empowering and building the self-esteem of women. Examples include the IUF Africa Women's Project, as well as many local and national initiatives, such as the programmes of SINTRAINAGRO's Women's Department in Colombia and FENACLE's women's programme in Ecuador<sup>2</sup>. The research conducted in Ecuador includes direct testimonies of women workers who were able to challenge unequal treatment and harassment in the workplace as a result of this training. Training for women is also important to support their full participation in the activity and decision-making of their unions.

The Ecuador case study also discusses examples of where company investment in training on topics related to human relations and behaviour in the workplace have been appreciated by workers and have led to improvements in the treatment of women.

The need for more education is not one which affects only current generations of women workers. It is also a generational issue, in which there is a danger that (if no remedial measures are taken to break the pattern) poor education and low expectations get passed on from one generation to the next. This is a matter of concern to a great number of women and in single parent households, where women are left to worry about their children's futures alone. In most, if not all banana exporting countries, the majority of single heads of household are women. Their lack of access to work and, often, poverty pay mean they cannot always afford school fees, meaning that their children are sometimes unable to attend school.

This pattern appeared to be of greatest concern for women in Cameroon and the Windward Islands. The headmistress of a primary school in a banana company accommodation camp in Cameroon, for example, commented on families not being able to afford the examination fees enabling them to enter secondary school. She concluded that: *"it's not easy for children born in the camps to escape poverty. The chances are they will become plantation workers like their parents"* (Labouchere H. & Skolidou D. 2012). Yet, ironically, the women interviewed in Cameroon for this research often cited that a primary reason for seeking regular employment in the banana plantations was precisely in order to enable their children to gain an education and therefore improved employment prospects.

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2 <http://www.fenacle.org.ec>



## **6. Innovations towards Decent Work and sustainable livelihoods for women in banana production**

The regional reports outline a number of innovations by companies, trade unions and producer associations which could provide some important lessons for the global industry. These key innovations relate to:

- Targeted recruitment campaigns, company policies and clauses in collective agreements to increase women's employment
- Education and training - for women workers and their families
- Advances in childcare and breastfeeding provisions
- Healthcare provision - for women workers and their families
- Advances for women workers negotiated through collective bargaining
- Gender training and the promotion of women's leadership
- Company training on topics related to human relations and respectful behaviour in the workplace and policies aimed at ending sexual harassment

Rather than repeating the details of all these initiatives here, two initiatives, which could potentially be useful or influential at an industry-wide level, will be highlighted. The recommendations section will then consider potential ways for industry-wide advances to be made, drawing on these experiences.

### **6.1. Women's Committee of the Chiquita/ IUF/ COLSIBA Regional Agreement**

In April 2011 a Women's Committee was created as part of the Chiquita/IUF/COLSIBA Regional Agreement, which aims to promote and strengthen a safe working environment (free of harassment, exclusion and inequality), conducive to performance improvements and personal and professional developments for women workers.

The multi-stakeholder approach seeks to address problems through actively engaging both management level staff and women workers. The focus of activities is three-fold: strengthening company policies on working conditions for women in company farms; developing capacity building programmes for women; and, developing proposals for increasing women's employment opportunities.

The issue of sexual harassment was identified as a key priority, and a specific clause on the issue was agreed by the committee in March 2013 and will be included as standard in all future collective bargaining agreements negotiated by company-owned plantations. COLSIBA affiliates representing workers on Chiquita plantations then began educating their members about the clause and Chiquita management began to work internally to inform local management about the clause and develop a code of conduct that prohibits sexual harassment. (Cooper A. & Quesada V., 2014)

A pilot project has been initiated in Panama, which was identified as having the lowest level of women's employment on Chiquita owned plantations within the region. This project is being carried out by the parties to the Regional Agreement in collaboration with local union SITRAIBANA and is entitled '*Developing training modules to promote the equality of opportunities, respect and well-being within the workplace and community*', as detailed in '*Annex: Women's Committee of the Chiquita/IUF/COLSIBA Regional Agreement*'.

## 8.2. Fairtrade International (FLO) certification

Fairtrade sets out, among other objectives, to have a beneficial gender impact on women's representation in the banana industry. In most agricultural sectors, it appears to be successful in this respect. In the case of the banana industry, however, the position is less clear.

For production in all agricultural sectors *"one in four Fairtrade producers is a woman, and on plantations this figure is even higher, with women making up 47 percent of hired workers in Fairtrade."*<sup>3</sup> However, in the banana sector only 13% of small-scale farmers and workers involved in Fairtrade are women (FLO 2013). As this figure does not seem to be significantly higher than normal industry figures (as shown in Table 1), and in the absence of specific information on percentages at country and producer level, it is difficult to establish the extent to which Fairtrade certification really does make a difference in women's representation within the industry at present. The regional reports highlight a few key cases where FLO-certified plantations have higher women's representation rates, for example, the VREL plantation in Ghana (28%) and Fairtrade small producers in the Windward Islands (45%).

There are some specific clauses relating to gender discrimination and women's capacity building within Fairtrade standards both for small-scale producers and for hired labour which are worth referencing here. In particular, some recent advances have been made in the latest Fairtrade International (FLO) standards for hired labour produced in 2014 (FLO 2014).

- Standard 2.2.5

*'Your company must give special attention to the empowerment of women by means of adequate training, capacity building, guidance, encouragement and assistance as necessary.'*

- Standard 2.2.6 (new in 2014)

*Your company must undertake activities to achieve equity in the workplace. This includes specifically addressing the employment and promotion of suitably qualified people from disadvantaged and minority groups.*

- Standard 2.2.9 to be implemented by year 6 of certification

*Your company must provide support for crèche facilities for your workers' children either inside or outside your premises*

While Fairtrade has not yet shown itself to be particularly exemplary with regards to the conditions for women workers, specifically in the banana industry, it does have a proven track record of success in other sectors. The recent attention given to reforming the standards for hired labour and, in particular, the inclusion of new clauses which pertain specifically to women's employment, bode well for the future. Fairtrade standards have built into them a notion of continuous development and it is to be hoped that this notion will bear fruit in the long-term. To provide a concrete example: where farms have been Fairtrade certified for some period of time, although under Standard 2.2.9 crèche facilities are not required until Year 6, a farm which has already been certified for 5 years will come under immediate pressure to introduce such facilities, if they have not already been established. On the other hand, where a farm is newly certified, the producer will not be under serious pressure from the Fairtrade certifiers to set up such facilities for a number of years to come.

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3 <http://www.fairtrade.net/>

## Conclusions

It is interesting to note that when employers and women workers were interviewed in Ecuador, the main reason which employers gave for there being more men than women in the banana industry was that there was *'less interest from women'*, whereas women workers responding to the same inquiry said that it was *'because companies don't want to hire more women'*. The recommendations section below suggests ways of addressing this misunderstanding.

It is also clear from the evidence reviewed above that women are, at least in principle, capable of performing all the tasks which need to be performed in banana production. In the most extreme case, the Windward Islands, women small farmers report that they perform all the tasks themselves, although they also delegate when they need help. In BOH Plantations Ltd in Cameroon, 58% of workers are women and in Surinam, 40% of plantation workers are women. This demonstrated that, whether on a small farm or on substantial plantation, women are performing tasks both in the packing stations and in the field. In Latin America however, the gender perception is that, on the whole, women should only work in packing stations, even though some exceptions can be found. This inevitably suggests that there is a question which needs to be addressed:

***“Why does there exist such differences between regions and sometimes between countries within these regions, in the representation of women employed and the type of work considered to be appropriate for women?”***

The answer to this question is not entirely straightforward but appears to involve at least 2 elements:

First of all, there appear to be deep seated beliefs about women's capabilities that have roots in historical and cultural experiences. Section 3 above reviewed these experiences briefly. The banana export trade has been implicated in the history of conflict in Latin America and has combined with other elements of Latino culture and religious belief to produce a social milieu which is considered 'macho' where it is common for women to face discrimination including the exclusion in what is perceived as a highly-dominated male work environment. In banana producing regions, producer companies are often the main source of formal employment in the local economy. As previously mentioned, women are, therefore, normally confined to the pack house, where they can be both controlled and, perceived as being, protected by male supervisors.

In West and Central Africa, the cultural background is rather different. Most tribal cultures are paternalistic but women are still given working opportunities due to the tradition of matrilineal succession. In this context, women usually had sole responsibility for managing family plots of land (bringing in men occasionally to do the heaviest work) and, in many cases they also established roles as independent traders. In this context, it is not surprising that when plantations were established women were already seen as potentially capable of performing a wide variety of tasks, including field work, which traditionally had been always been their responsibility.

The Caribbean has had a history of slavery working on plantations. In the context of slavery, it is plausible that men have lost a considerable amount of their traditional prestige, which would have been associated with their capacity to protect the women and children of the tribe against incursions by their traditional tribal enemies. Men had clearly failed in this respect, when whole tribes were taken into slavery and, with this failure, the source of their traditional paternalistic power would have been undermined. With the end of slavery and the attainment of independence, society had to be recreated anew and one element of this renewal was the breaking up of estates and the redistribution of land. Cultural tendencies which pre-dated slavery and which derived from West African traditions may have reasserted themselves where

women appear to have rediscovered their ancient roles as both farmers and traders (Farquhar I., 2012; Leigh Fermor P.L., 1950).

This explanation is clearly somewhat speculative but it is at least broadly consistent with the data on assignment of roles in the different regions, with the data on overall levels of employment of women in banana farms, and in the case of Latin America, with the interpretations of the situation given by women workers themselves.

There are, however, two sets of anomalies which appear to be inconsistent with this historical and cultural explanation. If the explanation were true, it might be expected that the level of employment in West and Central Africa would be rather higher than it is, probably more or less equidistant between the two extremes of Latin America, where the global level of women's employment is 12.5% and the Caribbean where it is in the order of 35 – 40%. It might be expected that the level of women's employment might be somewhere, roughly in the middle, between 20% and 27.5%, for example. In practice, the regional figure for West and Central Africa is higher than the regional figure for Latin America but only at 17.4%.

Furthermore, there are individual countries which do not fit the pattern in all three regions. In Latin America, Honduras and Nicaragua have unexpectedly high representation of women in the industry whilst Colombia is particularly low at just 7%. In West Africa, the figure for Cote d'Ivoire is not only low for the region at 11% but it is also amongst the lowest figures for all the countries under consideration in this report. In the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic has an unexpectedly figure for the region at only 12.5%. This is to be expected with broad cultural generations across entire regions, however there appears to be some other second factor at work. Moreover, patterns of migration appear to be a strong influence on women's levels of employment. The decision to leave home and to migrate to another country to work on a plantation is unlikely to be easy for anyone. However, it is disproportionately difficult for women to leave behind family responsibilities and in particular children. In practice, the vast majority of such migrations within the banana industry have been taken by men.

Looking at the individual countries mentioned immediately above, patterns of migration have influenced women's employment in two ways. First, in the case of Honduras and Nicaragua, men have often left in order to work in other countries that offer better wages and prospects. In doing so, they have left behind a relative shortage of workers, which has opened up a corresponding opportunity for the employment of women. In Cote d'Ivoire and the Dominican Republic however, high levels of migration into the countries (leading to some plantations being staffed by as many as 80% migrants) have not led to the same circumstances, where the representation of women employed in the industry remains low.

Not only are the anomalies in individual countries resolved when migration is factored in but so is the lower than expected figure for women's employment in West Africa. If the large plantations of Compagnie Fruitière in Cote D'Ivoire, where there is considerable migration from the north of the country, from Burkina Faso, Mali and beyond, are removed from the regional calculation, a much greater representation of women employed is obtained for the region. Furthermore, the CDC plantations that have traditionally recruited primarily from local populations where women represent 24% of those employed, which is the exact middle range that might have been expected for the region had the cultural analysis been correct.

Of course, such an analysis is very difficult to prove and must remain speculative. Regardless, there is clearly scope for employers to involve women workers and their trade unions in reassessing current division of tasks and in questioning the extent to which these divisions are based on real physical imperatives or whether they are based on cultural assumptions, habit or working culture. Indeed, there is scope to question whether or not they can and should be revised. The possible benefits of employing women, who are perceived by some employers in Ecuador, for example, as being more responsible and

reliable than their male colleagues, often showing a greater attention to detail, should also be borne in mind.

It is also evident that reproductive rights need to be respected in the workplace and that pregnancy should not be used as an opportunity to exclude or dismiss women by employers who regard maternity leave and other provisions as an unwanted cost to productivity.

Increasing women's employment is not necessarily always an end in itself, however. Higher proportions of women's employment have often been associated with lower wage rates, more precarious work and temporary contracts. It is clear that women aspire to 'Decent Work' opportunities where their fundamental rights, in the home and the workplace are respected. Such rights have been enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>4</sup> (to which all countries in the research are signatories. These countries have agreed to implement the rights of working women as well as to take practical steps to help women claim those rights, to the following effects: that women should have an equal right to apply for any paid job and to be treated fairly when looking for training and promotion; that a woman should receive maternity leave when necessary; that she should be paid equally for doing the same work, but should also receive the same pay for different work which is of equal value to her employer; and that there is a duty to educate and encourage change in family life towards shared responsibilities in the home.

The research summarised in this overview has had very limited scope to understand the situation of female small holders. Further investigation and analysis is undoubtedly required. However, some very broad observations can be made. The female small holders from Ecuador and the Windward Islands who participated in the research process expressed the following concerns:

- Lower wages for female casual labourers compared to men;
- Lack of access to training and education, affecting participation in associations that represent them as producers;
- Concerns regarding child care and maternity rights;
- In Ecuador, women also complained of unequal treatment and gender-based harassment.

While many of the concerns of female small holders are aligned with women employed on larger plantations and their fundamental rights as enshrined in CEDAW are the same, yet their livelihoods are structured in a fundamentally different way. So too are their relationships to other actors in the international supply chain and in the national economy, including government agencies and ministries. The recommendations section which follows focuses less on how to promote improvements in the livelihoods of female small holders as compared to women workers.

The female small holders who participated in this research, like the women employees on plantations, contribute to two economies – the market economy of international trade, and the domestic economy where children are born and raised to become the next generation of workers, producers and consumers. Recognition of the socio-economic importance of the multiple work-loads that women undertake is a necessary starting point for responding to the challenges women face in any part of the global banana industry.

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4 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>



## **8. Recommendations towards the provision of Decent Work and sustainable livelihoods for women in the global banana industry**

The list of recommendations to follow provides possible strategies and actions for advancing towards the provision of Decent Work and sustainable livelihoods for women in the global banana industry.

The recommendations are intended for discussion at the Third Conference of the World Banana Forum, and the Second World Banana Forum Global Women's Meeting, which will be held in the days immediately prior to the Conference. Participants may also wish to consider recommendations to their national governments that the World Banana Forum could support.

### *Recommendations for Multi-Stakeholder action within the World Banana Forum*

Enable women in production (employed workers and small holders) from different export regions to meet and discuss issues affecting them, in order to learn from each other and develop shared strategies at a global level.

Enable and encourage women in production to discuss their experiences with other women who have influence at other stages of the supply chain.

Conduct analysis on the socio-economic impact of women's low participation in the banana industry for communities in regions where it is the main source of formal employment. Both Colombia and Ecuador would be important case studies, the former for the unusually low levels of women's employment, the latter for the importance of the banana industry to a country where, in 2013, 92% of the land in 3 provinces was dedicated to banana production (MAGAP, 2014).

Conduct more detailed investigations into the situation of female small holders, including an analysis of how the livelihoods of women producers can best be safeguarded and strengthened through multi-stakeholder action, and how women can be supported to participate equally and take leadership roles in their producer associations.

Facilitate a process for company and trade union representatives to collaborate to develop guidance on the safe employment of pregnant women and nursing mothers in banana production, including clear delineation of appropriate tasks and strategies for workforce organisation. This guidance can be incorporated into company OSHE management plans.

Promote policies and standards that address issues of concern to women in banana production and enable multi-stakeholder sharing of best practices, specific recommendations include:

- Produce case studies to share the best practices and experience of the medium sized companies in Ecuador that have policies aimed specifically at promoting women's employment and valuing women's work.
- Carry out research on the productivity benefits of employing women in specific roles often undertaken by men, both in the packing station and on the plantation, as identified by women workers and their representatives.
- Produce case studies of where mature industrial relations between producer companies, and trade unions which have a women's secretariat, have enabled the companies to address issues of concern linked to women's employment, for example gender-based harassment in the workplace, or OSHE and women's reproductive health.

- Monitor the impact of the Chiquita / IUF / COLSIBA Regional Agreement for women workers on Chiquita owned farms and in the Chiquita supply chain, including the Panama Pilot project and the clause on sexual harassment.
- Monitor the impact of the implementation of gender-specific aspects of the Fairtrade International Hired Labour Standards.
- Share learning from the Fairtrade Foundation calling for businesses, governments, NGOs and other agencies to support and incentivise producer organisations to address gender equality, including the relation to business and development outcomes (Fairtrade Foundation, 2015)
- Support and validate continued women-led programmes aimed at empowering women workers and small holders to challenge unequal treatment and harassment. Share best practice of successful initiatives and facilitate exchange of experiences.
- Share examples of government policies that have had a positive impact for women workers and women small holders.
- Continue research into the situation of women working in production in the banana industry, with particular input from national and multi-national companies. Include analysis of the existence of gender-specific and gender-sensitive policies, and the implementation and monitoring of these policies. Priority focus areas should be decided in consultation with the Women's Secretariats of the independent trade unions representing women workers.

#### *Recommendations for Producer Companies*

Actively promote gender balance in the company at all levels:

- Run targeted recruitment campaigns that encourage applications from female candidates for production work;
- Ensure systematic technical skills training for all workers, in order to promote gender equity as well as ensuring that all employees work productively and safely and develop knowledge of a range of functions and tasks;
- Re-evaluate established gendered division of tasks with the aim of increasing women's participation in a broader range of production activities;
- Take active measures to redress the gender imbalance at supervisory level and support women's leadership.

Ensure systematic training in occupational health, safety and environment for all workers, including women's reproductive health and safety. Ensure that all workers have, and use, adequate Personal Protective Equipment.

Strengthen the capacity of joint workplace Health and Safety Committees, ensuring the direct and active participation of women workers.

Introduce gender-sensitive policies on: safe employment of pregnant and nursing women as well as policies that target sexual harassment, with the enforcement of an official complaints procedure. Ensure that pregnant and breast feeding women are properly rotated to avoid inappropriate physically demanding tasks or tasks that involve direct contact with pesticides or chemicals, including in the first months of pregnancy.

Display information on about women's rights related to maternity and breast feeding as established by national law, and actively encourage women to report pregnancies to the company as early as possible.

Provide human relations training to improve the atmosphere in the workplace, including challenging gender-based harassment.

### *Recommendations for Small-scale Producers and their Associations*

Ensure ongoing training in occupational health, safety and environment, including women's reproductive health and safety. Ensure that producers and workers have, and use, adequate Personal Protective Equipment.

Ensure that pregnant and breast feeding women do not undertake physically demanding tasks or tasks that involve direct contact with pesticides or chemicals, including in the first months of pregnancy. Explore strategies, for example the development of mutual support networks, to enable women producers to safeguard their health and that of their unborn/ new born child during pregnancy and breast feeding.

Provide technical training for female small-scale producers to enhance their skills, especially in the use of new technologies for production, processing and the marketing of bananas (Peters, K. 2014)

Take active measures to promote the full participation of female small holders in producer association decision making, including the provision of leadership training.

Create and strengthen Women's Committees to ensure that women-only spaces exist to identify and put gender issues on the agenda.

Provide gender relations awareness raising sessions for men and women producers, including discussion of the socio-economic importance of domestic and care work as well as the discussion on challenging gender-based harassment.

### *Recommendations for certification bodies & retailers who source directly*

Include equitable employment policies in standards and norms as a high priority. Actively monitor levels of women's employment among certified/ supplier producer companies and associations.

Include gender-sensitive policies in standards and norms as a high priority, including specific policies on: safe employment of pregnant and nursing women; and, on sexual harassment, with the enforcement of an official complaints procedure. Actively monitor practice of certified producer companies and associations in implementing their policies.

### *Recommendations for Trade Unions*

Provide training for women members on topics including: labour, gender and reproductive rights; self-esteem; leadership; the socio-economic importance of domestic and care work; and the gender division of household roles.

Provide gender relations awareness raising sessions for men and women workers, including discussion of the socio-economic importance of domestic and care work in the home as well as the discussion on challenging gender-based harassment.

Provide leadership training to ensure the active participation of women in organisation structures and in company and supply chain negotiations, including promoting 'the incorporation of women into the committees negotiating Collective Bargaining Agreements' (COLSIBA, 2012).

Create and strengthen Women's Committees to ensure that women-only spaces exist to identify and put gender issues on the agenda.

Negotiate to ensure that companies do not discriminate against women leaders, and that they make commitments to incorporate the needs of women workers in company agreements, policies and organisational structures. Incorporate targeted recruitment drives and women's employment goals into Collective Bargaining Agreements, as well as other gender-sensitive clauses.

Advocate for formal technical educational processes aimed at better qualifying women agro-industrial workers to work safely and productively (COLSIBA, 2012).

Collaborate across countries and regions to develop a set of recommendations to companies and certification bodies on strategies for responding to women workers' needs for provision of child care in order to: advance this priority within the space of the WBF; and, support negotiations at company and national levels.

National and International Trade Union Confederations: Build the capacity of trade unions to provide gender training with both women and male workers on the issues of gender discrimination and women's rights within the workplace and at home.

As Irene Sandoval, Senior Communications and Corporate Responsibility Specialist, Chiquita Brands International, stated during the research in late 2014:

*"Our recommendation is that other companies in the industry put gender issues on the agenda, that they make it a priority. It should be included in company targets and specific spaces should be created at corporate level to ensure that women workers increase their competitive edge and participation in the productive workforce. We also need to invite governments and NGOs into these discussions to input on education, training, resources and policies to help the advancement towards greater equality and justice".*

The Global Women's Meeting preceding the Third Conference of the World Banana Forum (WBF) and the ongoing gender activities being driven forward by members of WBF's permanent Working Group 03 on Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues provide vital multi stakeholder fora for discussing, developing and effecting the implementation of the recommendations detailed above.

It is, however, clear that the outputs of the Global Women's Meeting being held before the Third Conference need to be incorporated into the mainstream activities of the WBF and its three permanent Working Groups; that gender is recognised as a cross-cutting issue that is relevant to all aspects of the WBF's work and governance; and women representatives at all levels are empowered to take forward initiatives to increase and improve women's employment and livelihoods in the male-dominated global banana export industry.

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## Terminology

**CDC** The Cameroon Development Corporation

**CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

**COLSIBA** *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros y Agroindustriales*: The Latin American Coordinating Body of Banana and Agro-industrial workers Trade Unions

**FENACLE** *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agroindustriales, Campesinos y Indígenas Libres del Ecuador*: The National Federation for Free Agro-industrial Workers, Peasant Farmers and Indigenous People of Ecuador

**FAWU** Fako Agricultural Workers Union, Cameroon

**FESTAGRO** *Federación de Sindicatos de la Agroindustria, Honduras*: Confederation of Agro-industrial Trade Unions, Honduras

**FETDECH** *El Sindicato de Trabajadores del Departamento de Chinandega*: Chinandega Workers' Union Federation, Nicaragua

**FLO** Fairtrade Labelling Organisation

**IUF** International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers

**ILO** International Labour Organisation

**MAGAP** Ecuadorian Ministry of Agriculture, Husbandry, Aquaculture & Fisheries

**NGO** Non Governmental Organisation

**OHSE** Occupational Health, Safety and Environment

**SINTRAINAGRO** *Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria Agropecuaria*. The National Confederation of Agro-industry and Fisheries Workers, Colombia

**WBF** World Banana Forum

**WINFA** Windward Islands Farmers' Association

**WHO** World Health Organisation

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## Annex 1: Historical & Cultural context of the Banana Export Industry by region

Any attempt to understand the impacts of the banana export industry on women's lives must take into account, differences in history and culture which might exist between the three main exporting regions and the influences which these might have had on gender and gender roles.

### Latin America

There is considerable diversity between the various exporters of bananas in Latin America and it would be unjust to the richness of their historical and cultural experience to make specific statements about them. Nevertheless some very general observations can be made.

First of all, almost the whole region (apart from Brazil, Belize and the Guyanas, almost the entire region on Latin America) was taken over some five hundred years ago by the Spanish Conquistadors and subsequently ruled by Spanish appointees until different regions achieved independence, most prominently in the early nineteenth century. As the influence of Spain was thrown off however, that of the USA tended to grow, with the USA both providing new industrial products and markets for Latin American goods (although Europe also remained a very important market for many countries.)

Throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a pattern of extremes of political belief emerged throughout much of the continent. Widespread discontent meant that, at different times in different countries, political leaders emerged promising land re-distribution, freedom for trade unions and the press, and other policies aiming at greater equality and social justice for the impoverished masses. Financial difficulties would in many cases contribute to these regimes being overturned by military coups. For decades left-leaning regimes and military dictatorships alternated between each other.

This pattern of instability was of great concern to the region's increasingly powerful northern neighbour, the United States, which began to take a very active role in the region, encouraging regimes which it saw as favouring 'democracy'. Paradoxically, the impoverished majority in the country in question often regarded what the US took to be totalitarian left-wing governments as being legitimate, democratically-elected regimes, which were trying to resolve the problems of poverty and inequality which plagued their society.

Latin America would eventually become the operating region for the three big major American banana multinationals, which would eventually to become today's Dole, Del Monte and Chiquita. It was a region which was politically unstable and prone to violence often on an epic scale during the cold war. In some Central American states, the US banana companies were the biggest financial players, with their own annual turnovers sometimes dwarfing the revenues and expenditure of national governments. It is not for nothing that some of the countries in question were referred to as 'banana republics'. In some cases, the *latifundias* that left-leaning governments proposed redistributing to the landless poor were owned by these same USA banana companies. The USA Freedom of Information Act means that the Cold War period is now better understood and there are well documented cases of how cold war tensions were manipulated by corporate interests, including in the banana sector (Garcia A. 1967).

The banana industry in Latin America today cannot be understood, nor the challenges it faces ameliorated, without both an understanding of this interplay between the political powers of the United States, the US based banana companies, and those social and economic changes in the region. While most of the Latin American banana world is currently considered stable and while many of its key players meet peaceably in World Banana Forum meetings, the violent history of banana production on the continent is recent, and is remembered by a great number of workers, trade unionists and local communities. It is

worth noting that it is only at the time of writing that the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement, some of whose engagements were carried out in the banana producing region of Colombia, was finally being resolved. Therefore, for many Colombian banana workers, the history of violence is far from being in a distant memory.

This is the broad background for women working in the industry, and the problems they face. The long history of conflict and extreme violence in the region has both damaged the fabric of society and contributed to the development of a highly 'macho' culture. Deeper still are the cultural and religious images of women: the Madonna and child; the Virgin, uncontaminated by sexual desire or practice; the good Catholic woman who should use no contraception but accept God's plan, regardless of how many new mouths this means she will have to feed. This surely is the woman who should stay at home to tend her growing brood.

Nevertheless, this deeply ingrained view of women's domestic role does not mean that it is supported at a social or economic level. Women's access to employment is limited by the often-constructed view that the plantation is no place for a woman. If women have a role to play in banana production, it is in the enclosed and more controlled space of the packing shed. However, many women across the banana producing regions of Latin America are heads of households, struggling to bring up new generations in the context of social breakdown and unsupported by men, either because sometimes their relationships could not withstand the pressure of the violence and disorder or because the men lost their lives in conflicts. Whether widowed, divorced, separated or simply single, many women with children have to work very hard to survive and to provide for their families, and sometimes they have to do this outside any of the protective structures of employment law. Women seldom are and certainly cannot afford to be anything other than strong.

## **The Caribbean**

The historical development of the Caribbean economy was largely built on slavery. Throughout this era, nearly all indigenous populations were killed, mostly inadvertently through exposure to European and African diseases and through marginalisation, as fertile lands were taken over for plantation agriculture. The population which survived was mostly of West African origin with some Europeans and the offspring of liaisons between the two groups.

Slaves were transported to the Caribbean islands in the greatest numbers by the British and French, primarily to work on sugar cane estates in their island colonies. The blockade of French ports by the British during the Napoleonic wars encouraged the French to begin to develop a sugar beet industry. This was later copied by other European producers. The importance of the sugar cane industry began a slow process of decline, while slavery itself increasingly fell into disrepute. It was later completely abolished during the British Empire by an 1833 Act of Parliament which was implemented in August 1834). The Caribbean sugar industry continued to struggle economically into the mid-twentieth century, and continues to survive in pockets today, when the crop was increasingly replaced by bananas, which commanded better prices and were less labour intensive.

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

The banana industry in the Dominican Republic is largely dependent on migrant labour from neighbouring Haiti, which has a markedly different colonial and post-colonial history and has remained extremely poor compared to the Dominican Republic (DR). Haiti does not export dessert bananas although it does export some plantains. While many Haitians are keen to gain employment on DR banana plantations, DR laws forbid enterprises from employing more than 20% of Haitians in their workforces at any one time. However, it appears that very few Dominicans are interested in working on the plantations. In practice, the industry is heavily dependent on Haitian migrant labour, and DR NGOs working with the migrant population estimate that 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 as well as the corresponding duties of paying taxes and contributing to the health and social security system. While it is widely known that Haitian labour dominates the industry, Haitians are mostly able to work only illegally and clandestinely. It is extremely challenging for women with children to subject themselves to the various dangers and difficulties involved in such a way of life. Therefore, women form only a very small percentage of the population of Haitian banana workers in the DR.

The picture in the other three main island exporters of bananas in the region, Dominica, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (often referred to collectively as the Windward Islands, in spite of the fact that geographically Dominica is part of the group called the Leeward Islands) is very different. There also exist two other major banana producing islands to the North and South of Dominica: Guadeloupe and Martinique respectively. Nonetheless, these are legally and politically classified as *départements d'outre-mer* – overseas departments – of France. Therefore, they are technically part of Europe and are consequently subject to EU employment and other law. For this reason, they are not included in the Caribbean regional report.

The three Windward Islands share broadly share a similar history. Indigenous populations were largely destroyed, as in other islands, although a small pocket of Caribs survives to this day 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, this continued until all three became British territories. The three countries then gained independence in the 1960s.

Plantations survived up until independence but had mostly shifted between the two World Wars from sugar to banana production (and in some cases to other crops like 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. These usually consisted of 1 to 2 hectares, though a few larger plots of up to 10 hectares exist today. This has often occurred as a result of family mergers or purchase.

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 to the Windward Islands today to leave with the impression that women were in any way subservient to men or to a patriarchy. While it is true that, as in most European countries, few women occupy the highest political positions or the pinnacles of power in the largest Companies, in all other respects women appear to have an equal status to men. As will be seen in the case of the banana sector, roughly half of banana farms are owned and managed by women.

## West and Central Africa

West and Central Africa are regions in which there are more than 150 tribes, each with their own cultures, traditions and languages. Different tribal identities are likely to have enduring impacts on the gender roles and status that help shape a woman's role in the industry.

Banana production for export mostly occurs in the coastal zones of three countries: Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon. It is useful to briefly bear in mind the history of colonisation and trade with Europe from which the banana industry emerged before focusing on traditional gender and other cultural patterns.

In the late 15th century and early 16th century, the Portuguese were almost invariably the first Europeans to arrive in the West African coastal areas where they established trading relations with local chiefs. The French, English and Dutch arrived somewhat later in the mid-17th century and set up trading stations. The Dutch mainly failed to establish permanent footholds and the Portuguese were largely displaced except in Guinea-Bissau and a number of islands. The Germans appeared much later, towards the end of the 19th century, when, from the 1890s, they briefly established colonies in Cameroon (which they held until 1922 when the territory became a British and French protectorate) and in Togo (which became a British Protectorate in 1914). Apart from these areas, the French and British dominated trading access.

Initially, trading outposts were established where suitable harbouring could be found and agreements could be made with local chiefs. Often forts were built to protect trading stations but Europeans did not initially attempt to control the interiors. Nevertheless, where trading interests were threatened by tribal wars, the Europeans would sometimes support militarily their local allies against the latter's enemies. In most cases, actual annexation of areas (or the establishment of 'protectorates') did not occur until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when borders were agreed between the European powers without consideration of tribal territories.

The banana export industry was initiated by Europeans for European markets. Even today the greatest volumes are exported by the French Company, Compagnie Fruitière, which has plantations in all three countries. Plantations were established by colonial administrations or private businesses (from the European colonising countries) and these allowed some local people to earn money to support themselves and their families, while generating sufficient surpluses to pay the taxes which were levied on them by the colonial administrations.

After the Second World War demands for independence grew. Ghana achieved independence in 1957 followed by most of the other countries in the region in the 1960s. Colonial operations producing bananas for export were in some cases nationalised by the newly independent governments, as is the case of VREL in Ghana and the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). Other national banana producers have been established in the period since independence.

Banana plantations have been attracting migrants not only from within countries but also considerably further afield. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, migrants come from as far away as Mali and Burkina Faso. In a similar way, Cameroon has also historically attracted significant migration flows from Nigeria. Moreover, Ghana also experienced a wave of immigration from the very distant land of Sudan in the 1950s.

The impact of these broad historical processes on traditional tribal customs and practices and indeed on this position of women has been considerable. On the one hand, the mixing of populations of workers who migrated to plantations or to cities tended to weaken the influence of tribal patterns of status, kinship and marriage. On the other hand, following independence, one or two tribes, in some countries,

have managed to become dominant in politics, with implications for regional development and for the allocation of resources and employment opportunities to particular areas or tribal interests.

Many women in West and Central Africa have traditionally been and continue to be active as traders. Similar patterns of change can be seen in the Akan, Ga and Fanti societies in Ghana. In the case of the Akan, the traditional division of labour between the sexes saw the woman farming both her husband's land and the land from her own lineage (McCall, D. 1969). On the former she was required to grow food to feed the family. On the latter, if she wished, she could produce to sell on the market, keeping the profits without any interference from her husband.

Women's trading was confined to foodstuffs and handicrafts. Men traded but in more valuable commodities, such as gold, slaves, kola nuts, monkey fur, ivory and clothe. This usually allowed men to earn more than women. Both marital partners contributed money, services or goods to support the family but they also maintained separate accounts from their personal profits.

In the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the financial positions of men and women changed significantly. The valuable commodities traditionally traded by men went into decline while agricultural commodities continued to be traded. Men's roles as traders began to disappear and increasingly women became the main actor in the market, diversifying into new areas as new goods from Europe became available. As time progressed, some women opened shops instead of working in markets or they became middle women who bought imports and sold to other women traders. The financial power of women made it difficult for husbands to exert control over them.

The fact that in many tribes or societies, it was the women who controlled farming activities and were often also significant traders, may explain the position of women in banana plantations.

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