

# Women workers in the banana agro-industry in Panama



# Proposed action

- Following proposals by COLSIBA, IUF and Chiquita, a pilot project is to be launched in Panama aimed at increasing the number of women in the workforce in the banana industry.



# Action in 2013

A census was carried out in the Teobroma communities in which university students participated as volunteers.

- The result: A total of 111 census forms were completed by women in the community
- Age: The census identified at least 48 women aged 20 to 30 who wanted to work
- Education: 36 of the women had received no education, 51 had received primary education, 22 had received secondary education and 2 had received a university education.
- Civil status: The majority of the women were single; 76 were not receiving social security benefits
- Work experience: 86 had never worked; 9 had worked in a banana plantation; 6 had worked in warehouses; 10 had done domestic work. Why did they leave work? Reasons included illness; pregnancy; looking after children or temporary contracts.

## Where did they want to work?

- Most wanted to work for packing companies in rural settings; some wanted to work harvesting yarn and baskets.
- Most of the women living in Changuinola, Panama are from the Ngöbe race, and their only means of looking after their children and families is by selling handicrafts.



# Meeting in March 2014

In March we met with Colsiba to discuss the Project, and subsequently met with the Chiquita company and the trade union to give them feedback on the Project, its goals and the steps to be taken. These were as follows:

1. Identify employment opportunities for women.
2. Carry out a Health & Safety risk assessment for women
3. Ensure there are opportunities for personal development / education
4. Communicate the programme to the workers.



# Employment opportunities

In packing companies:

- Packing
- Classification, selection
- Affixing lids.
- Weighing and stamping

In plantations:

- Cutting low branches. .
- Harvesting yarn.
- Deflection of the yarn.
- Collection of bags.

Employment opportunities which do not affect women's health.



# Integration of women in the workplace

- Plantation Division: 21
- Total number of women: 571
- Open-ended contracts: 486 (84%)
- Fixed-term contracts : 85+ (16%)
- Total number of women in:
  - 2013 - 429 (9.7%)
  - 2014 - 571 (12.5%)

The jobs which have been described are fixed-term contract (not permanent).

In 2015 the Project was agreed.

But there has not been follow-up



# Action for the Committee

- Communicate the Sexual Harrassment policy and the Agreement between Chiquita, Colsiba and IUF in the workplace.
- Present a risk analysis of plantation work and packing work.
- Run a campaign on the female workers' committee and the clause about women in Collective Agreements.
- Make sure that Industry and Government keep the law and respect and fully uphold the rights of women in Collective Agreements, Macro Agreements and Agreements of the ILO (International Labour Organization) 87, 98 etc



# Specific problems faced by female workers in plantations and packing companies as regards Health & Safety

- Constant exposure to agrochemicals
- Warm, damp environment which make workers more vulnerable to skin and respiratory diseases
- Damage suffered due to work routine and repetitive work, for example muscular pain, headache, colitis etc
  - Lack of washing facilities on plantations
  - Long hours (working day of over 8-hours) spent standing.



# Employment contracts and salaries

-A lack of stability in employment is caused by:

- . Contracts that are fixed-period rather than permanent, as in other sectors
- . Dismissal of female employees of less than 2 years' standing and pregnant workers

-Salaries:

The weekly salary of the majority of women represents the minimum wage - 1.62 balboas an hour and 12.96 balboas for eight hours: **this is not enough for them to live on**



*No más frutos amargos para las mujeres*

No more bitter fruit for women

Sembremos igualdad,  
cosechemos justicia

Let us sow equality  
And harvest justice



Thank you very  
much!!