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WORLD BANANA FORUM GOOD PRACTICES COLLECTION

WOMEN'S COMMITTEES IN THE BANANA INDUSTRY

Gender inequality in the banana industry can be seen in many forms of discrimination, including a gender pay gap, age discrimination, prejudice against new and expecting mothers, sexual and occupational harassment, gender-based violence, limited employment and training opportunities and a lack of representation in decision making at all levels. Women's committees at workplace, company or organisational level are a means towards fair work and increased job performance and career development, in an environment free from gender discrimination.

WOMEN'S COMMITTEES IN PRACTICE

Example of the International Union of Food Workers (IUF) / Latin American Coordinator of Banana and Agro-industrial Unions (COLSIBA) / Chiquita

Ever since the implementation of the certification standard [SA8000](#) in 2000, Chiquita has made efforts towards prioritizing the issue of women's rights. The internal [Code of Conduct](#) of the company was revised and positive actions have been undertaken, including the **"Zero Tolerance"** program, which aims to prevent the violation of women's rights, and the availability of telephone helplines, providing a space for women to express their complaints or concerns.

More than 2800 women work in Chiquita production operations in Latin America, representing approximately 17% of the workforce.

During the first Women's Committee meeting in 2011, a report was developed on the issues and actions to be undertaken at company level, referencing the following priorities:

- enhance Chiquita's policy on improving working conditions for women in the company's farms;
- include a clause on sexual harassment in the international agreement between Chiquita, COLSIBA and IUF, as well as in all local collective bargaining agreements;
- develop an awareness raising campaign for women to increase their knowledge and capacity in terms of technical skills, women's rights in the workplace and health and safety;
- provide female role models who can act as multipliers for the empowerment of women;
- share statistics on women's representation in the workforce and develop plans to increase employment opportunities.

Results

- Development and adoption of the [Chiquita / IUF / COLSIBA clause on sexual harassment](#).
- The launch of a gender pilot project on women's employment and decent work in Bocas del Toro region in Panama, improving their working conditions and increasing the scope of tasks to leaf cutting, banana cleaning, bagging, packing and boxing, control and application of fertilizer, pest control and planting of anti-erosion ground cover plants.
- Rigorous annual SA8000 audits, internal training and education programmes, the "zero tolerance" approach to Code of Conduct violations and the "Helpline" facility.
- Provision of childcare facilities for women workers in some plantations.
- Provision of gender equality in access to housing in some plantations.
- The Chiquita model was included in the agenda of the World Banana Forum (WBF) Working Group on labour rights (WG03) and the 2012 Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives, facilitating learning among other industry members.

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Example of the Pro-Women Committee of BANELINO (Asociación Bananos Ecológicos de la Línea Noroeste) in the Dominican Republic

The cooperative BANELINO was formed in 1996 by small Caribbean producers from Mao and Montecristi in the Dominican Republic. The country is the world's second largest producer of Fairtrade bananas, which allowed producers to earn an estimated extra \$10 million in 2014. 90% of BANELINO's production is Fairtrade-certified, providing funds for projects benefitting the health and livelihood of its members.



More than 20% of the 320 members of BANELINO are now women, and this number is increasing.

BANELINO's female members are mostly family heads with leadership skills and multiple capacities. They are producers and co-managers of their own farms with their husbands, and their daughters also often work in agriculture. However, until recently women were not involved in decision-making or in the social life of the association, despite their essential contributions.

In 2014, BANELINO's social department established the **Pro-Women Committee**, creating a group of women producers, wives and daughters of farmers in order to promote greater participation of women in governance, organizational leadership, representation and activities of the institution. BANELINO's Pro-Women Committee has been set up to motivate and integrate women into the association.

Before the creation of the Pro-Women Committee women had a passive participation in meetings in productive areas as well as during the General Assembly. Their participation in the association did not reflect the reality experienced in the farms, in which they expressed leadership and management capacity with both human and financial resources.

Results

- Women are now present in hierarchical bodies of the association, as part of the Executive Board and the Surveillance and Disciplinary Committees.
- Women are progressively empowering themselves in the various social, political and educational activities developed by the association.
- Women propose to the General Assembly of Members social projects that improve the quality of life of members of their communities, workers and their families.
- Two groups of women are being trained to create new livelihoods from bananas as a raw material, one using banana flour and one with banana fibre.
- Women have received training in several key topics including women's rights, women's empowerment and leadership, best agricultural practices and organic production, domestic violence, gender, and business management

Example of the Interinstitutional agreement between the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), the Ministry of Women (MMUJER) and the Dominican Association of Banana Producers (ADOBANANO)

ADOBANANO is an association that represents banana producers in the Dominican Republic from the provinces of Azua, Valverde and Montecristi. In 2013, the association signed an [agreement](#) with the United Nations Population Fund and the Ministry of Women with the following objectives:

- create a pro-women committee within the organizational structure of ADOBANANO;
- raise awareness and train female workers in banana plantations on gender, leadership and violence issues;
- organize capacity-building and awareness-raising workshops on gender equality in banana production areas;
- distribute educational materials on gender equality;
- provide legal and psychological support to women in banana-producing areas.

Recommendations towards creating effective Women's Committees

1. Identify representatives of both the company/producer and the workers to participate in the committee, including female trade union representatives where possible. Workers should be given the opportunity to nominate and elect their own representatives. In the case of small farmers, involvement of family members can be beneficial.
2. Ensure that the communication needs of women are met to ensure their active participation in the Committee, including providing interpreters if necessary.
3. Establish regular meetings of the Committee, as well as one-off meetings as required to deal with urgent issues. These meetings should take place within work hours and have no impact on the wages of the representatives.
4. Develop a gender-focused analysis of the situation of women and their role in the workplace and/or association. It is essential to share information about women's employment levels and role in production to enable analysis of employment opportunities and subsequent training needs.
5. Jointly define an action plan based on concerns raised by women workers and producers and identify the priority issues to be dealt with, within specific timeframes.
6. Develop expertise on specific health and safety (H&S) risks for women, and in particular for new and expecting mothers, to feed into workplace H&S prevention and management programmes.
7. Implement an outreach and awareness raising campaign at workplace or farm level on the activities of the Women's Committee and wider issues for women, with the aim of promoting participation in these spaces for dialogue and decision making for each developed subject or agreement.
8. Include different departments and expertise in the initiatives undertaken by the committee, for example Human Resources, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Procurement, the legal department and medical staff, among others.
9. Women's Committees are most effective when a collective bargaining agreement exists between the company and trade union. In this case, it is essential to ensure that women representatives are present in the negotiation and to monitor this agreement to ensure the needs of female workers are represented in the individual clauses of the agreement. This provides a useful structure and tool for the ongoing work of the Women's Committee.

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Promoting the sustainability of the banana industry

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