



**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations**

World Banana Forum Working Group 03 (WG03) on Labour Rights

DECENT WORK AND DIGNIFIED LIVING STANDARDS FOR WOMEN; WORKING TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONFRONT THE CRISIS

February 2012

Proposal for a Global Meeting of Women Banana Workers

The World Banana Forum (<http://www.fao.org/wbf/>) is a permanent space of assembly for participants representing the global banana supply-chain to promote open dialogue on challenges facing the banana industry. The Working Group on Labour Rights and Other Workplace Issues (WG03) – which includes representatives of trade unions, small farmers' organisations, civil society organisations, companies, retailers, certification bodies and government institutions - has agreed to prioritise freedom of association and collective bargaining, gender discrimination and occupational health and safety amongst its core areas of work.

In 2011, the WG03 carried out a diagnostic study on the labour rights situation in world banana production, including an analysis of the situation for women workers, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and the Philippines. Common experiences were found between women workers in Latin America and those in other regions of the banana production, where the industry is dominated by the same multinational companies whose plantations are certified by the same international certification bodies, and under the same international labour laws.

The context for Latin American women banana workers

The deterioration of the global labour rights situation has been particularly pronounced in the last ten years, especially for Latin American countries where a significant increase of unemployment rates and an associated deterioration in working conditions has been observed. There is no doubt that these are indicators of the difficulties faced in the rapidly changing global context for the Latin American banana industry.

Specific analysis of the high rates of women's unemployment in the member countries of the Coordinating Body of Latin American Banana and Agro-industrial Unions (COLSIBA) shows that there is a very low percentage of female labour contracted in banana and other agro-industrial plantations; moreover, during the last three years, we have not observed any significant increase in the numbers of women hired in the plantations. Many problems also face women who do find employment: including violations of their labour, trade union, health and environmental rights, as well as their sexual and reproductive rights; women workers see themselves as trapped in this stressful and distressing work environment.

COLSIBA, now coordinated by a women worker, in acknowledgment of the reality in which banana and women agro-industrial workers live, has framed a set of important proposals for the promotion of the labour, union, environmental and sexual rights of women workers in Latin America. This proposal has been fed into framework of the World Banana Forum framework.

Proposal for a Global Meeting of Women Banana Workers

The COLSIBA women, as active members of the World Banana Forum and its Working Group 03, would like to invite women workers from other key areas of banana production in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia (who have so far been under represented both in WG03 and the wider Forum) to share experiences on conditions faced by

women workers and how these are being challenged by unionised women in these countries. The objective is to develop joint proposals for achieving decent work and dignified living standards for women workers using the framework of the World Banana Forum.

To this end, a three day global meeting of women banana workers will take place in Guayaquil, Ecuador on February 24th, 25th and 26th, just before the 2012 global conference of the World Banana Forum in the same city. During the first two days women trade unionists and small farmers' representatives from Latin America, Dominican Republic, Windward Islands, Philippines, Ghana and Cameroon will be invited to participate. The third day will include the participation of wider stakeholders including women representatives of multinational fruit companies, supermarkets, certification bodies and gender experts at government level.

The meeting will be coordinated by Working Group 03 in consultation with the IUF (International Union of Food workers) and women participants from all the aforementioned countries. Collaboratively, these contacts will work on developing the meeting structure and methodology.