

Learning Activity 6.4

Identifying sexual harassment on a tea plantation

Overview

This Learning Activity uses a real life scenario reported in a journal (contained in a reading resource below) to illustrate the different forms that sexual harassment and violence takes in a tea plantation. In particular it illustrates how difficult it is to identify sexual harassment, even when companies go through an extensive audit process. It illustrates the multi-layered problems attached to identifying and addressing sexual harassment. Small group discussion is the suggested method.

Suggested time

60-90 minutes

Target group

- Stakeholders involved in developing and implementing workplace gender-based violence programmes;
- Programme managers, factory/farm managers and supervisors;
- Representatives from global, national and local employers and trade unions;
- Representatives from global, national and local NGOs and women's organizations.

Aims

- Realize the causes and consequences of gender-based violence on a tea plantation.
- Appreciate the roles played by different stakeholders and of social dialogue in devising practical workplace strategies to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence.

Preparation

- Prepare the activity by collecting sources of information for the group work session, including relevant case studies.
- Provide contextual information and tips about the issues that can be discussed.
- Elaborate a version of the scenario in the hand-out which may be appropriate to the group.

Setting

A room large enough to accommodate several groups.

Materials

Reading resource.

Time/Steps

Step 1: Preparation (suggested time: 15 minutes)

In small groups or in the full group read the summary of the report that appeared in 'The Ecologist' in April 2011 about sexual harassment in the tea sector.

Step 2: Small group discussion (suggested time: 45-60 minutes)

Split into small groups of between four and six people. Ask participants to nominate one person per group as rapporteur for the final plenary session.

Ask each group of participants to refer to the reading resource and identify the situations in which sexual harassment is claimed to have taken place and summarize the:

- **problems** of identifying sexual harassment;
- **reasons** *why* you think the alleged harassment took place; and
- **circumstances** that might encourage sexual harassment in a tea plantation.

Participants are invited consider the following questions:

- What information will you need to collect to take further action?
- How would you collect this information?
- What action do you recommend to resolve the problems identified?
- How can social dialogue play a role?

On the basis of their discussions, groups are asked to draw up a practical action plan to deal with the problems that SOMO allege existed at the plantation.

Step 3: Plenary discussion (suggested time: 15-30 minutes)

In the plenary session, ask rapporteurs to present each group findings and discuss the differing approaches that might be adopted and how they might interact.

How to adapt it

- The activity can be shortened/adapted to small group or plenary discussion.

Tips

- If participants have literacy difficulties, the article can be summarized and/or read to participants.
- When each group presents their findings, write up the main learning points from each presentation on a flip chart.

Resources

Sexual harassment in the tea sector

The Dutch research organization SOMO, which monitors the operations of multinational companies, uncovered evidence that some female workers at the Kericho tea estate in Kenya, operated by Unilever, have deplorable working and living conditions and have been victims of sexual harassment and abuse at the hands of company supervisors. There have been similar findings in the past from UK NGO War on Want and the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC).

Unilever denied the allegations and were not aware of any problems of sexual harassment at its Kericho plantation, and says that it will act on any case where there is evidence of such behaviour taking place. The company has Rainforest Alliance certification, where it successfully meets nearly 100 social, environmental and economic criteria. The certification body's audits in 2010 found no evidence of problems. According to the Rainforest Alliance's Sustainable Agriculture Division, "With regards to the allegation of sexual harassment, we found that the estate has a clear policy on sexual harassment. It was clear that the company has put in place positive measures to create both awareness and the empowerment of women – who are the victims mentioned in the SOMO report – but also that these measures are aimed at being able to identify the problem early enough if it occurs." It later added that: "In the November 2010 audit no evidence was found to support them. What we have said is that we need evidence and specifics so that independent auditors can follow up the allegations. Without these it would be difficult to do more than the thorough research audit conducted in November 2010."

The company said it had only dealt with one instance of sexual abuse in almost a decade, which they say was fully investigated and appropriate action was taken. Unilever also said that it had put in place several measures to ensure that allegations of inappropriate behaviour can be reported by workers: "These include regular rotations of our plantation unit leaders, a free telephone hotline for workers to register complaints anonymously, and a welfare committee with female representation to improve liaison between our workers and management on welfare issues." Following the publication of the earlier SOMO and KHRC reports, Unilever says it investigated all the claims made in relation to sexual harassment, working and living conditions at the Kericho plantation, and found nothing of concern.

A visit to the Kericho plantation in March 2011, by the authors of the *Ecologist* report, heard further allegations of sexual harassment, with some women at the estate claiming they have no choice but to have sex with male supervisors in order to survive. Sex is reportedly demanded by supervisors in return for allocating lighter duties, for help with securing better housing, organizing repairs to property and for extra money for women desperate to supplement their wages. Some women have claimed that they feel coerced into having intercourse in order to avoid being targeted by supervisors. Accommodation was also found to be in a state of disrepair and workers also alleged that some employees at the plantation are kept on a temporary basis for months – or even years – at a time, rather than be provided with contracts or benefits promised to permanent workers.

Voices of women working on the plantation

“I can’t show you my house...I’m just too embarrassed. I tried to get a transfer, but my options are a bribe of about 500 Kenya Shillings or to sleep with the supervisor. But he won’t sleep with me. At 48 he thinks I am too old.”

“It’s completely normal here...I’d say all of us, all the time, sleep with the supervisor, or agree to have regular sex, in order to get a lighter shift.”

“I didn’t choose this. I have sex with supervisors to survive, to pay school fees, to keep my house or to get a repair done. I think of the money when I have sex, or what I am getting. Nothing else. There’s no pleasure, or choice.”

“It is as bad as you see... sexual harassment and coercive sex [are] absolutely standard for all women under forty. You don’t go to the toilet at night...”

One young woman told her story of repeated abuse. She had to have sex with the supervisor in order to get the job in the first place and experienced repeated harassment and abuse; she was told that she would have to have sex with the supervisor or else her wages would be deducted. Others claimed they had to have sex in return for being allocated accommodation and or in getting lighter work or easier shifts. Better shifts make it possible for women to work round children’s school days, and to run the house – most work between 8 and 12 hours a day. Women pluckers who refuse sexual advances from male supervisors pay a high price and are given too much work or allocated work in lonely or dangerous plucking zones. Women do not report abuse and sexual harassment for fear of further reprisals, and also because the management could not be trusted to investigate abuse properly. Unions on the tea estates do not deal with the issue of sexual harassment and workers who are union members report being harassed, being allocated heavier tea picking duties or even dismissal if they raise difficult issues with the management.

Note: ITC-ILO does not verify or endorse the claims of either the SOMO report or the companies involved. The Ecologist report is being used as the basis of a training exercise.

Source: PG Tips and Lipton tea hit by ‘sexual harassment and poor conditions’ claims, by

Verity Largo and Andrew Wasley. http://www.theecologist.org/News/news_analysis/847973/pg_tips_and_lipton_tea_hit_by_sexual_harassment_and_poor_conditions_claims.html