

WOMEN STRAWBERRY WORKERS IN MOROCCO

Accessing rights to secure and decent work

'I did not know that I was supposed to be paid 63 dirham (£4.46) per day. I was only given 50 dirham (£3.54) by the supervisor, even though we sometimes had to work longer hours. I also did not know that we should have had access to social security.'

Since 2012, Morocco has produced almost 148,000 tonnes of strawberries each year, 80 per cent of which are exported to the European Union. Levels of production in this sector have increased 14-fold since 1990, leading to pressure on the labour market to meet demand. Those working the strawberry fields, overwhelmingly women, are continuously pushed to work harder and for longer hours. Roughly 20,000 women are employed by the strawberry sector in the north of Morocco alone. This work has provided women with an employment opportunity, but they still live in poverty. For these women workers, a lack of respect for their rights and a lack of equal opportunities are routine. Many are unable to formalize their work or register for social security, allowing some employers to pay meagre wages, well below the legal minimum, and to operate with poor health and safety standards and degrading transport conditions.

Strawberry pickers also report that sexual harassment by supervisors is rife. Male intermediaries often organize transport and labour. They recruit women and negotiate daily wages, transport them to the fields and supervise their work. As a result, they have disproportionate power over women labourers, who must often cope with unacceptable sexual harassment as well as verbal abuse.

In 2012, women strawberry pickers came together with support from Oxfam and civil society partners. They undertook training on their rights as well as literacy classes, and they now help to enable other women to register for social security and to report problems at work. In 2013, 70 per cent more workers were registered for social security, which entitles a woman worker with two children up to 40 per cent more income due to government contributions. The Moroccan government has welcomed the approach and now sends Social Security staff to support workers registering for this benefit. Some employers have begun to report increased productivity and a more stable workforce. More and more workers are reporting that they are on contracts, enabling them to predict their

work patterns and income.

Collaborations between a range of actors can accelerate positive change or can enable progress where change is absent, including internationally. In its work with strawberry workers to claim their rights, Oxfam has collaborated with the Ethical Trading Initiative and its British retailer members, as well as with the importers that provide retailers with the fruit. These organizations have encouraged Moroccan growers to comply with employment law and ensure that their workers have social security, and increasingly they are looking to engage with the government to support and bring about change.

NOTES

© Oxfam International October 2014

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail Sloane Hamilton at SHamilton@oxfam.org.uk

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN XXX-X-XXXXX-XXX-X in October 2014.
Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty. Please write to any of the agencies for further information, or visit www.oxfam.org.