

CHAPTER 6

Women in the Banana Industry: a Study of Plantations in Tiko, Cameroon

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Contemporary studies indicate male dominance in agro-based enterprises especially in various corporate plantations producing oil palm, rubber, bananas and plantains. This study shows gender discrimination only in strenuous and tedious operations such as sucker pruning, replanting and drainage where physical fitness is a necessary requirement for labour efficiency and optimum resource utilisation. Although men held most managerial positions because of the lack of qualified women and the belief that women were unsuitable to hold those positions in a predominantly male dominated society, there were no wage differences in operations jointly undertaken by both sexes. However, the unavailability of qualified women in agriculture and the chauvinistic beliefs still existing in certain male dominated societies are policy issues that require immediate intervention.

Introduction

The marginalisation of women in agro-based enterprises such as the banana industry is an issue of great concern particularly as bananas and plantains serve as major dietary sources in Cameroon. Other examples where women's work is marginalized include: oil palm and rubber plantations in Cameroon and Liberia, the banana industry in Tanzania and Jamaica, and matooke plantations in Uganda (Guyer, 1986; Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1983; Loudon, 1985; Smikle and Taylor, 1977;

Tabajuka, 1985; Marangu, 1985). Our study focuses on the status and working conditions of women engaged in agricultural labour in a modern banana plantation in Tiko, Cameroon, with the aim of examining gender inequality and its implications.

Women's work in wage-employment in some African countries has tended to be at unskilled levels and with inferior wages. Part of the explanation for the predominance of women as unskilled labour is women's lower educational attainment (Robertson, 1986). Other factors, which affect women's participation in wage-employment, include:

1. the nature of women's work in agro-business which in Africa, as in some other Third World countries, tends to be tedious, demanding little or no skill and seasonal with little prospects for training and supervision (Enloe, 1989; Guyer and Idowu, 1991);
2. the hiring policies are often gender-specific, with the tendency to employ females on a temporary basis as contract workers or as daily rated workers especially at peak periods (Ong, 1987; Enloe, 1989);
3. the use of a dual employment policy with its preference for young and single women on banana plantations, as in other multinational corporations. This bias is based on the anticipated higher costs of maintaining services for married and older women, such as maternity benefits, childcare and family commitments which are presumed to affect productivity and profitability. Further, young and single women are perceived to represent 'fresh and diligent labour' (Ong 1987; Enloe 1989; Stichter 1990);
4. the attitudes of employers and managements to the 'proper' roles and status of women in the society which restrict them from filling supervisory positions. There is a tendency for men to hold most of the senior posts because employers perceive male authority to be vital for supervision. This is probably based on the belief that men would not accept female supervisors (Anker and Hein, 1986; Ong, 1987);
5. the employers' perception that the impact of women's family responsibilities, on factors relating to productivity such as absenteeism and turnover, restrict women's employment in enterprises which function on the basis of profit-maximization. Employers perceive women to be more prone to absenteeism and labour turnover and are less committed to their jobs. Di Domenico (1983) shows that such a view is often not substantiated by any records of lateness or absenteeism;
6. the gap in male/female wages: women often receive lower wages than men for comparable tasks even when the difference in wages cannot be attributed to differences in levels of human capital (Anker and Hein, 1986; Loudon, 1985); and

7. the manipulation of feminine traits and learned skills to make production effective. Where employers discriminate positively in favour of female employment for certain tasks, it is because certain female traits and skills acquired through socialization in the household have become assets in the labour market (Stichter, 1990). Women are preferred in certain multinational corporations such as electronics, micro-machinery plants, textiles and food processing because they have 'nimble or fast fingers' i.e. superior manual dexterity (Elson and Pearson 1981; Ong, 1987).

In banana plantations in Latin America, Jamaica and Africa, women are employed in packing houses as de-flowers, de-handers, clusterizers, weighers, labellers and packers since these operations need to be done carefully and skilfully to minimize quality defects (Enloe, 1989; Loudon, 1985; Fonsah, 1993).

Objectives

The objectives of this study include an examination of the socio-economic status of women involved in banana production, identification of specific operations undertaken by women including an illustration of changes over time, and an examination of the working conditions of the labour force. Specific issues include:

- 1a. nature of recruitment, (i.e. permanent, casual/seasonal labour, working hours and mode of hiring and firing workers); duration of work and any variations for payment of nursing mothers;
- 1b. economic returns (i.e. wages, including rates and nature of payment by gender, including mode of inducements and variations - if any - according to seasons);
- 1c. social returns (specific fringe benefits affecting health, recreational, maternity, housing and child care facilities; transportation, lunch and attendance bonuses);
2. prospects for promotion/progress and training. This will also focus on gender differences in supervisory roles, identification of highest rank attained by women and the number in these positions;
3. examination of some factors affecting productivity such as labour turnover, absenteeism and lateness according to gender. This includes the examination of employers' attitudes to female workers in relation to these factors.

We anticipate that the outcome of this study will enable us make suggestions for enhancing gender equity in such a modern sector employment.

Hypotheses

The study rests on four hypotheses:

1. that there is a tendency for women to undertake mainly cleaning, less tedious and related activities in the packing stations;
2. that there is a tendency to assign most of the supervisory positions to men;
3. that the majority of the female workers are young and single women; and
4. that there is gender discrimination in the remuneration of the employees.

Methodology

The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC)/Del Monte (DMC) Tiko Banana Project was purposively selected for this study due to its dual and peculiar nature. It is a joint venture between a para-statal organisation, the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and a multinational corporation, Del Monte Fresh Fruit International Co. Data were collected during a period of four months lasting from March to June 1993.

The study called for various samples of respondents. Two kinds of questionnaires were designed: one for the general employees and another for the management staff. One hundred questionnaires were sent to the lower level employees of both sexes and six were distributed to the managerial staff. Furthermore, personal interviews were randomly undertaken along with participant observations of the field staff and packing station operations. The various samples were aimed at examining the general socio-economic status of the respondents, identifying specific functions and operations undertaken by men and women, their working conditions as well as economic and social returns.

All efforts were made to ascertain that both sexes received the questionnaires even though selection was random. Out of the one hundred questionnaires distributed to the lower level employees, 87 of them were usable. 36.8% of the total respondents were female while 63.2% were male. All the managerial staff responded to their questionnaires. Additional interviews were carried out to clarify issues that were not explicitly explained in the questionnaires. Further information and data collection were obtained from the Accounting, Personnel and Administration Departments of the main office.

Background to Banana Production in Tiko

The former West Cameroon has been involved in banana production for more than two centuries. Original cultivation was carried out at household levels either at the backyards (compound garden) or 'black-bush' (virgin forest) located several kilometres away from the farmers' homes. Both husband and wives contributed to

cultivation but it is believed that women's participation was greater since the men were more involved in activities like hunting, fishing, and felling of trees during land preparation (Fonsah, 1993; Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995).

Organised large-scale banana production was initiated in Tiko, which later became part of the Anglophone or West Cameroon, in 1907 by the Africanische Frucht AC of Hamburg, Germany (AFC), while the French Compagnie des Bananes was established in the 1930s in the Francophone part of the country also called East Cameroon. From 1947 to 1972, several firms and co-operatives joined the Cameroon banana industry. For instance, in the former West Cameroon the following were involved: Elders and Fyffes, Bakweri Co-operative Union of Farmers Ltd, (BCUF), the Kumba Federation of Co-operative and Produce Marketing Societies, Progressive Farmer's Produce Enterprise (PFPC); while in East Cameroon, there were: M. Wambo, M. Nuetza, Nassif, Coopam, (Co-operative Agricole de Mungo), M. Ngawa Victor, M. Tchuissei, M. Sandju etc. (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Fonsah, 1993; Epale, 1985; Lecoq, 1972).

Cameroon banana production has embraced several changes. First, it was the local variety of banana that was dried and exported to Germany. Then the *Gros Michel* and *Poyo* varieties from Costa Rica and the Canary islands were introduced in 1910. At this juncture, production was solely men's work as only bunches were exported. It was in 1961 that packaging of bananas for export was introduced by Elders and Fyffes in the first packing station at Molyko, in the former West Cameroon (Fonsah, 1993). After several decades of cultivation, it was discovered that the Gros Michel was susceptible to Panama disease. Thus exportation was halted in 1968 and the Cavendish variety was adopted (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Fonsah, 1993; Epale, 1985; Lecoq, 1972). Only traditional banana technology was implemented before 1907 but from 1907 to 1986 the semi-modern production system was in vogue. From 1987 a highly sophisticated banana production technology was introduced in Cameroon when Del Monte Fresh Produce Company initiated a joint-ventured project with the Cameroon Development Corporation called the CDC/DMC Tiko Banana Project (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Fonsah, 1993).

Highlights of the Study Area

The project under study is located in Tiko, in the South West Province of Cameroon. The CDC/DMC joint venture, which became operational in 1988, produces bananas on a large-scale strictly for export, while those of non-exportable quality end up in the local market. The project covers a gross area of approximately 2000 hectares with a total permanent labour force of about 2,500 people (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Fonsah 1993). At its inception in 1987, the Tiko banana project was the only banana firm in the entire country adopting the most modern banana technology. It is equipped with a cableway network, a complete irrigation system, well-defined fertility, pest and disease control programmes, drainage systems and

six modern packing stations. However, most of the competitors who were adopting semi-modern banana technology, such as the Société de Plantation de Nyombe-Penja (SPNP), the Société des Bananeraies de la Mbome (SBM) and the Cameroon Development Corporation, are gradually transforming by adopting the modern system (Fonsah and Chidebelu, 1995; Fonsah, 1993).

According to Fonsah (1993) and Fonsah and Chidebelu (1995), total export has grown steadily since its creation. In 1989 exports stood at 16,578 metric tonnes while 1992 and 1993 figures were 25,547 and 42,868 metric tonnes respectively. The firm has not only minimized unemployment in the Tiko area but boosted aggregate demand. It has further contributed to Cameroon's Gross National Product (GNP) and has generated significant foreign exchange earnings. At the domestic level, it has increased the aggregate supply of banana and food supply in the agricultural market-ecosystem from a macro-economic perspective.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic Status

A total sample of 87 workers, comprising 55 men (63.2%) and 32 women (36.8%) were interviewed. More than half (57.5%) of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 29. The analysis of this percentage by gender revealed that out of a sub-sample of 55 men, 62% were aged 25-29 years while 50% of the women ($n=32$) were within the same age range. Only 13.8% of the total population were under 25 years representing 25% women and 9% men. About 24.1% were over 30 years of age. This percentage was made up of 27.3% men and 18.8% women. The remaining 4.6% did not indicate their ages. The interviews, which were conducted with the managers, showed their preference for young men and women who had vigour. The information on marital status showed that 65.5% of the men were married while 34.5% were single unmarried, divorced or widowed. Of the women, 68.8% were single, unmarried and up to 21.9% were separated. The remainder of the women, 9.3%, were married.

The high percentage of single women in the sample was in line with management's preference for single women who were thought to be capable of providing 'fresh' and diligent labour. Moreover, single women have fewer family commitments. At the same time, management preferred older and more mature married men to single men. This was based on their view that family responsibilities compelled the older and married men to strive to retain their work. There was not much distinction in the educational background of the workers at the lower level according to gender. About 58.2% ($n=55$) of the men and 56.3% ($n=32$) of the women completed secondary education. The rest had only primary education.

The information on the socio-economic background of the respondents, therefore, support the hypothesis that the 'majority of the female workers were young and single'.

Nature of Recruitment

Modern banana production is one of the most difficult agricultural food-commodity enterprises. Successful accomplishment of its multifaceted operations requires people with scientific, technical and managerial abilities, as well as those in the category of general labour. It requires investment of huge capital investment even though productivity is both capital- and intensive-intensive (Fonsah, 1993). Here we focus on an examination of the intensive force involved with the agricultural field and packing station operations in the Tiko plantation.

The CDC/DMC Tiko Banana Project adopted a recruitment system as stipulated by the Cameroon intensive labour code (Republic of Cameroon, 1992). An employee may be hired for a specified duration as a contract worker or for an unspecified period as a permanent worker. In the latter case, the termination of the contract may not be fixed in advance and could be effected at any time, with prior notice either by the worker or the employer. The project hired over three thousand people out of which 29% were contract workers and 71% permanent. The distribution was biased towards men as women represented only 16% of the total intensive force.

Some of the operations were tedious and time demanding. An average of ten to twelve hours per day was necessary for most operations, including harvesting, irrigation and tasks in the packing stations. Thus, hard work and dedication were necessary conditions for success. Although recruitment was open to everyone, gender discrimination was inevitable based on the nature of the specified assignments.

Analysis of the survey showed male dominance in some of the operations, which were regarded as very tedious jobs that basically required a lot of stamina. Strictly male operations included pruning, replanting, drainage, harvesting, bagging and propping, holing, chopping and cableway maintenance. Operations perceived to be less tedious were carried out by both men and women; these included deleafing, input application, packaging, material preparation, weeding and nursery work. Although bagging and propping for a long time were undertaken mainly by men, interviews with the managers revealed that 16 women were trained for the position and a significant number of them actually preferred such operations and had been performing fairly well, except that their output equalled one-third that of their male counterpart. This finding showed that some of the earlier distinctions in male/female operations were being narrowed as women demonstrated the capability of performing some of the strenuous operations. Picking of destructive snails and clerical work, however, remained largely female job.

In the packing station where fruits were assembled after harvesting, then graded, cleaned and packed for shipment or sales, women represented 43% of the work force. Interviews with the managers indicated that, initially, 100% of the workers in the packing stations were women. That was based on the assumption, as found in other studies, that women would be more careful in handling the fruits because

of their presumed 'feminine traits' (Enloe, 1989). However, when it was discovered that production remained low (about 2,000 boxes/cartons per day), management decided to employ men, reduce the number of women and introduce the incentive scheme to boost production. With these changes, production increased twofold. The male predominance in the packing station operations in this plantation demonstrated that the presumed ability to handle the fruit carefully, i.e. by those with 'nimble fingers' (Enloe, 1989), was not an innate trait for females but was acquired through on-the-job experience boosted by incentives. This nullified our simple hypothesis that 'there is a tendency for women to undertake mainly cleaning and related activities in the packing station'. We now move to the discussion of economic returns and benefits to workers.

Economic Returns and Benefits

Salary scales were commensurate with each position. A male and female employee doing the same job received the same pay except, of course, if one of them was either absent, or did not put in equivalent hours as the other. This was expected to eliminate chances of gender discrimination. Two payment schemes were identified, namely, payment by incentive and payment by hours (the normal payment). The packing station employee was required to pack a minimum 114 boxes/hours/line; where a line consisted of twelve workers. If this requirement was met, the workers on that line qualified for the incentive scheme, i.e. they were paid 30 FCFA per box. The number of lines/packing stations varied from three to six and depended on the size of the station.

Workers were expected to work for ten hours and produce a minimum of 1,140 boxes per line with a minimum quality score of 88%. Furthermore, there were three daily prize incentives: first prize 750FCFA, second 500FCFA and third 250 FCFA. The idea of attaching wages to output was pioneered by Frederick Taylor, a trained mechanical engineer and 'the most famous scientific manager in America' in 1895. Empirically, most of the workers in the project strove for the incentive scheme since most of the field operations such as harvesting, sucker pruning, bagging and propping were computed into the piece-rate system. The advantages were threefold:

1. workers earned more salary;
2. the company reduced intensive and/or production cost as less manpower was needed for a higher daily accomplishment; and
3. gender salary discrimination was avoided. Further insights were provided on how the incentive scheme was applied in other operations.

However, working hours varied according to operations and individuals. For instance, those on material preparation were supposed to work for eight hours but if

they completed their task in four hours, they were free to go. Therefore, for them the incentive lay in time saving. Those on deleafing operations had parcels of work or task in hectares. If one accomplished the number of hectares required, he/she was paid on incentive. Those who finished their parcels earlier than anticipated could be re-assigned for additional pay. More women (65.5%) than men (23.6%) received their pay both on hours worked and by incentive. On the other hand 58.2% men and 21.9% women received their pay on an hourly basis.

Those in management positions who were interviewed indicated that some women actually worked so hard on the incentives scheme that they earned more than the supervisors who were not on incentive but were paid by labour categories. To compensate the supervisors, management adjusted their salaries to higher grades. Although the principle underlining the incentive scheme was to encourage more effort in return for more salary, the majority, 72.7% of the men and 81.3% of the women, indicated that they would have preferred payment by hours. According to them, the use of incentives created a lot of pressure on workers. An interview with the Personnel Assistant revealed that initially the workers resisted the introduction of the incentive scheme because it made them work like 'robots'. Another member of the management staff revealed that the reason for their resistance was because they were unaware of the advantages accrued from the piece-rate system. From a scientific and behavioural standpoint, an average human being is shown to be resistant to any changes, be it good or bad (Hodgetts, 1982). Nevertheless, it was further revealed that workers gradually adjusted to the scheme because of its financial attractiveness. Apart from salaries, there were additional benefits the workers received, which we have described as social returns.

Social Returns

Some of the social returns or fringe benefits offered to employees of the project under investigation included transportation, housing and meal allowances, price and attendance bonuses, and maternity leave for women. CDC/DMC also provided health care facilities although no childcare facilities, particularly for nursing mothers were available then. Management indicated that efforts were being made to introduce recreational activities and facilities such as football, handball, volleyball tournaments and best worker award prizes.

Prospects for Promotion/Progress and Training

The prospects for promotion were based on two distinct factors: output and qualification, irrespective of gender. Output was considered crucial and vital, but because some qualified workers capitalized on their diplomas, degrees and/or recommendations from a 'godfather', their actual performance and accomplishments were inferior. The banana industry is so dynamic that simple diplomas, degrees and/or

recommendations were not necessary and sufficient conditions for success. The worker's qualifications became a sufficient condition if, and only if, a proven track record of excellent output had been established. At this juncture, the qualification became an important determinant on how far the worker could be drawn up the corporate ladder, especially when further training was a possibility. Other minor considerations included the workers' attendance records, and relationship with peers and supervisors. However, three kinds of training programmes were identified in-house, regional and overseas.

In-house training

This was usually orchestrated in the project and on-the-job. Both the local and expatriate staff participated in the training programme. Selected workers were trained for various skilled positions such as headmen, overseers, statisticians and quality inspectors. Training periods varied from one week to six months depending on the complexities of the position in question. At the end of the training session, successful candidates were posted to various sections of the project and were subsequently reclassified (i.e. change of categories).

Regional training

It was revealed that two or three workers were selected each year according to merit (i.e. output and qualification) and sent to the Regional Agricultural College, Bumbili, Northwest Province, for a period of one year. After graduation, they were posted to any relevant section to impart the acquired knowledge in the project. These workers were usually promoted to a supervisory rank such as a junior field assistant or a field assistant.

Overseas training

A number of workers were sent to the Republic of South Africa, Costa Rica, Guatemala and the Philippines each year for specific training programmes such as irrigation, tissue culture nursery management, and sigatoga or other disease control, research and/or as exchange scholars. Again, selection was based on output and qualification. The duration varied from one week to three months.

Labour Force Classification

The Cameroon Labour Code and the Cameroon Development Corporation's internal regulations define supervisory staff as anyone with a diploma or a high school graduate placed in categories seven to nine. This includes junior field assistants and field assistants. Management staff incorporates those from categories 10 to 12

and includes those with at least a bachelor's degree from a university or a diploma from a technical/trade school plus several years of experience and a proven track record of excellent output. Senior field assistants, farm administrators and estate managers are examples of management staff. Some of the skilled positions included overseers, headmen, statisticians and foremen. The skilled workers were usually those from categories three to six. Workers placed in categories one and two constitute general labour.

Position	%Male	%Female	Total
Accounts Clerks	77	23	100
Clerical	82	18	100
Drivers	100	0	100
Foremen	100	0	100
General Labour	78	22	100
Headmen	98	2	100
Nurses	0	100	100
Overseers	97	3	100
Security	100	0	100
Staff	100	0	100
Statisticians	78	22	100
Storekeepers	75	25	100
Supervisory Staff	77	23	100
Technicians	98	2	100

Table 1: CDC/DMC Labour Statistics

An analysis of CDC/DMC labour statistics (May 1993, Table 1) showed that most of the skilled, supervisory and management staff positions were held by men. Several explanations were offered by the managers for this situation. These included cultural factors as well as the fact that women had fewer educational qualifications for supervisory positions than men. It was feared that in a male dominated society, men would not be willing to work under female authority. This was in line with the several views based on material obtained elsewhere (Anker and Hein, 1986; Ong, 1987; Date-Bah, 1986) which hold, that male supervisors were preferred because of employers' belief concerning women's unsuitability for supervisory positions. Therefore male authority was preferred in order to ensure that supervisors would be able to enforce discipline and workers.

The overseers were workers classified in either category four, five or six. In this position, only 3% were female and 97% male. At the field level, each overseer had two headmen, a minimum of 30 workers, and managed a minimum farm of 90 hectares. On the other hand, the packing station overseers managed a minimum of

70-100 workers, depending on the size of the packing house. They also supervised field operations on non-packing days and managed their warehouses by keeping an inventory of all material in stock.

All the headmen were involved in operations such as harvesting, inputs application, sucker pruning, bagging and propping. Furthermore, each headman supervised at least 15 workers and handled a minimum of 45 hectares of farm. Only 2% of the total headmen were female. Their educational background included primary and secondary schooling. The statisticians worked mostly in the packing station, keeping all production and harvesting data. On non-packing days, they also supervised farm operations such as input application, bagging and propping. Female participation was highest at this level comprising 22%. Foremen occupied engineering positions and were responsible for field technical operations such as irrigation maintenance, line operations, valve operations, pump operations, cableway maintenance and electrical works. There were no females in this category.

On examining the limited participation of women in supervisory positions as shown in the Table 1, it was logical to conclude that positions with zero or insignificant number of women were strictly perceived as 'men's work'. This finding justified our hypothesis that 'there is a tendency to assign most supervisory positions to men'.

Factors Affecting Productivity

Labour Turnover and Absenteeism

Interview results showed a tendency for men to stay longer in plantation employment than women. The women left because they wanted to continue their education, get married, relocate or invest the money saved into private businesses. Departure from the plantation sometimes resulted from dismissals due to various offences often described as 'indiscipline' or absenteeism. With respect to absenteeism, there were no differences in rates attributed to sex. However, men tended to be absent owing to sickness or drunkenness; a pattern emerged whereby some men showed up drunk on Mondays or after receiving their pay. In contrast women, and in particular married ones, tended to be absent due to demands of childcare and family responsibilities.

Anticipated Changes

In view of the various constraints and difficulties experienced by the workers, interview results which could lead to positive changes in the plantation included upgrading in levels, promotions and improved working conditions. A total of 43.7% of the respondents (comprising 53% of the women and 38.2% of the men) expressed dissatisfaction with the present grading in the plantation even though they

admitted that the incentive scheme was much better than categorization or payment by hours. They added, however, that certain categories were valued more for prestige and as a status symbol. Another 37.9% of the respondents (which included 40% of the men and 34.4% of the women) suggested that the working conditions be improved. The remaining 18.4% of the respondents felt that any changes to be introduced would be management's decision. Specific suggestions made by the respondents included increased salary, reduced working hours, a demand for protective working materials as well as improved medical facilities. The demand for reduced working hours was to enable workers to have enough time to rest. Over time, sometimes lasting up to 11:00 p.m., was cited as an important factor for worker's absences on subsequent working days. Many suggested the introduction of fixed working hours.

Concluding Remarks

In the case studied, there was a preference for young men and women with vigour. The majority of the women employed were single persons who were expected to work diligently and with fewer family commitments. There was gender discrimination in recruitment, partly due to the nature of the specific assignments. Men dominated in strenuous and tedious operations such as sucker pruning, replanting, drainage, bagging and propping and harvesting. On the other hand, employees of both sexes undertook operations, which were perceived to be less tedious, such as deleafing, input application, packing station operations, material preparations, and manual weed control.

However, some of the women who received training in male-dominated tasks such as bagging and propping, performed fairly well even though their output was relatively lower than their male counterpart. Since wages in these operations were strictly based on output, the women earned less. Men, comprising over 50% of the workers in the packing station, undertook cleaning and fruit care operations. This trend indicated that the ability for fruit care was not an exclusively feminine trait but was acquired through experience and was also boosted by incentives.

Men held most of the supervisory positions partly because there were more qualified than women and also due to management's belief that women were unsuitable to hold these positions in a predominantly male-dominated society. Wages reflected total output irrespective of the gender of the workers. While men tended to stay longer in the plantation, there was no difference according to sex in the rate of absenteeism. Some of the problems identified by the workers included prolonged working hours, excessive pressure to meet incentive schemes, unsatisfactory grading and lack of protective working materials.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have implications for formulating policies that would

promote gender equality in the banana industry and related sectors. Management's preference for single women without commitments may not be unrelated to the higher rate of female turnover. This is particularly relevant since the study showed that some of the women left in order to get married. In order to prolong the tenure of diligent female workers, it is necessary to provide amenities that would enable married women to continue working on the plantation. Since women who received training in bagging and propping performed fairly well, there is the need to provide more training opportunities for women in these and other operations. This would help to eliminate gender discrimination in recruitment for various tasks. Similarly, the ability of men to perform dehanding, selection, and packinghouse operations efficiently demonstrated that providing on-the-job experience and appropriate incentives encouraged workers irrespective of gender, to perform efficiently.

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