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STRATEGIES



# Investing in Women Workers is a Win for the Kenya's Floriculture Sector.

By Ufadhili Trust

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Kenya's flower sector is one of the country's key foreign exchange earners besides, fruits/vegetables, tea, tourism, and diaspora remittances. The sector is estimated to employ

over 500,000 people, with over 100,000 employed directly by flower farms, and indirectly impacts over 2 million livelihoods (Central Bank of Kenya, 2021).

The country exports flowers to over 60 destinations globally, with Europe being the largest market. The Netherlands is one of the most important trade hubs for Kenyan flowers, with about 50 percent of all Kenyan flowers being sold through the Dutch auction markets. Recently, there have been calls from various stakeholders for the sector to invest more in women workers, with over 70 percent of the workers employed directly by the sector being women. This can be done by initiating innovative and collaborative solutions to advance women's economic resilience in the workplace.

Women Win, through its Win-Win Strategies brand, is one of the stakeholders working with the flower sector in Kenya, with the aim to promote gender equality by addressing the various issues that women workers face in the workplace. According to Kimberly Schoenmaker, Programmes Coordinator, Win-Win Strategies (Women Win), investing in women is essential to the success/sustainability of many flower companies.

She notes, "Women workers form the backbone of many sectors, including the flower sector. Their labour and contributions are essential to the success of floriculture companies. It is therefore important that flower farms support women workers to ensure their wellbeing and create sustainable empowerment opportunities for them. When women workers are safe, supported, and empowered, this is not only beneficial for themselves and their communities, but is also likely to lead to greater job satisfaction, greater productivity, and overall beneficial outcomes for the flower farms."

Even though the sector has made progress in addressing some of the challenges women face, more needs to be done. Some of these challenges are; access to healthcare/sexual reproductive health rights, access to fair recruitment and promotion opportunities, career progression, labour rights, participation in decision making, amongst others.

To address these ongoing issues, the industry's umbrella body, the Kenya Flower Council (KFC), has initiated a number of initiatives and entered into collaboration with stakeholders, particularly women's rights organisations (WROs)/non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to mainstream gender issues. By partnering with WROs/NGOs, the sector will benefit immensely from the expertise of these organisations on women's rights issues, from both the local and international perspectives. Ambassador Elkanah Odembo is the Acting Executive Director of Ufadhili Trust which is one of the organisations that work actively on improving gender equality within the sector notes that such collaborations make the industry more sustainable by embracing international best practices.



## A Collaborative Approach

“Collaboration between flower farms and different stakeholders is critical for not only the wellbeing of the workers, but also for the sustainability of the sector.” – notes Odembo.

The United Nations Economic and Security Council in 1997, defined gender mainstreaming as;

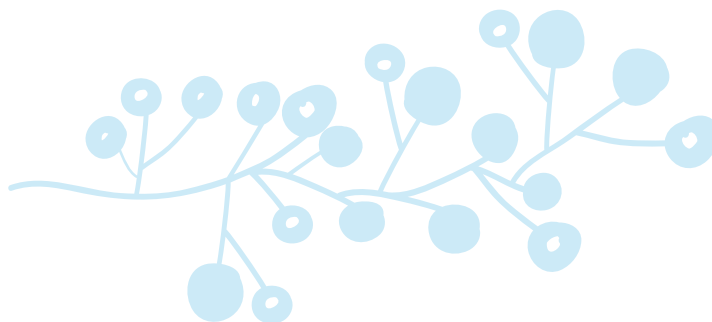
“The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuate...” – with the ultimate goal being to achieve gender equality.

Currently, the KFC, in collaboration with Women Win, is working with a number of WROs/NGOs on gender mainstreaming and women’s economic empowerment and resilience initiatives. These organisations include; The African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Haki Mashinani, Workers Rights Watch, Fida Kenya and Ufadhili Trust.

Clement Tulezi, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of KFC, notes that, over the years, women have continued to be disadvantaged due to some of the prevailing structural barriers, and as such, the industry is working with stakeholders to address the issues.

Tulezi notes, “The area of gender is critical, because about 70 percent of the workforce is women, and therefore, we have to work very closely with civil society organisations as well as to cultivate a lot of partnerships with many organisations. For us, we believe that gender mainstreaming is the way to go, because women have had some disadvantages, which are either cultural, educational and many more.”

Lydia Macharia, the human resource manager at the Laurel flower farm, located in Olkalau, Nyandarua county in the greater Naivasha flower growing zone, notes that the farm has invested heavily in areas aimed at improving the wellbeing of their workers, particularly women. This is because flower farms operations are labour intensive and from a business perspective it makes sense to invest more in their workers to enhance productivity. The company has invested in a number of areas; such as a daycare centre for the working parents as well as providing training opportunities for the workers to expand their knowledge and skills – including knitting, tailoring and catering amongst others. Lydia notes that, eventually, these efforts are going to pay off since more women are willing to work overtime, which will earn them extra income. The workers will also have access to more promotional and employment opportunities within the farm; which is also in line with company’s goal of paying a living wage.



At Florensis flower farm, located in Naivasha, Florence Obonyo, the human resource/ sustainability officer notes, that the farm has also done significant work on gender mainstreaming by aligning its operations with the sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as; goal 5 on gender equality, and goal 17 on partnerships for the goals. The company's open door policy, equal opportunities for all, non-discrimination, and prompt resolution of workers issues, has improved on productivity and satisfaction at work. This has been as a result of the company implementing fully the labour laws and other international best practices.

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Salome Odera, from the WRO Haki Mashinani, advises flower farms to ensure that they have gender-inclusive policies in place, and create safe working environments for their women workers. She adds that it is important for women workers to be paid better, at least, the minimum wage to be able to take care of their families. Further, there is the need encourage them to take up leadership positions, very important for their personal growth and sustainability of the flower farms \_ a win-win situation for all parties. Inclusion of women at every level of decision making bridges the gap on inequalities and creates a platform of openness and confidence to highlight/share issues affecting them.

Salome notes, “ It is important, for the management to ensure that they have polices in place that have a gender lense, to ensure that women workers are secure, but also they feel that the working environment is all encompassing... this ensures that women are given equal opportunities in terms of recruitment, promotion, self-care, and sexual reproductive care.”

Since the majority of the women workers occupy the lower cadres in their workplaces, there is the need to encourage, and include them in decision-making positions. This is not only important for their personal growth and sustainability of the flower farms, but also it bridges the gap on inequalities, notes Rachel Kagioya from FEMNET- another WRO working with the flower farms. Rachel advises;

“I would like to make a rallying call to every flower farm in Kenya, to ensure that the representation of women in decision making and leadership is equal. Don't settle for a management team that has only one gender, making decisions on behalf of everybody. A safe, equal, fair, transformative and sustainable workplace is possible; we just need to have the commitment to do it.”





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