

'Make Fruit Fair' delegation visit to Cameroon May 2011

SUMMARY REPORT

Background

Banana Link (Jacqui Mackay) and Peuples Solidaires (Vanessa Gautier) coordinated a delegation visit to Cameroon in May 2011, as part of a European Union funded consortium project, entitled '*Mobilising support for fair and sustainable banana and pineapple supply chains*'. The visit aimed to enable delegates to have firsthand experience of social and environmental conditions on banana plantations supplying the British and French markets, and to meet local trade unions and other relevant industry players, including companies and government. The visit was hosted by plantation workers' union, the Fako Agricultural Worker's Union (FAWU), in the South West Region, who alongside stakeholder meetings, arranged four days of plantation visits, as well as providing an opportunity to visit workers in their own homes.

The so-called 'Race to the Bottom' being pursued in the global banana industry has led to the expansion of export production in Central and West Africa. Virtually all exports enter the EU, predominantly the UK and France, and increased expansion - to these markets - is expected with the securing of duty-free and quota-free access for bananas in regional Economic Partnership Agreements. Another strong economic driver behind African relocation is the downward pressure on prices paid to fruit companies by retailers in the UK and elsewhere, combined with very low labour costs.

A key objective of '*Mobilising support for fair and sustainable banana and pineapple supply chains*' is the development and strengthening of alliances with stakeholders in Central and West Africa as tropical fruit export production expands. We believe it is a crucial time for civil society in both North and South to share knowledge about the impact of corporate practices on workers, their communities and environments and to build alliances with civil society partners in Africa. To this end our delegation included an industrial organiser (Richard Beccles) from the General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) of Ghana, the IUF Regional Women's Coordinator for Africa (Adwoa Sakyi) and a Regional Education Officer from the Southern and Eastern Region of the British TUC (Theresa Daly). Jan Nimmo, an independent filmmaker, accompanied the delegation. Two French journalists, who intended to join the delegation, were unable to secure accreditation from the Ministry of Communication in Cameroon in time to travel.

This report has been produced by Banana Link and is intended for internal distribution only. A public document will also be made available. The summary¹ report of a previous research visit to Cameroon and the Cote d'Ivoire undertaken by Banana Link and Peuples Solidaires can be downloaded [www.http://www.makefruitfair.org.uk/download](http://www.makefruitfair.org.uk/download), as can other background documents about conditions in the West and Central African industry.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank FAWU for their unending generosity and to all of the plantation workers that we met for their unwavering belief in consumer awareness in how they work and live.

Introduction

In Cameroon, the banana sector is the fifth largest export earner, employing some 46 000 workers. The EU is supporting Cameroon's efforts to boost banana exports with the aim of reducing production, transport and marketing costs so as to allow the country's local producers to compete with "dollar" bananas from Central and South America.² The aim is double production to 500,000 tonnes between now and 2012.

1 Full report available on request

2 <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/y5143e/y5143e10.htm>

Competition will become tougher as EU tariff levels for non ACP banana imports continue to decrease, reducing competitive advantage for African bananas. The tariff rate for non ACP bananas is already 114 euros and as low as 65/75 euros under some bilateral agreements. The EU is however the only viable market for African bananas; the U.S. is not an option because of their proximity to Latin American supplies and the export route to Asia is too long. Input costs are particularly high for African bananas as these, from fertilisers to packaging, have to be imported. Productivity is lower than in other banana exporting regions, notably Latin America, and the number of workers per hectare of export bananas planted much higher too. There are reported problems with technical and field management which also reduce yield, for example the failure to leave land fallow for long enough resulting in nematode infected land being reintroduced for production. Widespread Black Sigatoka³, climatic conditions and poorer soil than other producing regions also impact on yield.

A meeting with the EU Advisor to ASSOBAACAM, the banana industry body in Cameroon, highlighted a desire to be able to establish differentiation for African bananas to strengthen the ability to compete with Latin American bananas. One proposal was that this USP could be based on high social and environmental criteria. Our visit clearly demonstrated that, at least in the experience of this delegation, the Cameroonian industry is not in a position to support such a claim.

Two companies operate banana plantations in the region visited: PHP, a subsidiary company of Compagnie Fruitiere, 40% owned by the multinational fruit company, Dole, and the state owned Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), the largest private employer in Cameroon. The delegation was refused permission to visit PHP plantations, although had an opportunity to meet with a small group of workers employed at the PHP plantation. The impressions detailed in this report are therefore based upon conditions witnessed at plantations owned by CDC. These break down into two operations: the Banana Expansion Project managed solely by CDC, and the Tiko Banana Project, managed by CDC but with financial input and technical advice on how to grow and manage the crop from Del Monte, who buy the crop at FOB (fruit on boat) prices and market the bananas in Europe. CDC provides land, logistics and labour. It is worth noting that since the delegation visit, plans for Del Monte to withdraw their investment in 2013 have been widely reported in trade media⁴. In line with government ambitions, CDC aim to be producing 200,000 tonnes hence their investment in the Banana Expansion Project, through which 1750 hectares need to be developed by next year.

There was a clear sense throughout the visit of the pressure the Cameroonian industry feels themselves to be under from market quality demands. This is clearly communicated to workers, with one sign displayed in a pack house asking workers to treat bananas with care 'because they are like new born babies', and bulletins on notice boards informing workers of problems in quality identified on the European market.

Our hosts, FAWU, have 4000 members, 2000 of which work in the banana sector, most in CDC operations. All banana workers are directly employed and aged 18 or over in the industry, even though the Labour Code allows employment, under special conditions, from 14. The majority of their members are lowest paid workers in the industry employed in the field and pack house. Union fees are 1% of basic wage and fund FAWU staff and activity.

The issues of concern detailed in this report were shared by the delegation at a meeting with CDC management, chaired by the General Manager, Henry Njalla Quan, and reflect overall impressions created by witnessing working conditions and interviews with workers and their union, FAWU. We welcomed the meeting with CDC and hope that this subsequent report will indeed serve '*as a road map and guide for them to improve*'.

3 **Black Sigatoka** is a leaf spot disease of banana plants caused by ascomycete fungus *Mycosphaerella fijiensis* (Morelet). Plants with leaves damaged by the disease may have up to 50% lower yield of fruit.

4 <http://www.reefertrends.com/news/12124> June 30 2011

Social and environmental conditions

Wage levels and hours

Agriculture is the lowest paid economic sector. Within Cameroonian agriculture the banana sector is considered to be particularly physically demanding. Workers need to be skilled and work long hours with early starts. To quote FAWU *'Management is not unaware of the fact that banana is a perishable fruit that demands skillful handling from the planting stage to packaging for European markets. Banana cultivation is carried out by semi skilled and skilled labour with no general labour operations as such. All operations in the cultivation of banana require professional knowledge or adaptation⁵.'*

Our clear understanding was that plantation workers do not receive a living wage and that a number do not even take home a minimum wage, which at 28,000 CFA is the lowest in the Central African region. Low wages obviously challenge a worker's ability to adequately feed, clothe and educate family members, as well as clearly have a negative impact on productivity. In spite of the long hours, many are in continuous debt and struggle to make ends meet once deductions for credit union borrowing and co-operative shop purchases are taken from wages.

On our previous research visit, 15 workers were asked at random how much they needed for different items of expenditure per month. The following medians give a rough idea of living costs for a family of 4 (although most families are in practice larger); food 30,000; room 14,000; electricity 3,500; gas 7,500; education 1,200; other 10,000; totalling 66,200 FCFA (approx. 100 Euros) per month. For a worker earning good bonuses during peak periods of production, it may be possible to earn a monthly salary which roughly meets these basic needs. However, workers met during this delegation visit were reporting wage levels around 20-30,000 CFA. These living costs are also based on only very basic needs, particularly as regards the quality of accommodation and would be dependent on extra working time for lower categories.

Workers are entitled to a monthly minimum salary according to their category and 'Echelon' for working notional 48 hour weeks. A worker should be able to earn this minimum salary without working additional hours. Categories of workers are defined in the National Agreement on Agriculture and Related Trades where salary scales are laid out. Category 1 is General Labour and category 12 Senior Manager. Within each Category, corresponding to a particular type of job, there are also 'Echelons' from A through to F. Workers should move up to an echelon every two years automatically. In practice the companies tend to act as though this is discretionary and they make it subject to an 'Appraisal' in which the quality of service a worker provides is taken into account. In theory after two years a Category 1A worker should be paid a slightly higher salary as a Category 1B worker. Article 24 of the National Agreement on Agriculture and Related Trade (2008) refers to how *"the promotion from a lower incremental position to a higher one within an undertaking shall be done on the grounds of merit and seniority. However, workers who have not been promoted on merit must automatically be promoted after a three-year period"*. This is blatantly not implemented, with many workers, notably women in their 50s, still in Category 2, despite decades of employment, with claims that workers are unable to move up from Category 2, especially if illiterate. There is clear demand for the retirement age of 60 for agricultural workers to be reviewed in the banana sector. Workers in theory are given less demanding jobs in the later years of employment and might go for early retirement, but this can be difficult to negotiate with social insurance.

The commencement of a day's work starts at 6.30 a.m. but the workers have to leave their houses as early as 4.00a.m. in order to be able to get at their place of work at the stipulated start time. Those in the field are paid the minimum wage for completing a basic task judged to be reasonable in a notional 8 hour day.

5 Collective grievances and demands of the workers of the banana group addressed to the General Manager of CDC, 31 March 2011

Any additional work beyond the basic task is paid according to quantity of work done. How much work can be done depends not only on the worker's effort but also on the state of the plantation itself. If workers do not complete their basic task, they can be marked down for only half a day's work, leaving them below minimum wage rates. Workers reported leaving work after six hours suffering from exhaustion, subsequently being marked down as absent for the whole day and not paid.

Due to the nature of their operations banana workers are compelled to work hours in excess of the legally stipulated 8 hours, 6 days a week. While legislation provides for overtime rates for hours worked in excess of the statutory 8 hours a day, the system of work (piece work) for most operations in the cultivation of bananas does not permit for overtime to be paid. Although management claim that workers can undertake a maximum of 4 hours overtime, workers report leaving the pack house as late as 10 or 11 pm during peak periods, clearly contradicting this.

Sunday working in the pack house is theoretically optional during peak periods and open to field workers too (who do not otherwise have access to overtime). However, workers reported needing to take these extra hours because the basic wage is inadequate. Management also described how they 'encourage' workers to come in on Sundays, apparently putting them under pressure to do so by threatening suspension if they fail to comply. Although Sunday working primarily takes place in the 'busy' (rainy) season, as this lasts for roughly 3 months, it is clear that these extra days, combined with long hours, can leave workers exhausted, negatively impacting on productivity. The National Labour Code clearly states that agricultural workers should undertake no more than 48 hours a week, with a compulsory weekly rest of 24 hours.

Another pressure on workers is the lack of chop farms; land used to be provided to all to enable workers to grow their own food to supplement that which is bought. Some workers with chop farms report a lack of energy or time to tend them; those without are simply further impoverished.

The cooperative shop enables workers to buy goods on credit which are deducted from monthly wages. The original shop was run and then closed down by the Tiko Banana Project Management but in 2008 was relaunched by Tiko Banana Project workers and registered as a cooperative with the support of FAWU. The shop does not have sufficient funds to buy on a scale which would enable them to pass on significant discounts in lower prices to workers and is seeking capital investment to stimulate their ability to buy in greater bulk. There is also a desire to establish a store for building materials to enable workers to afford to build housing. Greater support for this social enterprise would certainly help lowly paid employees.

Other deductions from wages include repayments to the Workers' Credit Union and social security payments (1.7% of salary). FAWU are currently pursuing complaints about the delay in the payments of these deductions to the credit union from CDC. A significant number of workers also reported not being that social security payments were being deducted from their pay despite their not being registered in the social security system.

One key objective for FAWU is the negotiation of a national wage agreement in the banana sector rather than the agricultural industry wide agreement that currently exists. Although both the National Labour Code and the Heads of Agreement⁶ signed between CDC and FAWU clearly allows for collective bargaining at enterprise level, this is not currently taking place, the employer appearing to hide behind the National Agreement on Agriculture and Related Trades. FAWU is trying to negotiate norms with CDC addressing piece rates and productivity at the enterprise level and this could be taken forward by the company individually and bilaterally with the union to raise the minimum standard set out in the National Agreement.

6 Heads of Agreement between the Cameroon's Development Corporation and the Cameroons Development Corporation Worker's Union

Plantation conditions

Aside from wage levels, the key concerns for workers are their working conditions. Issues included the lack of proper breaks; the absence of transparency concerning the recording of the number of hours worked on payslips; a lack of sanitation, such as toilet facilities (the use of which is only with the permission of a senior manager who holds the key) without paper or soap, and the culture of reckless irresponsibility in the storage and application of agrochemicals. The theme throughout was one of worker reports conflicting with management claims, this disparity often backed up by what the delegation witnessed during plantation visits.

Food provision

Although food is provided, workers pay for meals unless they are employed in the pack house or as harvesters. Workers were also concerned that the meals were inadequate given the physical demands of their labour.

Drinking water

There is a lack of access to safe drinking water on the plantations. We were pleased to learn that CDC is installing a water purification unit to provide access to safe water for thousands in their operating region. CDC provide workers with containers, but given limited availability of safe drinking water in communities and the practicality of carrying sufficient water for the day, this is an inadequate solution to the problem of water provision.

CDC informed the delegation that the national water company struggle to achieve 100% coverage. Indeed, less than 40% of Cameroon's population has access to safe drinking water. According to the water companies, CAMWATER and the CRC, the aim is to achieve a national coverage rate of at least 60% in 2015⁷. However, on the plantations, CDC is clearly responsible for doing more to ensure that the health – and therefore productivity – of workers is not compromised by a lack of safe drinking water. This responsibility is clearly outlined in the National Labour Code, Section 97 (3) which states that *'The employer shall supply water and non-alcoholic beverages at the workplace and during working hours.'*

Use of agrochemicals

I will personally never forget witnessing a nine month pregnant woman, only a few days from starting maternity leave, using a plastic lid to apply fertiliser by hand, plastic gloves her only protective equipment. She told us she had been working for 4/5 hours in the tropical heat without a break. She was working alongside a male colleague who was mixing large amounts of the fertiliser for application, again without proper protective equipment. It was this casual handling of agrochemicals, apparently endemic throughout CDC operations, which was so shocking. The level of awareness of the dangers of handling and applying a range of fungicides, fertilisers, nematicides and pesticides appears woeful at management level, with a sense that these chemicals are a symbol of progress and development.

Although we appreciated seeing workers in the Garage wearing improved Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) since the previous visit of Banana Link and Peoples Solidaires, most workers in other areas reported either having no PPE or having new equipment only once a year when the plantation receives visitors. Many field workers reported having to buy their PPE, with boots, for example, costing 5000 CFAs. Deleafers in particular reported not being given gloves, resulting in repeated wounds to their hands. We filmed workers preparing to spend four hours unloading Counter, banned from sale in the U.S., but applied twice yearly by hand here. Workers stated that although designed for one use only, their protective clothing is worn many times before being disposed of and is rewashed for use. Although denied permission to visit the laundry facilities, we understand the workers washing protective clothing for reuse are doing so without gloves or other protective clothing themselves. We witnessed workers unloading and opening packages of blue bags

7 <http://www.businessincameroon.com/categories/53-news/221-drinking-water-the-partnership-onep-camwater>

lined with Chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate, without any protective equipment. This included pregnant women opening the packs of bags by hand despite the prenatal risk of impaired neurobehavioural development⁸ There also appears to be a lack of consultation with workers about the appropriateness of the PPE provided given the tropical conditions in which people are working. Quality was also questioned with the boots that some had, lasting only 3-4 months before needing replacement. We witnessed women working in only flip flops slipping over on the rough ground of the plantation.

Aerial spraying

We were told that aerial spraying of the banana crop to protect against Black Sigatoka only takes place in the mornings (because of wind patterns) and that farms are informed well in advance to ensure that workers are removed from the field for the 2/3 hours that spraying can take. One management claim was even that spraying only took place on Sundays. However, we filmed the cycle of a spraying application, from the plane being refuelled and reloaded with pesticide at the CDC-owned airport, to the application of this pesticide on the field. Signs may clearly warn that aerial spraying takes place, but our experience showed that when it does, no effort whatsoever is made to stop people entering the plantation. For example, workers finishing for the day passed through as the plane sprayed overhead, as did other people, carrying food, possibly intended for sale. We witnessed workers working in the field whilst spraying took place, these workers telling us, as many others did in interviews off site, that they simply sheltered under banana leaves.

One of the most shocking aspects of the visit was the denial by senior medical staff employed by CDC of any negative health impacts from the handling of agrochemicals. Given the extensive research in this area and that many chemicals used in the banana industry are classified as 'hazardous' by WHO, this was quite astonishing. It is therefore difficult to understand how effective treatment can be if there is not transparency about the possible causes of health problems for the plantation workers.

All workers are supposed to receive quarterly training, including advice on how to handle chemicals. However there seems to be a cultural ignorance and inertia throughout the management structure about the dangers posed by the handling, storage and application of toxic agro chemicals to workers or the environment. There, for example, appeared to be an absence of buffer zones around water courses on several CDC plantations. At every turn the blatant lack of safety in the handling and application of agrochemicals was denied at management level, as were any negative health impacts by medical staff. This awareness must change through education, delivered in partnership with the union, for any progress to be made in improving standards and reducing environmental impact.

Healthcare

CDC provides health care as specified in Section 98 of the Labour Code with two clinics serving workers and their families, offering a range of services including ante and post natal care and a vaccination programme. The delegation visited both clinics, which share one doctor, meaning the clinics can only offer consultations with a doctor 2 or 3 days a week. The Tiko Banana Clinic can see up to 300 patients a day and on treatment days the doctor will expect to see 50 patients.

Workers expressed a wide range of concerns about the healthcare provided. There were many complaints of insufficient supplies of drugs and workers taking incomplete doses or combinations of drugs due to irregular supplies. Workers therefore often buy their own drugs and are not subsequently being reimbursed. There is a first aid post on each plantation but these are only staffed for a few of the hours when workers are on site. There are no drugs available when the posts are not staffed.

Workers reported 1-2 workers collapsing a month and being taken to the clinic. Many workers worry that there are insufficient ambulances available to transport ill or injured workers to the clinics. Healthcare contributions of 800 CFAs are deducted from wages but workers also pay a consultation fee of 300 CFAs and

8 <http://versita.metapress.com/content/g4470858487t28u4/>

have other associated costs, such as paying for food for hospital patients. The Tiko Banana Clinic in particular was crowded with no safe drinking water available despite waiting times for patients of 4/5 hours. Workers also fear that they are being given insufficient sick days to recover from illness which would also contribute to poor productivity if workers in poor health have to return to work. Many also reported that if referred to the hospital for treatment, they are treated in a disrespectful and condescending manner. One suggestion was this could be due to CDC falling behind with hospital payments. Workers described the hospital providing two levels of care: one for the 'big men' and one for labour.

Nursing staff also shared a number of concerns, notably the delay in laboratory investigations, non-functioning sterilizing units (autoclaves) (leaving one clinic to use a two ring gas stove) and the lack of drying room which is a particular problem in rainy season. They also emphasised their belief that there was a need for 24 hour clinic provision.

Agrochemical exposure

As already noted, the clinic doctor we spoke with denied any link between agrochemical exposure and the common symptoms seen in patients that are associated with this, including skin rashes and respiratory problems. He recognised that there can be problems from accidental but not systemic exposure which given the substantial body of evidence is astonishing and extremely disturbing. Nursing staff however reported seeing workers suffering skin problems caused by agrochemicals and that the prescribed treatment was not working, leaving them wondering what to do. A number of women told us they feared that long term infant ill health was due to their exposure to agrochemicals. Workers are worried and know that the products they are coming into regular contact with are dangerous, but they are simply not properly informed about the risks or supported to manage these effectively. Those directly handling or applying chemicals are tested to check if they are healthy enough to apply fertilisers (and pesticides/nematocides) but never shown the results of these tests, just informed if they can proceed with these tasks, or not. There does not appear to be any follow up if a worker fails a test.

Malaria

On the Tiko Banana Project which employs 4578 workers, one manager estimated that in his area of work (the garage), absenteeism due to malaria at any one time is 15%. A nurse claimed that poor living conditions mean that people are contracting malaria once every two months. Productivity is obviously directly impacted if workers are absent for roughly 3 days each time they contract malaria. Malaria nets are the only prevention available and these are solely provided to pregnant women and children aged under 5. Ensuring workers can afford, or providing housing with, proper ventilation could reduce this incidence level dramatically⁹.

Union Freedom, labour rights and industrial relations

A high percentage of workers do belong to unions and we saw no evidence of a lack of freedom to join a union. However there are questions over how much respect management has for social dialogue and collective bargaining. It is also reported that social legislation has weakened as foreign investment has increased and that this can be seen in the Labour Code, revised in 1982. Labour inspectorates tend to be unqualified with a poor knowledge of labour legislation, most civil servants preferring to be employed in taxation. Cases sent to labour tribunal for consideration can remain in the system for 10-12 years. The delegation had the opportunity to meet with the local labour inspectorate and was impressed with her wish to engage proactively with ongoing issues for banana industry employees.

FAWU, an independent union in existence for more than 40 years, is the only significant union organising in the Anglophone banana zone. At recent staff representative elections within CDC, who employ 5878 of the total 6113 banana workers in the region, FAWU secured all 200 places (100 representatives, 100 substitutes). A second union, DISAWOFA, did not secure any staff representatives. Most 1-6 category

9 <http://www.malariaworld.org/forum/malaria-and-architecture-can-house-improvement-play-role-reducing-malaria>

workers voted for FAWU and those in 7-12, for DISAWOFA. The latter union is only two years old and may be an example of the common tactic of creating multiple unions to create division in the labour movement. Staff representatives are given 15 allocated hours for union meetings in a month and how this is apportioned within the month depends on the workers. However, representatives report that they frequently fail to be given the space they are entitled to¹⁰ and that it is difficult to coordinate workplace meetings at the end of day without transport.

There is a lack of cooperation and a level of corruption in the union movement in Cameroon. This report does not analyse this situation, except to note the negative impact that this has on FAWU-- a union operating in isolation in its own country and without regional or international union links. There are no facilities for educating workers or to provide leadership training.

FAWU has an Agreement¹¹ with CDC which the union believes offers '*a well defined procedure of consultation for grievance for settling individual or collective disputes.*' Staff representatives meet with management on the plantations every month. The FAWU leadership identify and address unresolved, mainly collective, demands detailed in the minutes of the monthly meetings. Any outstanding problems are referred to top management and issues still unresolved at this level is referred to the 'Joint Industrial Council' that meets once a year. These 'Joint Industrial Council' meetings have equal participation of union and employer representatives and provide FAWU with an annual opportunity to meet with the heads of CDC annually to review changes to norms and terms of employment. Individual unresolved complaints are communicated to the Labour Inspectorate.

FAWU face serious difficulties due to a lack of sustained worker education for rank and file members and for leadership development. There is a need for resources to build capacity in this area. The focus of union activity at present is primarily the pursuit of individual grievances through legal channels. As some workers die before their grievances are heard, this is not an adequate method of sustainably tackling the range of problems on the ground. Although relations are cordial between FAWU and CDC (but not PHP) there are problems with the effectiveness of CDC's recognition of the union, notably their unwillingness to allow the union to collectively bargain for better wages at enterprise level.

We were pleased to learn that CDC is introducing an Industrial Relations Officer and hope that this can be a part of a broader commitment to training middle management in the Labour Code and its application in the workplace.

Housing

CDC used to provide housing for all because the rural nature of the banana industry meant that there was unlikely to be sufficient decent housing available with water and electricity. However, as operations have expanded, only about a quarter of workers are not given CDC housing; the remainder receive a housing allowance.

Richard Beccles, GAWU, described his experiences when visiting '*the Tiko Banana Residence Camp and the immediate realization was that the places were too small and poorly ventilated; so many people had to share a place of convenience and bath house. The buildings looked so old and needed to be renovated.*'

A letter from FAWU to CDC management outlines the housing entitlement; '*Workers on production line and who are attributed category I to VI inclusive are by a 1986 J.I.C. Agreement entitled to be provided two camp rooms. Besides this, Ministerial Order No. 018/MTPS/SG/CJ of 26 May, 1993, sets down the type of housing the employer has to provide to a worker, in its Article 4 (3) (a), (b) and (c), which roughly translate inter-alia,*

10 Section (3), Article 16, CDC Hand Book on Internal Relations

11 Heads of Agreement between the Cameroon's Development Corporation and the Cameroons Development Corporation Worker's Union

*'the housing shall have in the minimum a kitchen and toilet, (a) two rooms for a worker without children, (b) three rooms with one to two children and (c) four rooms for one worker with three or more children', housing allowance does not provide for this minimum level.'*¹²

For those on the lower level of basic wage, around 30,000 FCFA per month, 25% amounts to 7,500 FCFA which is not sufficient to get even the most basic accommodation. A single room costs at least 10,000 CFA per month, if not more. We witnessed families of 5 cooking, living and sleeping all in one room, with furniture rearranged according to the time of the day. Water taps are shared by hundreds of users, with supplies only available at stipulated times to enable access to be provided in turn to the whole of a community. The allowance doesn't make provision for the six month deposits required for private accommodation. FAWU is asking CDC to increase the housing allowance to 40%.

There was concern expressed by occupants that the accommodation provided by CDC was poorly maintained. However, the delegation was pleased to learn that CDC is now building new homes providing two rooms minimum and would urge that FAWU is proactively consulted on this project. However the vast majority of workers are currently poorly housed and this needs to be urgently addressed, especially given the explicit link between poorly ventilated housing and prevalence of malaria.

Transport

CDC provides transport to the plantations as workers can live up to 10k from the workplace. There are collection stations on the highways that workers walk 1-2 kms to, having to pay for taxis if they miss the transport or the vehicles are too full. Vehicles are dangerously overcrowded, with trucks pulling off while workers are climbing over each other to get in. Some trucks looked more suitable for transporting cattle with no obvious ventilation. Workers are at risk of attack if they have to travel home alone late at night.

Gender

In the Tiko Banana Project 23% of workers are women with a ratio of 60/40 women/men in the pack house. This is a far higher rate of women being employed on plantations than in Latin America and delegates had never previously encountered women being employed in the field.

Women begin their four month maternity leave 3 weeks before the delivery date. Social insurance covers maternity pay. Nursing mothers are given a 1 hour break per day for breastfeeding which can be taken at the beginning or end of the day. They are also entitled to start work at 8am, but this right is not respected. Nursing mothers are given field tasks when they return to work so that they finish earlier. However, undertaking the demands of, for example, deleafing so soon after childbirth and whilst breastfeeding has severe health impacts for women, including abdominal pains. Indeed, management at Ndongo Farm (Banana Expansion Project) described removing women from certain tasks in response to their being hospitalized with lower abdominal pains. Pregnant women can work 6 hours without a break, applying fertiliser, deleafing or even cleaning drainage canals. Women felt strongly that - if consulted - they could propose better jobs for pregnant women and nursing mothers during their first 6 months back at work that would allow women to work seated, such as material preparation and the washing of plastics and foam. Women employed in the pack house also suffer a range of health complaints including back pains and irregular menstruation.

Childcare, available on CDC rubber plantations, is not provided in their banana operations. Mothers quoted figures of 10,000 CFAs per month for babysitting in the community.

Very sadly, the long hours that women are working in the pack house, especially in the evenings, means

12 Collective grievances and demands of the workers of the banana group addressed to the General Manager of CDC, 31 March 2011

they are often absent from the home and the incidence of domestic violence appears to be increasing as a result.

Women reported that sexual harassment had been stopped at the Mussaka plantation, but that it continues elsewhere in CDC operations. If women refuse sexual favours to their supervisor, they fear that their hours of pay may be cut or continual employment threatened.

Land use

We heard no complaints about land grabbing, although this is a serious problem in the Francophone zone, with the CDC claiming that all expansion plans are based on utilising their existing land bank. However, ASSOACAM implied that some CDC land granted by the government has not been cultivated by the companies for years so would be seen as theirs by the villagers that have been cultivating it. They would require compensation, although agreements reached for this purpose are usually not respected.

Conclusion

Cameroon's Minister of Trade, Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, has referred to the banana industry as the *"social cement" of ACP countries, many of whom are struggling to emerge from economic and political turmoil, providing sources of employment which feed into social stability.*¹³

As stated in the introduction, our concern is that the employment provided is Decent Work that can contribute to social stability rather than exacerbating poverty. The clearest indication that workers are not earning living wages is the standard of the living conditions that we witnessed. It does not appear that industry expansion has improved conditions for workers, and it is crucial that further expansion does. One worker attributed the widespread acceptance of low wages and poor working conditions to a lack of alternative employment. Although the industry is keen to double exports, problems with productivity will continue if working and living conditions are not improved, challenging the ability to compete in the European market.

The time seems ripe for the Cameroon industry, notably CDC, to pursue differentiation for their bananas by engaging with international stakeholders, for example, through the World Banana Forum, to work towards improved social and environmental sustainability. There are also voluntary certification initiatives, notably the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO), that have no presence in Cameroon and could be approached to help with raising standards. FAWU needs external support to build their capacity to deliver the comprehensive education programme they wish to provide for members and staff representatives in their efforts to secure more effective social dialogue with CDC, and in particular collective bargaining for living wages.

Following this visit, Banana Link and Peoples Solidaires are committed to developing and strengthening our relationship with FAWU, building links between them and our full range of partners working in the global tropical fruit export industry. We will be working with FAWU in pursuit of *'Solidarity, Progress and Social Justice'* (FAWU motto).

To close, we would like to add the following note of concern. *'We could sense a high level of intimidation by management because some of the workers were afraid to talk to us even when we went to their homes. Management were all over just trying to listen to the interviews we were having with the workers. Their presence alone intimidated workers so some of them could not speak to express themselves better. All these things were indication that there was intimidation on the plantation and even their houses'* (Richard Beccles, GAWU). We sincerely hope that the workers who took time to share their concerns with us in the hope that conditions and wage levels could improve, have not reason to worry about having done so.

13 www.africanagricultureblog.com/search/label/banana