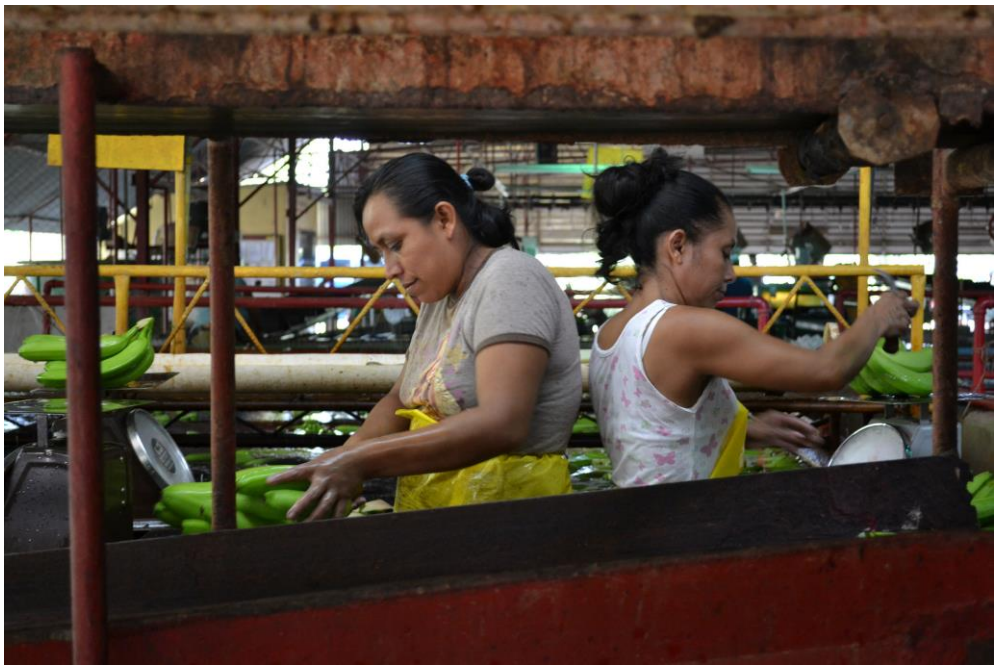
Women in the Banana Export Industry
Regional Report on Latin America



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Summary

Women in the Banana Export Industry Regional Report on Latin America is part of a global report on the economic aspects of gender issues in the banana sector. It is based on research conducted in Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua with a primary focus on the situation for hired labour and analyses levels of women's employment in the region and the key challenges for women workers. The report will inform the work of the World Banana Forum[1].

The average proportion of women employed in the Latin American banana industry is 12.5%, although this varies within and between countries. A key reason for this low rate of women's employment in the sector is the limited access of women to the whole range of work tasks on the plantation. Women tend to be restricted to work in the 'more controlled environment' of the packing shed in part due to the gender stereotyping of women. Many field tasks are perceived to be too technically difficult or too physically demanding for women to undertake but tend to be better paid. Women are viewed primarily as domestic actors and childcare providers.

The occupational health and safety risks for women identified are particularly those related to the effects of agrochemical exposure on reproductive health. Other problems faced by women workers are sexual harassment, discrimination when pregnant, a lack of childcare provision and the additional burdens faced by women managing childcare, domestic duties and in some cases, trade union activity.

A lack of access to training (in skills required to undertake field tasks) is an obstacle to women accessing employment. It is recommended that women are consulted to assess which tasks they can do and that this learning could inform guidance for employers. The initiatives led by women trade unionists throughout the region are highlighted as some examples of best practice in terms of increasing and improving employment for women. Company practices to improve women's treatment in the workplace, such as the only sexual harassment policy in the region (adopted by Chiquita), are also assessed. It is noted that the socio economic impact of the low proportion of women's employment, especially given the high rate of women as single heads of household, requires analysis. The report concludes by recommending the World Banana Forum as a multi stakeholder environment in which (the Women's Secretariats of) independent trade unions and companies can work together to develop and share strategies to increase the provision of Decent Work for women in the banana sector.

[1] The World Banana Forum is a permanent space of assembly for participants representing the global banana supply-chain to promote open dialogue on challenges facing the banana industry (http://www.fao.org/economic/worldbananaforum/en/#.Vl7x6XbhCUk)

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Introduction

This is one of three regional reports on the economic aspects of gender issues in the banana sector (the other reports focus on the Caribbean and West Africa respectively). This exploratory research was commissioned by the World Banana Forum's permanent working group on "Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues", as part of an on-going process involving data collection, analysis and action. These reports will be presented to the second Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives, which will be held in conjunction with the Third Global Conference of the World Banana Forum (WBF) in 2016.

The need for this research was identified in 2012, during the first Global Meeting of Women Banana Representatives. Participants of the meeting expressed that in order to drive forward the creation of strategies to increase the provision of Decent Work for women in the sector further information is required. This information includes:

- Key issues for women workers and small producers in the local banana industry;
- A particular analysis on the issue of women's employment (including the percentage of women's representation, variations between region/company, analysis of causal factors);
- Identification of the key roles carried out by women in the workplace and any perceived associated productivity and quality benefits;
- Any advances that have been, or could be, made through local, regional and international multi stakeholder dialogue and collaborative projects.

Methodology

This report provides an overview of research findings from Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

In the case of Ecuador, the largest banana exporting country in the world (a country in which industrialised monoculture on a large- and medium-scale coexists with small-scale family production for the world market), independently funded field research was conducted over a period of five weeks with the help of the volunteer Rachel Smith and in-country support from the National Federation for Free Agro-industrial Workers, Peasant Farmers and Indigenous People (FENACLE).

As part of this field research conducted in Ecuador, semi-structured interviews were held with company representatives from eight exporting companies and two medium sized producers. Eight workshops took place with groups of women workers employed on monoculture plantations. Additionally, it was possible to conduct informal interviews with over 70 women workers and six men. During the field work, small producers selling to the international market via larger national and multinational producers were also considered. Representatives of four small producers associations and 12 small-scale female producers were also interviewed. Material from the field research conducted in Ecuador has been integrated into this regional report, although a more detailed report on Ecuador alone can also be found in Annex 1 for the benefit of the interested reader.

The information from Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua was provided by the women's secretariat of the main trade unions representing workers in the banana industry: SINTRAINAGRO (Colombia); SITRABI (Guatemala); FESTAGRO (Honduras) and FETDECH (Nicaragua) who responded to a questionnaire disseminated through regional agro-industrial workers trade union coordinating body COLSIBA. The questionnaire can be found in Annex 2. The information obtained from the women's representatives has been further supplemented by information obtained from existing documentation regarding the position of women workers' in these countries.

In the case of Colombia, information was gathered from fieldwork in the country to informally discuss the challenges faced by women workers on the fringes of a workshop focusing on other issues. Some of the insights gained from these discussions have informed the interpretation of data received via the questionnaire returned from Colombia.

A limitation of this report was lack of budget for trade unions to conduct workshops with female members in

order to gather new information on the above issues Therefore, information on women workers in Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua is considerably less detailed than that on Ecuador, where field research could be carried out as a result of the availability of independent funding. Furthermore, information on Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua was gathered exclusively through independent workers' organisations. Moreover, in most cases the information given was about companies, where trade unions were in a collective bargaining process to improve conditions for both their female and male members. Thus, it is probably that the problems described in this report may be more severe in other parts of the industry where there is no independent trade union representing workers.

A second limitation of this research is the lack of information about the gender dimension of the informal employment relationships that are prevalent in large parts of the industry.

Another limitation of the research for all countries except Ecuador is the lack of information and input from companies producing or buying in the region. Dole and Chiquita had already shared gender differentiated employment statistics for 2013 with the members of the World Banana Forum permanent Working Group 3 on “Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues” and these are included in the section of the report about women's representation in the industry.

The perspective of producers and exporters – from small- and medium-sized national businesses to well known multinational actors – might facilitate greater understanding of why the unequal treatment and harassment experienced by many women workers persists, and how it can most effectively be addressed. Researching the perspectives of company representatives regarding the issues raised in this report would be one of the strongly recommended next steps along the path to improving the working lives of women employed in the banana industry.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the contributions from all those who supported with this study including: Pascal Liu and Victor Prada of the World Banana Forum; Alistair Smith, Julie Porter, Jacqui Mackay, Rachel Smith and the team of volunteers at Banana Link; Sue Longley of the IUF; Iris Munguia and Adela Torres of COLSIBA; Carmen Banegas of FENACLE and all the other local trade union representatives and workers involved gathering the information in this regional report.

We would also like to acknowledge the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for financing this publication.

Background I: Historical & Cultural context

There is considerable diversity between the various exporters of bananas in Latin America and it would be unjust to the richness of their historical and cultural experience to make specific statements about them. Nevertheless some very general observations can be made.

Firstly, apart from Brazil, Belize and the Guyanas, almost the entire region was taken over some five hundred years ago by the Spanish Conquistadors and subsequently ruled by Spanish appointees until different regions achieved independence most prominently in the early nineteenth century. The period of Spanish rule saw the brutal suppression, and in some cases, destruction of many of the indigenous cultures, and an almost universal ideological penetration of the region by Roman Catholic beliefs and practices (albeit often modified through the prisms of indigenous belief systems, and influenced by the African religions imported by force with the slaves).

However, as the influence of Spain declined, that of the United States tended to grow, as the United States began to provide, among other points of influence, new industrial products and markets for Latin American goods (although Europe also remained a very important market for many countries.)

Throughout much of the 20th century, a pattern of political extremes emerged throughout much of the continent. In many countries vast tracts of land (*haciendas* inherited from the Spanish imperial period and known as *Latifundias*) covered much of the better cultivable land and many agricultural workers lived on them in bonded labour. Poverty, both in the countryside and in the growing urban centres, frequently threatened social stability and patterns of land ownership inherited from imperial rule. This was frequently seen as an impediment to both the alleviation of poverty and the modernisation of agriculture, which was an important source of foreign export revenue.

Widespread discontent meant that, at different times in different countries, political leaders emerged promising land re-distribution, freedom for trade unions and the press, and other policies aiming at greater equality and social justice for the impoverished masses. Financial difficulties would in many cases contribute to these regimes being overturned by military coups. A pattern emerged which lasted for decades in the twentieth century with left-leaning regimes and military dictatorships alternating between each other. The oscillation between political extremes was frequently accompanied by considerable violence. This often included civil war, which lasted for years, and by social repression.

This pattern of instability was of great concern to the region's increasingly powerful northern neighbour, the United States. Much of Latin America was seen by the United States as its own 'backyard'. During the post-war period, the deepening of Cold War tensions enhanced the fears of Americans with regard to anything that might be interpreted as 'socialism'. It was during this time that the United States began to take a very active role in the region, encouraging regimes which it saw as favouring 'freedom' and 'democracy' and discouraging regimes which it saw as favouring 'totalitarianism' and 'tyranny'. Paradoxically, the impoverished majority of Latin Americans often regarded the totalitarian left-wing governments as being legitimate, democratically elected regimes, which were trying to resolve the problems of poverty and inequality which plagued their society.

Latin America would eventually become the operating region for three major American banana multinationals, which would eventually become today's Dole, Del Monte and Chiquita. It is a region which was politically unstable and prone to violence often on an epic scale during the cold war. In some Central American states, the US based banana companies were the biggest financial players, with their own annual turnovers sometimes dwarfing the revenues and expenditure of national governments. It is not for nothing that some of the countries in question were referred to as 'banana republics'. In some cases, the *latifundias* that left-leaning governments proposed redistributing to the landless poor were owned by these same US banana companies. The USA Freedom of Information Act means that the Cold War period is now better understood and there are well documented cases of how cold war tensions were manipulated by corporate interests, including in the banana sector (*Garcia A., 1967)*.

The banana industry in Latin America today cannot be understood, nor the challenges it faces ameliorated, without an understanding of this interplay between the political powers of the United States, the US- based banana companies, and those social and economic changes in the region. While most of the Latin American

banana world is currently considered stable and while many of its key players meet peaceably in World Banana Forum meetings, the violent history of banana production on the continent is recent, and is remembered by a great number of workers, trade unionists and local communities. It is worth noting that it is only at the time of writing that the conflict between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla movement, some of whose engagements were carried out in the banana producing region of Colombia, was finally being resolved. Therefore, for many Colombian banana workers, the history of violence is far from being a distant memory.

This is the broad background for women working in the industry and the problems they face. The long history of conflict and extreme violence in the region has both damaged the fabric of society and contributed to the development of a highly 'macho' culture. Deeper, still, are the cultural and religious images of women: the Madonna and child; the Virgin, uncontaminated by sexual desire or practice; the good Catholic woman who should use no contraception but accept God's plan, regardless of how many new mouths this means she will have to feed. This surely is the woman who should stay at home to tend her growing brood.

Nevertheless, this deeply ingrained view of women's domestic role does not mean that it is supported at a social or economic level. Women's access to employment is limited by the often-constructed view that the plantation is not a place for a woman. If women have a role to play in the banana production, it is in the enclosed and more controlled space of the packing shed. However, many women across the banana producing regions of Latin America are heads of households, struggling to bring up new generations in the context of social breakdown and unsupported by men, either because their relationships could not withstand the pressure of the violence and disorder or because the men lost their lives in conflicts. Whether widowed, divorced, separated or simply single, many women with children have to work very hard to survive and to provide for their families and, sometimes, they have to do this outside any of the protective structures of employment law. Women seldom are and certainly cannot afford to be anything other than strong.

Background II: The Banana Export Industry today

Latin American banana production typically involves large monoculture plantations, which can encompass up to 1,000 hectares in size (Banana Link, 2014). The monoculture production model requires intensive use of agrochemicals to control disease. The scale of these plantations requires a workforce of hundreds and sometimes thousands of individuals. This has also led industrially banana production to surround rural communities on all sides.

Colombia and Ecuador are the only countries among the major Latin American exporters that still have a few thousand small banana farmers alongside the large-scale plantations. The emerging Peruvian organic banana sector is the 'exception that proves the rule': some 3,000 micro-producers, often with less than a hectare each, have come together since 2000 in around 30 growers' associations (Banana Link, 2014).

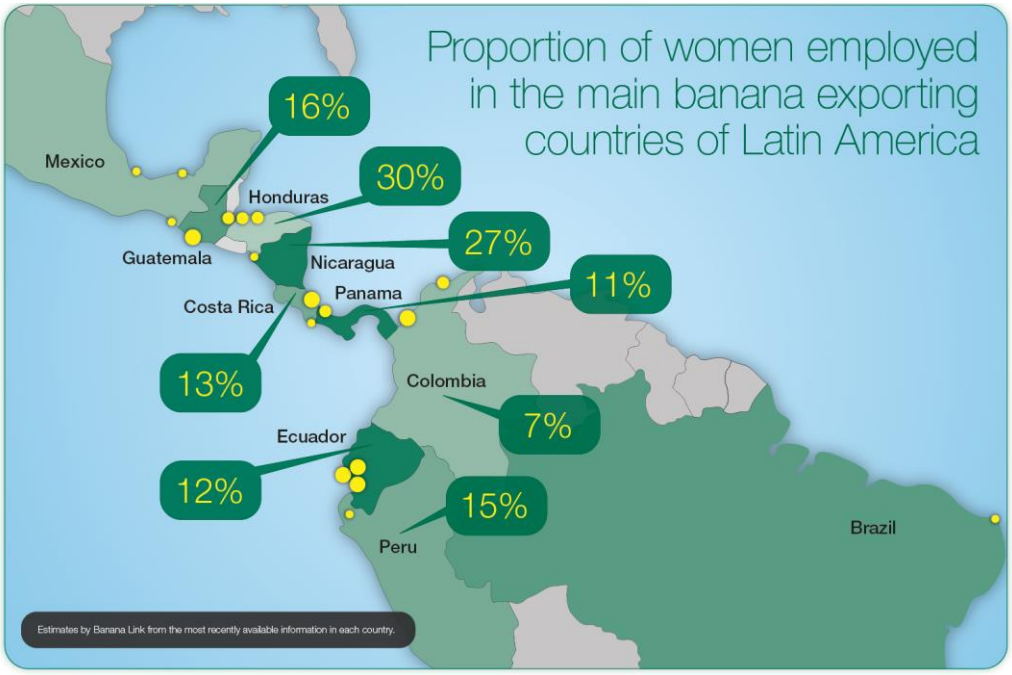
The four tropical fruit multinationals which dominated the world banana market in the 20th century – Chiquita, Dole, Fyffes and Fresh Del Monte – have continued to do so into the beginning of the 21st century. All four buy from national producers and all, except for Fyffes, manage their own plantations. (Fyffes sold off its plantations in the Caribbean, Belize and Costa Rica during a process of restructuring around 7 years ago). Although the multinationals maintain their dominant positions, their market share has fallen from 62% in 2002 to 23% in 2013 FAO estimates in 2014 were that the market share of the 'big four' is now even lower than this (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014).

In recent years, a handful of large national companies in Guatemala, Costa Rica and Ecuador, whose growth has been accelerated by direct contracts with North American and European retailers, have taken up much of the market space occupied by the traditional multinational growers and traders. Major Colombian national companies, Uniban and Banacol, have consolidated marketing arrangements with Fyffes and Dole respectively and remain relatively stable in their annual export volumes. Meanwhile, the Ecuadorian conglomerate, Grupo Noboa, which owns the Bonita brand, has shrunk from being a dominant national banana company two decades ago (with over half of all banana exports and over 6% of world trade) to being the second biggest exporter in that country behind Dole, shipping less than 10% of the country's total export volumes (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014).

Whilst there is some recognition of the poor working conditions and poverty pay that workers on the farms and

plantations of Latin America often endure, and of the impact of agrochemical use on neighbouring communities, in particular the practice of regular aerial spraying of fungicides and the regular application of other pesticides, the specific issues facing women employed in the industry receive little attention. It is only the trade unions through their continental coordinating body, COLSIBA,, founded in 1993 that have put these issues on the world banana map.

Graph 1: Proportion of women employed in the main banana exporting countries in Latin America



Source: *Banana Link, 2015*

1. Employment of women

1.1 Participation of women in the banana industry

The graphic 1 gives an overview of the participation of waged women workers in the Latin American banana industry, based on the latest available information shared by national and multinational producers and gathered by trade unions representing women workers at plantation level. The estimated percentage figures have been calculated by Banana Link on the basis of the known or estimated size of the workforce in each country. These figures are not to be taken as authoritative. In some notable cases such as Ecuador, no reliable national statistics exist for the number of people employed in a large and complex industry. The average proportion of women employed in the eight exporting countries in Latin America, calculated by Banana Link where information sources are reasonably reliable, is 12.5%.

The detailed information provided by companies and trade unions shows very significant variations in the proportions of women employed in the banana industry between and, in some cases, within different countries of Latin America.

Colombia has the lowest representation of women in the industry with a national average estimated at 7%. The low proportion of women employees persists despite the fact that women played a bigger role in the industry during the 1990s when a large number of men were killed during internal conflicts in the country. The Colombian banana industry is notable for the mature industrial relations between the producers' association AUGURA, and the sectoral level trade union SINTRAINAGRO, which represents 90% of workers employed in the industry. This may affect how some of the cultural and industry attitudes identified in the section below on pathways to employment, play out in the Colombian context. A national campaign by SINTRAINAGRO in the mid-2000s and clauses in the last two sectoral level collective bargaining agreements negotiated between the union and

AUGURA, all aimed at promoting the employment of women have so far failed to successfully redress the problem of the low employment of women.

Nicaragua and Honduras remain the two countries within the study with the highest employment levels for women. The statistics are from trade unions with women's secretariats that have promoted gender equality through their collective bargaining agreements. As such, they may indicate a higher level of women's employment than the industry average. However, even with this cautionary note the difference remains significant. This can in part be attributed to historical and cultural factors. In Nicaragua, the legacy of the Sandinista revolution and government from 1979 to 1990 is an important factor (Randall, 1994). Women were active protagonists in the social revolution and their participation in the workforce and in the political sphere greatly increased during the period of government. Investment in education for all and training programmes for working women were accompanied by legislative changes to enhance the participation of women in productive industries. The legacy of the revolution and current government by a different Sandinista administration, favours respect for labour rights, and in this context trade unions and women's organisations have been able to defend women's role in the productive industries, including bananas. However, since the 1990s, Nicaragua, the continent's poorest country has very low wages, the lowest in the industry. It was only in 2013 that collective bargaining agreements negotiated during the first Sandinista government were renewed, after over two decades without pay bargaining.

While the current government and political history of Honduras is very different from that of its neighbour, the cultural changes experienced in Nicaragua were not confined to its national boundaries. Honduras has also had a very strong women's movement that has successfully promoted greater gender equality in some areas of society, whilst currently combating some of the worst gender violence on the continent (Cem-h, 2014).

High levels of women's employment in these two countries may also be attributable to migration patterns (Acuña, G et al, 2011; Briones G., et al. 2012). Large numbers of male Nicaraguan banana workers migrate, either temporarily or on a permanent basis, to Costa Rica which offers better wages and generally better working conditions than those found in Nicaragua. Similarly many Honduran workers have migrated or migrate for temporary periods to Guatemala. The departure of significant numbers of experienced banana workers to neighbouring countries has provided women with opportunities to replace them. While many of the migrants will have been field workers and therefore any deficits generated my have been in field work rather than packing plants and while women are largely excluded from field work, male packing workers may have been reassigned to field work, making more employment opportunities available for women to work in the packing plants.

Dole directly owns plantations in three countries: Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras. The statistics on women's employment at plantation level in the table of Annex 3 were reported to the Working Group on 'Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues' of the World Banana Forum, in March 2013. Overall, Dole employs 2,123 women workers, of which 1,215 are on permanent contracts, and 45 women workers in administration roles, of which 40 have permanent contracts (Dole, 2013). It is striking that all 877 agricultural (field and pack house) and administrative workers, hired on temporary rather than permanent contracts, are in Honduras. This suggests that either there are less legislative constraints on employment contracts in Honduras, or that there is weaker enforcement by government authorities. Whatever the reason, women (and men) employed on temporary contracts are less able to exercise their rights, as a worker hired on a temporary basis is not allowed to join a trade union under Honduran law.

In Honduras, there has been a worrying tendency within the multinational company Chiquita during the last two years with men being recruited in positions where women have historically been employed, reducing women's representation in the workforce. In 2014, FESTAGRO calculates that 79 positions passed from female to male employees (FESTAGRO, 2014). The cause of this change is unclear, however, it highlights the need for company policies that promote women's employment.

The only opportunity to interview managers and to find out about women's opportunities in managerial positions occurred in Ecuador. Here it emerged that there was a very low representation of women in managerial positions. In Dole-Ubesa, 6 out of 26 managers are women. Out of Bonita's 300 supervisor positions, 4 are women. Furthermore, a national producer directly supplying the UK retailer, Tesco, does not have a single woman supervisor. Only one exception to this rule was reported. This involved a company founded by women, where the

President, Managing Director, Director of Operation and Administrative Director were all women[2].

1.2 Pathways to employment: recruitment and training

Low levels of employment for women, identified as a problem particularly in the South American banana exporting countries, suggest that there are factors that discourage women's entry into the industry.

Interviews with managers in Ecuador revealed that a combination of cultural expectations and informal recruitment processes handled by male employees meant that many positions that women had the ability to fill were instead given to men. A woman worker in Colombia[3] described how recruitment criteria on the fair trade plantation where she is employed specify that candidates must be able to perform five different kinds of work. Furthermore, young men often go out onto the fields on the less regulated plantations and help their friends voluntarily before seeking formal employment. This allows them to pick up the required level of skills. The low level of women's employment, and the fact that women are not considered suitable for field work, means it is far more difficult for women to gain the number of entry skills required.

Across the region, the women workers' representatives who completed the questionnaire reported discriminatory practices affecting women's access to employment in the industry:

- Discrimination against women due to their reproductive role and rights. The perception that pregnancy, breastfeeding and women's child care responsibilities are regarded as financial risks and costs to productivity by plantation owners and management is widespread, although there are variations. The Ecuador case study found that practice of dismissing women workers who become pregnant, rather than complying with legislation on maternity leave and provisions for new mothers who are breastfeeding, remains common among producers which are subject to neither regular government inspection nor ethical audits to comply with international certification schemes. In Honduras, the women's secretariat confirmed that this practice is prevalent in those companies where there is no trade union representation to educate women about their reproductive rights and to defend them in cases of unfair dismissal.
- Positive discrimination based on a woman's receptiveness to the sexual attentions of the team leader or the supervisor who has the responsibility for recruitment.
- In the banana producing regions across Latin America there is a high number of women headed households. Furthermore, in the vast majority of homes where a woman lives with her partner, child care is considered to be primarily the role of the mother, even where both partners work full time. The double workload of women workers is discussed below. The women workers interviewed in Ecuador regard the lack of child care facilities in plantations as one of the most significant barriers to their entry into the industry. This view was echoed by the COLSIBA women's secretariat representing women across the region.

Discrimination against workers over 35 or 40 years old in parts of the industry affected both male and female workers equally. In both Guatemala and Nicaragua, trade unions are aware of age discrimination by certain multinational companies but do not see the same problem with national producers, where they have older members still working in the industry.

Independent trade unions can play an important role in promoting a level playing field for women and men seeking employment in the industry. In Nicaragua and Izabál, Guatemala the trade unions reported that in the companies where they represent the workers, women did not face gendered discrimination in access to employment.

However, trade union representation is not always successful in this respect. In Colombia, companies continue to discriminate against women in their recruitment drives despite very strong trade union representation and a specific clause in the sectoral collective agreement actively promoting the employment of women. Additionally, in 2014, there were clear instances of women workers being disproportionately targeted for redundancies following extreme weather events that affected production and led certain companies to reduce their workforce

[2] Figures from Annex 1 Report on fieldwork carried out in Ecuador

[3] Personal communications during field trip, 2014

(at least temporarily) (Banana Link, 2011)

In Ecuador, the current government has made considerable efforts to improve compliance with its employment laws in recent years. As part of this initiative it has helped to promote greater gender equality. This has had a positive impact and the field research found that explicit discrimination against women due to pregnancy is now less common in the larger companies, although problems still remain in other parts of the industry.

1.3 Roles for women workers

Across Latin America, field tasks are almost exclusively considered men's work, and women are employed in the packing house. The biggest exception to this tendency uncovered by the research is the work undertaken by small female producers in Ecuador. Although they employ men to do the very heaviest field tasks, they do most of this work themselves. It is interesting to note that in Nicaragua pregnant women are sometimes sent to join the teams working in the fields and undertake the light tasks involved such as fertiliser application and de-leafing.

Table 1 indicates the main tasks women carry out. Different respondents to the questionnaires gave different levels of information about tasks, so this list should be considered as an overview rather than an exhaustive list.

Table 1: main tasks carried out by women in the banana industry

	Colombia	**Ecuador** – medium- and large-scale plantations	**Guatemala**	**Honduras**	**Nicaragua**
FIELD TASKS					
Fertiliser application	**x**				**x**
Maintenance		**x**			**x**
Cleaning/ weeding					
Pruning					
Fruit care					
Nursery plant care					
Sucker selecting					
Ribbon counting					
Material preparation					
Harvesting					
PACKHOUSE					
De-flowering	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Sorting onto trays		**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Selection & division into clusters	**x**	**x**	**x**		**x**

De-handing					
Weighing fruit	x	x	x	x	x
Washing fruit		x	x	x	x
Post harvest spraying		x	x	x	x
Removing & washing pads/ cushions			x		
Collecting & washing bags	x	x	x	x	x
Applying stickers	x	x	x	x	x
Weighing trays	x	x	x	x	x
Packing fruit in boxes	x	x			x
Cleaning packing plant	x	x	x	x	x
Stacking boxes on pallets & loading into container					
Box assembly					
Plant waste disposal					

Source: *information given by women worker representatives on the women's secretariats of national trade unions as part of research, 2014*.

The division of work – between field and packing house, but also inside the packing house – determines the wage that workers are able to earn. In the majority of companies, more technically difficult and physically demanding work is better paid, and these tasks are almost always allocated to male workers. Women interviewed for the Ecuador case study expressed that because they received a lower wage, they felt their work was not valued equally to men's work, suggesting that pay inequality affects the self-esteem of female employees, as well as their income. UK-based company, Banabay, is challenging this situation by its decision to pay women a wage that is above the industry standard.

The questionnaire shared with women trade union representatives included a question on whether the women felt capable and interested in undertaking any of the tasks considered “men's work”. The respondents were equally divided on this issue between a yes and no. Some of them had specific reservations, such as a concern about how physically demanding field tasks might be or they added comments, such as the observation that there was a power of expectation regarding the established division of responsibilities in the production process. Respondents also noted that they felt that many women were, perhaps, unprepared to challenge perceptions of what roles were appropriate for what genders. Any challenge to the current division of tasks would need to be based on an assessment by women workers themselves of the nature of the tasks, and the extent to which the current divisions are based on the real physical demands as opposed merely to entrenched habits or working culture. Some women workers feared that undertaking tasks which might make excessive physical demands on them could lead to an increased danger of their suffering from occupational illnesses or accidents.

In Ecuador women felt that their wages were being suppressed due to their exclusion from performing the allegedly more “technical” task of cutting clusters even though they were confident that they were able to undertake this particular task without undue physical stress. Some of the company representatives interviewed in Ecuador maintained that women employees could be more responsible and reliable than their male colleagues and show greater attention to detail.

In all Latin American countries it is common for pregnant women workers to be allocated lighter tasks, although it is not clear from what point in the pregnancy heavier work is regarded as unacceptable. Both the Guatemalan

and Nicaraguan respondents highlighted rotation onto lighter tasks during the final three months of pregnancy. In Ecuador, Colombia and Honduras respondents confirmed that pregnant women are not generally required to fumigate with post harvest chemicals. However, these good practices are not industry standards. The more detailed research in Ecuador found an exception of a plantation where pregnant women are required to do agrochemical spraying. Women smallholders in Ecuador, many of whom supply the international market through larger national or multinational producers, prepare their own chemical applications. The section on health and safety describes some of the impacts that women workers identified with regarding these poor practices.

The case of Colombia seems to represent best practice in this respect. Here, high levels of unionisation enable greater monitoring of industry standards, and pregnant women are routinely excused from cleaning tasks due to the chemical products used. However, in Colombia, the industry does not employ many women, precisely because many employers view them as costly. Indeed, the trade union alleges that many employers insist on women having pregnancy tests prior to recruitment. If they are pregnant they are not employed.

Colombian women are also impeded from gaining employment in banana plantations by virtue of unusual recruitment procedures, as previously mentioned. In many plantations new recruits are required to demonstrate that they are capable of performing at least 5 discrete tasks. Young men often gain the required quota of skills by working alongside friends voluntarily in the fields before seeking formal employment. Women, however, are restricted to enter many plantations unless they already have employment. This means that women cannot easily undergo the kind of apprenticeship process that is informally available to men. They are, therefore, often left in a 'Catch 22' type dilemma. They cannot gain the 5 skills unless they can enter the plantation to undergo informal apprenticeship (most likely with other women), at the same time they cannot enter the plantation unless they are already employed which can only happen if they already have the 5 skills. In spite of this dilemma, a few women do manage to develop strategies for 'beating the system'.

Table 2: Main tasks undertaken and not by pregnant women

Country	*Main tasks undertaken by pregnant women*	*Tasks NOT undertaken by pregnant women*
Colombia	Deflowering, selection, weighing, packing, cleaning	Cleaning (contact with chemicals), disposing of stems (physically demanding),
Ecuador	Deflowering, counting stems – tasks that can be undertaken whilst seated	Spraying with post harvest chemicals (in the majority of companies but not the whole industry). Breast feeding women are also not required to spray.
Guatemala	Tasks requiring less physical effort, requested with support of trade union shop steward.	*"Pregnant women are not required to work at all in the final three months of pregnancy, however if there is a role carrying out more accessible work the supervisor offers her a temporary rotation"*
Honduras	Deflowering, selecting over-ripe fruit, cleaning	Spraying with post-harvest chemicals, removal of 'diapers'/cushions (because of contact with agrochemicals in both cases).
Nicaragua	Tasks requiring less physical strength/ effort, for example in the store-room. Sometimes pregnant women join the field work teams to undertake the lighter tasks	Pregnant women cannot be required to work in the final three months but may be rotated to lighter tasks.

Source: *information given by women worker representatives on the women's secretariats of national trade unions as part of research, 2014*.

1.4 Contracts and length of working week

The legal working day in the countries considered in this report is 8 hours, with different stipulations and limits applied to overtime. The reality for women workers in the industry can be summarised as follows:

- In Honduras, women employees regularly work 12 hours a day.
- In Guatemala, in the plantations in Izabal region where conditions are better than the Pacific South thanks to a high level of trade union representation, employees work 10 to 11 hour days. There are periods of high demand when workers are required to work seven days a week from 6am to 6pm.
- In Nicaragua, the average working day is 10 to 11 hours. During periods of high demand workers in packing houses also work on a Saturday from 6am until 5 or 6pm.
- In Colombia, the sectoral trade union has negotiated a working week of 10 hour days from Monday to Friday instead of the legal norm of 8 hour days from Monday to Saturday.
- In Ecuador, workers are often obliged to work a 10 to 12 hour day.

As discussed in the section on women's double workload, there are gendered impacts of these extensive working days in terms of the additional domestic and childcare tasks often undertaken by women.. Whereas most men who work long hours can at least relax for a few hours before sleeping, women are expected to prepare food and look after their children. They are also generally expected to prepare breakfast and prepare children for school or childcare before they leave for work in the morning. This would appear to further create an unequal burden for women compared by most of their male counterparts.

There are also significant differences contracting terms and agreements for women and men workers in the industry. In Ecuador, temporary contracts are most common for the seasonal field tasks undertaken by men. In contrast, in Colombia strong trade union representation has secured permanent contracts for over 95% of workers. However in Honduras, approximately 40% of the 10,000 jobs created by the banana industry are temporary. Women make up about 10% of the temporary workforce, meaning that approximately 13% of women workers in the industry are temporary.[4] 'Permanent contracts for women workers' is one of the demands of FESTAGRO, the Honduran trade union that represents workers in plantations owned by Chiquita, Dole and national producers.

In both Colombia and Ecuador it was noted that women are more frequently employed on part-time contracts than their male colleagues. This is due to the division of work where women are almost exclusively given work in the packing house. Disparities in contracts are also linked to the size of the company as only the larger operations run a packing process on a daily bases. In Colombia, where almost all producers are medium-sized nationally owned businesses, over half of women workers are employed on "special" contracts which mean that they are given work only on the days when there is a harvest and packing process. This ranges from 3 to 5 days a week depending on the season. Accordingly, male field workers have more opportunities to increase their income through overtime than women.

1.5 Trade union representation

Between 15 and 20% (COLSIBA, 2015) of the total banana workforce in Latin America is unionised, with particularly high union density in Panama, Colombia, Northern Guatemala, the Chiquita and Dole plantations in Honduras and in the nationally owned plantations in Nicaragua. In both Costa Rica and Ecuador, union membership is very low, although it was very high in Costa Rica for half a century, up until the early 1980s, when the industry and its allies actively set about trying to rid the country of independent trade unions, accused of intending to destroy banana companies. In Ecuador, unions suffer from a bad reputation because of historical examples that have remained in many employers' memories. In the relatively new plantations of the Guatemalan Pacific South coastal plain workers generally fear the consequences of forming or joining a union, since the first concerted attempt to organise themselves was violently repressed in 2008 within days of a trade union being

[4] All figures derived by author from information gathered during research

registered at a nationally owned plantation (Banana Link, 2011).

The barriers to joining a trade union are higher for women workers than their male colleagues. They may face explicit pressure from family members not to join the trade union in their place of work, as family members may fear that they will have insufficient time to get involved with the union on top of all their existing responsibilities. Indeed, even where women do join trade unions, the double workload that results from combining a long working day in paid employment with child care and domestic responsibilities often leaves women with little or no time to take part in activities and decision-making within their representative organisation. For this reason, and because unions representing workers in a male dominated industry are in consequence male dominated organisations, specific activities for women workers, such as training in their gender and reproductive rights and self-esteem, often held at weekends, are necessary to support women to participate actively in their union as well as to challenge the unequal treatment and harassment they face as an employee.

2. Problems faced by women in the workplace and at home

2.1 Remuneration

Women workers routinely earn less than men in the banana industry in Latin America. In a few cases in Ecuador this was because women were not paid the same wages as men to perform the same job. However, this is unusual, even in Ecuador. Usually they earn less because the tasks they are allowed to perform are paid at a lower rate than those which apply to heavier and more technical work (from which they are generally excluded). When women in the Ecuador were asked about where they would most like to see improvement, pay was the number one priority.

In the majority of cases the gender difference in pay is due to the way that work is organised. Women are not employed to undertake the field tasks that are more highly remunerated. The conditions for workers in packing houses varied between countries. In Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua women and men working in plantations where there is trade union representation receive the same wage for their labour. For example, in Honduras the total volume packed that day is used to calculate the wage of all workers in the process.

Male workers often have more opportunities for increasing their earnings through overtime. During periods of high production there is more work on the plantation/ field. Men undertake the heavy lifting tasks at the end of the packing process. Accounts were given for Guatemala and Nicaragua of how men work overtime unloading materials, stacking crates and cleaning the area where the fruit is removed from the cut stem.

In Ecuador, women workers confirmed some cases of women employed in medium and large plantations being paid less than men for the same productive tasks. The company has justified this disparity by stating that men have “higher productivity”. However, other companies interviewed in the same research process described women employees as more reliable and with greater attention to detail. A clear distinction can be made between wage systems based on the productivity of individual workers and differential pay rates based on gender stereotypes. Male casual labourers in the Ecuadorian industry command a daily rate that ranges from $5 to $10 more than the $9 to $18 paid to their female counterparts This is usually to do different tasks. (See Annex 1: *Report on fieldwork carried out in Ecuador Women in the banana export industry – the case of Ecuador*).

Unpaid overtime, salary irregularities and lack of transparency regarding how their wage has been calculated are problems reported by men and women workers interviewed for the Ecuador study. These problems are known to be common across the industry. Particularly, in small to medium plantations where there is no internal monitoring through worker education and recourse when remuneration is miscalculated and no external monitoring through independent government inspections and ethical certification audits.

It is important to specifically recognise what is known about the pay and conditions for the women and men who work for the national producers on Guatemala's Pacific South that supply the international market via larger national and multinational companies including Chiquita. Failure to pay the legal minimum wage is remains common, as is the practice of paying the legal minimum for an 8 hour day but requiring the employee to 11 hours, an obligatory 3 hours of unpaid overtime, every day (Banana Link, 2011). As referred to above, there are documented cases of violent persecution of workers who attempted to exercise their rights to organise and negotiate collectively for fairer pay and conditions in the Pacific South of Guatemala, but little is known about the

pay and treatment of women workers in this vast banana producing region.

2.2. Health and Safety

Women and men workers suffer many of the same main occupational illnesses and risks. The most common problems specifically reported by women workers are:

- Allergies and skin rashes;
- Physical complaints from long periods standing and from repetitive movements, including lumbago, poor posture and varicose veins;
- Fungal infections in the toes;
- Urinary tract infections.

The conditions listed above all present immediate symptoms, and do not include the medium to long-term health impacts of regular contact with agrochemicals.

Two distinctions were made between the health & safety concerns experienced by women and men workers. The first is the impact of agrochemical use on women's reproductive role. The Ecuador study cites one case of a small group of women developing cancer of the uterus after reusing chemically impregnated plastic bags as aprons when their employer did not give them sufficient protective equipment. Workers also attributed a colleague's miscarriage to her work with post-harvest chemicals.

Aerial spraying with pesticides is a regular activity on the large-scale monoculture plantations where there are no natural factors to mitigate the spread of plant pests and diseases. While the number of spraying cycles varies according to the producer and country, it is common in Latin America for a company to spray the fields on a weekly basis. How the spraying process is managed overall also varies according to country and producer. In Colombia, workers are withdrawn from fieldwork during the aerial application of pesticides and for two subsequent hours. Approximately 50% of the workers interviewed in the Ecuador research described how their employers conduct aerial spraying unannounced directly onto workers. Peru's organic banana industry however represents a significant difference in health and safety impacts, since the use of agrochemicals is disallowed in organic systems.

Aerial spraying affects banana workers and the women, men and children living in communities near the banana plantations. In September 2014, the Regional Institute on Toxic Substances of Costa Rica's National University (*Instituto Regional en Sustancias Tóxicas de la Universidad Nacional*, IRET-UNA) published a report on the high levels of *ethylene thiourea* (ETU) found in the urine of women living near the banana producing regions in Limón province on the Caribbean coast where the pesticide *mancozeb* is regularly used in aerial applications (de Joode, et al, 2014). The average level of ETU found by the study was five times greater than the levels found in studies in the US, Italy and England. The presence of ETU exceeded the safe level established by IRIS, the US Environmental Protection Agency's Integrated Risk Information System, for 75% of the 445 women who participated in the study. 10% of the participants had three times the IRIS ETU safe level of the chemical in their urine.

The researchers established that the principal source of contact with the chemical was aerial spraying on the neighbouring banana plantations. The women did not use products containing ETU in the home, and their diet was not a source of contact with the chemical. Women who lived closer to the plantations, who worked on the plantations during their pregnancy, or who washed the clothes of family members working on the banana plantations presented higher levels of ETU.

Studies of agricultural workers in Mexico and the Philippines have found that contact with mancozeb and its derivative ETU can alter thyroid function, essential for healthy development of the foetus and new-born child. Moreover, mancozeb is listed in the U.S. state of California as a chemical known to cause cancer in humans[5] .

In Guatemala, workers attribute cases of miscarriages and premature births, children born with deformities and learning difficulties, to the mother's contact with agrochemicals through her work in the packing plant. The findings from Costa Rica support this interpretation of events. There have also been cases of women workers developing breast and uterus cancer. Further research on the impacts of the agrochemicals routinely used in the

[5] http://environmentalcommons.org

industry on women banana workers is an urgent priority.

A Final health concern with a gender dimension identified by the research is the psychological stress and worry that single mothers face leaving their children alone or in the care of untrusted others. In some cases, women have no choice but to leave their “older” children of seven or eight years looking after babies or toddlers while they work the whole day in the packing plant, which may be essential in order to meet the family's financial needs.

2.3 Treatment of women in the workplace and sexual harassment

There are significant variations across the region in terms of how women workers are treated. The trade union in Nicaragua did not report complaints by women workers of unequal treatment. On the hand, sexual harassment was identified as a problem in Honduras and Guatemala. In Guatemala, the trade union supported the action of two separate female members bringing complaints against colleagues guilty of sexual harassment. Both cases resulted in the company terminating the contract of the men responsible.

In Ecuador, women interviewed reported specific examples of both differential treatment from their male colleagues along occasional experiences of maltreatment. These examples include:

- If a woman sits down to rest for a minute, the supervisor immediately tells her to get up and start working, whilst male workers are treated with more leniencies.
- If a woman finishes her tasks early, she is not allowed to go home, whereas a man who finishes early is.
- Supervisors show more respect towards male workers, whilst treating female workers “*however they like because they know we won’t confront them*”.
- Outside of work, male workers often tell jokes about the inappropriate comments they make to their female colleagues.
- Male workers often use crude and impolite language towards their female colleagues, giving female workers nicknames such as “*fatty*” or “*little cow*”.

In Colombia women reported hostility and aggression from male colleagues as well as discrimination and harassment by supervisors in addition to main problems already mentioned above

Given the frequency of the problem of sexual harassment, and the number of large national and multinational companies pioneering best practice in other aspects of the banana industry, it is of concern that the questionnaires - and interviews (in Ecuador) - yielded only one example of a company that has developed a specific policy on sexual harassment. The 2013 Chiquita-IUF-COLSIBA agreement is discussed in the section on strategies and examples towards decent work for women below.

2.4 Women's reproductive rights

In most Latin American countries there exist certain laws that protect women’s reproductive rights. Nevertheless, women's essential reproductive role and the legal requirements by companies to support these rights by contributing to payments of maternity leave and by making other provisions are often regarded by company management as an unwanted burden, which they prefer to avoid. This unfair treatment is, perhaps, aided by dominant cultural perceptions, where the responsibility for raising children is seen predominantly, or exclusively, as being women's work.

The need to protect women’s rights is particularly acute as women frequently find themselves having to bring up children without the support of men in many countries. In Honduras, there are no laws establishing men's responsibility towards their children and the problem of women being left to raise children without any support from the father is particularly widespread. An estimated 30% of workers in the banana industry in Honduras are women heads of households. In Ecuador, women headed households are also very common in rural areas. In Colombia, approximately 70% of women workers identify themselves as heads of household, either because they

are single mothers or because their partners do not contribute financially to the home. In Guatemala and Nicaragua respondents reported that the majority of women workers are single mothers with three or four children[6].

Not only do mothers find themselves unsupported either by men or by companies abiding by legal requirements; they also frequently find that pregnancy or the possibility of pregnancy places a barrier to their employment in the industry. In Colombia, for example, women are routinely given pregnancy tests before being offered employment and it is also common for companies to require a certificate proving that female applicants have undergone medical sterilisation. As it will be described in 4.2, the practice of firing women workers who become pregnant remains widespread in parts of the industry where there are no independent worker organisations. Whilst in Ecuador this practice has declined amongst larger producing companies, it continues among small- and medium-sized producers who are not subject to government inspection or monitored by other external bodies like auditors or certification schemes.

Women workers in companies across the region, where this practice still remains, face a strong disincentive against advising their supervisor about a new pregnancy, meaning that they are not allocated to suitable tasks and may continue, for example, to undertake chemical spraying in order not to lose the income on which they and their families depend. The Ecuador case study also confirmed that women workers might leave their jobs on becoming pregnant due to concern about the danger of their work for their unborn child.

The research also highlighted that when female workers remain in their post after giving birth or after receiving the maternity leave to which they are legally entitled, a women is then likely to face severe obstacles in continuing to breastfeed and in spending adequate time with her child. The extensive working day required by employers in the banana industry does not allow women sufficient time to fulfil their care and domestic responsibilities. In Ecuador this situation is ameliorated by a law that establishes a shorter working day, of six rather than eight hours, for new mothers in workplaces without a nursery (ILO, 2012).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that childcare is consistently regarded as a high priority in terms of the facilities and services women workers wish to see provided by their employers. However, this research did not find a single case where a nursery or other childcare facility was provided.

In Guatemala, the lack of childcare provision is in violation of a law that requires any company with over 30 employees to provide a secure place for women to feed their children[7] under three years old, and a nursery facility where the mother can leave her children in the care of a paid member of staff suitably qualified for the role. The SITRABI union in Izabál has attempted to secure a commitment to comply with legislation in this area in negotiations with Del Monte, but has so far been unsuccessful.

There have however been some successes. In Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras trade unions have successfully negotiated for companies to provide health care to workers' children and to support their education through the provision of materials and some scholarships. In Nicaragua, international certification (by the Rainforest Alliance) has brought some benefits to the local community.

2.5 Women's double and triple workload

As noted in section 4.4 Latin American workers in the banana industry are routinely required to work hours which are significantly longer than those required by national laws. However, travel to and from plantations can also be time very consuming. In Colombia the companies often provide transport, yet some women workers travel up to an hour and twenty minutes in each direction. It was also found that the communities where workers live in Izabál, Guatemala, can be a significant distance from plantations and the lack of regular transport means workers may take up to an hour to travel to and from work.

Provision of public services in the banana producing regions is often weak to non-existent. This may lead women to have minimal confidence in public childcare facilities, even where other family members or friends are able to help them to bridge the gap between the opening hours of the nursery and their working day. In Colombia many

6 Figures all author's own compiled from research interviews and questionnaires

7 http://www.ariaslaw.com

women reported that they have no choice but to leave older children, who may be just seven or eight years old, in charge of the youngest members of the family. In both Ecuador and Colombia many women reported that they worked part-time in order to be able to balance their dual workload, but that this meant that were unable to meet their financial needs on the resultant reduced income.

Difficulties like these have many negative impacts for women workers and for their children. Women often wake very early to cook and prepare their children for school, then travel to the packing plant to work an average of 10 to 11 hours, travel home and put their children to bed before completing other domestic tasks. This exhausting regime has a negative impact on their health. Many women suffer stress and feelings of guilt about the amount of care they are able to give their children.

During interviews carried out in Ecuador women reported in some detail about these feelings, saying that:

- They feel guilty for leaving their children alone or with other family members when at work.
- They cannot concentrate at work because they are worried about their children.
- They do not have time to help their children with their homework.
- They are not able to work if their child is ill.
- They often cannot attend school meetings.

Those women who are also active in promoting improvements in their work place through their trade union activities find it even more difficult than other women to balance their extreme workload. While their collective agreements allow for time be taken out from their working week for their trade union activities, they routinely have to give more time supporting their colleagues and organising activities than the hours granted allow.

3. Initiatives towards decent work for women banana workers

3.1. Employment of women

The findings suggest that increasing the employment conditions of women in the Latin America banana industry is achievable and would be positive for both women and companies.

Across Latin America, **women workers are almost exclusively concentrated in packing houses.** However, the range of tasks in which they undertake varies, demonstrating how gender stereotypes and industry norms exclude women from working productively in roles that they are willing and able to undertake, particularly those that require additional training and skills or are more physically demanding. Women in some parts of the industry also undertake the lighter field tasks.

In contrast to the negative stereotypes regarding the productivity of women workers, **some employers in Ecuador perceive women workers to be more responsible and reliable than their male colleagues, with greater attention to detail**.

Broadening the range of tasks currently undertaken by women workers would have clear employment benefits. Many women workers in small to medium sized producers are employed on part-time contracts because companies perceive that they cannot be rotated to field work on days when there is no packing process. Women are often excluded from the better-paid tasks in the production and packing process, creating a culture where women's work is devalued. As already reported in section 5.1, in Ecuador some women reported that they and their female co-workers were paid less than men for undertaking the same work.

Guidance on which tasks within the production and packing process are suitable for women workers would be a useful tool to challenge prevalent stereotypes and employment norms. Ideally, the process of researching this guidance would involve women workers directly in decisions about which tasks they find to be suitable, and would include an analysis of the productivity of trained and experienced women workers in the different roles. Any company wishing to promote more equitable employment practices could begin to develop a policy on women's employment.

Policies on the range of roles suitable for women workers should be considered during recruitment processes. **Strategies to challenge discrimination against women, and company evasion of their legal responsibilities to**

support the reproductive role of women workers, are also key areas to address. In Ecuador, the combination of pressure received from international markets for ethical produce along with increased government inspections, was successful in challenging the practice of firing women workers who had become pregnant in the case for larger producers in the industry.

The research in Ecuador also found that informal recruitment led by male employees was often an obstacle to women's access to work. Local women felt that companies did not wish to employ them. **Targeted recruitment and strategies to further welcome applications from women** could overcome these patterns. In Nicaragua, FETDECH has negotiated a clause in its collective agreement where women candidates are given preference for vacancies in the packing plant. Women represent between 25% and 28% of the workforce in the companies that have negotiated and signed this agreement (FETDECH, 2014).

There is a **correlation between strong independent unions engaged in permanent dialogue and collective bargaining of wages on the one hand and better conditions and higher levels of women's employment on the other**. This has been noted in Honduras, Northern Guatemala and Nicaragua. Member unions of the FESTAGRO federation in Honduras, as well as SITRABI and UNSITRAGUA in Guatemala and FETDECH and ATC in Nicaragua all have higher levels of women in their membership than the proportions employed in their respective industries would suggest. Although there is no empirical evidence to support this assertion, it appears that the proactive promotion of women's education, training and leadership over the last two decades in the unions in Northern Central America, led by Iris Munguia from SITRATERCO/FESTAGRO in Honduras, has impacted positively on maintaining or increasing women's employment in the sub-region's banana industry. The women union leaders' story is well documented in the book: *Bananeras! Women transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America*, by Professor Dana Frank of the University of California published in 2005.

However, unions in both Changuinola on the Caribbean coast of Panama and Colombia's main exporting district of Urabá have not been able to overcome a gender bias amongst employers at the point of contracting, coupled with seemingly cultural barriers amongst the potential workforce itself. It is reported that some male leaders of the indigenous Guaymi communities, who make up virtually the entire labour force at Bocas Fruit Co., in Panama, are very opposed to more women being recruited to work in the industry. No research has been done as to their reasons for discouraging women from taking up salaried jobs in an area where almost no other formal employment exists. The complex reasons for the low levels of women's employment in the Colombia industry are analysed in the book of Clara Gomez entitled *Derechos y reveses de las trabajadoras de la agroindustria del banano* and published in 2004.

It will be interesting to evaluate the impact of the 400 newly hired women employees by Chiquita in its Bocas Fruit subsidiary in Panama, as part of a pilot programme in 2014 to promote women's employment. This plan was agreed amongst the Latin American banana trade union coordinating body COLSIBA and the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (IUF). This agreement, driven by COLSIBA, reflects the relative strength of women leaders in the banana workers' union movement. Since the mid-1990s, **active women's secretariats in the banana workers' unions of most countries, coordinated by COLSIBA's own Women's Secretariat have been very influential in 'feminising' the trade unions across the industry** in Latin America and, more recently, beyond.

In Colombia, SINTRAINAGRO's women's department launched the campaign "*In the banana plantations we accept women!*" in 2004, in order to directly challenge the low levels of women's employment and to **demand greater inclusion in the industry**. The campaign combined meetings with company managers, publicity activities including canvassing in a branded vehicle that toured plantations and activities with women workers. In 2013, a new clause was agreed to employ an extra women in each of the plantations, linked to a training programme for women heads of household (see below). However, the cultural barriers to change in the banana producing regions of Colombia, where internal conflict has damaged the social fabric and contributed to high levels of gender inequality and violence in the communities, are strong. At the time of this report the situation seems to be worsening rather than improving, with gender discrimination in a recent series of redundancies leaving some farms without a single woman worker.

The difficulty of promoting change for women's representation in Colombian industry seems to be one of a **deeply ingrained *"machismo"*** or male chauvinism among the men who own, manage and work in the industry. **The influence of external stakeholders** is therefore extremely important in promoting greater equality in the industry. Fairtrade has a significant presence in Colombia, with around 15% of exports certified by the scheme (Quesada, 2013). This suggests that Fairtrade could play a role in levering change in the industry. Financial

support for the work of the Women's Department of SINTRAINAGRO – which represents over 90% of workers in the industry (Quesada, 2013) – is also an important strategy to challenge the discrimination and harassment that Colombian women workers face.

The Ecuador and Colombia research both identified **formal training as a key to unlocking potential employment for women** in the industry. In both countries, some women describe a lack confidence in their skills to undertake the work in comparison to more experienced male colleagues. In Colombia, SINTRAINAGRO relate that the occasionally hostile attitudes of male workers towards their female colleagues are a barrier to women learning their work informally, 'on the job', as it is often required. They have recently started a training initiative in collaboration with the National Banana Producers Association (AUGURA) and the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA), whereby women heads of household will be given the opportunity to learn industry tasks at college, removing the barrier that relative lack of experience in the industry compared to male candidates might pose for women seeking work. This initiative is linked to a new clause in the sectoral level collective agreement where companies commit to employing one more woman on each of the nearly 300 farms covered by the agreement.

Systematic technical training, provided by companies or producers' associations, for all new workers in the tasks they are employed to undertake would have productivity and health and safety benefits for the companies as well as removing one of the barriers to women's employment. In Honduras, where women represent around 30% of the workforce[8], the labour code establishes a 60-day probation period during which a new employee learns their work [9]demonstrating how a standardised training process is an element of more equitable employment practices.

3.2. Treatment of women

The initiatives that have promoted improvements in the lives of female banana workers in Latin America have overwhelmingly been **led by the women themselves**. This demonstrates the power of an approach focused on empowering women to challenge the unequal treatment and harassment they face, and contrasts with the lack of action by producer companies and other stakeholders.

COLSIBA, the Latin American Coordinating Body of Banana and Agro-industrial Workers' Unions, has a commitment to ensuring that women are represented in its leadership and it has had a strong women's secretariat which has been defending the rights of women workers and promoting improvements in women's lives across the region since 1996. COLSIBA works to further the ILO's goal of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The central objective of the COLSIBA Women's Secretariat is inclusion, the active social, political and economic participation of women in society.

In 2004, representatives of trade unions from Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras formed a ***Platform for Claiming Women's Rights***, to ensure the **integration of a gender perspective in collective agreements** in the industry. The platform wrote specific clauses addressing the problems faced by women workers which unions across the region could integrate into their negotiations. A clause against gender discrimination in now included in all collective agreements signed by the participating trade unions.

As already described in this report, a clause to specifically promote or guarantee greater employment opportunities for women has had a positive impact on women's representation in the industry in some countries. Other benefits for women workers and their children, which have been secured through gender sensitive clauses in collective agreements, include:

- Securing workers the choice in whether or not to work overtime, meaning women workers are more able to balance their work and home lives;
- A monthly allowance/ bonus per child for employees with children;
- Health care for workers' families;
- Provision of school materials for worker's children;
- Scholarships schemes for workers' children;

[8] Figure estimated by Honduran union FESTAGRO, 2014

[9] http://www.central-law.com

- Income generation: preference for women heads of household in running plantation canteens, and training in food preparation to support these women in the role;
- Income generation: support and training for women heads of households in the production of worker clothing/ uniform;
- Company contributions to a fund to support workers to buy their own home;
- Company contributions to a rotating fund to support workers facing domestic emergencies;
- Community projects and support to workers in the areas of education, recreation, culture and sport.

Furthermore in 2004, the COLSIBA women's secretariat undertook a **participative research process** into the experiences of their female members and the priorities of these women for change. This arguably remains one of the best sources of information available about the reality for women working in the banana industry in Latin America and, over ten years down the line, it is perhaps time to repeat this process and see how and to what extent the situation has changed. In Colombia, research into the labour, sexual and reproductive rights of women banana workers was turned into a book: *Derechos y reveses de las trabajadoras de la agroindustria del banano*, by Clara Elena Gómez Velásquez. Another book, Lucha de mujeres bananeras, is based on the experiences of the same group of women.

COLSIBA's regional women's programme was last revised in 2012. It emphasises that the situation of women workers in the banana industry is the **responsibility of all industry stakeholders** and that the **active involvement and commitment of companies and producer associations** is necessary to make progress towards gender equity. While the secretariat demands respect for the sexual, labour and reproductive rights of women workers in the banana industry, it goes beyond this rights based approach to promote women towards becoming active protagonists in transforming their position in the workplace, the home and society. Their focus is on **women's empowerment** through:

- a broad programme of training and capacity building to support women banana workers to develop and fulfil their potential in the workplace, in the community and in their personal lives;
- securing commitment to the inclusion and political participation of women workers, both within the management structures of producer companies and within trade union workplace committees and organising structures.

The research in Ecuador elicited testimonies as to the way that training provided by trade union FENACLE for women workers in labour rights and self-esteem helped the participants to challenge unequal treatment and harassment in the workplace, and to build more equitable relationships in other areas of their life. It also demonstrates how women trade union organisers, who have received training and capacity building, are ideally placed to deliver this training and to support their colleagues in making formal complaints when necessary.

In Colombia, the women's department of SINTRAINAGRO has developed a detailed project proposal for the provision of childcare to children aged 1 to 4 years whom are considered to be at risk due to their levels of physical and mental development, and for accompanying training activities with single mothers to support them in understanding their rights, managing the family economy and dealing with abusive relationships. The union has so far been unsuccessful in securing funding for this proposal, even though it would enable certifiers and retailers buying from the region to make real headway in promoting gender equity in their suppliers, vindicating the importance of women's reproductive role and allowing workers to raise their families in conditions of security.

Whilst one of the most important strategies for promoting improved treatment for women workers in the banana industry is supporting those women to transform their situation, as the COLSIBA women's secretariat emphasises, **proactive company-led initiatives are an essential ingredient in promoting change**. The research in Ecuador demonstrated the value of human relations training provided by companies to improve the atmosphere in the workplace, including challenging gender-based harassment. For example, Dole provides such training on the plantations on which it directly owns within the country. The attitude of management is also confirmed by workers as a key factor in shaping the culture of the workplace.

Gender-sensitive policies at company level are necessary to mitigate discrimination and promote equity for women banana workers. The methodology of this research process has not enabled collection of reliable

information about what policies exist in different national and multinational producer companies. The research conducted in Ecuador demonstrated that the codes of conduct developed by producers to respond to international certification schemes and market opportunities generally contain an anti-discrimination clause. However, no company participating in the research had a policy against sexual harassment in the workplace. An overview of current situation for women banana workers in Ecuador demonstrated that, while codes of conduct are a positive development, change requires sustained commitment over time.

The evidence of current levels of discrimination and harassment make it clear that gender sensitive policies are absent in large parts of the industry and, if and where they exist, the procedures they establish for implementation and monitoring require strengthening. The Ecuador research process, the knowledge of the sectoral trade union that represents over 90% of banana workers in Colombia, and the insights into the industry of the union respondents in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua revealed that no producing companies have a policy on the serious and pervasive problem of sexual harassment, with the exception of Chiquita.

The formation in April 2011 of a **Women's Committee as part of the Chiquita/IUF/COLSIBA regional framework agreement** "on trade union freedom, minimum labour standards and employment in Latin American banana operations[10]" has enabled the multinational company to build on its existing work on issues faced by women employees. The overall objective of the Committee is to promote and strengthen a safe working environment (free of harassment, exclusion, and inequality), which is conducive to performance improvements along with personal and professional developments for women workers.

The multi-stakeholder approach seeks to address problems through actively engaging both management level staff and women workers themselves. The focus of these activities is three-fold: strengthening company policies on working conditions of women in company farms; developing capacity building programmes for women; and developing proposals for increasing women's employment opportunities.

The issue of sexual harassment was identified as a key priority, and a specific clause has been written by the committee that references IUF and ILO's conventions on gender issues in agriculture as well as guidance on sexual harassment policy extracted from an Ethical Trading Initiative training manual (developed in consultation with its tripartite membership) for supervisors and managers which aims to assist employers and unions in tackling sexual harassment in agriculture. This clause was agreed in March 2013 and will be included as standard in all future collective bargaining agreements negotiated by company-owned plantations.

The agreement of the clause is however only the first step. COLSIBA members are currently running a campaign to make trade unions and women workers aware of the clause and how to implement it at plantation level. Local Chiquita management appear to not always respect agreements made at regional level, demonstrated by a declining employment opportunities for women on Chiquita plantations in Honduras. Therefore, Chiquita is working internally to inform local management about the content of the clause and its importance. This multi-stakeholder Chiquita/ IUF/COLSIBA approach is an example of good practice that has the potential to offer industry-wide lessons about how to effectively tackle the pervasive issue of sexual harassment.

Other stakeholders also have a role to play in promoting increased and better employment for women in the banana industry. The **development of indicators to measure gender equity by external auditors and international certification schemes** is an important strategy that has some potential to counteract ingrained and pervasive sexism in the culture of many producing countries. **Fairtrade certification** has pioneered work in this area, with anti-discrimination policies and requirements for training to empower women workers and to support their progression into positions of responsibility. By year 6 of certification, producers are required to provide crèche facilities for workers' children[11] In Colombia. However, where only 15% of exports are Fairtrade certified, women continue to represent a very low proportion of the workforce and different forms of gender harassment are recognised to be widespread, demonstrating the need for collaborative efforts between stakeholders to ensure policies are effectively translated into practice.

Ethical audits and international certification schemes must also consider the **legislative framework for women workers** in the particular country in question. For example, in Guatemala industry actors are not currently meeting their legal responsibility for provision of childcare facilities – one of the main priority areas for

[10] http://www.iufdocuments.org
[11] http://www.fairtrade.net

improvement identified by women workers. In this regard, it is important to consider that the companies with the best employment practices in Guatemala are directly competing with producers on the country's south pacific coast, known for having the worst pay and conditions in the region and for consequent low prices. This highlights both the need for a mechanism to push up standards across the industry and that widespread change requires **actors throughout the supply chain to take initiative.** It also highlights the need for supporting producers to implement more ethical and sustainable production, which respects women's labour, gender and reproductive rights.

Conclusions

A patriarchal economic model in countries with weak social protection combined with entrenched male chauvinism has left many women workers in the banana producing regions of Latin America in a situation of vulnerability, poverty and disrespect. Cultural norms maintain that women's primary role in society is in childcare and domesticity, often creating a barrier to women assuming positions of responsibility and authority in the workplace . The frequency of women headed households demonstrates that in many cases the fathers of the children also frequently fail to take responsibility for helping to raise the next generation of citizens and workers.

Women's reproductive role is one of the main reasons for discrimination against their entry into the workplace. In Central America there is a clear correlation between independent trade unions in social dialogue and collective bargaining with companies on the one hand, and increases in women's participation in the industry on the other. Yet, in Colombia, where the culture of machismo is particularly strong, companies have responded to the greater pressure to respect their workers' rights by increasing the obstacles to women joining the workforce. 15% of banana exports from Colombia have Fairtrade certification, illustrating the influence that external stakeholders can potentially have in challenging inequitable employment practices in order to evade legal responsibilities towards female employees.

Another factor that contributes to the low participation of women in the banana industry is the way that tasks are organised and women are mostly restricted to pack-house work. The tasks women undertake are often paid at a lower rate than those carried out by men workers, and in companies that do not pack for export every day many women are employed on part-time contracts. However, women workers express an interest in undertaking a wider range of tasks than is currently assigned to them, including more technical tasks that are better paid but do not require excessive physical strength. The Ecuador research also showed that some companies view their female employees as more reliable and as having greater attention to detail than male workers.

A participative research process to establish the full range of tasks appropriate for women workers, led by the women themselves, would be a useful tool to promote greater employment opportunities for women. Targeted recruitment campaigns that encourage applications from female candidates, and systematic training for all new workers are strategies which could increase women's representation in the industry where they are undertaken in the context of company commitment to equitable recruitment.

While there is ample anecdotal evidence of negative impacts on the health and well being of women and their children in the current environment of the industry, the socio-economic impact on a community level in regions where it is the main source of formal employment, is not fully understood. A detailed case study into this issue is one of the recommended next steps for furthering the WBF work on gender.

The research to date demonstrates that initiatives led by women workers themselves have been the main force for change in the Latin American banana industry. Supporting the continuity of women's efforts to challenge unequal treatment and harassment, transforming their situation in the workplace with benefits in other areas of their life, is an essential element of promoting change. Independent workers organisations provide a framework for women workers to advance their labour, gender and reproductive rights in an integrated way, learning from the experiences of women in other parts of the world. Gender sensitive clauses in collective agreements have been an important tool to challenge harassment, supporting women workers with a channel for redress. In Latin America, COLSIBA has a strong track record in supporting local and national trade unions to empower their women workers.

The World Banana Forum offers the possibility of multi-stakeholder initiatives in which different actors work together to promote increased and better employment for women in the industry. Research to accompany and learn from the attempts at collaborative gender work, which are already under way, will help identify the most successful strategies for the future.

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Environmental Commons, http://environmentalcommons.org/cetos/criticalhabitat.html

Fair Trade, http://www.fairtrade.net

IUF, http://www.iufdocuments.org/www/documents/Chiquita-e.pdf

Terminology

ATC Association of Rural Workers, Nicaragua
AUGURA National Banana Producers Association, Colombia
COLSIBA (*Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros y Agroindustriales)* The Latin American Coordinating Body of Banana and Agro-industrial workers Trade Unions
ETU Ethylene Thiourea (used in the fungicide Mancozeb)
FARC **(***Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia)* The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FENACLE (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Agroindustriales, Campesinos y Indígenas Libres del Ecuador*) The National Federation for Free Agro-industrial Workers, Peasant Farmers and Indigenous People of Ecuador
FESTAGRO (*Federación de Sindicatos de la Agroindustria, Honduras*) Confederation of Agro-industrial Trade Unions, Honduras
FETDECH (*El Sindicato de Trabajadores del Departamento de Chinandega)* Chinandega Workers' Union Federation, Nicaragua
ILO International Labour Organisation
IRET-UNA Instituto Regional en Sustancias Tóxicas de la Universidad Nacional
IRIS US Environmental Protection Agency's Integrated Risk Information System
IUF International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers
SENA National Apprenticeship Service, Colombia
SINTRAINAGRO Colombian national agricultural workers' union
SITRABI (*El Sindicato de Trabajadores Bananeros de Izabal)* Izabal Banana Workers Trade Union, Guatemala
SITRATERCO Labor Union of the Tela Railroad Company, Honduras
UNSITRAGUA National trade union centre, Guatemala
US United States

Annex 1

Report on fieldwork carried out in Ecuador

Women in the banana export industry – the case of Ecuador

1. Introduction

Ecuador is by far the world's largest exporter of bananas. Its principal markets are the European Union, Russia, the Mediterranean and North America. China is also becoming an increasingly important market. An estimated 2.5 million Ecuadorians[12] are involved directly or indirectly in the banana sector, which represents the only source of employment for many villagers in rural areas with limited education.

Ecuador is characterised by a large number of small and medium plantations. The country also has some of the largest plantations in the world. Small producers account for 86% of the country's banana producers[13]. Whilst the industry continues to be dominated by several large exporting companies, there are an increasing number of smaller exporters. Most exporting companies purchase a proportion of their fruit from third-party suppliers, which is an issue of particular concern as it theoretically enables them to evade their own policies. With regards to women workers, this practice can result in discrimination and harassment in plantations going unchallenged.

In recent years, media attention has been focused on the poor treatment of workers, child labour and high tariffs imposed by the European Union. There has been very little interest in women workers. The current government has been leading the country since 2007 under the banner of "The Citizens' Revolution". Concrete actions taken to date that are of direct relevance to women employed in the banana industry include increasing the national minimum wage (faster than the cost of living rises), encouraging the affiliation of workers to the national social security system and conducting more inspections of companies. However, given the large number of producers, the government lacks the resources to conduct thorough inspections for all producers.

The current Labour Code is fairly protective of employees' rights and contains several clauses pertaining to women, including the establishment of equal pay to men and three months of paid maternity leave.

The government has made a concerted effort to incorporate a gender perspective into public policy and there has been an increase in the participation of women in some sections of society. The President recently unveiled a reform plan that includes the prohibition of dismissing pregnant women and trade union leaders along with the affiliation of housewives to social security. The plan has yet to be approved.

However, a 2009 report by the Japanese Development Cooperation Agency (JICA) concludes that in spite of legislation introduced by the government in recent years, more concrete results are needed in this domain.

Rural and indigenous women continue to be disadvantaged in comparison to men and are primarily employed in the informal sector. Amongst the main issues facing women are a high rate of teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence. It is estimated that 83,000 Ecuadorian women suffer from physical, psychological or sexual violence every year (UROCAL, 2012). In addition, it is difficult for women to receive access to property and loans.

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2. Contents

3. Methodology

The field research was conducted in Ecuador over a period of five weeks in later part of 2014. It involved semi-structured interviews with representatives of seven exporting companies, two medium-sized producers and four small producers' associations; two plantation visits; semi-structured interviews with three packing plant team leaders; semi-structured interviews and workshops with female employees; five workshops with female casual day labourers; and farm visits along with interviews with ten small female producers.

There were several limitations to the research. Some companies did not want to participate or only shared limited information. It was difficult to gain access to women workers and some of those interviewed were reluctant to speak about certain topics, including sexual harassment. Moreover, in order to ensure confidentiality, workers were not asked to provide personal information.

It is also important to note that whilst some of the women interviewed are employed by the companies whose representatives participated in the research, many are not. Discrepancies between the information given by employers and employees do not therefore imply dishonesty on the part of the former, and the results should be interpreted as a general overview of the industry as a whole.

The field research was carried out with support from Carmen Banegas of the National Federation for Free Agro-industrial Workers, Peasant Farmers and Indigenous People (FENACLE) and Rachel Smith.

4. Employment of women

Women represent between 7% and 29% of the agricultural workforce of the companies interviewed, and 16% to 63% of administrative employees. There are few women in managerial positions.

While company representatives believe **women lack interest** in jobs in the industry, **women believe companies do not want to employ them**.

The **lack of specific policies for the employment of women** in most companies, in addition to a heavy reliance on **informal recommendations from male workers and from male team leaders** when hiring workers, are key factors for low employment rates for women.

Of the small producer associations included in the study an average of **14.7% of the small producers were female-headed**.

Field work is considered to be too physically demanding for women, although a small number of women do undertake the lighter field tasks and some of the women interviewed indicated an interest in field work if given the opportunity. Article 139 of the current Labour Code establishes the maximum weight that women can bear.

Nearly all female agricultural workers are employed in the packing plant, where they represent approximately 32% of the packing plant workforce on average.

Women working on **organic plantations** said that these tend to employ a higher number of women, as there are more tasks that are suited to them. It was not confirmed whether these are field tasks associated with the higher levels of plant care required in the absence of the regular use of agrochemicals.

The tasks most commonly performed by women are picking the flower remains off the fruit, applying post-harvest chemicals (spraying inside the packhouses) and sticking labels onto the bananas. **Many women feel capable of doing more tasks than they are permitted to do.** The tasks that they would like to do include weighing the fruit, making clusters and, in some cases, packing the fruit into boxes.

The fact that women do not work in the field impacts their employment opportunities in two key ways. **Small producers employ few women**, as they require greater flexibility in the range of both field and packhouse tasks their small group of workers can undertake. **Medium producers often employ women on a part-time basis** because they cannot be rotated to do field tasks on the days when there is no packing process. Women casual labourers are less likely to find work every day of the week due to the fact that they are not hired to work in the field.

Casual day labourers do not have a contract and most are not affiliated to social security.

The majority of the women workers confirmed that work is organised so that **pregnant colleagues are given tasks that are less physically demanding** – for example, removing the flowers from the fruit or counting the number of banana stems, which can be done sitting down – and that do not require high levels of contact with agrochemicals. However, **one respondent claimed that pregnant women continued to fumigate with post-harvest chemicals where she works.**

Persecution of trade union organisation is widespread in the banana industry in Ecuador, and only one of the three existing independent workers' associations has an elected women's secretary.

The right to Freedom of Association is not respected in the Ecuadorian Banana industry and workers fear losing their job if their employer discovers that they are involved in a union or worker association organising activities. Consequently, there is a very low level of trade union organisation in the sector.

4.1. Level of employment of women

The proportion of female agricultural workers in the companies interviewed ranges from 7% to 29%. While the administrative departments of the companies are far smaller than the agricultural workforce, the percentage of women working in administration is consistently higher, ranging from 16% to 63%.

Table 1: Employment of Men and Women in Banana Growing and Exporting Companies

Company	*Total Employees*	*Women*	*Permanent contracts*	*Men*	*Permanent contracts*	*% of women*
Bonita administration	700	150	100%	550	100%	21%
Bonita agriculture*	4931	584		4347		12%
Dole administration	899	143	100%	756	100%	16%
Dole agriculture	2350	162	100%	2188	92%	7%
Jasafrut administration	20	10	100%	10	100%	50%
Jasafrut agriculture	48	13	100%	35	100%	27%
Novamerc S.A. admin.	16	10	100%	6	100%	63%
Corporacion Palmar	1390	410	100%	980	70%	29%
Medium company A	50	2	100%	48	unknown	4%
Medium company B	100	18	100%	82	100%	18%
Grupo Wong/ Reybanpac	12% women in all branches of the company and including management, administration, field & packing plant positions					

Source: Figures compiled by researcher based on company interviews, 2014

* 4% of Bonita's agricultural workers have a temporary contract for the high season. The male/female breakdown is not known

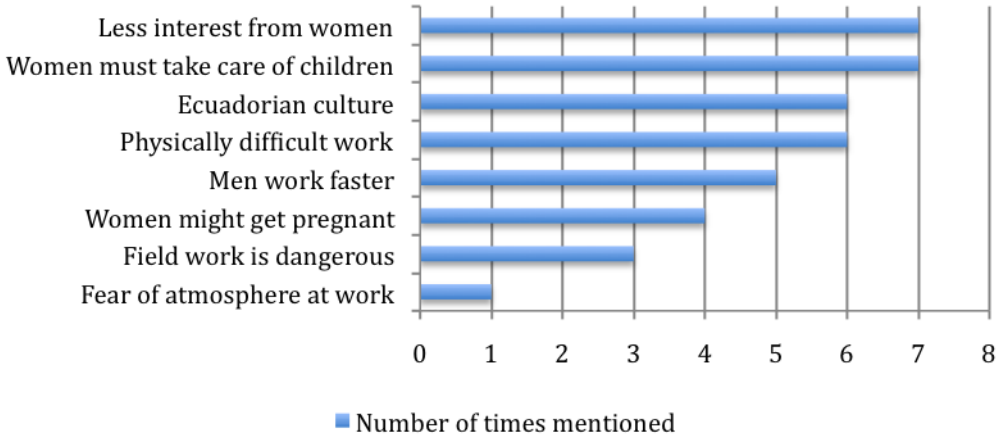
The companies with a small number of employees own only one or two plantations and purchase the majority of their fruit from third-party suppliers.

There are relatively few women in management positions. In Dole, with a total of 26 managers, six are women. Four of Bonita's 300 supervisors are female. In Reybanpac, all the supervisors are men. Novamerc S.A., the first exporting company in Ecuador to be founded exclusively by women, presents an exception. The President, Managing Director, Director of Operations and Administrative Director are all women. One reason suggested for

the low representation of women in managerial positions is that these employees require a degree in agronomy, a subject that few women currently study.

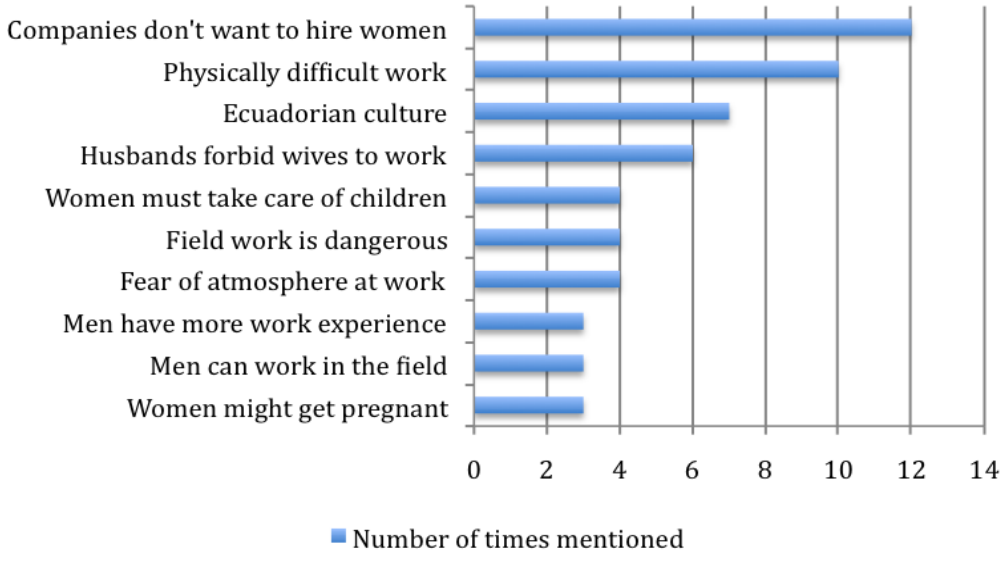
Under-representation of women in the banana industry in areas where there are few other paid work opportunities can often leave many rural women in conditions of severe poverty. There is a high number of women heads of household in the Ecuadorian countryside. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the reasons suggested by company representatives and workers for the low level of employment of women in the banana industry:

Table 2: Why are there more men than women in the banana industry? Responses of company representatives.



Source: responses of company representatives in interviews conducted by researcher, 2014

Table 3: Why are there more men than women in the banana industry? Responses of workers.

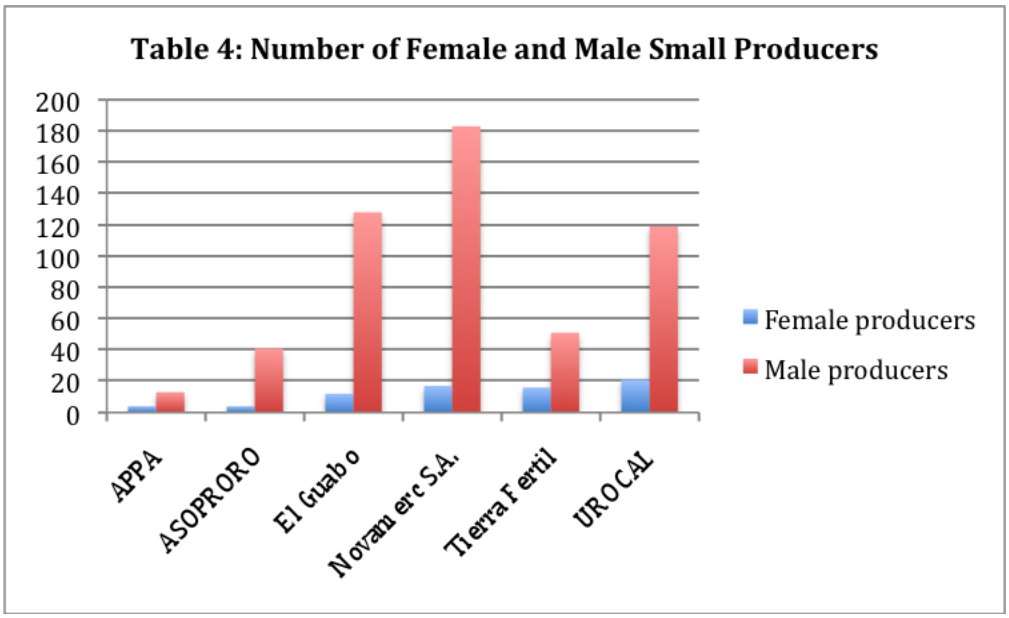


Source: responses of workers in interviews and workshops conducted by researcher, 2014

The comparison between the most common responses is striking. While company representatives said women lack interest in jobs in the industry, women believe companies do not want to employ them.

4.2. Small Producers

Of the small producer associations included in the study an average of 14.7% of the smallholder farms were female-headed. Table 4 illustrates the number of female and male small producers, and also includes the small producers who supply Novamerc S.A.



Source: Figures compiled by researcher based on questionnaire responses and interviews, 2014

Ecuadorian culture, third on the list of both company and worker reasons for low female employment in medium to large banana plantations, is also the reason given by small producers and small producer association representatives for the low number of women producers. It is customary for farm owners to pass land to their male children, and couples that buy farms usually register the land in the man's name. Several producers replied, "***That's just the way it is***," when asked why the majority of small producers are men. The majority of the female small producers interviewed are widowed or separated and either inherited the land or purchased it alone. Whilst it is possible for women to purchase land, another possible explanation for the low number of female small producers is the fact that fewer loans are granted to women than to men.

The majority of workers employed by small producers are men. This is linked to the greater flexibility small producers require of their employees, and the gendered division of tasks.

4.3. Pathways to employment: recruitment and training

The reliance of many companies on informal recruitment channels and male team leaders to bring workers to the packing plant appears to be one of the principal barriers for the employment of women. The selection process is appears to be predominately in the hands of workers who are accustomed to working in a male-dominated environment and many of whom assume that women are not suited for the banana industry. Whilst this is the most prevalent in plantations that informally sub-contract the majority of their labour, it also exists in larger companies that formally employ most of their workers and is exacerbated by the frequent need to recruit workers at the last minute.

Most companies have no specific policy regarding the employment of women and their recruitment efforts depend largely on the interest of local villagers. It is interesting that the principal reason cited by companies for low women's employment is the lack of applications from women, as stated by one company representative, "***Work is available for them if they want it, but they don't ask***". Women, on the other hand, believe that companies do not want to hire them. Low numbers of applications by women are also linked to cultural

perceptions of women's role as taking care of children and the home. Although women are becoming increasingly involved in some sectors of society, largely due to positive initiatives by the current government, change is slow to reach rural areas.

Lack of formal training in the different production tasks is another barrier to women entering the industry. Given the tensions between men and women workers, it is more difficult for women to learn informally from colleagues. Combined with their comparative lack of work experience in the industry, this leads many women to doubt their own capacities. While some employees confirmed that they receive regular training, others have noted that they have received little or no training. Workers brought in at the last minute, as is frequently the case, are not provided with training and are expected to know the tasks or to learn 'on the job'. Lack of resources to provide training for employees is an issue for smaller companies. Casual day labourers are not provided with any form of training by the plantations where they work.

Most small producer associations provide technical support for all their producers, male and female, but few provide gender specific training.

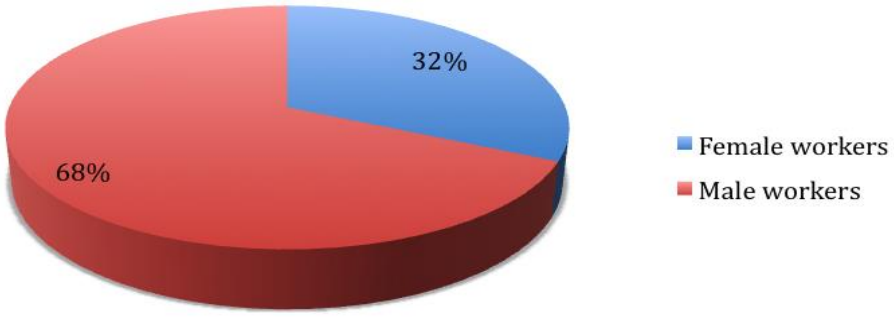
4.4 Roles for women workers

The majority of female agricultural employees work in the packing plant. In Dole, there are no women working in the field. In Bonita and Palmar, there are only two female field workers out of thousands (see table 1).

Women and companies share the view that work in the field is too physically demanding and that women working alone would be unsafe due to the risk of harassment or assault by male workers or local delinquents. However, some of the women interviewed said that they would be willing to work in the field if they were given the opportunity. These women established perceptions of field work as a male domain undoubtedly contribute to the low presence of women. One female worker expressed that "***the companies don't hire us for field work, so we don't think of applying***". The few women who do work in the field are generally employed to strip the leaves off the banana plants, illustrating that some field tasks require less physical strength than others. Women field workers organised in teams are unlikely to feel vulnerable in such a way a single woman worker may feel.

While there was a considerable variation in the responses of workers from different plantations, when asked to give the number of men and women employed in their packing plant, the research found that an average of 32% of packing plant workers are women.

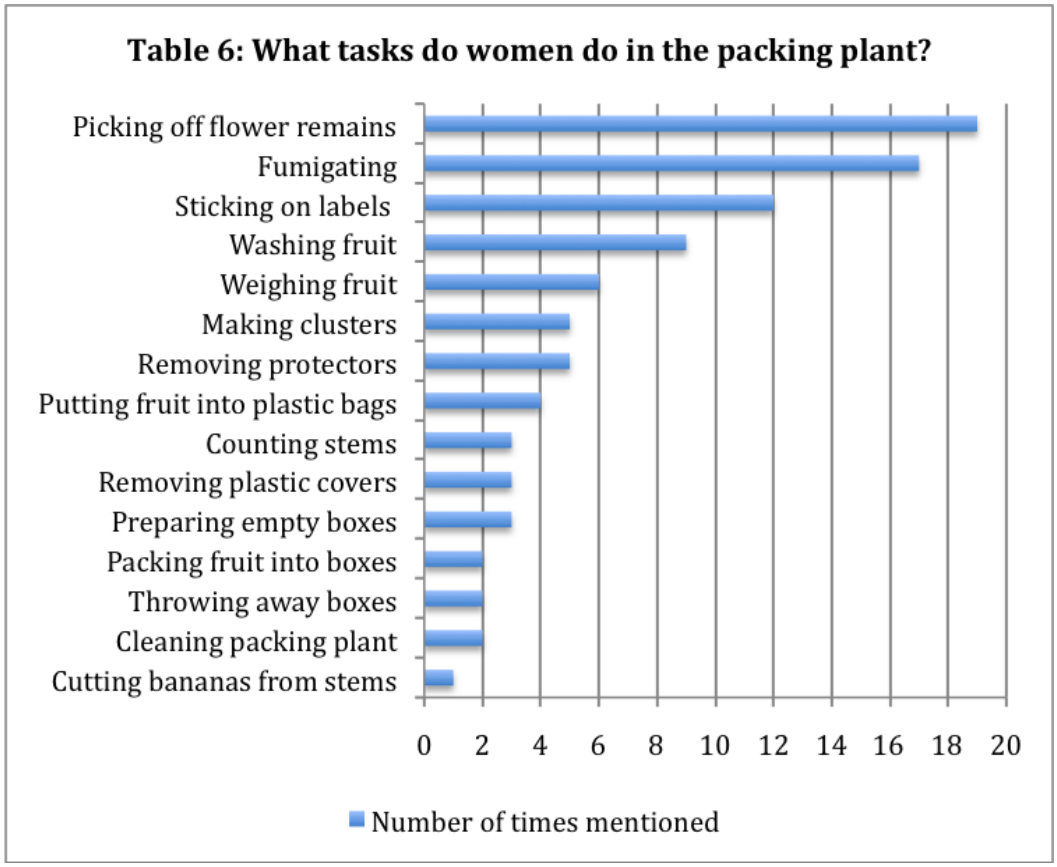
Table 5: Average number of female and male workers in the packing plant



Source: Figures compiled by researcher based on company interviews, 2014

Workers employed on organic plantations said that these types of plantations tend to employ a higher number of women, as there are more tasks that are suited to them.

The tasks allocated to women vary greatly between companies. Table 6 illustrates the frequency with which certain tasks were mentioned by both workers and company representatives:



Source: responses of workers in interviews and workshops conducted by researcher, 2014

The tasks most commonly performed by women are picking the flower remains off the fruit, applying post-harvest chemicals (fumigating) and sticking labels on the bananas. Certain women are employed to make clusters, as some supervisors believe that women are more meticulous and less likely to damage the fruit. Nevertheless, it is uncommon for employers to employ women for this technical task. Similarly, it is fairly rare that companies employ women to pack the fruit into boxes as it is considered that they would work slower their male colleagues. The final tasks in the packing process are always completed by men as these tasks involve lifting heavy boxes and require a considerable amount of strength. The allocation of the remaining tasks for women or men varies according to the company and, in some cases, to the supervisor of the plantation or the team leader. Only Dole has a list of tasks considered unsuitable for women due to the high level of risk.

Many women feel capable of doing more tasks than they are permitted to do. The tasks that they would like to do include weighing the fruit, making clusters and, in some cases, packing the fruit into boxes. However, they all agree that the tasks at the end of the process require too much physical strength for women.

Company representatives explained that, if considered necessary, pregnant women are given easier tasks such as picking flower remains off fruit or counting the number of stems, which they can do sitting down. Some companies claimed to follow the recommendations of the doctor. Pregnant women are not allowed to spray due to the exposure to chemicals. The majority of the women interviewed confirmed these statements. Only one said that pregnant women continue to spray in the packing plant where she works. Breastfeeding women generally do the same tasks as usual, with the exception of spraying.

All of the women producers interviewed, with the exception of one, do the majority of tasks both in the packing plant and the field of their farm, although said they get tired more easily than men. There are some tasks in the field, however, that they are physically unable to do and, as a result, they rely more on outside help than male producers, who can do all the work in the field. As women get older, there are fewer tasks that they can do in the field and many rely on male family members to do the more physically demanding jobs.

The majority of workers employed by small producers are men, including those that work in the packing plant once or twice per week. As there is a relatively small quantity of fruit to be packed, the workers are required to

do a variety of tasks in the packing plant, including the heavier tasks along with certain tasks in the field. The majority of the women employed by small producers tend to be family members or neighbours and many explained that they were employed as a gesture to help them. Among the small producers interviewed it was explained that pregnant women should not work because it is too dangerous for them and that breastfeeding women are not to work because they have to stay at home and take care of their child.

4.5. Contracts and length of working week

Company representatives linked the type of contract to the type of work the employee undertakes, rather than to gender *per se*. Women employed in the packing plant and administrative or management positions all have permanent contracts and are registered to the national social security system. Temporary contracts tend to be used for male field workers.

Approximately 75% of the female employees interviewed confirmed that they have a permanent contract. However, some indicated that they had not been entitled to keep a copy. The remaining women stated that they had never signed a contract, but confirmed that they are affiliated to social security (the affiliation of all workers to the social security system has been a focus of the current administration).

In smaller companies, women are contracted to work for only the days when there is a packing process, normally two or three times a week. Men are employed for five days as they are assigned tasks in the field on days when there is no packing process. Full-time work is only available for women in larger companies where there is a packing process on a daily bases.

Casual day labourers do not have a contract and most are not affiliated to social security. Only one group of workers interviewed, employed informally on the same plantation, receive an annual Christmas bonus.

The casual female labourers interviewed reported that it is difficult for them to find work for more than two or three days per week. Male casual labourers, on the other hand, can usually find work every day of the week because they are employed to work both in the packing plant and the field. Whilst some women prefer to work part time due to their family commitments, the majority of those interviewed said that they would like to be able to work more often.

4.6. Trade Union and Producers' Association participation

There is a very low level of trade union organisation in the banana sector in Ecuador. Trade Union persecution is widespread and workers fear losing their job if their employer discovers that they are involved in union or worker association organising activities. Two of the women interviewed are active members of a workers' association and have been unable to find work in banana plantations for two years. Trade union and association leaders report a lack of motivation amongst women workers to attend meetings and activities. This may be linked to the double workload – paid and domestic – that many women have to manage.

There are currently only three independent trade unions. One has no female members and another has only two female members. The third, the National Federation for Free Agro-industrial Workers, Peasant Farmers and Indigenous People (FENACLE), has an elected a Women's Secretariat. There are several regional workers' associations, one of which has a female General Secretary.

Certification policies such as Tesco's Ethical Trading Policy stipulate that companies must allow the free association of workers. Some companies deal with this by helping their workers to form an internal works committee, often selecting and training the leaders themselves and ensuring that women are involved. However, such work committees are not independent and can remain highly controlled by the company.

Of the small producer associations interviewed, two have a female president. All the association representatives said that small female producers participate equally in association meetings and that they are treated in the same way as men. The producers interviewed confirmed these comments.

5. Problems faced by women workers in the workplace and at home

Women banana workers frequently earn less than men because of the tasks they are employed to do, sending the clear message that their work is of less value. Women are routinely excluded from better-paid technical tasks that do not require a man's physical strength.

While most company representatives interviewed said that women and men earn the same salary if they do the same task, it appears that **in some companies an expectation of lower productivity of women workers is formalised into a higher rate for men**. Male casual day labourers may be paid as much as 50% more than female casual day labourers.

Women workers reported frequent illness among those required to fumigate with agrochemicals. In one workshop the participants related how **some women fumigators had vomited blood** but were provided with no medical assistance from the company. One woman sprayer also suffered a miscarriage after being withdrawn from this task.

According to approximately 50% of the workers interviewed, **many companies continue to perform aerial spraying during the working day without prior announcement**.

Lack of adequate personal protective equipment is a significant problem. Combined with insufficient worker education about the impacts of working with agrochemicals and impregnated bags, this issue may have led to **several women developing cancer of the uterus** in one packing plant. All the women affected noted that they had tied plastic bags around their waist because the company did not provide them with protective aprons. In several cases, employees are only provided with protective equipment before a government or international inspection.

While all companies said they provide regular **health and safety training**, some workers said they had received little or no training.

Women workers described **unequal treatment** compared to men and inappropriate comments by male colleagues and supervisors. Some company representatives indicated they felt **unable to effectively challenge sexist comments** and verbal harassment on the grounds that it was “cultural”.

Discrimination based on physical appearance and receptiveness to the sexual attentions of the supervisor occurs in some companies. Women workers explained that many women continue to be afraid to report incidences of **sexual harassment** and gave several examples of women who had left their jobs due to unwanted sexual attention by colleagues, supervisors and their boss.

Some **female small producers feel that they receive less respect** from male workers, buyers and technicians, who assume that they are incapable of managing a farm. The small female producers not affiliated to an association said that male producers are generally able to negotiate better prices.

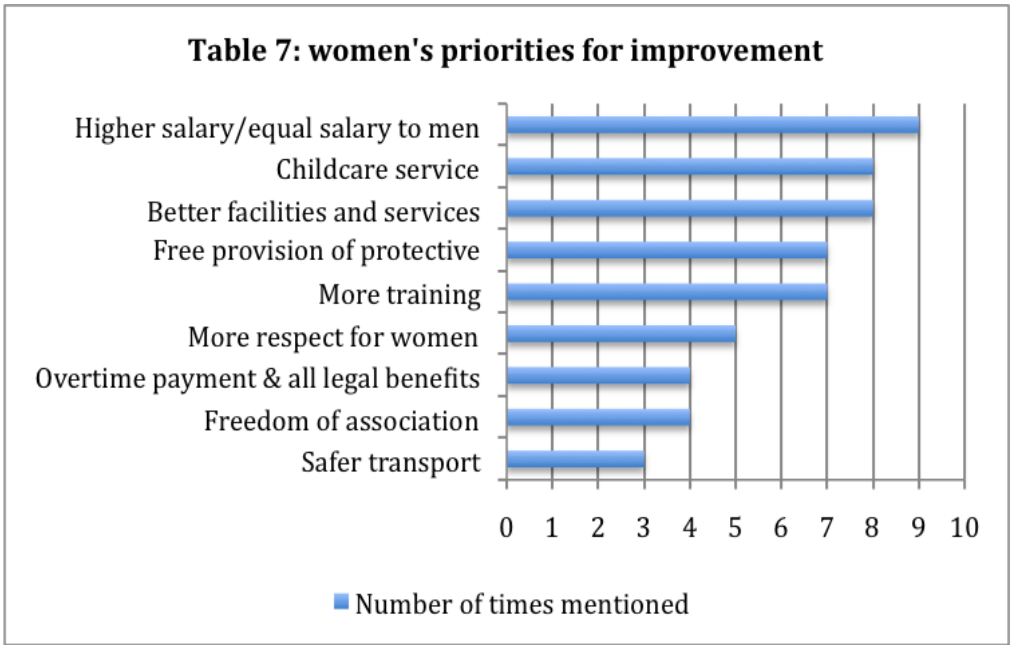
Company representatives and workers agreed that **raised awareness of the rights of pregnant women** was the biggest improvement they had seen in the workplace in recent years. This seems to be attributable to two factors: the promotion of gender equality by the current government, and market pressure to comply with international certification schemes in order to demonstrate ethical and sustainable production. However, the dismissal of pregnant women is still common in some smaller companies.

The **view of pregnancy – and pregnant women – r**emains a problem and is prevalently seen as a cost to productivity. While women are less likely to be fired for becoming pregnant, many are pressured to leave their job due to harassment from supervisors and belief that the work is dangerous for pregnant women.

No company provides a **nursery or childcare**, although it is the service most desired by women. The opening hours of public childcare services are often not long enough for workers in the banana packing plants.

Women workers **suffer psychologically** with feelings of guilt and worry about spending so much time away from their children. They are **exhausted by their double workload** and say they experience more stress than men.

Table 7 shows the key areas where women have concerns about the workplace and would like to see improvement:



Source: responses of workers in interviews and workshops conducted by researcher, 2014

5.1. Remuneration

Wage is the number one concern expressed by the women workers interviewed. Women banana workers frequently earn less than men because of the tasks they are employed to do, sending the clear message that their work is of less value. It is standard practice in the banana industry in Ecuador to base the packing plant workers' wage on the level of physical difficulty of the task that they do. Workers who complete tasks at the start of the packing process, such as picking flowers remains off the banana plants, earn less than workers who do more technical tasks. These tasks include making clusters or specific tasks that require greater speed or strength such as packing the fruit into boxes. It is considered necessary to pay more for tasks that involve more physical force in order to find workers who are willing to complete them.

Most large companies pay workers completing tasks requiring less physical force the national minimum wage, in addition to an extra productivity bonus based on the number of boxes packed per day. Most company representatives interviewed said that women and men earn the same wage if they do the same task. It appears, however, that in some companies the expectation of lower productivity of women workers is formalised into a higher rate for men.

In Ecuador, companies are required by law to provide overtime payment, two annual bonuses, fifteen days of paid holiday and to distribute part of their profits to their employees. 30% of employees said their company failed to comply with some of these regulations. Unpaid overtime, salary irregularities and lack of transparency regarding how their wage has been calculated are problems reported by both men and women workers. When one employee asked her supervisor why she had not received overtime payment, his reply was, *"**If you don't want to work, you know what you have to do!**"*

There is a great variation in the daily wage earned by female casual day labourers, which ranges from $9 to $18 and may or may not include lunch. Small producers pay the highest wages. Male casual day labourers earn between $5 and $10 more per day. These women frequently work 10 to 14 hour days. Whilst a few are paid extra for overtime or according to the number of boxes packed, the majority receive no additional payment.

5.2. Health and Safety

The principal work-related health problems that women identified are:

- inflammation of the urinary tract
- rashes or spots on their arms and upper body
- fungus in the toenails
- muscle pain/repetitive strain injury
- work accidents such as cuts

For all listed conditions, the symptoms are immediately visible. Therefore, the list does may include the medium to longer-term impacts of working in proximity with agrochemicals. The majority of the health problems were regarded as affecting men and women equally, although women are more likely to suffer from inflammation of the urinary tract. This is generally the case with urinary tract infections and is likely due to long hours spent in the packing plant that has high temperatures combined with insufficient water intake and toilet breaks Older women in particular are also more prone to suffering from muscle pain.

Use of agrochemicals is an acute risk to the health of workers. In one workshop, the workers related how some women sprayers had vomited blood but were provided with no medical assistance from the company. In another plantation, following frequent illness amongst women sprayers, the supervisor started to alter the workers who did this task. Despite this, one sprayer had a miscarriage several months into her pregnancy, even though she did not spray whilst pregnant. Although small producers employ external workers to perform manual spraying, they prepare the mixture themselves and are thus regularly exposed to the chemicals that it contains.

According to approximately 50% of the workers interviewed, many companies continue to perform aerial spraying during the working day without prior announcement. In one workshop, a women stated that spraying is sometimes performed whilst they are eating lunch in an uncovered canteen, contaminating their food as a result.

Companies are required by law and by international certification schemes to provide protective equipment for their employees. Whilst the majority of the employees confirmed that they are given protective equipment, some said that they are not given sufficient equipment. It was explained that sprayers are not given masks and in one case, it was found that they are not given any protective equipment. In several cases, it was explained that employees are only provided with protective equipment before a government or international inspection, demonstrating the need for independent worker redress when a company fails to comply with the law. Of the casual labourers interviewed, approximately 50% are not provided with any protective equipment and 25% are sometimes given protective equipment but have to buy their own replacements.

In one plantation, several women have recently developed cancer of the uterus. All of them had been wearing plastic bags around their waist to protect themselves from getting wet or from the chemicals used for fumigation because they were not provided with protective aprons by the company. The fact that these women were unaware of the danger to their health of reusing plastic bags that had contained agrochemicals demonstrates the importance of worker training in health and safety. Company representatives all said that they provide their employees with regular health and safety training. Many started doing this to comply with certification schemes such as GlobalGap. Nevertheless, some workers stated they had received little or no training.

The larger companies provide a medical service for workers and their families. However, some women said that they are hesitant to go to the company doctor for fear of losing their job. The social worker interviewed confirmed that employees often do not report medical problems early enough. Some women said that the medication they need is rarely available in the dispensary, whilst others complained that the cost of medication is deducted from their salary.

Transport was also regarded as a problem. Approximately 50% of the employees interviewed feel that the buses provided by their company are old and unsafe. Casual day labourers are at greatest risk, travelling to work by motorbike or in overcrowded trucks provided by the company.

5.3. Treatment of women in the workplace and sexual harassment

There is clearly a great variation in the way in which women are treated in different workplaces. Some employees

and the majority of casual day labourers feel that women are not treated equally in the workplace. Examples cited include:

- If a woman sits down to rest for a minute, the supervisor immediately tells her to get up and start working, whilst male workers are treated with more leniency.
- If a woman finishes her tasks early, she is not allowed to go home, whereas a man who finishes early is.
- Supervisors show more respect towards male workers, whilst treating female workers "*however they like because they know we won't confront them*".
- Outside of work, male workers often tell jokes about the inappropriate comments they make to their female colleagues.
- Male workers often use crude and impolite language towards their female colleagues, giving female workers nicknames such as "***fatty***" or "***little cow***".

Some company representatives recognised that they are aware of the vulgar language used by men and the impact it can have on the atmosphere in the packing plant. For instance, male workers often like to listen to rap music in the packing plant. The words are sexually oriented and encourage them to make jokes and tease women. However, these companies claim that it is difficult to change such behaviour, which they attribute to cultural values. Several other companies have an internal code of conduct and/or are currently developing one in order to comply with international certification schemes such as Tesco's Ethical Trading Policy. The codes of conduct contain a general non-discrimination policy.

Women described discrimination between women workers based on age and physical appearance. Supervisors often show a preference for one or two female employees, who are usually young and attractive. For instance, if the preferred women are absent due to illness, they still receive their full day's wage. This understandably creates tension between the preferred employees and the other female members of the team. In general, the women were unwilling to share much information on the topic of sexual harassment. Only one admitted to having experienced sexual harassment at work but did not give details, explaining only that it was "***to get work for my son***". The others said they had no personal experience of sexual harassment in the workplace, but gave the following examples of friends or colleagues who had experienced sexual harassment within the past five years:

- One woman decided to leave her job after the team leader made advances on her.
- Another woman left her job following teasing and advances made on her by her male colleagues.
- Two women lost their job after refusing advances made on them by the boss.
- In one workshop, the women said they knew of young women who were promised a job if they would engage in sexual activities with the boss.

In many cases, women felt they had no choice but to accept unequal treatment and sexual harassment. In one workshop, a woman said that many workers continue to be afraid to report incidences of sexual harassment. Some employees said that the Human Resources department in their company never takes any action if complaints are made. In one case, a male boss was moved to a different plantation following accusations of sexual harassment, but he did not lose his job. None of the companies have a specific policy on sexual harassment.

The experience of relationships with male workers and industry actors was varied for small female producers. Some small female producers feel that they receive less respect from male workers, buyers and technicians, who assume that they are incapable of managing a farm. Male workers do not always like taking orders from a woman and while one woman said "***I treat my workers well, so they treat me the same way***", others have to put a lot of pressure on their workers to make them work effectively. One respondent explained that the sprayer she hires often does not treat the entire area of land as he assumes she will not check his work; another woman stated that she contracts male workers until 4pm but they frequently ask to go home earlier or demand more money. The small female producers not affiliated to an association said that male producers are generally able to negotiate better prices. Some female small producers feel vulnerable due to increasing crime in the area and

dislike being alone on their farm. Whilst theft is a significant problem, they also fear sexual harassment or assault.

5.4. Women's reproductive rights

Companies and workers agree that the awareness and respect of pregnant and breastfeeding women's rights in many larger companies has improved in recent years. Company representatives attribute this to greater awareness of the law, increased government inspections, and market pressure for compliance with international certification schemes that prohibit discrimination against pregnant women. However, the dismissal of pregnant women is still frequent in some smaller companies. Several company representatives and women workers gave conflicting interpretations of the law, indicating that better knowledge of women's legal rights is still needed.

The workers interviewed confirmed that women are permitted to take the three months of paid maternity leave stipulated by law, during which the company pays 25% of their monthly salary and the government covers the remaining 75%. However, there is evidence that despite improvements, the view of pregnancy – and pregnant women workers – remains a problem and is prevalently seen as a cost to productivity. Some pregnant women choose to stop working because they "believe it is too dangerous", demonstrating a fear that they will not be allocated appropriate tasks. Others leave their job following pressure from the team leader. Approximately half of the casual day labourers interviewed said that pregnant women are not allowed to work.

The law states that breastfeeding women should work a six-hour day, and the majority of the employees interviewed confirmed this, with the exception of one who said that breastfeeding workers are still required to work the full eight hours. Another worker explained that although the law is respected, the transport provided by the company does not leave until 4pm, which means that women who live far from the plantation either have to pay for their own transportation or wait the extra two hours that they would have worked, making the provision of a shorter working day meaningless.

5.5. Facilities and services for women

Childcare is considered by women workers to be the service that they need the most. The opening hours of the public childcare services (8am-4pm) do not coincide with their working hours and, in addition, many women are afraid to leave their children in the hands of strangers.

None of the companies provides childcare services. Dole is the only company to have considered this, but decided that the project was too expensive to implement without support from an external partner or the government. Other companies consider that it is neither necessary nor feasible to provide a childcare service, due to the high costs involved, the relatively low number of female employees and the availability of nearby public childcare services.

Most companies provide separate toilets for women, but in smaller companies this is not always the case. Some, but not all, provide separate showers and changing rooms, with the consequence that women workers have access to fewer facilities than their male colleagues. The comment was made more than once that it is not appropriate for women to shower at work as "***this might tempt men to look at things they should not see***".

The casual day labourers reported that some plantations provide separate toilets for women, whereas others do not. Some provide communal showers and changing rooms, but none are separate for women.

5.6. Women's double workload

There is a large number of female heads of household in the villages of Ecuador, whilst the vast majority of married women are responsible for taking care of their children and doing all the household tasks with little or no support from their spouse. Juggling long work hours, household tasks and raising children is a challenge for most women. They often manage their double workload by waking up very early to cook and doing household tasks in the evening. In the words of one woman interviewed, "***we have no choice but to be really strong***".

The following impacts of women's double workload were cited:

- Women feel very tired and experience more stress than men.

- They feel guilty for leaving their children alone or with other family members when at work.
- They cannot concentrate at work because they are worried about their children.
- They do not have time to help their children with their homework.
- They are not able to work if their child is ill.
- They often cannot attend school meetings.
- They are not able to look for full-time work.
- They resent their husbands for not helping them.

In addition, the current lack of recognition of their work in the home (though this is under review by the current administration, which has proposed to offer social security affiliation for housewives) and the lower wages that prevail in many workplaces lead to women to feel undervalued and can contribute to their lack of self-esteem.

Small female producers also feel the impact of their double workload, which means that they have less available time to spend at the farm than male producers. As a result, they are not always able to oversee their workers. Small male producers are able to build up a better relationship with their workers because they spend more time at the farm.

6. Initiatives to promote decent work for women banana workers

Some employers perceive women workers to be more **responsible and reliable with greater attention to detail** than their male colleagues, and two companies had considered recruitment campaigns to increase the proportion of women in their workforce.

Most company representatives agreed that increasing women's employment in the packing plant is possible. The development of **policies** providing guidance about what tasks are suitable for women, **targeted recruitment campaigns** to overcome the perception that applications from women are unwelcome, and **training for all new workers**, would overcome the main barriers to women's employment in the banana industry.

The development of more gender-specific policies, most notably a **policy on sexual harassment**, in addition to the enforcement of an **official complaints procedure**, would help to improve the treatment of women in the workplace.

Company **training on topics related to human relations and behaviour in the workplace** has helped alter the attitudes of both male and female workers and had led to significant improvement in the treatment of women on some plantations. The **attitude and behaviour of supervisors and senior staff** has an impact on the atmosphere in the packing plant.

The **best working conditions were reported in companies that collaborate constructively with an independent trade union**. Union representatives can negotiate improved conditions for women workers and challenge discrimination and harassment.

Women who have had access to **training on topics of self-esteem and labour rights** are more able to assert themselves and challenge discrimination and sexual harassment. **Female trade union representatives are ideally placed to deliver such training** and workshops provided by FENACLE had empowered participants to demand greater respect in the workplace and in the home.

Female small producers benefit from membership of **producers' associations**, particularly where these are certified Fairtrade or organic and **targeted outreach** for female producers by these associations may encourage more to join. One small producer association has a **gender policy** and provides **training and other measures of support to its female-headed members**. Other associations could learn from this best practice.

6.1. Employment of women

While under-representation of women is the norm in the banana industry in Ecuador – leaving rural women and

their families in the local areas with little or no opportunity to increase their income – when questioned some company representatives confirmed that they see benefits of employing more female workers:

- Women are absent less often than men, who frequently miss work on Mondays after consuming an excessive amount of alcohol at the weekend. In general, female workers are more responsible.
- There is a higher turn-over rate for male workers compared to female workers.
- Some supervisors prefer to employ women for certain tasks, such as sticking on labels and, in some cases, making clusters and packing the fruit into boxes, because they are more meticulous and less likely to damage the fruit.
- Women tend to concentrate more than men, making them more suitable for tasks such as fumigation.
- Women are less likely to argue with their colleagues.
- They are more disciplined and rule-abiding.

Some companies have acted on the observation that women workers are often be more reliable and responsible than men. One company had increased the daily wage of women workers as part of a conscious effort to recognise the value of women's work. Palmar has a policy of only recruiting women for a number of tasks in the packing plant, including picking off flower remains, removing and washing protectors and spraying, and as a result its packing plants employ a higher number of women than elsewhere. Jasafrut has recently decided to increase the proportion of female full-time employees, allocating more tasks to women in the packing plant and reorganising the work process so that they have tasks to do on days when there is no packing process. In 2013, Dole initiated a pilot project with the aim of reaching 100% employment of women in the packing plant for the tasks they are permitted to do. However, the target was later reduced to 70% and the project is currently on hold.

The majority of the company representatives interviewed agreed that increasing women's employment in the packing plant was possible. The fact that some packing plants employ a greater number of women demonstrates that it does not decrease the team's productivity as some team leaders argue it would. Certain company representatives had witnessed a greater proportion of women workers in packing plants in Colombia, Costa Rica and Honduras.

The findings suggest that it would be relatively easy to increase the employment of women in packing plants, with three elements to the strategy.

- The development of policies regarding which tasks are most suitable for women and communicating these tasks to supervisors.
- Targeted recruitment campaigns which communicate clearly that applications from women are welcomed. The experience of Palmar demonstrates that it is possible to reach out to women workers.
- The systematic training of all new workers would make comparative lack of experience less of a barrier and increase women's confidence to apply for jobs in the banana industry, as well as improving productivity and health and safety for all workers.

6.2. Treatment of women

The research identified some good practice and strategies that have been successful in improving the treatment of women in the workplace.

The development of more gender specific policies, most notably a policy on sexual harassment, in addition to the enforcement of an official complaints procedure, would help to improve the treatment of women in the workplace. The larger companies and companies whose market requires compliance with international certification schemes have or are in the process of developing an internal code of conduct. These codes contain a general non-discrimination policy and, in some cases, a clause specifying that female applicants cannot be tested for pregnancy. No company had a specific policy on sexual harassment and this is a key area for improvement. The development of a mechanism for ensuring compliance with the code that goes beyond audits and

inspections is essential as workers frequently reported never seeing inspectors, companies only handing out protective equipment prior to an inspection and team leaders selecting their favourite workers to speak to inspectors.

Company representatives from Dole explained that they periodically present their code of conduct to employees, reminding them of the importance of maintaining a positive and respectful workplace. If employees experience disrespectful treatment or sexual harassment, they can make an official complaint via the company's intranet system (Doleintegrity.com) or by communicating directly with the Human Resources department. The name of the person making the allegation is kept confidential and the company starts an investigation process in which the directors of several departments participate. If the allegation is justified, the accused employee may be sanctioned and the person making the allegations has the right to make a legal claim against the aggressor. Employees reported that this process has occasionally resulted in the suspension or dismissal of male employees, thus sending a clear message to the other workers that such behaviour is not tolerated by the company.

With regards to small female producers, those affiliated to associations promoting Fairtrade and organic certification reported the best working conditions, which may in part be due to the greater economic stability resulting from the stable price paid for their bananas and support received from the association. Women producers affiliated to associations received the same price for their bananas as men producers. Outreach by associations to female producers to explain the benefits of being part of an association and encourage them to join would be beneficial.

Urocal is the only small producer association of those interviewed with a gender policy. As part of its Institutional Gender Equality Plan, it incorporated gender equality into its rules, increased the number of women in the administration of the association, organised discussions with its producers to raise awareness of gender equality, provided technical training for its female producers and introduced initiatives for women such as access to saving and credit accounts. Other associations could learn from this good practice.

Some workers described that company training on topics related to human relations and behaviour in the workplace had helped alter the attitudes of both male and female workers and had led to significant improvement in the treatment of women the past five to ten years. Dole organises talks given by specialists on topics such as behaviour in the workplace, self-esteem, nutrition, HIV and raising children. These talks are greatly appreciated by its employees and have a positive impact on their personal and working life. Other companies said they are aware that it would be useful to organise human relations training for their workers in order to encourage a more respectful environment in the workplace, but feel that it would be too costly or that there are other priorities.

The attitude of people in positions of authority has an important impact on the atmosphere in the workplace. In Banabay, the owner has transmitted his values to the supervisors who, in turn, ensure a respectful working environment. Palmar provides its supervisors with managerial training, with a focus on the proper treatment of employees. An employee of another company explained that the treatment of workers towards each other has improved since the arrival of a new supervisor who, unlike his predecessor, has "***imposed some order in the packing plant***".

The best working conditions were reported in companies which collaborate constructively with an independent trade union. Union representatives can negotiate improved conditions for women workers, as demonstrated by the experience at Dole plantation Megabanana, where union representatives negotiated a monthly allowance of $3 per child for workers with children. Alamos negotiated that workers could choose whether or not to do overtime, which has made it easier for women workers to balance their home and working life. In one case, improvement in the treatment of women was attributed to the presence of a female union leader in the packing plant. In another, the treatment of women has improved since action was taken by FENACLE and the trade union to denounce several male workers for sexual harassment. A more mature and open attitude to trade unions and respect for the right to freedom of association would open the possibility of positive collaborations between workers and management to improve the work environment, overcome problems and inefficiencies in the production process, and provide workers with adequate training.

Communication with independent trade unions that directly represent workers is a reliable mechanism for government inspectors and auditors to find out about weaknesses in company compliance with legislation and international certification schemes.

Female trade union representatives are well placed to support women in asserting themselves and challenging discrimination and sexual harassment. Women who have had access to training on topics of self-esteem and labour rights are more likely to be treated better in the workplace. Many Ecuadorian women lack the confidence to speak out and do not realise that their own behaviour can change the attitude of others. They have been known to quietly accept teasing and insulting as they believe that reacting to it will make it worse.

Some of the workers interviewed had participated independently, or through a workers' association, in workshops organised by FENACLE on themes such as labour rights, leadership, self-esteem and the gender division of household roles. Women who had attended these workshops reported increased awareness of their legal rights, better knowledge of key health and safety issues and improved self-confidence. One participant explained that, "***When one of my colleagues insulted me, I calmly told him that I didn't deserve to be treated like that. When he saw that I was sure of what I was saying, his attitude changed***". Another related that, "***I told my boss that I was working hard and that there was no reason to shout at me. I told him I wanted to be treated with respect***". Since then, he has treated her better. Some participants also described that they were receiving more help and respect from their husbands in the home. The fact that these workshops are not delivered by representatives of the company where the problems of discrimination and harassment exist is a key factor in their success in empowering the women worker participants.

7. Conclusions

The research suggests that the under-representation of women in the banana industry in Ecuador, and the fact that women workers normally receive a lower wage than men, are both primarily due to cultural factors: expectations about employment in the industry and established practices of how work is organised. Challenging these issues is achievable and promises benefits for both employers and female employees.

Targeted recruitment campaigns to overcome the perception that applications from women are unwelcome, and training for all new workers, would overcome the main barriers to women's entry into the banana industry as well as improving productivity and health and safety in the workplace. The development of policies providing guidance about production and packing tasks which are suitable for women employees and recognise women's suitability to technical tasks requiring care and attention to detail could increase the earning potential of women workers and lead to productivity benefits.

After remuneration, the challenge of combining paid work with childcare responsibilities is a primary concern for the women who participated in this study. It is an issue that has a negative impact on the psychological well-being of both the women and their children. The situation is particularly stressful for women who are the heads of household. As the cost of a childcare is clearly a major concern for companies, one solution could be the collaboration of different plantations located in the same area to provide shared childcare facilities for their employees. Thus reducing the financial burden and also increasing the number of women who could benefit from the service. Government support could also be solicited.

Whilst the experience of women within the workplace varies, unequal treatment of women workers and sexual harassment are widespread problems. Women often feel they have no choice but to accept this behaviour or leave their job. Development of more gender policies by companies, most notably a policy on sexual harassment, and the enforcement of an official complaints procedure, are effective ways of improving the treatment of women in the workplace. Larger companies have some good practice in this respect. Provision of human relations training with regard to behaviour in the workplace and good leadership can enable a positive working environment. Providing training in gender and labour rights and self-esteem to support women to assert themselves and challenge all forms of discrimination and harassment is a powerful tool for transforming gender relations in the workplace and in the home. Female trade union representatives are ideally placed to provide this training.

Government policies to promote gender inequality and knowledge of the rights of pregnant women have improved conditions for women in Ecuador's banana industry. Compliance with international certification schemes in order to sell to markets demanding ethical and sustainable production has a powerful influence on the policies and practices of larger companies. The worst working conditions for men and women workers exist in medium companies which are rarely inspected and which continue to informally sub-contract their workers.

Many of these companies are third party suppliers to larger exporting companies, who do not act to challenge discriminative or illegal practices in their supply chain.

Trade union repression is widespread in the banana industry. The best conditions were reported in those companies that do collaborate constructively with an independent trade union. Union representatives can negotiate improved conditions for women and men workers and challenge discrimination and harassment. They also provide a reliable mechanism for government inspectors and auditors to discover weakness in company compliance with legislation and international certification schemes, including concerns relating to the employment and treatment of women workers.

The experiences and challenges of women small producers parallel those of women workers on medium to large plantations in terms of lower representation, sometimes receiving a lower price for their work/ produce, and less respect from workers and buyers. Whilst it seems that the low number of female producers is largely due to cultural values which will take time to evolve, there are several ways in which associations and the government can reach out to women producers.

Membership of a producers' association means payment of a price equal to that received by male producers, and additional support where the association is certified Fairtrade or organic. Active communication from such associations to female producers to encourage them to join, the development by these associations of a gender policy and provision of both technical support and training on self-esteem would ensure that more women producers are able to command equal and respectful treatment from the men with whom they collaborate. Training on gender roles could also result in a more balanced workload in the home, thus enabling female producers to dedicate more time to their farm.

Finally, the government could encourage more women to buy land by making it easier for them to access loans.

Bibliography

UROCAL, 2012 Women's Rights and Gender Issues for Small producers in Ecuador http://www.bananalink.org.uk/sites/default/files/Women's%20Rights%20and%20gender%20issues%20for%20small%20producers%20in%20Ecuador.pdf

Annex 2 : Questionnaire spent to Coordinators of Trade Union Womens' Sections

Name:

Position/responsibilities:

Union:

Present in:
(Names of companies)

Country:

If you have any documentation or material on the topic of gender from the past two years (since February 2012), please send it to us along with this questionnaire before Friday, December 12

Please answer the questions below using as much space necessary. We have drawn up a long list of questions so if you choose, you may only answer the most important or relevant questions related to the situation of this sector in your country. Information on specific companies is of particular interest and use.

Overview of employment situation for women in the banana sector

How many employees are there in the banana industry in your country? How many are female and how many are male? How many workers are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary ones? *Company details, with the name of the company and information on the number of employed men and women are very useful where possible. More general information is also useful. Please use the box below.*

	Total No. Employees	Women	% permanent/ temporary contract	Men	% permanent/ temporary contract
National Industry					
Company 1					
Company 2					
Company 3					
Company 4					

Is there gender discrimination regarding employment? (Number of women employed, type of contract) How do companies defend their recruitment policy?

Is the employment process the same for women as it is for men? For example, are there the same training opportunities?

What factors make it difficult for a woman to work in the banana sector?

Once employed...

What are the jobs/tasks that are NOT carried out by women?

Among these "male" tasks, are there any that women feel able and interested in doing?

What are the jobs that are NOT carried out by pregnant or breast-feeding women? Please explain why. Is it due to physical agility or exposure to agrochemicals?

Work/task	Reason

Please also detail any key tasks that are being carried out by pregnant and breast-feeding women:

Work/task	Reason

Do women earn the same salary as men for the same work?

Are there jobs/tasks that are better paid than others? Are these jobs ones that could be done by and would appeal to women?

How many hours does a banana worker do on average in your country? Is there any difference in the length of the working day for male and female workers? How many hours are established by law?

<u>The main problems that women workers face (economic, social, occupational health and reproduction), in the workplace and at home</u>

What are the main complaints made by working women? Are males and females treated equally in the workplace?

What are the health and safety risks at work that affect women, either because of the work they do or because of gender discrimination?

Are there many cases of sexual harassment in the banana industry? What possibilities have women to report it and work free from harassment? What are the consequences for those accused of harassment?

Are there any companies which have policies on sexual harassment? How do they work in practice?

What rights for pregnant and breast-feeding women are covered by law? Are these rights respected within the banana sector?

What rights for parents looking after children are covered by law? Are these rights respected within the banana sector?

Is it known if there are many women who are heads of household working in the banana industry in your country?

Are there any companies that provide special services for children and families of the workers?

Are there any companies that provide special services for women?

How to deal with these problems to ensure dignified work for women workers

How many workers in the banana sector are affiliated to your union? How many of these are women? How do these figures compare to the proportion of men and women employed in companies where the union has a presence?

How does the union try to promote improvements in the employment of women in the banana sector?

What have been the major challenges and achievements in the field of gender equality for your organization?

What ideas do you have on how to improve the conditions of women workers in the banana industry?

If there is any other issue or problem that is not listed here in the questionnaire that you consider important, please detail below.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Annex 3: DOLE 2013 statistics on women's employment at plantation level

These statistics were reported to the Working Group on Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues of the World Banana Forum in March 2013. They cover plantations owned by DOLE. They do not include plantations that supply DOLE through third party contracts.

Dole Tropical Products Latin America S.A. Number of Women plantation workers							
	Permanent		Temporary		Total		
	Admin.	Production	Admin.	Production	Admin.	Production	Total
Honduras	7	432	5	872	12	1304	1316
Costa Rica	16	667	0	0	16	667	683
Ecuador	17	152	0	0	17	152	169
Total	40	1251	5	872	45	2123	2168