

# **Promoting Women Workers' Rights in African Horticulture**

## **Overview of research into factors affecting labour conditions in horticulture industry in Tanzania**

### **Executive Summary**

**2011**

#### **Introduction**

This report gives a brief summary of the research conducted into the lives of the women workers in horticulture farms in the Arusha and Kilimanjaro regions of Tanzania between September 2008 and June 2009. The study was conducted by the Tanzania Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union (TPAWU) with the support of Mr. Beda Ngalapa (Consultant).

To view the full research report and the research from other countries involved in the project (Uganda and Ethiopia) please visit our website <http://www.women-ww.org/>

#### **Project Background**

The study was commissioned as part of the project 'Developing Strategies for Change for Women in African Horticulture'. The project aim was to improve the lives of the women workers in horticulture farms by implementing strategies that will enable them to claim their rights as workers. The project was funded by Comic Relief under the coordination of Women Working Worldwide.

Three components of the project included; 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 advocacy campaign to address workers concerns.

The project is intended to empower and assist women who make up the majority (over 60%) of the workforce in the horticultural sector in Tanzania, many of these farms supply to the European markets. The project made a significant impact on the lives of women workers, with farms showing improvement against a wide range of labour rights indicators. We hope to release a summary report of this impact over the next few months.

#### **Research aims and Methodology**

The research has aimed to document:

- The purchasing practices of the European Retailers
- Cultural, behavioural and management influences
- The effectiveness of Codes of Practice primarily regarding gender issues

A sample of 12 horticulture farms (10 cut-flower and 2 vegetable / seed) out of 21 farms operating in Tanzania was selected. From 12 farms containing 157 workers, 104 are women and from the total number of 241 respondents, 146 are women.

A sample of 241 respondents was selected and these included:

- Women and men workers employed in the farms and
- TPAWU branch officials
- Branch committee members and women workers committee (WWC)
- Tanzania Horticulture Association (TAHA)
- Labour institutions and Arusha Regional authority.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to gather information; five research tools used include official documentation (literature review), interviews, workshops, focus group discussions, and observation.

### **Circumstances during the study**

The research took place at the moment of uncertainty in relation to the global economic crisis. The horticulture industry continues to be affected by the global economic downturn; exports are getting more expensive to ship and even harder to sell while production costs continue hitting the greenhouse roofs.

- The industry is no longer yielding the anticipated fortune even during the peak flower consumption times like Valentine's Day, Mothers' Day and the Easter holidays.
- From October 2008, prices on average have declined by between 30 and 50% as compared to the previous year, while certain varieties and lengths of flowers have had zero demand in European markets.
- A major growth in the world economy by 5.2 % in 2007 saw a marked growth in the flower industry with increased supply that exceeded demand, a situation leading to a downfall of prices.
- Two major importers of East African flowers have seen their currencies weakened drastically leading to curtailed imports of flowers:
  - The UK Pound has weakened by 28 % in last year (2008) alone resulting in a 20 % reduction of East African imports;
  - The Russian Rouble has weakened by 35 % which has had the equivalent downward impact on Russian prices.

Management, TPAWU and the workers were worried about the expected negative impact of the global economic crisis on workers. Management in two farms had already planned to retrench workers and cut down costs.

## **Research Findings**

### **Purchasing practices and impact on labour rights**

The study aimed to investigate whether a link exists between purchasing practices and labour rights issues on the production farms. The study revealed that there were linkages between the two. Issues experienced by respondents are as follows:

- 84% of the 12 horticultural farms surveyed are owned by foreign investors, the rest are jointly owned between local and foreign investors.
- Half of the respondents indicated they had variable orders:

- 41% respondents experienced customers changing volume and other criteria after placing the order
- 5 farms indicated customers give notice for an order. Notice periods range between 2 weeks and one month
- 58% respondents said some customers decrease orders after placing them
- 66% respondents say some customers cancel orders after placing them
- The above noted variables by customers experienced by producers all cause a lack of stability, products being wasted/dumped, overgrown or sell at very low prices. In this situation it can cause losses for the farm and problems meeting running costs, including paying salaries and other benefits to the workers.
- Some customers make late payments which puts producers in difficult financial constraints which in turn can impact upon producers' ability to meet labour costs.
- Around 50% of the respondents revealed that their customers fine them indirectly by paying low prices, rejecting products if of poor quality.

### **Recommendations**

- Actions should be taken to regulate the purchasing practices and to implement contracts between producers and customers with agreed terms and conditions.
- Customers must understand the full costs of production and include labour and social cost issues when calculating minimum selling price per unit and transparency.
- Producers must have direct dealings with customers throughout the order to maximise the company's income and ensure worker's rights.
- Actions should be taken at regional, national and international levels by human and labour rights advocates to ensure the buyer is aware of production costs, workers rights and the general effects of purchasing practices.

### **External factors casing gendered occupational segregation within the cut flower industry**

The study aimed to make an assessment of the external influences to the supply chain which are causing gender inequalities both within and outside the farm. In addition, the study sought to gain a better understanding and document why there is a preference of women in the horticultural industry. The study revealed the following issues:

- Roles and responsibilities in the farms are based on gendered physical, mental and behavioural assumptions of capabilities which come from cultural traditions and customs, i.e. women are not assigned 'men's work' such as construction, lorry driving, mechanics, spraying etc
- The majority of women are confined to lowly paid jobs which are regarded as unskilled (as women do not often have the skills to perform men's work as listed above) with fewer opportunities for promotion.
- 58% of supervisors are women but their decision making powers are limited. This means that women cannot influence decisions which affect their lives.

- 39% of managers are women.
- Sexual harassment is a serious problem facing women workers.
- Women Workers Committees (WWCs) have played roles in the empowerment of women workers by giving women a platform to discuss issues, fight injustices and to strengthen solidarity among women workers. 99% of WWCs in horticulture are active with only one branch not having a WWC.
- Awareness training has contributed to the empowerment of women workers to realise their rights.

### **Recommendations**

- Actions should be taken to ensure horticulture employees, both women and men are aware of the effects of culture on women workers.
- Through policies and collective bargaining agreements, women workers, trade unions and management of the farms should be empowered on equal opportunity issues and the rights women hold in the workplace.
- Through collective bargaining and awareness training, management staff, women and men workers should be empowered on equal opportunities issues on women workers rights and protections and relevant legislations.
- Advocacy and campaign actions at local and international levels on women workers rights should be conducted.

### **The effectiveness of social codes of practice primarily regarding gender issues**

The study aimed to understand what kind of codes of conduct the workers' companies comply with and the efficacy of the codes with regards to gender issues. The codes are the International Code of Conduct for the Production of Cut Flowers (ICC), Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI Base Codes) and MPS and FLO. The study revealed the following:

- The Tanzanian government has ratified the ILO core conventions and domesticated them in the labour legislation.
- All farms under the study did not comply fully with all items on the code, i.e. they do not pay a living wage, only a statutory minimum wage.
- Social codes of conduct are useful to the workers in general especially to the women workers, however they lack consideration on gender issues i.e. reproductive health and sexual harassment.
- The codes do not also provide for awareness training for workers and management.
- Social auditing is not the only contributing factor to the improvement of the working conditions as much work has been done by TPAWU in this sector, however it does appear that codes of conduct have led to improved conditions.
- TWAPU uses the codes as a leverage to improve the working conditions in the farms through collective bargaining, raising awareness of workers' rights to freedom of association, equality, working conditions, pay and workers security.
- TWAPU membership has increased in all farms from 25% in 2004 to around 75% in 2009 after they conducted awareness training on workers' rights and freedom of association.

## **Recommendations**

- The codes should be revised to be gender sensitive, i.e. reproductive health issues and sexual harassment issues.
- Workers awareness training should be strengthened on labour standards and relevant code of conduct, in addition to national labour legislation.
- Advocacy actions at national and international level should be taken to ensure producers comply with national legislation, international labour standards and code of conduct.

## **Conclusion**

In order to contribute to the empowerment and realisation of women workers rights in African horticulture the purchasing practices of the European retailers need to be addressed to ensure they are aware of production costs, workers rights and the general effects of purchasing practices. Actions should be taken to ensure horticultural employees, both men and women can challenge cultural bias against women workers. Social codes of practice should be used on more farms but more work needs to be done on issues of Living Wage and gender issues to ensure better standards. The implementation of the proposed recommendations will contribute to the empowerment and realisation of women workers rights in African horticulture.