

Case Study

Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture

Working Women Worldwide | January 2019



Organisational overview

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

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

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

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

As an NGO working on gender – these examples of good practice are woven into the very fabric of our organisation. We don't really have 'levels' in the normal sense. Examples include our procurement – For stationery we actively chose an independent, locally-based woman-run business. Another example would be our IT support – again an independent, locally based woman-run business. As a feminist organisation, working in women's rights, our board, staff and volunteers are all female. This is to be reviewed in 2019.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 2018 the issue of sexual harassment and #metoo and #timesup, have raised issues around SH and GBV in other industries and countries. Campaigns regarding women garment workers

and the awful conditions under which they work, culminating in the horrendous Rana Plaza accident where so many women workers lost their lives, have raised awareness of gender issues in the garment trade. Expose of the conditions of garment workers in the UK (factories in Leicester and Manchester) has brought this into focus for many people in the UK.

The Modern Slavery Act, and greater awareness of this within supply chains, has also raised the issue of gender. In the countries where we work there have been some strides in the last 5 years regarding the position of women in society and government. Many of the projects we have developed with partners in the past have been addressing a shortfall in these laws – this is changing – see the Kenyan Act, appointment of women into gov. positions in Rwanda, Ethiopia etc. Using these in-country drivers are crucial. We also recognise that many countries still lack full/any rights for women, and all countries are at different stages on this journey.

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

Specific Gender Initiative Case Study: Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture

Name, workplace, industry and area/country that case study is based?

Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture: a research, education and advocacy project with trade unions and NGOs in Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya and Uganda.

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

2005 -2008

Funder: FNV; DFID

Budget/Expenditure:

- Year 1 – 45,072 (FNV)
- Year 2 – 71,647 (FNV)
- Year 3 – 78,503 (FNV)
41,736 (DFID)
- Year 4 – 28,256 (FNV)
30,462 (DFID)

Total = GBP 295,676

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

- Research supply chains and how workers' rights can be protected within those chains

- Raise workers' awareness of their rights by developing educational materials and programmes
- Involve workers in advocacy work in collaboration with other stakeholders
- Exchange knowledge and experience across the region and with partners in Europe

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

Workers' rights violations found on horticulture farms included:

- Extremely low pay leaving women unable to cover basic living costs such as food, schooling for children and basic health costs
- Job insecurity meaning workers are unable to stand up for their rights for fear of losing their jobs. Contracts were not provided
- Poor health and safety including exposure to pesticides leading to reports of breathing problems, skin disorders and miscarriage
- Forced and unpredictable overtime which impacts children specifically as they are often left unattended
- Sexual harassment including verbal and physical abuse. Women are offered permanent contracts in exchange for sexual favours
- Lack of unionisation whereby union activity is discouraged on many farms

There is also concern about environmental damage and the disruption of local communities. Whilst these concerns led to some action being taken by workers' organisations alongside other stakeholders, the effectiveness of this was limited by a lack of resources.

ETI base code – Freedom of Association is allowed, working conditions are safe and hygienic, living wages are paid, working hours are not excessive, no discrimination is practised, regular employment is provided. All these were addressed through this project.

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

Workers' Education Association of Zambia (WEAZ); Tanzania Plantation and Agriculture Workers' Union (TPAWU); Uganda Workers' Education Association (UWEA); National Union for Plantation and Agricultural Workers, Uganda (NUPAWU); Kenya Women Workers Organisation (KEWWO); Zambia National Farmers Union (ZNFU); Zambia Export Growers Association (ZEGA).

Were women involved in designing and developing the initiative?

WWW and the partners mentioned above developed a project that researched working conditions in supply chains; trained workers in their rights; and implemented advocacy strategies at a national and international level. The gendered nature of the exploitation in the flower and horticulture sectors meant that issues important to women workers, such as sexual harassment and the right to motherhood, were placed at the top of the project's agenda, these were known from previous work carried out in the sector.

A collaborative approach to the project meant that partners gained by learning from others' experiences. Linking with other initiatives in the region strengthened their position with employers who typically argue that any sign of "trouble" would lead buyers to move to neighbouring countries.

The first year of the project focused on researching conditions in supply chains into the European market, while the second, third and fourth years concentrated on education and advocacy work in both Africa and Europe.

What were the number and description of women workers engaged (eg. fixed term contract, permanent, migrant)?

Together the partners:

- Interviewed approximately 1,000 workers (613 female workers, 357, male workers from 29 flower farms, 14 vegetable farms and 3 mixed crop farms)
- Facilitated more than 6,000 workers to join trade unions
- Increased women's participation in union structures and committees
- Ran 24 multi-stakeholder meetings which have brought women workers together with management, export associations and government bodies to address vital issues
- Trained more than 6,000 workers, giving them an understanding of how they contribute to the national economy and international supply chains, an understanding of their rights and as well as the confidence to demand them.

Were you monitoring the wider impact of your initiative?

No

How was implementation monitored?

Each country produced reports.

Interviews, pre-prepared questionnaires, focus groups, workshops, etc –numbers are in the reports.

Have you evaluated the initiative?

Impacts varied from country to country, but included:

- A network of experienced and mutually supportive partners with strong knowledge on developing and implementing women worker’s rights projects in E Africa’s flower and vegetable farms
- Research and baseline information
- Education and training materials developed, and trainers trained
- 6,000 workers who are empowered through training and who are aware of their rights
- A reduction in disputes and grievances (no numbers given)
- Increased unionisation of workers including women in active roles
- Reduced sexual harassment of women workers
- Improved Occupational Health and Safety processes (committees, policies, signage), practices (observation of re-entry periods), and equipment (provision of PPE to workers)
- Increase in use of written contracts and maternity leave provision
- In some cases, a reduction in the use of casual labour
- In Uganda and Zambia multi-stakeholder groups have been formed

WWW continues to ask consumers not to boycott African flowers, but to keep engaging with retailers to ask what they are doing to improve working conditions for women in their supply chain. Whilst important progress was made throughout the course of this project, it is vital that work continues in this sector to create sustainable change for women workers on all farms.

Quotes:

- “You Europeans must always be falling in love seeing as you give each other flowers so often...” joked Martha, a Tanzanian worker
- “For me the training has been most useful, to understand what our rights are, to realise we are not alone and to know that we should be demanding better working conditions” Mary, a Tanzanian flower worker involved in the project

- “This project has meant we now get 60 working days for maternity leave as provided for in the law. Before this, women workers were getting 45 days or less and some workers could not get any leave, as they were just dismissed. Now female workers go on maternity leave and even return to work after the leave” Rebecca, a Ugandan flower worker

Briefly explain how the initiative has improved:

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

6,000 workers joined union

Aspiration – opportunities for advancement, promotion and training

Trained more than 6,000 workers

Dignity – treatment, behaviour, attitudes

Multi-stakeholder groups set up

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

Increase in maternity leave provision

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

Reduced sexual harassment of women workers

Improved occupational H&S

Security – job and income security

Increase in written contracts

Has the learning been shared?

In the year following the project’s completion WWW staff gave presentations and participated in a number of conferences and workshops, largely speaking about the work in African horticulture and the need to consider the role of women in the workplace.

Information and collaboration continued through the network the project set up of experienced and mutually supportive partners with a strong knowledge of women’s rights in flower and vegetable farms.

Has the intervention continued?

All this work has been incorporated into and built on by subsequent programmes. In particular, the projects on sexual harassment in Kenya and the living wage project across East Africa and in 2018 a continuation of the Kenyan work on SH by [Workers Rights Watch](#) and [Hivos](#).

Future work

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

The project was to promote gender equality – this question doesn't really apply. But with hindsight we would advocate all projects should have continuation of minimal funding to monitor long term change. For the project ensure there are sufficient resources for monitoring and evaluation leading to better and more thorough documentation of outcomes and impacts – perhaps working with linked universities for external evaluation. Recognition that capacity building with partners takes time and resources and that long-term view needs to be factored in.

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

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

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

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

- Partnership working with those on the ground
- Working with companies/unions and NGOs
- Engaging with women workers – ensuring voice is heard and is shaping delivery
- Education and literacy
- Tackling the domestic burden on women

- Including men in solutions as well as the women
- Delivering training to both management and workers on – worker’s rights, SH, gender bias, negotiation, communication, leadership, etc. etc.
- Help with policy and strategy development
- Peer networking – both in country across farms and industries and across countries
- Engagement with buyers and suppliers
- Capacity building for those working on the ground; unions, women’s groups and NGOs

Resources

- [Overview of research into conditions on horticulture farms in Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda - Summary](#)
- [Overview of research into conditions on horticulture farms in Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda – Full Report](#)
- [Report of the planning meeting - Kampala, 31st January to 3rd February 2005](#)

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