



SOCIAL PROTECTION, BUILDING DIGNITY !

Improving working conditions of women
workers in the berry sector of Morocco



Union Européenne



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Acknowledgements

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1. Summary

In 2009, Oxfam identified several flaws in the berry sector, especially with regards to the working conditions and the non-respect of women workers' rights; no contracts, low rates of registration to social security, child labour, verbal violence and harassment, non-compliance with minimum wage and legal working hours, lack of identity documents for workers, very difficult transport conditions and non-compliance with health and safety standards in the workplace. Oxfam and its partners have designed a programme to improve working conditions and increase respect for the rights of women workers in the berry sector in Morocco.

Oxfam's programme has always adopted a positive approach collaborating with key stakeholders on a series of joint initiatives. At the national level, synergies have been developed between Moroccan civil society associations, state institutions, experts, berry producers in Morocco as well as women workers themselves. At the international level, Oxfam works with European importers and retailers of Moroccan berries.

The international strategy started in the UK in 2011 as a collaborative effort between supermarkets and berry importers, the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), and Oxfam, who together created the "Better Strawberries Group" (BSG). An ambitious action plan was developed and for its implementation each buyer works closely with his Moroccan suppliers.

Following the implementation of the programme and in particular the action plan of the BSG, it is important to take a step back and analyze the results and changes in practice. Progress was assessed on the basis of the 2012-2015 BSG Action Plan and highlights data of the past 4 years working with women workers. However, data from the last two years (2013-2014) have been particularly highlighted as a period when most changes occurred. The main results are detailed in the complete report, but here are some of them for each aspect of the work plan:

Issue	Target	Results
National Identity Card	100% compliance of agro industry units with local regulation for employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 1,400 women received their National ID Card with the support of Oxfam's programme • Over 70% of pack houses and processing factories require ID Card for their workers
National Social Security Fund	Cross-stakeholder collaboration to reach 100% of workers being CNSS-registered, as well as a marked uplift in CNSS registration of workforce by growers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All companies directly supplying the UK market, have obtained their CNSS ID • Steady progress in farms affiliations which has especially increased in 2013 • The number of people registered in the GCBH region increased by 40% in 2012 and 70% in 2013 • In 2014, the registration of workers is around 65% for both Larache and GCBH in the berry sector. • The programme has supported more than 3,025 people, including nearly 2,700 women, to get their CNSS card or check its functionality

Labor Providers	Work towards creation of a standard code of practice regarding the use of labour providers, for all strawberry growers to implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a transporters' association • Increased awareness of producers on the importance of healthy labour relations and non-violent communication in the workplace • Tension decreased between supervisors/waqqafs and employees in pack houses and processing factories where labour intermediaries are not the only interface between the employer and the employee, and where labour relations are formalized by contracts
Transport	A concerted focus on improving transport to and from sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue initiated between all stakeholders, including government agencies, growers and local NGOs, to work on practical and realistic solutions related to transportation issues
Health and safety	Adherence to Global G.A.P health and safety standards as a minimum on all Moroccan strawberry farms. Within 3 years agro-industry units should improve working conditions and hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moroccan farms exporting to the UK are Global G.A.P certified. Some producers are trying to get other types of certification (BSCI audits/audits to the ETI Base code) • In some factories and pack houses, infrastructures and health and safety practices have improved
Minimum Wage	All workers on Moroccan strawberry farms are being paid at least the national minimum wage for their work. Ensuring all deductions from workers wages are legal and agreed to, including transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% of the pack houses/processing units for which we have information, are ensuring payment of minimum wage • Women know their rights and increasingly refuse a job that does not pay the minimum wage

Direct dialogue with the buyers and suppliers of Moroccan berries in Morocco has emerged as an effective way to allow for sustainable changes, while being attentive to the challenges of each actor taking part in the dialogue (workers, local associations, producers, importers and retailers).

Progress in several sections of the action plan is clearly a direct result of management and monitoring of the action plan done by these key UK buyers. These improvements are tangible, but are not happening in all companies and even less in those supplying the frozen strawberries market, as the UK market buys mainly fresh strawberries. Following the success of the international strategy and the outreach with British buyers, strawberry buying-companies in France, Spain and Sweden are being targeted to follow a similar approach. Key actions are being developed with companies in these countries aimed at harmonising the expectations of all importers of the Moroccan market.

2. Acronyms

AECID	Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation
AJJ	Youth for Youth Association
AMAPPE	Association and the Moroccan Association of Support for the Promotion of Small Enterprise
AMCEF	Moroccan Association of the processors and exporters of strawberries
AMPFR	Moroccan Association of berry growers
BSCI	Business Social Compliance Initiative
BSG	Better Strawberries Group
CNSS	National Social Security Fund
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
EU	European Union
FLDDF	Federation of the Democratic League for Women's Rights
GCBH	Gharb Chrarda Beni Hssen
Global G.A.P	Global Good Agricultural Practice
GMP	Green Morocco Plan
ILO	International Labour Organisation
National ID	National Identity
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
ORMVAL	Regional Office of Agricultural Development of Loukkos
RADEV	Development Associations Network
SMAG	Guaranteed Minimum Agricultural Wage
SMIG	Guaranteed Minimum Wage (non agricultural)
UK	United Kingdom

3. Introduction

In 2004, Oxfam published a report entitled "Trading Away our Rights - Women working in global supply chains," which denounced poor working conditions largely affecting women worldwide. The introduction reminded us that:

It is not inevitable that globalisation marginalises the poor in general, or poor women in particular. Nor is it inevitable that the expansion of international trade creates a 'race to the bottom', with investors taking advantage of opportunities to relocate. Increased trade and improved working conditions can go hand-in-hand, if governments, companies, and international institutions create the right policy conditions.¹

More than ten years later, this analysis remains relevant. The results presented within this report illustrate that economic development and improved working conditions *can* go hand in hand. While trying to be as fair as possible to all stakeholders, the reports also tried to give a central place to women workers' voice and courage. Oxfam presents here the results of the Better Strawberries Group's (BSG) action plan to show how collaboration between different actors, despite challenges and difficulties, can also lead to remarkable results. Although the report attempts to present concrete results and illustrate progress based on an action plan, it also aims to illustrate a more global view of the complexity in which this programme evolves, and tries not to lose sight of the scope within which a global supply chain and local dynamics sit.

We hope that the challenges and recommendations from this report may serve as a future guide to responsible sourcing practice, not ending a story, but rather open new doors of a continuous improvement process. By mainstreaming good practices and respect of women's workers rights as a fundamental part of trade, lasting changes across the berry sector and more broadly in Moroccan agriculture can substantially emerge, confirming the importance of having responsible supply chains.

4. Context

4.1. In Morocco

In April 2008, the Moroccan government presented their new agricultural development strategy up to 2015, the Green Morocco Plan (GMP) which included poverty reduction among its objectives. The Green Morocco Plan intended to make agriculture one of the main drivers of the Moroccan economy, particularly through the mobilisation of investment, job creation and land use planning.²

The detail of the GMP in the Loukkos and Gharb Chrarda Beni Hssen (GCBH) region aimed to increase the scope of production of berries and its potential export market. Over the past 15 years, Morocco has increased its production of strawberries from 10,000 tons in 1995³ to 165,000 tons in the 2012-2013 season⁴, for a total cultivated area of 4,900 ha. 90% of the national production of berry is from the Gharb-Loukkos region, which represent 148,000 tons over 4400 ha. According to the Regional Office of Agricultural Development of Loukkos (ORMVAL) 625 farms are growing berries, among them 593 growing strawberries of which, 78.5% of them have less than 5 ha. The sector is also characterised by the presence of large farms, 12% of farms with more than 20 ha area, and a strong presence of industrial foreign investors. Again according to ORMVAL, there are 22 factories (pack house and/or processing plants) that coordinate 90% of the production. Berries added value has led to 80% of its production being exported. In 2013, Morocco was the fourth

¹ Oxfam International, *Trading away our rights, Women Working in global supply chains*, 2004, p.9.

² The green Morocco Plan does not have, according to public documentation, a specific section on women and gender inequality.

³ FAO Stats, <http://faostat3.fao.org/home/F>, 2014.

⁴ Fresh Plaza, *Considerable development in Moroccan red fruit sector*, 2014.

largest exporter of processed strawberries and the eleventh largest exporter of fresh strawberries. The sector has an ambitious plan for the period 2014-2020 with the aim to increase land use for strawberry growing to 5,000 ha (generating 200,000 tons for export), 1,000 ha for growing both raspberries and blueberries (generating 10,000 tonnes for export of each). Sales targets would be three times higher than the ones in 2008, around 3 billion dirham at export (€259,785,000)⁵.

As the European Union (EU) is Morocco's largest trading partner, the ambition for this sector will also enable a process of strengthening trade relations and free trade with the EU. In fact, following the implementation of the associations' agreement made between Morocco and the EU in 2000, in 2008 Morocco received an advanced status to strengthen exchanges and its involvement in European agencies. Since 2012, Morocco implemented the Agriculture Agreement which has created a free trade area between Morocco and the EU for industrial and agricultural products, with the exception of some sensitive products, like strawberries, where restrictions have been kept: *"Under this last arrangement, Morocco was granted new preferential export quotas allowing it to export 55% of its products - namely tomatoes, cucumbers and oranges - without paying Customs duties, as opposed to 33% under the previous agreement. The new entry price system, however, would invalidate the terms of Morocco's deal, taking away these fiscal advantages. In response to the discontent and lobbying from Morocco, the EU agreed in June to adjust entry prices for certain crops, notably strawberries, garlic, cucumber and cherry tomatoes."*⁶ The negotiations surrounding the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement between the EU and Morocco, initiated in March 2013, are currently at a standstill since the last negotiation round in April 2014. If the agreement is concluded, it could increase again the export potential of strawberries which to date remains under the quota system.



4.2. Analysis of the berry sector – situation in 2009

In 2009, Oxfam commissioned a study to document working conditions of workers in the berry sector, specifically for strawberries production. The study found that the rapid growth of the sector, although having allowed an economic boom, had not led to a substantial improvement of the living

⁵ Idem

⁶ Oxford Business Group, *The EU tightens control over imported Moroccan fruits and vegetables*, 2014.

conditions of workers and especially of women workers. No need to mention that the overwhelming majority of people working in the sector, 75% to 90%, are women.

The principal conclusions of the 2009 study reflected that the conditions of employment evolved in a predominantly informal and precarious environment. For example, women had to travel distances of up to 100km to reach their workplace, often in overloaded vehicles not designed for transporting people.

The employment relationship between the employee and the employer was blurred by the presence of labour providers (*waqqaf*) which served as intermediaries that allowed some employers to disengage from any responsibility with regard to the workers, especially since in the majority of cases no written contract existed between the two parties. When a formal contract did exist, it was temporary and renewal depended on the goodwill of the employer. Moreover, if contracts were provided women workers often did not understand the content.

Working hours were exhausting, often exceeded that determined by the labour code, sometimes by up to ten or eleven hours per day or more during the high season. Weekly rest was rarely respected, and over time did not give rise to increased payment.

Opportunities for promotion were very rare, often conditioned by blackmail done by the supervisors on the workers; some of them also experienced harassment from supervisors. This abuse of power was alarmingly present and in some cases was also used by supervisors and transporters when making decisions to grant or not jobs.

Workplace safety was not always ensured, particularly in farms where some agricultural workers were affected by the misuse of pesticides alongside the lack of protective equipment (gloves, masks). Access to toilets, or drinking water was scarce and if the infrastructure existed, they were largely insufficient.

« When I started working in the strawberry sector four years ago, I accepted the money they gave me without questioning the supervisor and without counting the hours I worked. Sometimes we could work very early in the morning until sunset ».

- Women Worker

The wages paid remained low and did not exceed, in the best case, the minimum wage guaranteed by law. The wage level was particularly low in farms where the Guaranteed Minimum Agricultural Wage ('SMAG') was rarely respected. The situation was more favourable in the processing factories where employers seemed to comply, at least formally, to the legislation (compliance with the Guaranteed Minimum Wage (non agricultural), 'SMIG'). In all cases however, the provisions on overtime were never respected.

Registration with the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) was far from being applied to all workers, and hardly benefited seasonal workers. The situation was slightly better in pack houses and factories, but only a few employees actually benefited from the family allowance and the medical insurance. The benefits offered by the CNSS for women workers could represent significant improvements in their living conditions. For example, a woman with two children can access a 40% increase of her income through accessing the family allowance. In addition, CNSS registration also provides access to free health care services, paid maternity leave and can contribute to retirement allowance.

Several factors contributed to this non-compliance with labour rights and poverty of women working in the berry sector. It should be noted that these issues are not exclusive to this sector and are widespread throughout the agricultural sector. The current Moroccan labour code is fairly advanced, despite the fact that it is not quite suitable for agriculture, for example regarding seasonal contract. Morocco has ratified twenty-three international conventions on labour and a further fifty-seven international labour conventions are considered by International Labour Organisation (ILO) as

possible for ratification by Morocco. The Labour Code implemented was published in the Official Journal on the 6th of May 2004. It includes regulations on issues such as the employment contracts, working hours, working conditions, relationships at work, rights and duties, conflict and arbitration and the principles of equity.

The main challenge remains the implementation of the law. Violation of labour law is partly possible because of lack of and/or limited resources representatives of public authorities especially for labour inspection and National Social Security Fund (CNSS) officers. As for audits commissioned by international customers, these are often oriented at monitoring quality standards, hygiene and safety, rather than looking at compliance with norms for decent working conditions.

The possibilities of improving socioeconomic conditions for women workers in the agricultural sector are to some extent linked to the government actions to promote fair economic and social development of the region and to ensure environmental protection. However, while the Green Morocco Plan promises to attract private investment into agriculture and create thousands of jobs, it does not take into account interests of workers and how to safeguard them.

In addition, local population and in particular women through their representation in civil society organisations, have limited access to spaces to defend their rights and influence local and national political decision-making. As a result, these policies very often do not align with their priorities and needs. This is particularly difficult for the most vulnerable as the developed policies fail to promote equal and sustainable economic and social development. Under these conditions, agricultural workers do not have the capacities or the means to defend their interests and rights and to change the situation. Unions are not, for the moment, active in the berry sector and women workers have shared not feeling represented by these predominantly male dominated organisation. In addition, there is also a lack of knowledge and understanding among workers of their rights, they are afraid of being fired and have no time or access to organise in order to defend their rights and fight for change.



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4.3. Berry exportation

The process of globalisation has produced a high level of interdependence among countries and a liberalisation of trade in goods and services. In Moroccan agriculture, this has meant that in the last decade large multinational enterprises, both foreign and Moroccan, have been set up in key areas of the country. They intend to export products of interest to European consumers. In a way, this process has revitalized the Moroccan economy. Supply chain analysis has demonstrated that European countries were the first importers of Moroccan strawberries, both fresh and processed, and other berries (raspberries and blueberries mostly, still relatively new in Morocco). It is important

to note that raspberries and blueberries are, at actually predominantly sold in fresh markets, particularly because of the high demand, scarcity and value of the product.

Although Spain is the largest exporter of fresh strawberries in the world and France the twelfth largest, just after Morocco, the two countries are also the first two fresh strawberries importers from Morocco. It should be noted that in the last 15 years, several Spanish companies have settled in the region to produce berries. According to Abdellatif Taraf of the Euro-Arab Foundation of Graduate Studies, in 2010 50% of the strawberries exported to Europe from Morocco were produced by Spanish companies.⁷

The United Kingdom (UK) is the third largest importer of fresh strawberries from Morocco. This is not surprising given a study coming from the University of London explaining that 86% of people who think about a bowl of strawberries feel happier!⁸ The UK is also a major producer of strawberries, but as the UK season begins in April, the country imports from Morocco between December and March.

The companies importing fresh berries are mainly supermarkets during the winter, because the harvest is earlier in Morocco than elsewhere in the EU. The first fruit crops can be harvested in December and therefore are able to take advantage of the open European market until the end of March, when the import duties begin to apply. Processing companies will also import fresh strawberries to freeze in their plants or for use in whole dairy preparations. Jam companies, yogurt and fruit juices are major importers of processed strawberries (frozen or pureed). In 2013, the Moroccan exportation of processed strawberries was more than 91,000 tons.

5. Oxfam's programme

5.1. Rationale and Approach

This analysis has led Oxfam to believe that improving the situation of agricultural workers in the GCBH and Loukkous region (see Graphic 1), and for women workers in the berry sector in particular, can be achieved by first, **strengthening the autonomy and leadership of these women workers and civil society and their capacity to organise**. This would enforce their position as credible interlocutors to defend their rights and influence decisions among the various stakeholders involved in the sector. Secondly, Oxfam believes it is crucial to increase **accountability of all actors involved in berry production, including both the private sector and government bodies** to achieve long lasting changes.

The intervention proposed by Oxfam and its partners covers the regions of GCBH and the area of Larache and Moulay Bouselham (Loukkos). Oxfam implemented this programme thanks to the financial support of Spanish International Cooperation Agency for Development (AECID), the Autonomous Government of Valencia, the EU and Oxfam's own funds. The intervention has covered almost the whole area of berry production in order to ensure that local producers meet the socioeconomic and environmental rights of women workers.

⁷ *Spanish companies produce 50% of the Moroccan strawberry exported to Europe*, article published in ABC.es on 07/06/2010.

⁸ The University of London's Centre for the Study of the Senses, *It's official, strawberries are the fruit that make us the happiest*, article published on <http://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk>, on 23/06/2014.

Graphic 1 – Map of the berry production in the north of Morocco



The programme worked with the support of local civil society organisations, partners associations, involved in community development: Development Associations Network (RADEV), the Hands United association, the Federation of the Democratic League for Women's Rights (FLDDF), the Youth for Youth Association (AJJ), the Chaml Association and the Moroccan Association for the Support and Promotion of Small Business (AMAPPE), all of whom together contributed to perform the following actions across the following three pillars:

- Strengthening women workers' leadership of women workers through awareness raising of their rights, strengthening their knowledge and their ability to self-organise and to network in order to claim these rights;
- Strengthening the capacity of social actors who have formed citizen platforms that integrate agricultural workers in the berry sector to organise and position themselves together as credible actors with decision makers;
- The establishment of citizen monitoring mechanisms based on the values of participatory democracy (good governance, accountability, effectiveness).

One of these mechanisms was the development of a network of local associations. The programme has supported the creation of the *Unity* in the region of Larache, and the *Alliance* in the GCBH region: these are coalitions of civil society organisations established to have an active role in the implementation of actions, the programme partners, as well as the ability to influence women workers in berry sector as well as institutional actors. Those two associations have contributed to three types of actions: awareness raising, advocacy and mobilisation and support to operations. To date, the Alliance is made up of 15 associations in GCBH and Unity of 27 associations in the Larache area.

Oxfam believes that agriculture can bring not only economical growth, but can be a real leverage for social development.

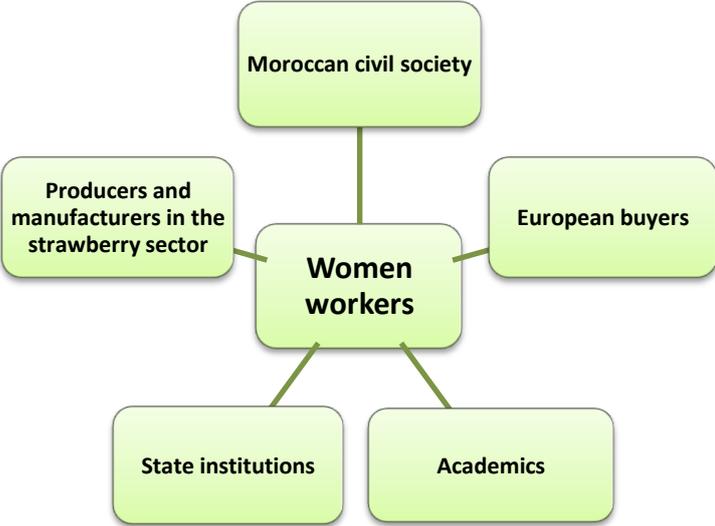
Oxfam's programme has always adopted a positive approach collaborating with key stakeholders on a series of joint initiatives. At the national level, synergies have been developed between Moroccan civil society associations, state institutions, experts, berry producers in Morocco as well as women workers themselves. It was through concrete actions and joint work that connections were strengthened between local associations, creating the ability to act with the population and the government to regularise the situation of marginalised people. Whether by increasing information flow and building trust between local stakeholders, authorities and government bodies or through building a better understanding of the constraints that each actor faces, the programme has helped work within and improve these dynamics, thereby promoting greater cooperation in the area and restoring confidence in the institutions concerned.

At international level, the aim was to highlight the realities of the women workers while taking into account the constraints and complexities of global supply chains. The international strategy was based on dialogue between the importing companies and aimed at harmonising their expectations with regard to the Moroccan producers. The link between the national and international levels was also a mechanism to encourage transparency and joint problem solving. The approach was developed to allow all stakeholders to come together to address the challenges faced by all stakeholders involved, and to work and address the systemic causes of the problems, which is largely impossible if working at individual actor levels.

5.2. Programme Components

The programme was first and foremost built to address the concerns and challenges faced by women workers. Being through the issues addressed, the international strategy or through the advocacy messages targeting the government at local and national level, the programme not only aims to meet the needs of these women, but allows them to be active actor in the changes that affect them, as is illustrated in Graphic 2. The programme consists of three major components: the Association of Women Workers, the Observatory and the Campaign, of which the international strategy is part.

Graphic 2 – Programme Stakeholders



5.2.1. The Association of Women Workers

Since the onset of the programme, women workers had wanted to create their own association to defend their rights themselves. The association Al Karama was formed in the Larache region with nearly 100 women who have all played an important role in participating in the raising awareness caravan or in other outreach activities in villages. Women promoters also address cases of rights violations and provide referrals to women working in factories and farms.

The role of women workers in the programme has gradually grown through training on leadership, communication, and other topics, allowing them to become more involved in raising awareness in villages or in meetings with local authorities. In addition to social mobilisation in the villages, they also provide concrete information for all stakeholders in the programme. They contribute in particular to strengthening community awareness on labor rights, but also ensuring that the rights violations are brought to light and addressed by local authorities, partner organisations or by foreign importers.

They have acquired a legitimacy that now allows them to organise activities independently, thereby further strengthening the social fabric among those involved.

5.2.2. Observatory

The Observatory mission is to detect and report cases of labour rights violations. The most common violations remaining were related to a lack of work contract, bad transport conditions and non payment of overtime. The Observatory thereby worked as a social audit of enterprises and public institutions. Guidance and legal support is also an important part of work done by the Observatory. The Observatory has been managed by the Solidarity Hands Association and FLDDF in Larache region and the Chaml Association in GCBH.

5.2.3. Campaign

The campaign is led by the *Unity* in the Larache area and the *Alliance* in the GCBH area. These Nongovernmental Organisation (NGO) platforms are acting as relays in the villages and provide a continuous link with local communities. The campaign's actions has been divided in three components, to which the international strategy has been added in 2011 to insure efficiency, integrated action and proposing specific responses to identified needs.

- **Caravan Project**

The caravan project, managed by the Development Associations Network (RADEV) raises awareness of workers in the berry sector on labour code and the right to social protection and identity. During each awareness-raising caravan, fun activities are organised for children providing an enabling environment for women to participate in the sensitisation activities. Women workers become key actors of these activities, acting as community relays in the villages for the implementing teams of the programme. Caravan activities have, as of June 2014, reached more 34,000 people, including 16,100 women in the strawberry sector (7,100 factories and 9,000 farms).

Julie Thérroux-Séguin /Oxfam



- **National Social Security Fund Unit**

The CNSS unit aims to raise awareness, support and accompany women workers as well as producers (upon request), on everything that is related to CNSS including: regularisation of declarations, consultation of points in the system, and access to services of CNSS. The CNSS Unit is coordinated by RADEV. Close collaboration has been established with the CNSS agencies to facilitate the standardisation and regularisation of records. As presented in the next section, the CNSS data confirms a significant increase of both women workers registration and producers affiliation to CNSS.

- **Identity Unit**

The Identity Unit is coordinated by the Larache section of the Federation of the Democratic League for Women's Rights (FLDDF) and the Chaml Association in the GCBH region. Its mission is to raise awareness, support and provide guidance for women workers and their families for the regularisation of wedding certificate, as well as accessing identification and civil status, which are all essential prerequisites to access CNSS services and all their rights as citizens.



Luigi Forese/Oxfam

- **International Strategy and the Better Strawberries Group**

As part of the campaign and in order to stimulate dialogue with producers, the need to work with clients of producers of Moroccan berries, and thereby reaching and working with all components of the supply chain, has become indispensable.

Oxfam has, over many years, campaigned for companies to take action to improve the situation of workers in their global supply chains. This is the reason why Oxfam participate in initiatives, which aim to raise awareness and share best practices between companies, trade unions and non-government organizations on this subject. Oxfam has welcomed the retailers and importers willingness to discuss their supply chain challenges, as well as their demonstration of leadership striving for progressive positive change.

Following an initial Oxfam internal report describing the situation of workers and illustrating the seriousness of the situation, the international strategy was launched in the UK in the spring of 2011.

This decision was not taken lightly. Members of the Labour Rights team within Oxfam, based in Oxford, were already working with several supermarkets on different projects, as well as with the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), an alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs that promotes respect for workers' rights around the globe. As such, this existing trust and collaboration between Oxfam and British buyers could allow this project to further develop this initiative.

Various stakeholders in the supply chain, buyers from the UK (supermarkets and berry importers), the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Oxfam, came together in order to highlight the violations suffered by women workers and to identify ways to improve the situation and address the poor labour practices in their supply chain. As a result, the Better Strawberries Group (BSG) was created. To understand the working conditions these women were facing, a stakeholders meeting including importers, retailers, berry growers and their representatives associations AMPFR (Moroccan Association of berry growers) and AMCEF (Moroccan Association on the conditions and exports of strawberries), Moroccan civil society, ETI and Oxfam was held in Morocco in October 2011. Following this first meeting and a clear desire on all sides to see changes happen, an action plan was developed. This action plan, ambitious and focused on the needs of women workers, became the basis of dialogue between importers and producers to improve their working practices by 2015. It had the explicit aim to *"enable suppliers to take ownership of this action plan and its implementation in the supply chain ensuring that the rights of women in the Moroccan strawberry sector are respected and that their working conditions are improved"*.

Direct dialogue with the buyers and suppliers of berries in Morocco has emerged as an effective way to allow for sustainable changes, while being attentive to the challenges of each actor taking part in the dialogue.

Direct dialogue with the buyers and suppliers of berries in Morocco has emerged as an effective way to allow for sustainable changes, while being attentive to the challenges of each actor taking part in the dialogue (workers, local associations, producers, importers and supermarkets).

Progress in several sections of the action plan (see table below) is clearly a direct result of management and monitoring of the action plan done by these key UK buyers. These improvements are tangible, but are not happening in all companies and even less in those supplying the frozen strawberries market, as the UK market buys mainly fresh strawberries. Following the success of the international strategy and the outreach with British buyers, strawberry buying-companies in France, Spain and Sweden are being targeted to follow a similar approach. Key actions are being developed with companies in these countries aimed at harmonising the expectations of all importers of the Moroccan market.

Extract of Work Plan BSG 2012-2015

Objective	Target
<p>I. Identity</p> <p>Companies working in the strawberry sector only hire employees with their identity card</p>	<p>100% of employees have an identity card</p>
<p>II. CNSS</p>	<p>100% of the employees of strawberry producers have</p>

Workers are registered with the CNSS and companies pay their premiums	their CNSS card and employers pay contributions based on hours worked
III. Labour providers	
Establish a code of good practice in relation to the work intermediaries that promotes the adoption of standards by all strawberry producers	Create an intermediaries association
IV. Transport	Improve practices and advocate for infrastructure improvements nationally
Improve the workers' transportation to and from the worksite	Producers must agree on standards of good practice in transport.
V. Health and Security	
Adhere to the Global G.A.P (Good Agricultural Practice) standards for health and safety as a minimum for all Moroccan farms	Within 3 years, all agro industry units have improved working health and hygiene conditions and hygiene. Training on the protection of workers
VI. Minimum wage	
All of Moroccan women working in strawberry production are paid at least the national minimum wage	Ensure that all deductions made from the wages of workers are legal and consenting, including those based on transportation with proof of payslip.

The group of importers, retailers and Oxfam, with the facilitation of ETI held regular meetings in London to discuss the progress of the action plan and any difficulties encountered. Many of the companies involved in the group are members of the ETI, and are engaged in this process to respect the code of ethics and social responsibility principles of the latter. However, not all of them are, but they did also commit to the programme objectives. Annual meetings in Morocco were also organized to strengthen the commitment of all stakeholders to continue their efforts to find solutions to the challenges faced.

6. Evaluation of results and progress made

6.1. Methodology

After several years of implementation of the programme, and in particular the action plan of the BSG, initiated in 2012, it is important to analyse the results and any changes in practices. Progress was assessed on the basis of the 2012-2015 BSG Action Plan and highlights the quantitative data collected by local associations and compiled over the last four years working in the field with women workers, which includes a representative sample of 2,857 people (out of approximately 20,000 women working in the sector). However, data from the last two years has been reviewed and highlighted as the majority of the changes have occurred during this period. Quantitative data for the period 2013-2014 were extracted from meetings and interviews conducted with nearly 1,500 women (from the observatory and related discussion groups).

Qualitative data was collected during the awareness raising caravans and outreach work, during focus group discussions on specific issues and through discussions and interviews held with people visiting the Observatory. The verification of the data was done in consultation with key programme partners including the CNSS officers of Larache and Kenitra (regional office), labour inspectors, and

importers and producers of berries. As we aimed to demonstrate the overall situation throughout the berry sector, particular attention was given to ensure that the data was representative of producers supplying the UK market, who have had been most influenced. The challenges and constraints experienced to achieve some of the results were also highlighted throughout the paper.



Julie Thérault-Seguin/Oxfam

6.2. National Identity Card

Target	100% of employees have identity cards
Initial Situation	No specific data, however problematic situation
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 1400 women have received their National ID within the programme • Over 70% pack houses and processing plants require National ID

The issue of workers’ lack of identity documents had not been raised before the start of Oxfam’s programme. Nevertheless, the work done at local level by partners and complexity faced by growers when attempting to reach full compliance revealed that it was a major obstacle for the registration of workers to social security. Indeed, a significant proportion of women working in the sector as well as their families did not have identity documents, and therefore could not sign formal contracts or be declared to social security. Sometimes marriages had been conducted the traditional way and had not been documented and children did not have identity papers since their birth was not recorded, which then became a further problem if they wished to enrol in secondary school.

It must also be noted that many women in the region do not voluntarily make the effort to legalise their status either because they misunderstand the process which may seem tedious for a non-literate person, or because the procedure requires some cost (transport to the city, photocopies, paper, etc.) and they do not have the means to do so or because they have a certain level of distrust of state services. Thanks to the awareness raising caravans that visited the villages in the region to help women with the administrative procedures, as well as the request of some producers for their

workers to have National ID cards, we have seen a real increase of the use of National ID cards. So far, **more than 1,400 women have obtained their National ID card** through the programme.

According to our calculations based on the statements of women workers, cases compiled as part of the caravans during the awareness-raising sessions made by the programme teams, and cross-checking the data with industry experts and partners, we estimate that over 70% of pack houses and processing factories now require women to have National ID card to work and over 80% of the women have it.

With regard to the farms, those related to pack houses or processing factories will require National ID card but it is not yet a common practice among all farms. This practice is also more common during the fresh strawberry season (December through March) partly due to the monitoring done by British importers.

This extremely encouraging growing rate combined with government efforts to ensure national coverage of the use of National ID leads us to believe that in a few years, if this trend continues and the use of National ID normalise, all women will have their cards and be able to enjoy their rights as citizens.

As part of the work, the use of National ID allows the issuing of contracts, registration of workers to the CNSS and the prevention of the recruitment of underage workers (under 15 years). Although the issue of child labour is much less common in pack houses and processing factories, due to the type of work required, it seems to be still present on farms, especially during the high production season when producers have greater labour needs. In 2013-14, we identified 90 cases of child labour out of the 1,458 people who visited the Observatory to report a right abuse they had witnessed, or suffered. We cannot extrapolate this data to the whole sector as the number of people who came to the Observatory are people who came especially to file a complaint; neither can we state that there are only 90 cases for the whole sector since not all the cases of child work are reported to the Observatory. In 2009, it was reported that the proportion of children working in the berry sector was estimated at 3.4% and, we can reasonably believe that such efforts have reduced this rate.

As part of the programme, Oxfam has offered producers (for their pack houses, factories or farms) the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of local associations that have the ability to guide and assist women in their administrative procedures. This proposal was done through BSG, through two producers' associations (AMPFR and AMCEF) and offered directly to producers. To date, two companies have agreed to receive the support offered by the local associations and a third one has contacted the programme team.

The impact of the group's influence on the systematic use of National ID and the support for women who do not have legal status has not yet achieved its target (100% of workers). However, it is worth noting the remarkable increase in both the pack houses and factories, some of which the target has been reached. The volatility and seasonality of labour, as well as increased labour force demand over a limited period of time and the mobility of workers from an agricultural area to another are factors that have hindered the producers' ability to successfully support the women in their efforts to gain their National ID.

6.3. National Social Security Fund

Target	Cross-stakeholder collaboration to reach 100% of workers being CNSS-registered, as well as a marked uplift in CNSS registration of workforce by growers.
Initial Situation	According to the High Commission for Planning and Labour and Social Affairs Ministry, in 2008 3.6% of people working in agriculture were registered to CNSS. In 2013, this rate increased to 5%.

Results

- All companies directly supplying the UK market, have obtained their CNSS ID
- Steady progress in farms affiliations which has especially increased in 2013
- The number of people registered in the GCBH region increased by 40% in 2012 and 70% in 2013
- In 2014, the registration of workers is around 65% for both Larache and GCBH in the berry sector
- The programme has supported more than 3,025 people, including nearly 2,700 women, to get their CNSS card or check its functionality

There are three elements to consider when assessing the success of this target: first, the affiliation of producers to the CNSS (the company must obtain an ID), worker's registration to CNSS (the worker will obtain a CNSS card) and the payment for the days worked so that women can benefit from the contributions made by employers.



Luidi Forese/Oxfam

To better understand the situation, according to the data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and as highlighted in the Report of the International Commission of Jurists in 2014, the number of employees reported to the CNSS in Morocco increased from 2.04 million in 2008 to 2.87 million in 2013⁹ based on a working population of approximately 10.5 million people in 2013 compared to 10.1 in 2008. Of these reported, an estimated 20% come from the manufacturing sector, 16% from trade and only 7% from the agricultural sector, given that approximately 39% of the employed population works in the agricultural sector¹⁰. In comparing these figures, we can see that in 2008, 3.6% of the working population engaged in agriculture were declared to the CNSS and 2013, this rate increased to 5%.

⁹ Ministry of Labor and social affairs, *Social Balance sheet*, 2013, p 43

¹⁰ High Commissioner for Planning, Department of Statistics, *National Study on labor market for the 1st quarter of 2014*, 2014.

All companies directly supplying the UK market, who did not previously have one, now have their CNSS affiliation. However, strawberry farms supplying to or linked to these companies are not always affiliated with the CNSS, but agents of the CNSS have confirmed a steady progression in affiliations which has accelerated in 2013.

« If we did not push farms to register their workers with the CNSS and we were not behind them all the time to make sure they did, they will not do it, they do not see interest and consider it an unnecessary expense ».

- Officer in a pack house

A substantial increase has been witnessed in the number of people registered to the CNSS likely to reach 65% for both GCBH and Larache areas, and this number only refers to those working in the berry sector. Such a clear increase in less than three years is an impressive achievement and demonstrates the strength and impact of a multi-sector stakeholders' collaboration.

Women's registration to CNSS has increased due to the influence of the implementation of the action plan. In

2009, the number of people declared in the berry sector in the GCBH region was only 2246, this number has seen a steady increase reaching 7,144 in 2013 and it is reasonable to assume that it will continue to rise. In 2013, the agency of Souk Larbaâ alone, a region where many companies are investing in the berry sector, 2,058 new registration cards were issued, which is approximately the total number that was granted in 2009 for the entire area. According to Youssef Fadili, Regional Director of the CNSS in Kenitra during an interview with Oxfam, the number of registered persons has increased by 40% in 2012 and 70% in 2013.

The programme has reached more than 3,025 people, including nearly 2,700 women, to help them get their CNSS card or check the functionality of their card¹¹. Nearly 60% of cases required the intervention of the CNSS to legalise their record, which was successful in 80% of cases referred to the responsible agencies. Irregularities encountered were mainly due to the absence of CNSS card, card loss, lack of identity papers to get the card and especially the large deficit of payment for days worked.

The International Commission of Jurists demonstrate in their report that: *"... in the agriculture sector employers generally report only 16 days worked instead of 26 a month to avoid paying employer contributions to the CNSS. This is a real problem when the worker reaches retirement age. Seasonal workers are normally reported every three months because they do not work all the time, which poses problems for the records and for the obligatory health insurance because, in order to be eligible, you must have worked 54 working days during the last 6 months preceding the illness. The failure to pay contributions to the CNSS and the failure to disclose is punishable by law, but since 1960 no business has been convicted of this offense, and this, despite the large amounts of wages shares that have been paid."*¹²

« At the beginning of the programme, we went to the villages with caravans and no one had heard of the CNSS. Now, when we go into the villages, women come to us to see if their employers have paid for the correct number of days. This is quite a change ! »

- RADEV

So, the increase in producers' affiliation to the CNSS has been important over the past 2 years, especially among large and medium producers (10 hectares or more).

However, some factories still do not declare all of their workers. The declaration from farms remains low and the number of days worked is not always accurately reported, which does not allow women

¹¹ Oxfam, *Annual Report on Gender Justice Campaign, 2013-2014*.

¹² International Commission of Jurists, *The special investment export regimes: Impacts on economic and social rights in Morocco, 2014, p.41*.

to benefit from social security services. The seasonality of the work and volatility of the workers (some workers preferring not to have a contract or written commitment, and some leaving work without informing their supervisors) does explain reasons behind why some producers are unable to reach 100% registration of their workers. However, it is to regret that we still see some producers not changing adequately their practices to register their workers. Resistance to change and the reluctance of some to correctly apply the Labour Code overshadows those producers and entrepreneurs in the sector having respectful practices.



Julie Theroux-Seguim/Oxfam

6.4. Labour providers

Target	Work towards creation of a standard code of practice regarding the use of labour providers, for all strawberry growers to implement
Initial Situation	Most of workers are recruited through labour providers who sometimes will play the all in one role of labour provider, transporter, supervisor and payer. This mechanism of recruitment and management is highly informal and puts workers in a precarious position.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a transporters’ association • Increased awareness of producers on the importance of healthy labour relations and non-violent communication in the workplace • Tension decreased between supervisors/waqqafs and employees in pack houses and processing factories where labour intermediaries are not the only interface between the employer and the employee, and where labour relations are formalized by contracts

This aspect of the action plan is probably one of the most complex and one in which we can acknowledge only very few changes. Although supervisors, labour providers, transporters and "waqqafs" (supervisors) are the cornerstone for improving working conditions, taking into account their different roles and the status of one company to another, as well as the high level of informality of the job, it has proven difficult to obtain tangible evidence of improvement.

As part of a study conducted in 2012, several stakeholders in the sector expressed their desire to formalise working relationships¹³. Transporters/recruiters wanted to formalise the requests of producers (more fixed schedules, insurance payments for women workers, seasonal contracts), to gain some stability, to better enforce labour laws and to regulate the recruitment of women workers. However, although producers have also expressed the desire for greater stability of their workforce

¹³ Jucar, Social Development Consultant, *Study on workplace intermediaries in the strawberry sector in Larache region and Moulay Bousseham*, 2012, p.5.

and especially the willingness to decrease the length of transport of women workers through the promotion of the employment of women living in the area, it seems that few initiatives have been put in place to specifically formalize the labour provider's role.

In April 2014, in Moulay Bouselham, Oxfam organised a training to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both employees and employers in factories and farms regarding disciplinary action and 17 producers joined this training. This training brought to light and addressed misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the labour code and clarified certain aspects of its implementation with participants (mostly human resources and farm managers). During spring 2014, other trainings on communication in the workplace were held through a UK supermarket's initiative, and offered directly to certain producers in their supply chain. These activities were relatively recent and therefore their impacts are currently difficult to measure, but the importance given by the top management demonstrates a willingness to improve labour relations.

As part of the programme, a process of sensitisation of transporters was initiated and a capacity building plan was developed with them. This process led to the creation of an association of agricultural transporters. However, these efforts seem to have led to little change according to the testimony of women workers and most recently, the association does not appear to be very active.

In addition, and without diminishing the impact of social mobilisation and awareness changes among several producers on the importance of communication in the workplace, it has been reported that verbal and physical violence is unfortunately still common in many farms. Women workers, especially on farms, explain that supervisors yell at women to work faster, insult them regularly, force them to work longer hours or to perform more difficult tasks when the women confront their supervisors and inflict sexual harassment. A worker described the situation during a group discussion: "*Pretty girls are always favoured by the waqqaf. They can sit in front of the truck, they get*

easier tasks, have more time to rest ... however, if they refuse their advances, they change their attitude and become very cruel ..."

Physical violence is also largely present on farms where women reported being shoved and pushed to the ground. As part of the Observatory project, 25% of women interviewed reported that they had experienced violence during the 2013-2014 year. However, the taboo surrounding violence and the difficulty faced in identifying and verbalising harassment and verbal abuse, leads us

to believe that this figure may be underestimated. This violence is very difficult to address as many workers do not wish to report it for fear of losing their job. As a result of this fear, they do not question the authority of the predominantly male supervisors, which only further deepens the patriarchal patterns still persistent in Moroccan society.

Moreover, in the pack houses and factories where labour providers are not the only interface between the employer and the employee, where labour relations are formalised by contracts, where there are automated systems to calculate hours worked and where transport services are provided by the employer, these bad practices seem to decrease. Such kind of mechanisms help to ensure that the company's leadership vision trickle down to the rest of the enterprise, which can be challenging with big enterprises where ways of working change slowly. Coaching and clarifying roles and responsibilities of supervisors by the top management of factory also helps to reduce the power of some waqqafs or transporters may have over women workers. This type of human resource structure is key to prevent the abuse of power that only exacerbates inequality between women and men.

Workers in two different pack houses have also told us that they have had the opportunity to engage and discuss directly with their management regarding working conditions and that a workers' association was also existing in their enterprises. It seems that such practice has happened in the factories over the past 2 years.

6.5. Transport

Target	A concerted focus on improving transport to and from sites.
Initial Situation	Poor road infrastructures conditions. Bad conditions of transport means and risky journeys for women to reach their working location (overloaded trucks, risky driving behaviours...)
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dialogue initiated between all stakeholders, including government agencies, growers and local NGOs, to work on practical and realistic solutions related to transportation issues

In order to improve the transportation for workers, multiple challenging factors have to be considered. First, the sector's rapid growth is forcing companies to seek workers from further distances. Some producers claim to have to hire women living more than 100km away from the production site. Moreover, according to the analysis of the Ministry of Equipment, Transport and Logistics, the GCBH region is one of the three regions "*distinguished by a road in a particularly high state of degradation.*"¹⁴ This difficult and sometimes dangerous access during rainy season in addition to the great distances only further amplifies the challenges in offering workers safe and appropriate transport conditions.

However, as it was illustrated by Jucar's 2012 study on labour providers working in the strawberry sector, "*the informality of the whole transportation sector is responsible for most of its shortcomings.*"¹⁵ Indeed, according to this study, none of the 30 surveyed transporters had passenger authorisation, nor knew of other drivers in the region that had one. None of them worked in a formal setting (company incorporated, appropriate driving licenses for public passenger transport, insurance, etc.) and agreements with employers were always verbal. This has not, according to the Transporters' Association created within the programme, changed since the study was done, and especially regarding the informality of the recruiting role of the transporter in the villages.

The condition of vehicles transporting workers, which are often trucks not designed for personnel transport, risky driving behaviours and especially overloaded trucks are the elements most frequently cited as the most problematic for workers. For example, one of the main forms of transport is the Mercedes 207 van, which can legally accommodate 9 people. However, the information collected shows that these vehicles will transport an average of 35 people, and in some cases, up to 55 people.¹⁶

« I believe that if my workers had more comfortable transportation, they would be in a better condition to work. But I cannot afford to invest in a bus, especially given the state of the road, within a year my bus would be ruined ! »

- Producer

Oxfam's programme and the synergy created within the international strategy fostered the organisation of a seminar involving all stakeholders around the issue of transport in March 2014. The stakeholders agreed on a common conclusion: the need of strong political will of the Moroccan government to improve the road infrastructure and also the need enforce the actual legislation on transport in order to improve transport conditions for women workers. However, given the lack of alternatives, some producers take advantage of this status quo that perpetuates the informal

¹⁴ Presentation of the Ministry of Equipment, Transportation and Logistics, "*Route Plan 2035, Perspectives and Ambitions* », presented in the seminar organized by Oxfam in March 2014.

¹⁵ Jucar, Social Development Consultant, "*Study on workplace intermediaries in the strawberry sector in Larache region and Moulay Bousselham*", p.29.

¹⁶ Ibid, P.30.

systems currently prevailing. The seminar brought together women workers, civil society associations, producers and British importers. It also included the participation of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Logistics, Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs.

The recommendations that emerged from this meeting were concrete and favoured a multi-sectoral dialogue. The Ministry of Infrastructure, Transport and Logistics, has shown real enthusiasm and willingness to work together and contribute to the coordination of activities in order to improve the roads conditions. We would like to encourage the Ministry to discuss with the Regional Governor of GCBH in order to make concrete progress on this issue in collaboration with the stakeholders who have expressed interest. This situation is intolerable and accidents each year continue to endanger women workers. It also furthers the informality of the labour situation (workers, recruiters, transporters, waqqafs) and hinder the expected economic growth within the Green Morocco Plan.

6.6. Health and Security

Target	Adherence to Global G.A.P (Good Agricultural Practice) health and safety standards as a minimum on all Moroccan strawberry farms. Within 3 years agro-industry units should improve working conditions and hygiene
Initial Situation	Few farms have Global G.A.P certification
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moroccan farms exporting to the UK are Global G.A.P certified. Some producers are trying to get other types of certification (BSCI audits/audits to the ETI Base code) • In some factories and pack houses, infrastructures and health and safety practices have improved

According to Oxfam’s findings, Moroccan farms and farms operations exporting to the UK are Global G.A.P certified and this certification must be renewed each year by an audit. Some farms supplying exporting pack houses or other major exporting farms do not have this certification. The process to obtain certification requires first for producers to improve their practices to the Global G.A.P standards, select a certified auditor and arrange an appointment to be audited and receive certification. The elements assessed during the audit are:

- 1) Soil management
- 2) The use of substrates
- 3) Verification pre-harvest
- 4) Harvesting
- 5) Product handling

Each of these categories includes subcategories that will address more specifically training of employees, especially regarding the handling and storage of the product, most of the time unrelated to working conditions. Although producers have received their Global G.A.P certification, this certification covers a limited number of items on health and safety at work and is much more focused on the quality of the product.



As such, it is an encouraging step forward, but it seems that this certification does not allow for substantial improvement of working conditions and infrastructure of the companies in terms of health and safety. The issues regularly mentioned by women workers, which do not respond to standard occupational health and safety under the law can be summarised in four points:

- 1) Absence or lack of sufficient toilets, most notably on farms;
- 2) Little or no protective clothing and equipment, primarily those needed for protection against pesticides during spraying in greenhouses and warm clothes in refrigerators. In focus groups discussion conducted during the 2013-2014 period, 30% of women said they were in regular contact with hazardous chemicals (pesticides, chemicals) and without protective equipment while working on farms.
- 3) Use of unsafe/polluted water in some facilities that causes skin irritation and skin allergies to women and limited access to clean water for drinking. This high frequency of skin problem has been confirmed by an occupational physician specialised in agriculture in the strawberry production area.
- 4) Few qualified medical staff or first aid kits available in companies with over 50 employees, which is the legal threshold, above which medical equipment and staff are required to be available on site. Also, very few qualified occupational physician are working in the region and the mechanisms put in place to insure health of workers are well intentioned, but are rarely efficient.

The programme sought to improve this aspect by organising a seminar in December 2013 on health and safety in the workplace. Four producers, a dozen of labour inspectors, an occupational physician and civil society organisations were mobilised during this training.

The audits undertaken at exporting farms and facilities, required by international buyers (and sometimes conducted by supermarket staff) are regularly criticised by women workers. During focus groups discussion conducted between September 2013 and June 2014, 30% of women workers reported that the factories were "*transformed*" on the days of the audits. It seems unfortunate that such practices are used to bypass verification systems in place, but as audits have commercial implications, it is obvious that the audited companies do not want to show their shortcomings, even if they are sometimes due to systemic difficulties that exceed the capacity of producers to solve them.

Although audits might reveal a number of issues, repeated and unannounced audits have the potential to undermine trust between stakeholders in the supply chain and do not allow for constructive dialogue. As the saying goes, "you cannot fatten a sheep by weighing it" which in this case means that it is not the repetition of audits that will improve practices, but the dialogue that is developed and the improvement activities that follow. If the focus is only on hygiene and product handling, issues relating to respecting labour laws will not be highlighted and the improvement activities expected will have little impact for women workers. Also, repetitive audits can become quite expensive for importers and quite time consuming for producers and it often becomes more of a control tool than a real opportunity for improvement. The audit would be more meaningful if it feed the dialogue for improvement between producers and importers and not remain an outcome in itself.

As audits have commercial implications, it is obvious that the audited companies do not want to show their shortcomings, even if they are sometimes due to systemic difficulties that exceed the capacity of producers to solve them.

Some producers have shared with us that they faced resistance among workers when they wanted to implement new safety rules or provide protective equipment. For example, women workers are accustomed to not using gloves, which is a hygiene measure but can also protect against cuts. However some of them systematically took them off as soon as the supervisor had left their workstation as they felt it slowed or hindered their work. This then caused tensions between workers and supervisors that on occasion developed into an excess of violence against workers. It seems that beyond a simple resistance to change, there is also a lack of understanding of the reasons to use the protective gear. Safety measures and productivity expectations are not always concomitant and can further increase the pressure exert on women workers if priorities are not clearly stated.

6.7. Minimum Wage

Target	All workers on Moroccan strawberry farms are being paid at least the national minimum wage for their work. Ensuring all deductions from workers wages are legal and agreed to, including transport
Initial Situation	Wages are particularly low in farms where the minimum wage is rarely respected. The situation is more favourable in the pack houses/processing factories where employers appear to comply with the law respecting minimum wage. However, the provisions on over-time are never applied.
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of the pack houses/processing factories for which we have information, are ensuring payment of minimum wage Women know their rights and increasingly refuse a job that does not pay the minimum wage

The programme's impact was evident in many ways on this aspect of the action plan. Firstly, highlighting during awareness raising activities the irregularities in minimum wage payments combine with the influence done by importers on their suppliers for compliance on this aspect, an increase of the wages, particularly in the pack houses where labour contracts are established between employers and employees has been done. As a result, we estimate that 70% of pack houses and processing factories for which we have information, now meet and respect the minimum wage (12.23 dh/hr). This huge change will have a significant impact on the living conditions of the women workers.

The awareness-raising done on labour rights shedding light on minimum wage has enabled many women workers to request an increase to their wages, or refuse work that does not comply with the minimum wage. The rapid growth of the berry industry is further increasing labour needs which play in favour of women workers: many of them said they would nowadays refuse to work for a labour provider not offering at least the minimum wage. This negotiating skill was unimaginable at the onset of the programme and demonstrates the impact that awareness raising and social mobilisation can have when reaching all stakeholders from employees to employers and importers.

According to our calculations based on the number of people who visited the Observatory in 2013-2014, 17% were not paid the minimum wage and 46% did not receive the proper payment for overtime. The role of the labour providers is key in addressing non-compliance with minimum wage or overtime pay; however the informality of the organisation of labour in strawberry farms remains a large obstacle in achieving full compliance with the minimum wage. The farms that are directly connected to pack houses and processing factories are more regularly audited by external customers, and as a result workers seem to benefit the payment of SMAG and overtime payment. This trend however is not predominant across the entire sector.

The resistance of some producers and their unequal commitment to change bad practices jeopardises the possibility to build lasting change in the entire sector and overshadows the good practice implemented by some producers.

Unlike other elements of the action plan, such as transportation, for which a variety of actors are involved and therefore may in part explain some of the difficulties in achieving the objectives, no external constraint can justify the non-payment of the Agriculture Minimum wage (SMAG) and Non-agriculture Minimum wage (SMIG). To comply with Moroccan law and their commitments to their customers, some producers have to make an extra effort to comply with legislation and labour inspectors must ensure must be persistent in order to properly implement the application of the minimum wage.

7. Constraints

7.1. During programme implementation in Morocco

- Reluctance from some producers

Since the beginning of the programme some producers have demonstrated a transparency and willingness to engage in dialogue with regards to the difficulties they have faced to comply with the law or share their good practices. Others have instead expressed distrust to the programme actions or to local civil society.

This distrust was expressed in different ways. Some employers/supervisors/transporters have tried, for example, to prevent women's access to raising awareness caravans, either by retaining them at work for longer hours or by sending supervisors to discourage them from visiting the caravan, or by dropping them off far from their village. While such practices were not frequent and were mostly used during the first three years of the programme, they have still been reported during caravan outreach activities in the 2013-14 year.

Another finding was that some pack houses and processing factories are complying with the labour laws, but also buy large quantities of strawberries from other producers who do not respect

Moroccan labour law, and therefore close their eyes on working conditions of women workers in the farms supplying to them.

The resistance of some producers and their unequal commitment to change bad practices jeopardises the possibility to build lasting change in the entire sector and overshadows the good practice implemented by some producers. While some producers have implemented changes in their factories or farms it becomes challenging for them to maintain such practices against unfair competition, creating a race to the bottom effect. This unhealthy competition is also maintained as some importers continue to purchase from these producers further endorsing, consciously or not, these bad practices.

Finally, the possibility of some producers to export to other “*less demanding*” markets, as said by one producer, is yet another real concern. This may, as a result, cause other producers to be less willing to make these changes.

- Resistance of workers

Although surprising, many women workers did not know their rights and did not wish to do the whole process to get their National ID card or did not see the point of having a Social Security card. This resistance made the administrative process supported by local NGOs much longer.

In factories where labour contracts were in place, some women workers preferred to keep a certain level of informality to maintain flexibility and not have contracts, which represented a challenge for those factories that really wanted to comply with the law. Some women workers also told us that when the pack houses or factories in which they worked, reduced their hours to eight a day, they were unhappy since it meant a decrease in income.

Although these reservations and resistance are real, it seems that when women workers understand the benefits of being registered to the CNSS, to have a contract providing stable employment and have a fixed schedule and more time to spend outside of work, and especially when done in a collective manner among all workers, the resistance are dwindling.

- Time constraint

As this is a seasonal crop, the majority of awareness raising activities must reach the workers during this short season which only lasts between three to six months per year. Some caravans had to be postponed or reschedule due to bad weather and other constraints, but as the season is short, it requires greater flexibility from local associations in order to reach the women workers during these short and critical periods.

During the months of the high season, the berry producers (farmers and pack houses) and importers have less availability to collaborate and to honour their commitments and when the season is over, the discussions on improvements of working conditions no longer remain a priority. As a result, the ability to work effectively together can occur only during a few months, most easily just before the start of the season.

« *We must not judge companies on the mistakes they make, but rather on how they respond to them* ».

- *John Ruggie, former UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights*



Luigi Forese/Oxfam

- Infrastructure constraints: inaccessibility of the villages

As previously mentioned in the section dedicated to transport, roads in the area are in poor condition and some villages, remote and isolated, were not easily accessible.

- Non collective engagement of actors in other importing countries

It is important to note that in the French, Spanish and Swedish markets that have been solicited so far, the supermarkets and companies welcomed the programme and the results achieved. Regular contact was established between Oxfam and the different stakeholders and some have already started concrete and consistent dialogue with their producers. However, their commitment did not result in the establishment of a joint platform like in the UK, which requires more attention and therefore makes it more difficult to evaluate the impact.

7.2. Encountered by Better Strawberries Group

- Ways of working

BSG stakeholders were used to working unilaterally without much collaboration. Although ETI members are used to working collaboratively, the range of stakeholders engaged requires a significant amount of coordination as well as shared operating principles. Often, although there was agreement in principle, the implementation could be compromised by different agendas and the need to reach consensus before moving forward. To achieve this, it was necessary to adapt the ways of working to enable both shared and closed spaces for dialogue while also leaving room for confidential and/or bilateral discussions between importers and retailers without Oxfam. Although the group has progress continuously and learned to work together, it has taken time and required a great amount of flexibility so that all stakeholders were comfortable to participate. While sharing a common goal to improve the working conditions of women workers, this held different meaning and had different implications for each actor in the group, as each stakeholder had their own internal objectives. This, coupled with individual internal constraints and a lack of verbalisation of internal challenges faced, sometimes meant that the group's ambitions in terms of meeting deadlines or achievements.

- Communication, transparency

Essential elements to achieve smooth progress and common objectives, such as trust and transparency, were not always easily developed between NGOs and the private sector, let alone between competitors (group of importers or group of supermarkets) and between entities holding a commercial relationships (importers and supermarkets). Distrust was one of the greatest barriers in building collaborative relationships throughout the first year, making the sharing of information and accountability on both sides, sometimes very complex. The constraints relating to commercial confidentiality also hindered the sharing of information in this heterogeneous group and mechanisms to build anonymity, managed by the ETI were necessary for success. The dynamics needed to safely and appropriately share information as well as the mitigation of fear of potential commercial impacts (as a result of any potential public denunciation or cessation of trade relations) was only possible through frequent and delicate discussions throughout the implementation process as well as with the support of the ETI.

8. Future of Better Strawberries Group and Recommendations

8.1. The future of the group

8.1.1. Ways of working

- Following the lessons learned from this experience and with increasing confidence between the various stakeholders, **ways of working should be reviewed and adapted accordingly**. In order to insure sustainability of the results and keeping the right level of commitment from all stakeholders, ways of working should be adapted according to the revised action plan.
- An agreement to complete the 2012-2015 action plan is underway and a review must be made for the upcoming period, taking into account the remaining challenges and constraints that have prevented the achievement of certain objectives during the first action plan.
- From a sustainability of impact perspective, it would be beneficial to put in place more frequent meetings with Moroccan producers and set up mechanisms that facilitate monitoring and sharing of information.

8.1.2. Sustainability of impact

- Following the March 2014 seminar looking at the transportation issues, recommendations were made and follow-up was done with the Ministry of equipment, transport and logistics. In recent months there has been very few changes on these issues and it remains a key problem faced by women workers as well as producers and importers. Particular attention will be placed in addressing this issue.
- Increase enforcement of the Labour Code in all berry farms and processing plants by increasing resources to insure training, monitoring and control on site.

8.2. Recommendations

8.2.1. For companies importing berries

- Go beyond audit and develop a longer-term vision to improve working conditions with Moroccan suppliers to ensure compliance with the Moroccan Labour law as well

as international norms such as ILO Conventions and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹⁷.

- Align company social responsibility and sourcing strategies with purchasing practices. As described by Prof. John Ruggie: “Responsible purchasing is as important as responsible manufacturing”.
- Develop business incentives that support social responsibility and which are based on progressive improvement, not solely on administrative compliance.
- Encourage other buyers to join in joint initiatives in order to have a systemic and long lasting impact.

8.2.2. For the producers

- Take advantage of civil society capacity to help workers in obtaining their identity and CNSS cards and aim at recording all workers to CNSS. Ensure that the employer’s share of CNSS is paid for all days worked.
- Formalise the work of labour providers through clear contracts and responsibilities, and engage them in ensuring that the labour code is respected.
- For exporting farms and processing industries: support your supplying farms so they progressively meet the labour code. This support can be provided now, even if your facility is not yet fully compliant.

8.2.3. For the government

- Increase the resources available for workplace inspections and awareness raising (labour inspector and CNSS).
- Improve the transport infrastructure and formalise the sectors of transport and worker recruitment.
- Align the SMIG/SMAG.

8.2.4. For Civil Society Organisations

- Ensure cases of rights violations are properly recorded and information cross-checked with different means in order to provide evidence based facts to relevant actors (institutions, importers etc).
- Reinforce women’s workers associations and continue awareness raising on labour rights especially in remote and isolated areas.
- Continue advocacy work with the support of berry companies with the relevant authorities to improve transport conditions.

¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights’, Office of the High Commissioner, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, New York and Geneva, 2011.

9. Conclusion

Increased collaboration and reinforced positive potential of joint initiatives between workers, civil society, producers, European importers and government institutions, has helped to create a common vision and enable change in the lives of thousands of women. This synergy is now ongoing and the collaboration between these stakeholders will continue. The collaboration between these stakeholders will continue and several initiatives from local associations, government agencies, producers or importers are still being developed. Being on awareness-raising on labour rights or on the process of formalising labour relations within businesses, many of these ongoing activities will continue to multiply and diversify.

The commitment of all supply chain stakeholders would not be as meaningful without this lively and essential mobilisation from women workers themselves.

Through the leadership that they have developed throughout the course of the programme, women workers can be central to these efforts to drive long-term sustainable changes across Morocco's Agriculture sector. The strength they have shown in what has often been unstable and unsafe situations and their desire to develop the tools they need to shape a fair and equitable future for themselves is the most remarkable impact this programme has achieved.



Julie Thérour-Séguin/Oxfam

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