

WOMEN PRODUCERS OF 'BOUQUETS AND BEANS' IN KENYA

Exploring the links between international business and poverty reduction

In 2013 Oxfam and International Procurement and Logistics Ltd (IPL), the biggest importer of fresh produce to the UK and a wholly owned subsidiary of UK-based supermarket chain Asda, published the findings of a Poverty Footprint Study on the intersects of international agricultural business and poverty in the horticulture sector in Kenya.¹ Oxfam and IPL identified a number of key areas of both positive and negative impact. Oxfam made recommendations on the basis of the findings and, based on these, IPL made a set of public commitments. One of the key areas of commitment was on diversity and gender equality.

The study found that women from over 60 per cent of the horticulture industry workforce, as small-scale producers, employees and in some cases unpaid labour; some estimates put the proportion of women labouring on large-scale cut flower farms as high as 75 per cent. The sector provides women with substantial job opportunities and the potential to achieve financial independence, but the roles on offer tend to be strongly demarcated by gender. Horticultural work is also not always compatible with taking care of the family, a burden which in Kenya falls primarily on women. **Key findings:**

Empowering women: Women in the Kenyan horticulture sector are in general highly disempowered. However, the sector can empower women by providing them with income and financial security. The most important way of doing this is to improve wages and conditions for waged workers.

Discrimination and sexual harassment: The study found that temporary employment on casual and short-term contracts opens up opportunities for these forms of abuse, particularly during the recruitment process. Preventing and addressing sexual harassment is an area of compliance requiring technical expertise that site managers do not often possess.

Childcare: The horticulture industry employs, as waged workers, a large number of single women with dependent families. In the settlements that have sprung up around areas of intensive horticulture, the quality of childcare available is often very poor, with reliance on makeshift informal childcare providers, which results in high rates of negligence and abuse of children.

IPL's learning and commitments

The study confirmed that women make up a disproportionate part of the labour force involved in export horticulture, and are more likely to benefit from any positive changes that come from

IPL's commitments. They do, however, face gender-specific challenges and bear a disproportionately greater burden of family care. IPL committed to undertake the following actions:

- Monitor and support progress improved gender balance on pay and grades.
- Monitor and support reductions in the levels of discrimination and harassment that women face.
- Monitor and support improvements in the provision of childcare.
- Monitor and support access to bank accounts.

Recent research for the Capturing the Gains programme² and by Riisgaard and Gibbon³ found that workers who process high-value, delicate horticultural products (such as roses) have seen improvements in some areas. Although their wages are still far from being a living wage, the most skilled workers in the pack-houses, 75 per cent of whom are women, report improvements in health and safety, reduced sexual harassment and more secure contracts compared with ten years ago. Some workers reported that it was easier for them to progress from temporary to permanent employment.

Helping factors, based both on the Poverty Footprint study and Capturing the Gains, were found to include the implementation of codes such as the Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code, product certification (Kenya Flower Council, Fairtrade), more professional human resource management, the establishment of gender committees and improved legislation.⁴

NOTES

¹ Oxfam (2013): 'Bouquets and beans in Kenya'. <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/exploring-the-links-between-international-business-and-poverty-reduction-bouquet-290820>

² Capturing the Gains: Economic and Social Upgrading in Global Production Networks and trade. www.capturingthegains.org

³ L. Riisgaard and P. Gibbon (2014) 'Labour management on contemporary Kenyan cut flower farms: foundations of an industrial-civic compromise', *Journal of Agrarian Change*. Volume 14, issue 2, April 2014.

⁴ S. Barrientos (2014) 'Gender and Global Value Chains: Economic and Social Upgrading in Agri-Food', European University Institute Working Paper RSCAS 2014/96, Italy.

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

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Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.