

Case Study 1.2

The horticulture and cut flower global supply chain

Background

The horticulture and cut flower industry is seen as beneficial to developing countries, particularly in Africa, because of its higher returns and employment. Cultivation of fruits, flowers and vegetables is substantially more labour intensive than cereal crops and offers significantly more post-harvest opportunities for the global chain to add value. There is a rise of regional supply chains within the global South. (Evers et al. 2014) Several developing countries have successfully up-graded into packing and processing, and the number of women employed in the sector has increased significantly. (Staritz and Guilherme Reis 2013)

Over half of the flowers bought in Europe are produced in Africa. According to Women Working Worldwide, pressures to produce a supply of fresh and high-quality flowers, often under very tight deadlines, impacts on the health, well-being and rights of workers.

In Kenya, for example, the cut flower industry has grown rapidly. It provides employment for more than two million people. However, many of the jobs are extremely low paid and are unskilled. Jobs grading, packing, harvesting, tending beds and watering are low skilled. Many workers are very poor and vulnerable to exploitation. (FAO, IFAD & ILO 2010)



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“The flower industry promises to make important contributions to Kenya’s economic development by providing rural employment, attracting foreign investment, and improving domestic technology and infrastructure. However, for this development to be sustainable, environmental impacts and social abuses must be addressed effectively in order for the industry to fulfill its potential positive effects.”
(Leipold & Morgante, 2013, p.2)

Structure of the sector

The horticultural value chain includes several stages: inputs (such as seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals, and farm and irrigation equipment), production, packing and storage, processing, and distribution and marketing. The chain is buyer-driven and the lead firms are large supermarkets in key markets. (Staritz and Guilherme Reis 2013) Supermarkets may have very tight deadlines resulting in production pressures on workers, especially at peak times such as Valentine’s Day.

Gender dimensions of the horticulture value chain

There is a marked gender bias in roles. Men are favoured for positions that require physical strength. Women are preferred for jobs that depend on finesse, dexterity, and attention to detail. There is also gender bias with respect to crop types. Women participate in all stages of the value chain but are concentrated in the packing segment. Women are likely to have different wages and contractual conditions from men, flexible employment that heightens uncertainty, limited access to training and they experience sexual harassment.

Low wages and flexible employment of predominantly female workers help reduce employers’ costs – at women workers’ expense. But the lack of training can limit productivity and prevent upgrading into more sophisticated segments of the chain—particularly those that depend on women. (Staritz and Guilherme Reis 2013) While union activity is discouraged on the farms, the principal drivers to improve working conditions and the rights of women workers in Uganda have been promoted through collective bargaining and advocacy by Ugandan trade unions and non-governmental organizations, backed by European NGOs. (Evers et al., 2014)

➔ **A case study of the collective bargaining agreement in the cut flower sector in Uganda can be found in Module 8: Case Study 8.3: Challenging sexual harassment in horticulture through social dialogue in Uganda.**