



Food and Agriculture  
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The World Banana Forum (WBF)

Working together towards sustainable banana production and trade

Task Force on Gender Equity (GE-TF)

## WEBINAR

### Closing the gender pay gap by increasing women's participation in banana production and leadership roles

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Report of the WBF Task Force on Gender Equity (GE-TF)

Monday, 6 November 2023


#### 1. Welcome by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

On behalf of the World Banana Forum (WBF) Secretariat, hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), **Mr Pascal Liu, Responsible Global Value Chains Team Leader, FAO**, welcomed participants to the webinar, which was organized by the WBF Task Force on Gender Equity (GE-TF).

**Mr Liu** highlighted that the focus of the webinar would be on sharing insights on initiatives from industry stakeholders to increase and improve women's participation in banana production and leadership positions. He noted that this activity can support efforts to close the gender pay gap in the banana sector.

To enable progress in this area, the WBF GE-TF has led concrete activities and awareness-raising efforts since its inception in 2012, such as the co-funding of a pilot study in the Colombian banana industry in 2021 and 2022 to test a gender module developed by the Anker Research Institute, which aims to provide guidance and tools on how to conduct a gender analysis of prevailing wages and a living wage in specific economic sectors and workplaces, as well as help identify programmes and policies to close the gender pay gap and gaps to a living wage. The results and recommendations of the study were presented in a webinar of the GE-TF in September 2022.

**Mr Liu** then mentioned that this current webinar aimed to support key recommendations that arose from that study, particularly through the dissemination of examples and good practices to support women's participation and permanent opportunities in the industry, in order to increase women's involvement in banana production beyond



the packhouses and to help women access roles and functions of leadership and management, with an emphasis on closing the gender pay gap.

He also informed that the webinar served as a starting point to compile examples of good practices that could eventually result in the production of a comprehensive booklet to facilitate the sharing of experiences, lessons learned and recommendations on this topic. Participants were invited to share good practices and experiences that can be considered in the development of the booklet in the future.

**Mr Liu** finished by introducing the webinar's agenda and inviting participants to attend the forthcoming Fourth Global Conference of the WBF that will be held on 12 and 13 March 2024, and will be preceded by the Third International Meeting on Gender Equity on 11 March.

## 2. Introduction by the Chairperson

**Ms Camila Reinhardt Hurtado, WBF Secretariat**, highlighted the multifaceted challenges women face in the banana industry, ranging from discrimination and sexual harassment to limited employment prospects, as well as the segregation of women primarily into packing house activities. She emphasized that this remains a significant hurdle which prevents their access to the same remuneration levels achieved by men involved in diverse farm activities, notably the higher paid field activities and managerial positions.

She re-stated the aims of the webinar and stressed the importance of developing a resource via fact sheets or a booklet for industry actors, which can serve as a tool to support efforts to increase women's participation in banana production and leadership roles.

**Ms Reinhardt Hurtado** informed that the session would count on important contributions and perspectives of a small producers' association, ASOGUABO, a larger banana producing company, BanaExport, and a global retail company, Tesco, on improving women's participation in the banana and agricultural sectors. She welcomed the panellists and gave them the floor to share their experiences on what they have been implementing within their own organizations to support the increased participation of women in the banana industry, with the aim to increase opportunities for closing the gender pay gap.


## 3. Summary of the presentations by panelists

### 3.1 The experience of a small producer's association in achieving a fair participation of women in banana production, leadership and management positions

*By Ms Fabiola del Rosario Ramón San Martín, President of the Association of Small Producers, El Guabo (ASOGUABO)*

**Ms Fabiola del Rosario Ramón San Martín** shared that ASOGUABO is an association made up of 122 small producers, of which 31 percent are women. These women are owners of their own land and actively participate in banana production, just like men. She stressed that the association has provided a voice for women since its inception.

She informed that ASOGUABO has created empowerment and leadership schools that have allowed for the sustainable development of their producers and workers. She stressed the need for this system to be replicated elsewhere, and the need for fairer and more egalitarian standards in these areas. The presence of women within the association is part of ASOGUABO's work culture, and the promotion of respect for both men and women is key for their development. **Ms Ramón San Martín** shared that in the past, those who have held executive positions have been men, but her own experience of seeing other examples has allowed her to develop a work environment that



involves the activate participation of women.

She added that many of their platforms and departments are led by women, such as human resources. The executive committee used to be made up entirely of men, but now 2 out of 5 members are women. In addition, they have 1 200 workers, 34 percent of which are women, with the majority working in the packing houses. Their recruitment policies are open to any person, man or woman, and when engaging new staff, they focus on skills and whether the person is able to comply with the requirements of the position. There is a zero-discrimination policy whereby both men and women have the same opportunities.

She noted the work in the farm has traditionally been led by men and made for men, and that there are more and more women within the packing processes, as they feel safe in these activities. There are still very few women working in the fields; however, there are women who know how to work with fertilizers, work the fields and remove leaves. If women request to carry out tasks that require more physical strength than the tasks they are used to dealing with, they are given the opportunity to do so.

Women, however, still face many challenges and barriers in the workplace, such as gender inequality, discrimination, sexist behaviours, both in terms of chores at home and at the workplace, on the banana farms. It is imperative for associations like ASOGUABO to involve women in this work and for everyone to also work in providing training for women, to allow them to break stereotypes and have access to better opportunities in the workplace, in particular in the banana sector. She also touched on the issue of gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace. In Ecuador, there is currently a lack of security which is experienced mostly by women when they work in the fields. Many women do not want to work in the fields, and their husbands do not want to take them to the field because of the levels of insecurity and crime in this sector. It affects women at the national and international levels.

**Ms Ramón San Martín** underscored that there are clearly defined gender roles which impact women's access to leadership positions. Clear gender and wage policies that allow for equity between men and women, and more efficient work and in better conditions to facilitate human development, are necessary. Discrimination of women, where women are seen as expensive workers due to their reproductive nature, needs to be dismantled. She noted that recognition of gender aspects by male counterparts is still an issue that needs to be addressed. Gender equity must include and involve men and not only be targeted towards women.


She added that women are not properly represented in decision-making, collective bargaining, negotiations, and social dialogue platforms. She reiterated the need to empower women and noted the importance of women in high positions working in favour of other women, so that they too can reach their full potential and have sustainable jobs.

To conclude, she stressed that to remove these barriers, gender policies and health and safety for women that will enable the inclusion of women's participation in the banana sector, are necessary. Maternity leave and breastfeeding periods should also be considered, to provide women with tools to help them participate in this market and to end all sorts of gender discrimination. Investment in education and training for women producers and their families is also essential.

### **3.2 Insights on the BELLAS project – including its objectives, achievements and challenges – to achieve a greater participation of women in banana production**

*By Ms Viviana Agudelo Gómez, Labour Relations Manager, BanaExport and Ms Maira María Martínez Conde, Processing Manager, BanaExport*

**Ms Viviana Agudelo Gómez** introduced BanaExport's BELLAS (Banana women, empowered, leaders, local, autonomous and safe) project in Colombia – a programme that aims to generate a culture of gender equality and inclusion in the organization through the transformation of stereotypes, empowerment of women workers and creation of employment opportunities for them, making the banana sector an accepted and viable option for women in the region to promote the independence and confidence of women banana workers. She stated that



BELLAS is about showing women that they can do any type of job around the world. Their male colleagues have also been supporting the project since the start, and women are setting an example that they can take care of their families and their children, while also capable of working and doing anything they set their minds to.

BELLAS was founded in 2022 as a labour-inclusion project. BanaExport was initially looking to hire women who were in love with the banana sector, at first mothers and housewives that had been victims of domestic violence. It then decided to include all those women who were interested in the banana producing sector, whether they had experience or not.

From the start of the project, BanaExport aimed to increase women's representation in the company from 6.5 percent in 2022 to 30 percent by 2024, mostly in the packing houses. In Colombia, it has not been common for women to work in the banana sector, but when they do it is common for them to work in the packing houses. More often it is men working in the banana sector due to the physically demanding tasks and activities. However, the company found that in Central America, women were actively working in the packing houses, and so it wanted to build on those experiences.

Some of the main challenges faced by BanaExport were ensuring that women stayed in the sector and that men supported women's increased participation in the industry. Convincing women to join BELLAS was challenging too. Women held certain stereotypes about themselves: that it was too difficult to work in the sector and that they were not as efficient as men. The farm management staff also stereotyped women and were not hiring women under the same conditions as men. As a result, BanaExport made a shift towards breaking all these stereotypes, even if it was difficult. This was achieved through training and education.

One of the first steps of BELLAS was establishing a 'sisterhood cycle' between the women, while a key challenge was to convince women to focus on leadership, as women were not actively participating in leadership roles. Training sessions were held with the operational staff to discuss active fatherhoods, a key element to get men more involved in parenthood. The administrative staff were also made aware of the male and female stereotypes they might be holding on to, and how this may impact the hiring process.

**Ms Maira María Martínez Conde** presented that during the trainings, women were trained in a variety of skills to carry out different tasks on the farms, as part of the role they were already undertaking in banana production. "Movement Economies" was the main training applied, which refers to carrying out tasks more efficiently and in a shorter period of time. This meant that women could rest more in between tasks, and would therefore get less tired. Women started to realize that they could carry out different tasks that had historically been carried out by men. In removing that stereotype, women's mental wellbeing and work life improved.

BanaExport has carried out different studies, including in assessing risks, which it has ultimately worked to mitigate. This has helped women feel safer at work. BELLAS has enabled women to perform more tasks, which has helped with efforts towards closing the gender pay gap. Male colleagues have supported women throughout and have seen that women are capable of being leaders and carrying out the same jobs as men. Working in this way helped women identify the soft, cognitive, and hard skills they could incorporate into their positions.

After the trainings were implemented, women at BanaExport started packing with the BELLAS approach. As part of this approach, women workers have devoted their efforts to identifying what skills they could implement in their own role and how they could learn from other positions. For instance, BanaExport now ensures premium fruit packing activities carried out 100% by women on a quarterly basis. During these activities, all the processes and the facilities are in the hands of women. Ultimately, women are able to work on any team, and have made their male peers very proud.

**Ms Martínez Conde** also shared that the gender-based committee of the BELLAS project focuses on the prevention of harassment at work and is devoted to reinforcing policies and creating spaces for training and preventing gender-based violence. She added that another positive outcome is that they do not celebrate women's or men's day, but rather the month of gender. During this month, they have different activities that discuss the importance of being on



an inclusive team.

She concluded by emphasizing that there is a need for many other spaces to be inclusive of both women and men. For BanaExport, BELLAS is not a proprietary project, but rather represents Uraba, Colombia, and could be replicated all over the world. This effort to break old and create new stereotypes is in every single one of their worker's efforts. She also acknowledged their work with and support from other supply chain actors in this process.

### **3.3 A presentation on the Tesco Gender Toolkit and its recommendations to promote women's employment opportunities, particularly in supervisory and management roles**

*By Ms Tania Moodley, Responsible Sourcing Manager, Tesco*

**Ms Moodley** opened by introducing Tesco's Gender Toolkit, a resource that Tesco developed and launched just over a year ago, which aims to ensure that Tesco's first-tier suppliers reach 30 percent women representation in management and supervisory positions by 2025. She then went on to highlight the numerous barriers facing women workers in supply chains, including economic and social barriers, low-paying and precarious working conditions, and limited opportunities for entrepreneurship and starting their own businesses.

She stressed that empowering women is key to transforming production and building sustainable supply chains. Increased women's representation can help increase worker voice, leading to an increased opportunity to detect gender-sensitive issues. To identify and address the barriers faced by underrepresented and marginalized groups in the workforce, including women, increasing their participation in all matters and all spheres of the workplace is necessary.


**Ms Moodley** then went on to highlight some of the obstacles that prevent women's participation in global supply chains. She explained that women are often scared to raise issues against their supervisor, who often are male, because of the imbalance of power dynamics that exist. She also underscored that current audit methodologies are inadequate in uncovering gender issues. Often time, gender issues and systemic issues, such as sexual harassment and discrimination, are very difficult to uncover because limited time is spent during an audit on worker interviews, one of the main sources allowing Tesco to dig deeper into specific issues.

Tesco carried out a pilot in five countries across Africa and partnered with an audit service provider, focusing very specifically on gender-sensitive audits. There was a 600% increase in gender non-compliances raised during those gender sensitive audits, which demonstrates that focus on compliance needs to include a gender lens. Another challenge is inadequate and outdated grievance mechanisms as well as a lack of gender-disaggregated data. By asking suppliers to gather gender-disaggregated data, women's participation can be tracked, to better understand and effectively address some of the challenges that are facing women workers.

**Ms Moodley** highlighted Tesco's key commitments on gender, namely: addressing sexual harassment and discrimination; focusing on women in leadership; increasing women's voices in the workplace; and addressing gender stereotypes. To address these commitments, Tesco has developed partnerships with key organizations, including Oxfam for the development of the toolkit, Partner Africa to implement a gender-sensitive audit methodology, and their suppliers to pilot gender-sensitive grievance mechanisms. To increase women's voices in the workplace, Tesco has also developed a partnership with the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUFA).

She then gave an overview of the Tesco Gender Toolkit, explaining that the toolkit is a resource that was developed specifically to offer practical advice and guidance to businesses on how to support women in progressing and thriving at work. It offers suggested steps and actions to tackle and remove barriers that impact women workers and help create a safe and inclusive workplace for everyone.

The toolkit has been developed across three very specific areas: Recruitment, Progression and Retention. It is adaptable and can be utilized for specific areas where the business is facing challenges. The toolkit also includes



spotlight topics, which are topics that Tesco believes are complex but highly impact women workers within supply chains. These topics include addressing gender stereotypes, unpaid care work and the impact of gender-based violence. She then gave a brief explanation of how to use the gender toolkit, which entails:

- 1) Completing a rapid needs assessment to identify potential gaps or areas to strengthen in current activities.
- 2) Identifying key actions to implement, based on recommended activities in each section and how advanced the company is on the topic.
- 3) Incorporating all aspects and activities across different internal teams – e.g. human resources, compliance, and operations – to ensure that it becomes embedded into business practices, and it is not just held with human resources.
- 4) Identifying a gender champion at senior management levels, to make sure all these actions are implemented and aligned.

She shared that the toolkit highlights examples and case studies of barriers and issues faced by women workers and suppliers, especially with regards to the recruitment process and progression into senior roles, and builds on these case studies to offer practical steps to address specific challenges. Examples of case studies highlighted include: a supplier providing scholarships for technical courses and using gender positive language in the internal recruitment process; a supplier providing on-site daycare facilities and breastfeeding rooms; and, suppliers promoting women from supervisory and management roles into other areas of the business.

She concluded by highlighting key actions suppliers could take, particularly in the recruitment process. These include the use of gender-neutral and gender-positive language in adverts and jobs, consistent job profiles and interview questions for all roles, and anonymizing CVs and applications when shortlisting candidates. There was also a recommendation to have a certain percentage of women on every interview panel as well as a diversity and inclusion team dedicated to supporting and improving recruitment processes.

#### 4. Questions for panelists and discussions

A question was posed by one of the participants to **Ms Agudelo Gómez**: *What are the challenges and lessons learned from the BELLAS programme?*

**Ms Agudelo Gómez** responded that the first challenge was to include all the members of the company in this process. They began with the human resources department and staff at the executive level. She stressed that they were not forced to get involved, but rather, were convinced. Another challenge was to incentivize women to do tasks historically done by men. For example, women were not initially interested in packing. Now, all the women workers at BanaExport can work in packing, which makes it easier for them to access the labour market. The final challenge was for women to improve performance, to be at the same level as men when doing the same task. She stated that exercises where they timed women's work was key.

She added that the women at BanaExport have developed several skills, both physical and mental skills, that have enabled them to grow independently. This has made them feel more at ease when carrying out diverse tasks and further helped them to become more efficient as well. Packing activities are not carried out every single day, so it is important for women to be able to carry out work in the field as well, in order to reduce the gender pay gap.

A participant then posed a question to **Ms Martínez Conde**: *Did you work with the trade union SINTRAINAGRO in the implementation of this programme?*

**Ms Martínez Conde** shared that at BELLAS, they work with many partners, including the union SINTRAINAGRO, through their foundation FUNDAMILENIO. As part of the project's goals, the company and its allies bear in mind

the families of the workers as well, including their allies and children, and further develop integration activities with the partner organizations.

Another participant asked BanaExport: ***What is the Movement Economy?***

**Ms Martínez Conde** responded that it not only refers to completing a task in the least amount of time possible, but making the least number of movements possible when completing a task. This is related to health and safety because it helps prevent work-related injuries and diseases, such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.

**Ms Reinhardt Hurtado** asked **Ms Ramón San Martín** the following question:

***Based on ASOGUABO's experience, what specific suggestions and recommendations could you share with other producers on how to promote a culture of gender equality within their organizations?***

**Ms Ramón San Martín** responded that ASOGUABO been working a lot on the issue but has not achieved everything yet. She shared that it has been challenging to offer stable jobs to their workers like other larger plantations have been doing. In general, they hire a large number of people, but only need them to work once a week. This means they cannot focus on capacity building and trainings, which help end those gender stereotypes. She stressed the importance of decent wages and gender policies in order to grant employees the opportunities they deserve within the banana sector.

**Ms Martha Osario (FAO)**, then took the opportunity to share with all the participants that FAO has developed a series of [e-Learning courses](#) that aim to provide a practical guide and best practices regarding gender issues in agricultural investments in agrifood supply chains, which may be useful under the framework of the webinar's discussions.

## 5. Conclusion and final remarks

**Ms Reinhardt Hurtado** concluded the webinar by inviting participants to share their inputs on the format of the good practices booklet the WBF GE-TF aims to develop. She asked participants whether they believe having a booklet is a useful tool or whether they would prefer to see these good practices disseminated in alternative forms, for example, through short videos.

She then thanked all panellists for their interventions, insights and experiences, and for the work that they are doing to promote women's participation in the banana industry. She also thanked the participants, interpreters, and rest of the members of the WBF Secretariat for their support to the webinar.

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