GAIA principles: Case studies of good practice

Principle 7. Businesses enable workers to exercise their rights to and responsibilities in a GBVH-free workplace.

Preventing GBVH requires a strong culture of fairness, equality and zero tolerance in the workplace. Workers should understand their rights and specific workplace policies, and feel empowered to report inappropriate behaviour whether directed at them or others as active bystanders.

Businesses' efforts with all workers, including management, should focus on: 1) supporting worker agency, 2) promoting gender equality1 in the workplace, and 3) changing beliefs, attitudes and norms that underpin GBVH to address root causes of GBVH and build safe, respectful workplace cultures.

Equal Treatment of Workers programme

In 2006–7, some of ETI's company members sourcing from South Africa expressed concerns that ethical audits they had commissioned revealed that discrimination and sexual harassment were occurring in their supply chains. In the ETI impact report of 2006, sexual harassment and discrimination emerged among key issues for agricultural workers and thus became the main themes of ETI's Equal Treatment of Workers programme (formerly known as the Supervisor Training Programme).

How was the programme delivered?

The programme consisted of;

- Two days training for supervisors, a half day training for managers and one day training for workers on workers' rights, what constitutes discrimination and how to tackle it

- The courses used interactive techniques, which involve active participation, drawing out learning from participants' own experiences and encouraging participants to learn from one another

- They were accompanied by support and advice to employers about developing anti-discrimination policies and procedures and grievance mechanisms

- The programme monitored the existence of such policies, workers' awareness of them, their confidence in reporting incidents of sexual harassment and other forms of

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discrimination, and whether workers felt that complaints were dealt with better than before.

The three year programme (2011–13) was funded by Comic Relief and adapted (from a pilot in Kenya) and delivered on the ground by our partner organisation, WIETA. By November 2013 it had trained a total of 4,567 people on 69 agricultural sites predominantly in the Western Cape area of South Africa.

The farm owners and managers fed back that while the content of the training was not entirely unique, the way it was delivered was. The facilitators ran very participatory sessions, including role plays, to help bring out participants' experiences. The facilitators also spoke Afrikaans or Isixhosa, and material was translated into these language. Isixhosa speaking workers very much appreciated this for practical reasons and because it demonstrated respect for them.

After the separate training sessions, the three groups (workers, supervisors and managers) were brought together to discuss issues arising and agree an action plan. In many cases, this was unprecedented for these three groups to even gather together. Participants felt that they became aware of their constitutional rights, regarding working conditions and GBVH, and also experienced changes in their self-awareness, behaviour towards one another and in their expectations of how they should be treated. For example, one manager told ETI,

"The training was like a wake-up call. It was very important because you can't keep doing everything the same as you have done all the years. There was a lot of things I learned in the training that I needed to work on, like communication."

However, there was a realistic acknowledgement from those responsible for the programme that the changes it sought to make are long term, and cannot be achieved in a three year programme to fully bridge a training and cultural reality gap. The behaviours, attitudes and norms is sought to change are deeply rooted in the region's social and cultural history – a reminder that change is a continuous and collaborative process.