

Case Study

Guidelines on the healthy and safe employment of women workers in the Ghanaian banana industry

Banana Link | September 2020



Photo: Woman worker at Golden Exotics (Banana Link/James Robinson Photography)

Overview

Banana Link has worked with partner organisations in the Ghanaian banana industry to introduce a set of guidelines and training for workers on the healthy and safe employment of women workers. These activities were undertaken within the broader [Banana Occupational Health & Safety Initiative](#) (BOHESI), coordinated by [Solidaridad](#), Banana Link and the [World Banana Forum](#), to introduce wide scale occupational health & safety (OHS) training for plantation workers in Ecuador, Cameroon and Ghana.

BOHESI was launched in Ghana in April 2019 by Banana Link, with co-financing from [IDH - The Sustainable Trade Initiative](#), in collaboration with the Banana Producers Association (BPA) and the [International Union of Food Workers Union](#) (IUF) and is a train-the-trainer model to support improvements in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in the banana sector.

The [Guidelines on the healthy and safe employment of women workers in the Ghanaian banana industry](#) (“the gender guidelines”) were developed in collaboration with the three principal

banana producers in the country – Golden Exotics Limited (GEL) (a part of [Compagnie Fruitière](#)), Volta River Estates Limited (VREL) and Musamahat, along with the IUF, local plantation unions, the General Agricultural Workers' Union of Ghana (GAWU) and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU).

The guidelines were launched at an event to also launch the broader BOHESI training programme in Ghana in February 2020, and initial train-the-trainer training courses have been undertaken at all three producer producer companies.

Banana Link has previously coordinated training at both GEL and VREL, as part of our [education and empowerment training programme in west and central Africa](#) between 2013 and 2016, and more recently worked with GEL, their parent Compagnie Fruitière, and the IUF, to [improve and increase women's employment](#) on their Fairtrade certified plantation.

Aims and objectives

The immediate aim of the project was to enable trained trainers to deliver OHS education to all workers, based on the BOHESI training manual and the gender guidelines.

More broadly, the aim was to strengthen the operations of workplace Health and Safety Committees and therefore improve working conditions for women and men in the Ghanaian banana export sector. Committee members, and others with responsibility for health and safety at farm level, will be trained as trainers who will then also raise worker awareness of risks and good practice through an extensive workplace education programme. Reflecting the commitment of members of the BPA to improving employment conditions for women, activities will have a gendered focus.

The Ghanaian training manual will include guidelines on health and safety for pregnant and breastfeeding women. Industry actors will also work with external experts to learn how to develop better practices in relation to women's reproductive health.

BPA members will develop an advocacy strategy towards four relevant government ministries with the aim of establishing interest in and commitment to the creation of Occupational Health and Safety legislation for use in the agricultural sector, to provide a regulatory framework to also strengthen the role of workplace health and safety committees and training.

Ghana is one of the few countries worldwide to have so far ratified the International Labour Organisation's Convention 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, and the BOHESI project has been timely, given the government's commitment to introducing comprehensive occupational health and safety legislation.

Article 18 of Convention 184 requires that *“Measures shall be taken to ensure that the special needs of women agricultural workers are taken into account in relation to pregnancy, breastfeeding and reproductive health.”* The gender guidelines are, however, intended to go beyond the often narrow focus on the reproductive role of women and consider all of the health and safety risks specific to women because of both their sex and gender. The guidelines include

a comprehensive review of reproductive lifespan on the basis that it is important that everyone understands how hormonal changes can affect a woman's emotional, physical and mental well being.



Photo: Training at GEL (Banana Link)

The gender guidelines

The gender guidelines are written for the use of workers, trade union representatives, members of Health and Safety Committees and employers. They are based on a clear understanding that the best way to ensure a safe and healthy workplace for women and men is:

- the formation and existence of an effective action driven Joint Health and Safety Committee made up of women and men worker and management representatives who are fully trained to understand sex and gender differences affecting women's and men's health and safety in the world of work;
- identifying the health and safety hazards/issues faced by men and women at the workplace, assessing the risks and developing the most appropriate control measures to address the identified health and safety challenges;
- management implementing the control measures developed by the Joint Health and Safety Committee; and
- unions and management monitoring and periodically reviewing the implemented control measures to ensure they are effective in addressing the identified health and safety challenges.

The gender guidelines are intended to:

- enable a gender-responsive approach to occupational health and safety issues which acknowledges and highlights the differences that exist between male and female workers; and
- help with the identification of differing occupational health and safety risks and the proposal of control measures for consideration and implementation so that effective solutions are provided for everyone.

Most importantly the guidelines recommend that women workers are always consulted “to identify health and safety issues related to their work since they face them on a daily basis” and are encouraged and able to play an active role in shaping workplace policies and practices, including through their membership of independent trade unions and their Women’s Committees.

All women need to be proactively made aware of their rights and how to secure them, because as the ILO note, “The right to safe and healthy work is inseparable from freedom of association, the right to organize and the right to collective bargaining.” When trade unions form part of the drive to identify hazards in an inclusive way, this can enable the development and negotiation of an inclusive workplace policy with the employer. The involvement of trade unions also tends to shift the focus of health and safety policy from a behaviour based approach which views workers’ behaviour as the primary cause of work-related injury and illness, and towards an approach which takes larger workplace structures and systems into consideration as well. In this way, the hierarchy of workplace hazard controls is restructured.



Photo: Training at VREL (Banana Link)

Training

The initial aim of the training undertaken in Ghana was to strengthen the capacity of Health & Safety Committees by training:

- One Ghanaian based national BOHESI “trainer of trainers”, who will assist the facilitation of the first BOHESI training and could then train future trainers as required;
- 32 company employees who are members of the Health and Safety Committees, as BOHESI workplace trainers, at least 12 of whom are women; and
- 30 trade union representatives as BOHESI workplace trainers, at least 10 of whom are women.

Working with the appointed “trainer of trainers”, Banana Link devised a two day Women in Health & Safety training programme, the principal elements of which were:

Gendered health & safety risks

- Introduction to gendered health & safety risks in the world of work including:
 - women’s health issues;
 - social reproductive labour - health impacts of risks in the home, including stress, harassment and violence
- ‘Why does my PPE not fit me? Understanding the gender data gap’
- Reproductive health timeline

Assessments & inspections: putting learning into action

- Risk assessments and inspections
- An action plan to ensure a safer and healthier workplace for women

The design of the training programme reflected the [*ILO’s 10 Keys for gender sensitive OSH practice – Guidelines for gender mainstreaming in occupational safety and health*](#), which explains how to integrate gender issues into the analyses, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and preventive measures in order to reduce inequalities between men and women in OHS.

Initial training courses were held at all three participating producer companies in late 2019 and early 2020 which saw training delivered to over 100 participants, around a quarter of whom were women.

Evaluation and impact

The impact of the training has been evaluated both by direct feedback from training participants and also by broader key performance indicators (KPI) to measure improved health and safety standards on the plantations.

Training participants were asked to self-evaluate the training on the basis of these criteria:

- understanding of relevant legislation;
- capacity to play an active role in the H& S Committee;
- ability to communicate H&S guidance to workers; and
- understanding of gendered H&S risks, including harassment.

All training participants self evaluated positively against these criteria. The broader KPIs intended to measure impact on plantations were:

- Changes and/or reviews of company H&S policies – including results of any third party H&S audits;
- Reduction in the number of recorded accidents on plantations; and
- Establishment, and regular meetings, of H&S Committees.

With the training only beginning in late 2019, at time of writing in summer 2020, it is perhaps too early to make any meaning full measurement of the impact on plantations, but early indicators are positive, including reductions in the number of accidents recorded by all three participant producer companies, while company H&S policies have been updated to reflect the gender guidelines, and company H&S committee's are incorporating the guidelines into their activities.

At each of the three companies one of the worker reps has facilitated a session, observed by Banana Link, about Health and Safety, particularly concerning women, to workers in their workplaces after work or in a break. At Musahamat two young men explained the OHS considerations for women to a group of women, while at VREL, a member of H&S committee and Women's Committee delivered a session to workers and likewise at GEL. All sessions illustrated how well the reps had absorbed and understood the issues in the "Train the Trainers" sessions.

Ongoing activities

Further to the initial training of trainers, it is anticipated that BOHESI workplace training will ultimately be delivered to at least 3700 workers, of which approximately 13.5% are women. All three producer companies have plans in place to deliver this training through 2020 and beyond.

It is also planned to coordinate a workshop on Women's Reproductive Health in the Banana Industry, the outputs of which will inform training and the development of both advocacy strategy and company policies.



Photo: Training at Musamahat (Banana Link)

Conclusions

Early indications are that the gender guidelines and training are having a positive impact in terms of the gendered aspects of OHS being recognised, understood and acted on at all three producer companies.

These early positive indicators would suggest that the approach that has been taken to embedding gendered OHS in the Ghanaian banana industry could be replicated through other sectors such as tea and flower production.

A key factor in the success in Ghana has been the engagement and support of government, employers and trade unions, and which would be critical to replicating this initiative in other countries and other sectors.

This case study was produced as part of the **Comparative analysis of work towards gender equity in the banana, tea and flower sectors project** funded by the ETI Innovations Fund.