

# LEARNING BRIEF: USING REMOTE DATA COLLECTION FOR WORKER VOICE UNDER THE BUILDING RESILIENCE IN FLOWER SUPPLY CHAINS PROJECT

Fairtrade and MM Flowers partnered with the Co-op, Coventry University, Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET), Marks & Spencer, Tesco, and Women Working Worldwide to design and implement the *Building Resilience in Flower Supply Chains* project. The project has reached over 6,000 direct beneficiaries through the provision of health packages, gardens (kitchen, shared worker and nutritional), gender training, alternative income generation, farm diversification and almost 100,000 indirect beneficiaries through a COVID-19 communication campaign, all within Kenya. Its expected long-term outcome is that flower farm workers will be protected, and the flower industry will be fairer and more resilient.

This project is funded by the Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility (VSCF), a rapid COVID-19 response fund set up by the UK FCDO, and managed by Mott MacDonald Ltd. The Facility has partnered with 16 UK retailers supporting over 100 suppliers across Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Myanmar, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe to provide economic, social, and health benefits to around 1 million women and men direct and indirectly.

- **The *Building Resilience in Flower Supply Chains* project was designed to support the immediate needs of Kenyan flower farms and workers created by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as developing long-term sustainability measures at farm and buyer levels.** The project started in August 2020, when the pandemic had already been going for around six months. At the start of the project, it was important to gather data to establish a baseline for the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan, and to ensure project activities were being directed in the right way given that circumstances can quickly change during a crisis. At the end of the project, we repeated the same data collection exercise to understand if any changes had taken place within the time frame of the project.
- **One of the key surveys we used was a worker voice survey, which we developed in partnership with two organisations contracted to lead the project's M&E work, Partner Africa and &Wider.** This survey had 21 questions and was shared with workers via their mobile phone or via a call-in service, using phones provided by the farm management: first in November 2020 to gather baseline data and second in May 2021 for endline data. All questions were closed questions, framed so workers could answer Yes, No or Don't Know to each question. The total number of workers surveyed at baseline was 2,220 and 1,234 at endline, with similar demographics in both: at baseline 51 percent identified as female, 62 percent identified as under 35 and 16 percent identified as disabled; at endline 52 percent, 61 percent and 18 percent respectively.

- **The worker voice survey provided a snapshot of how flower farm workers in Kenya were affected at two points in the pandemic.** Our survey questions covered: COVID-19; livelihoods and food security; flower farm jobs; gender; and worker representation. We provide below a summary of our key findings from the May 2021 survey before providing our reflections on remote data collection.

## COVID-19

A key focus of the research was workers' access to resources and information to protect themselves from COVID-19. 85 percent of workers indicated that they had protective gear (like face masks, hand gel and soap) to avoid getting infected with COVID-19.

We asked *Do you know what signs to look out for if you think someone has COVID-19?* The response across workers was high, with 79 percent indicating that they understand the symptoms of COVID-19.

## LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY

A key focus of the research was whether workers felt their livelihoods are protected and secure. We asked workers *One year from now, do you think you will have a job or jobs that earn enough to support you and your family?* 64 percent answered yes. However, only 28 percent of workers reported their wages lasting the entire month.

Only 35 percent of workers felt they had enough food to comfortably feed themselves and their family every week. This is reflective of wider studies and media reports indicating the exorbitant commodity price increases in Kenya.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1170630/share-of-households-experiencing-change-in-food-commodity-prices-in-kenya>

## FLOWER FARM JOBS

Stable income from flower farm jobs is central to workers' livelihoods. To understand experiences with contract changes since the baseline survey, we asked *In the last six months, has the agreement that you have with your employer about when you work and how much you work changed?* 33 percent of workers reported that their contract had changed in the last six months.

The endline survey showed 70 percent of workers reported they now earn what they used to six months ago, which indicates that for most workers, no further wage reductions have taken place and the industry is slowly returning to normal.

## GENDER

In the survey, we asked *Do you feel able to challenge your supervisor if someone is being unfairly treated?* The endline results indicate that 66 percent feel able to challenge their employer if they witness unfair treatment. However, the percentage of women answering yes is in line with the demographic split, indicating that women may feel just as comfortable as men in challenging negative behaviour.



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## WORKER REPRESENTATION

The research found that worker representation, such as a worker committee or union, was important during COVID-19. 72 percent reported that a worker representative structure had been useful to them since the start of COVID-19.

- **Remote data collection is increasingly being used to gather data for projects or to monitor supply chains. In our experience, there are pros and cons of this approach when compared to in-person data collection.**

Through the worker voice survey, we were able to gain valuable insights from a representative sample of workers able to respond confidentially within a relatively short time frame, at a time when travel to and movement within Kenya was restricted due to COVID-19 regulations. However, this approach could not provide the context and narrative accounts that would be gained from in-person, on-site observations. We therefore supplemented this survey with data gathered from virtual or in-person (depending on each farm's COVID regulations), on-site focus group discussion interviews with workers between April and May 2021. In addition, we encountered data protection issues for some farms around sharing worker phone numbers for remote data collection, which we resolved by asking farm managers to provide a centralised phone in a closed room for workers to use for the survey. On balance, we see remote data collection as being an important tool which should be used by those seeking to understand the circumstances of workers at scale.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allow time when rolling out the survey for the first time to explain how the survey works to business managers and workers.
- Make sure the survey is well advertised to workers in their workplace so that they are more likely to respond when contacted.
- Ensure worker anonymity is maintained throughout – this allows workers to answer honestly without fear of repercussions.
- Work with a service provider who is able to set up a system for sharing anonymised results of each workplace with the management of each business and explain the results to enable managers to learn from and respond to the findings. This is also more likely to result in buy-in from business managers for carrying out further surveys.
- Where possible, supplement findings with an on-site, in-person survey which can add context and increased depth to help interpret remote survey results.
- Ensure workers can see the benefits of responding to the survey i.e. encourage business managers to identify changes that can be made in response or explore if the project has scope to pivot in response to survey findings.



Training at Kongoni River Farm Ltd (Star) to support workers on ideas for generating additional income