

Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture

Overview of research into workers' conditions and industrial relations in the Ethiopian horticulture sectors

Executive Summary

2011

Introduction

This report gives a brief summary of the research conducted into workers' conditions and industrial relations in the Ethiopian horticulture sector. This research report is one of the main activities in the project 'Developing Strategies for Change for Women Workers in African Horticulture'. It was implemented between April 2008 and March 2011 by the National Federation of Farm Plantation Fishery Agro Industry Trade Union (NFFPFATU) in collaboration with Women Working Worldwide funded by Comic Relief. The project was also implemented in Tanzania and Uganda.

For more information on the project please visit our website

<http://www.women-ww.org>.

Project Background and research aims

The horticulture industry in Ethiopia started in 1995 and has been growing steadily since 2002; it now plays a major role in Ethiopian economic growth. The spectacular growth of the export horticulture sector has brought with it increased attention to the industries' social and environmental impacts to facilitate the on-going sustainable development of the sector.

The project in Ethiopia has improved conditions for workers in this sector by providing training for workers on labour and women's rights, research to document the factors affecting labour conditions and the findings of the research are intended to shape national and international advocacy campaigns to address workers concerns.

The research, which took place between April 2009 and March 2011 aimed at assessing and documenting the working conditions and industrial relations in the horticulture industry in Ethiopia, in addition to as workers' rights embodied in both company codes and national law and companies working in supply chains.

The project findings are intended to help women workers who make up the majority of the workforce (70-80%) in the horticulture sector in Ethiopia to improve their lives and to maintain their social security in the workplace.

Methodology

Data relevant to the study was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included questionnaires, observations, focus group discussions and interviews. Data was collected from a sample of 8 horticulture farms (7 cut flower and 1 vegetable and rose) with 394 workers (71% female and 29% male), 52 members of staff including management, supervisors, trade union leaders, administrators, women workers committees and spray workers were selected at random for the study. The study areas were Holleta, Ziway and Sebeta districts

Secondary sources included published and unpublished information about the horticulture industry in Ethiopia.

The findings of the research were verified by the respondents through a feedback workshop which was organised for that purpose.

Limitation of the study

During the study there were a few challenges that were encountered:

- No publicised representative study at the national level could be traced.
- Data collection was sometimes difficult as the workers were on duty and also interviews were extensively time demanding for data collectors.
- Most respondents did not return questionnaires on time.

Research Findings

Farm characteristics

Sample farms have an average of 160.3 hectares of horticulture production. The size of actual green house usage has been expanded in all farms. However, in most of the farms, numbers of workforces were not proportional with the farm size or hectare. The farms' production was dominated by roses. Most of the farms are foreign owned. All farms exported in to European market particular in Holland via the auctions and direct market. Some products are also being exported to non-European markets such as Russia, Japan, and Jeddah.

Workforce characteristics

- Women constitute on average 71.5% (2841 workers) of the total workforce (3972 workers in total) on each farm and males 28.5% (1131 workers).
- The majority of the labour force are aged between 20 and 25 years.
- The proportion of non-married or single workers is higher than married.
- The majority of workers in the sample farms were employed on permanent contracts (approx 86.1% of the total labour force in the eight farms).
- Out of the total sample of workers 4.3% females and 2.8% males are HIV positive.
- 0.4% of workers hold degrees, 6.6% hold diplomas, 9.2% completed grade 12, 29.1% completed grade 10, 50.6% received education to a standard below grade 10 and 4.1% of workers having received no formal education.

Employment security

Many employers in the study have started to issue more permanent contracts, and shift seasonal and casual workers to permanent employment; 86.1% of the sample workforce are permanent workers, 12.5% casual and 1.4% seasonal on the sample farms. This study demonstrates that on the sample farms the majority of the workers were permanent. On the other hand, non-permanent workers often do not have written contracts and security of employment remained a concern for workers.

Wage and benefits

Despite the fact that most codes of conduct stipulate that the wages be sufficient to meet basic needs of the workers, salaries in the horticulture sector still remain too low.

- The starting salary for permanent workers varies between 11-19 Birr (US\$ 0.7-1.1) per day, with seasonal and casual workers receiving on average 12.2 Birr/Day (US\$ 0.7).
- All workers claimed that their wages did not meet their basic needs and therefore they were unable to save money.
- Most workers are paid monthly however all respondents complained that they received their salaries approximately 3-6 days late.
- According to workers reported that there was no variation in wages earned between male and female workers for equal work. However, sprayers and cold store workers are earning more than other workers due to an allowance being paid.

Recommendations

- Wage should always be sufficient to meet basic needs of workers.
- The employer should specify wages for all occupations, in addition the government should provide guidelines on the standard wage for horticultural workers.

Opportunity for promotion

Out of the 8 farms sampled:

- 57.9% of supervisors are female, 42.1% are male and 35.9% of females and 64.1% males hold management positions.
- Top management positions are dominated by men and supervisors are dominated by females.
- Women have equal opportunities for promotion in most companies; however there was evidence of corruption and favouritism with regards to promotions in two of the farms sampled.

Working hours and overtime

According to farm management, working hours comply with applicable labour laws and industry standards. This is defined as formal workers working 8 hour per day, 48 hours per a week. Overtime must not exceed 2 hours per day/20 hours per week/ 100 hours per year, even during busy periods. However workers in 5 of the 8 farms complained of long working hours and that overtime is habitually compulsory and frequently exceeds the maximum hours during busy periods such as public holidays or during times when changes are made to orders by customers after they have been placed (i.e. when orders are increased but delivery dates are not lengthened). It was reported that because overtime during peak seasons was so excessive women workers were not able to perform their domestic responsibilities or care for their child.

Leave

All 8 sample farms offered most of their workers (permanent & fixed term workers) paid annual leave, paid sick leave, paid maternity leave, paid mourning leave and paid union

leave. However, some respondents reported that workers had their annual leave delayed.

According to all female respondents they received 3 months paid maternity leave.

Provision of facilities

Facilities provided by employers to workers on the sample farms varied:

- In all sample farms, workers have access to drinking water in their workplaces and these facilities were seen to be adequately clean.
- 75% of farms sampled provide first aid and 5 farms have funding for medical facilities.
- Two out of eight farms provided transport facilities to their workers, two farms grant money to their workers as a replacement for transport services, and four farms do not provide transport services to their workers. As a result the majority of workers walk to work.
- Female sanitary facilities are available in six out of eight farms. However, in most farms soap was providing only for chemical workers and sprayer.

Maternity protection

According to labour law, maternity leave shall not be shorter than 90 days on full pay, not including annual leave.

- According to most respondent supervisors, pregnant women were assigned light duties and given special treatment, however workers from 3 farms reported that pregnant workers were not treated any differently.
- It was also noted that some women stop working when they become pregnant as transport services are not provided by the employer.
- Breastfeeding time was only available on two farms for 1 hour.
- Restrooms for pregnant workers were not provided in all farms and also there were no childcare facilities in any of the sample farms.
- Two farms had medical birthing facilities for pregnant workers.

Recommendations

- Childcare services should be provided in all farms.
- Women with young children should be permitted breastfeeding breaks on the farms where this is not already provided.

Training

According to the worker's interviews, 43.1% of workers (170 workers) obtained training on employment rights, gender equality, HIV, OHS and maternity protection. In most farms training was provided particularly on the improving productivity, quality, safe handling of chemicals, efficiency and first aid. As a result of training workers are able to claim their rights more confidentially.

Recommendations

- More trainers are needed to provide quality, sustainable and reliable education and training for management staff.
- Women and men need training on relevant legislation on women workers' rights and protection.
- Managers need to be made aware of the legal necessities in relation to employment conditions.

Sexual harassment

Six out of eight farms had specific policies on the verbal and physical abuse and sexual harassment with the intention of preventing sexual harassment. 86.7% workers revealed that sexual harassment had not occurred in their workplace but it occasionally takes place outside of work. 13.3% workers mentioned that sexual harassment had taken place in their work place in the form of unwanted touching, unwelcomed comments/banter and scratching etc.

Health and safety

According to the labour code, workers shall be properly instructed and notified of the hazards pertaining to their respective occupations and that companies are required to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) where applicable. The report found that there had been significant improvements in the health and safety practices of companies.

- 6 farms had a health and safety officer in their work place as well as workers and management joint health and safety committees.
- Most of farms are organized, awareness rising for their workers particularly, on production, efficiency, health and safety, HIV/AIDS and safe use and handling of chemicals.
- 93.75% of respondents indicated that the provision of PPEs should be changed at an interval of 3-6 months (as stipulated in the CBA)
- All respondents complained that PPEs were not replaced on time.

Environment protection

According to management information, most the farms had an environmental policy. They have taken measures on environmental protection through planting, dumping poison containers in the hole and burn, using biological crop protection, compost for rubbish in the company, by using proper drainage systems etc.

Codes of conduct

The major objective of social codes of practice are to guarantee that flowers have been produced under socially and environmentally sustainable conditions also the code provides a concise statement of minimum labour, human rights and environmental standards for the international horticulture industry. In 2007 the Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association (EHPEA) took responsibility for the development and management of the Ethiopian code of practice for the export horticulture sector. The codes are freedom of association and collective bargaining, equality of treatment, living wages, working hours, Health and Safety, pesticides and chemicals, security of employment, no child labour used and no forced labour. Research findings were as follows:

- International codes of conduct (ICC) for cut flowers were common, with social codes being applicable in 5 farms out of the 8 farms.
- 6 farms have adopted EHPEA codes of practice, with the MPS and EHPEA code of practice being the most common codes on the farms.
- In one case a farm was found adopting a fair trade code and two farms are in the process of adopting the EHPEA code of practice.

Recommendations

- Trade unions need to continue to play a critical role in ensuring workers are aware of these codes of conduct as well as playing a role in auditing compliance.
- All stakeholders need to work together to raise the employment standards and to ensure that workers' rights are not sacrificed in the face of competitive pressures.
- Company codes of conduct hold promise for improving women's' conditions but they need to be implemented and brought to the attention of workers.

Freedom of association and Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are two of the fundamental principles of the ILO conventions and according to Ethiopian law all workers have the right to join trade unions, including non-permanent workers. The research found that:

- All of the farms sampled have joined the union and currently in the horticulture sector there are 86 unionised farms in total.
- According to interviews 300 (214 female and 86 male) respondents were members of a union and 94 (68 female and 26 male) were not.
- Despite the good progress made, union activity was still reported to be discouraged by employers; this was reported to be through favouring non-union workers for promotions over union members and the termination or demotion of union members.
- CBAs are vital to supporting workers to regulate and improve working conditions on the farms. 62.5% of sampled farms have CBAs.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's horticultural industry is one of the top foreign exchange earners and it has shown an extremely dramatic growth in Ethiopia. Out of the export earnings generated, the country's horticulture potential is believed to be quite substantial. Recently, the horticultural industry has played an important role in the economic development of the country, therefore it is necessary to assess the performance of the industry in light of the benefits it gives and the problems encountered in the sector.

The aim of this study was to look at labour conditions and industrial relations in the horticulture industries of Ethiopia. Therefore the study results will be used, among other things, to inform related workers' conditions of in the horticulture industries.

In previous years horticultural workers predominantly came from the poorest backgrounds and experienced poor living conditions, high levels of employment insecurity, and unlimited working hours in poor working conditions. These workers also lacked knowledge of the employment rights that are available to them. Over the last three year there have been a number of positive changes have taken place as regards employment practices found in horticulture industries since the project started. The improvements that have taken place can be credited to collective bargaining agreements and the presence of Trade Unions, they have ensured that the workers have been made aware of the legal rights they possess and they have enabled improvements to be made towards better working conditions. Advocacy actions need to be taken at a national and international level to ensure that producers are complying with national legislation, international labour standards and codes of conduct. According to this report, the most critical outstanding problems on the farms that were involved in this study were critically low wages and long, forced working hours. Immediate action needs to be taken to address these issues and to ensure full compliance with all labour rights.