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# The Business Case for Improving Women's Working Conditions in the Agribusiness Sector in Egypt



UN Women, Egypt  
Cairo, July 2018

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**UN WOMEN EGYPT**

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## Executive Summary

The Women's Employment Promotion Programme (WEPP) aimed to improve women's working conditions in the agribusiness sector. The present business case provides policy makers and private sector actors with an overview of the actions that have been implemented by ten Egyptian agribusiness companies who took part in the programme. It presents the benefits gained by those businesses as a result of promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment through the implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). The findings presented below are a result of continuous monitoring and evaluation, based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through surveys/interviews with employers, employees and community members engaged in the programme activities.

### Challenges to Women Employment in Rural Egypt

Women in rural areas face specific issues to enter and remain in the labour market, linked to a variety of factors, such as socially prescribed gender roles and the subsequent unequal gender division of labour (with all care and domestic responsibilities being assigned to women); or widespread gender-based discrimination in the workplace (with women often hired under more precarious contracts, paid less than men for performing jobs of equal value, and often exposed to poor working conditions, including to the risk of experiencing gendered forms of violence such as sexual harassment). Those factors hinder women's access to their economic rights and limit their opportunities, capabilities and choices.

### A Challenging Context for Agribusiness Companies

Egyptian agribusiness companies reported several challenges they face to maintain their productivity levels. Some of factors contributing to these challenges are the employees' high turnover rate and high level of absenteeism. The two phenomena are evident more among women than men employees notably due to the additional barriers that women face to access and remain in the labour market: primary bearers of unpaid domestic work, discriminatory norms and practices, access to childcare, transportation, access to decent work etc.

High turnover and absenteeism are associated with higher recruitment and (re)training costs. Those costs are higher when recruitment of farm workers is externalised, and the companies rely on the services of labour contractors, whose interest might often collide with those of the companies and the workers.

In the agribusiness sector, having continuous access to skilled workforce is important particularly during the post-harvesting process, when quality control and compliance with quality standards (particularly important for exporting companies) are assessed. High turnover and absenteeism also hinder the quality of the production, and

consequently, the companies' productivity level. Lack of skilled workforce (due to the low retainment rate of employees over the long term) is particularly problematic during the post-harvest process. Egyptian agribusiness companies face significant challenges in securing the workforce that should perform those value-adding activities. Poor working conditions and lack of communication between the workers and the management also contribute to increased turn-over and demotivation of the workforce.

### Harnessing women's potential through the implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles

Against this background, the **United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)** partnered with the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** in 2015 to foster the development of safe, secure, and women-friendly workplaces within the agribusiness sector in Egypt under the ***Women's Employment Promotion in the Agriculture Sector: Creating Safe and Women Friendly Workplaces Programme (WEPP)***. Through the adoption and concrete implementation of the **Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)**, the programme aimed to support actions towards more gender-inclusive work environment and practices in ten agribusiness companies in Giza, Beni-Suef, and Minya governorates (*Blue Nile, Green Egypt, Beni-Soliman, Al Dawlia, Daltex, Dakhliya Agriculture Investment Company, Agriculture Investment and Development Company (AIDC), EgyTrust, Trinity and Wady El-Neel*) with the double objectives of fostering women's economic empowerment and helping agribusinesses to improve their performance.

The ten participating companies acknowledged that promoting women's employment is a strategic business decision for ensuring growth, and thus agreed to take steps towards the implementation of the seven Women's Empowerment Principles.



Recognising the need of having a **strong commitment from the management to ensure concrete and long-term improvements of the situation of both women and men at work**, the WEPs promote the adoption and implementation of gender-sensitive policies at the highest level (*Principle 1 - Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality*). As a very first step, companies carried out a gender-sensitive value chain analysis, to understand the specific needs of women and men workers, and to ground the subsequent adoption (and implementation) of gender-sensitive human resources policies.

Taking steps to **enforce principle of equality and non-discrimination in workplace policies and practices** (in terms of remuneration, benefits, recruitment or



promotion) and recognising the care and domestic responsibilities of workers (both women and men) is at the core of the WEPs (*Principle 2 - Treat all women and men fairly at work - respect and support human rights and non-discrimination*). Such principle can be implemented through different actions, such as the adoption of work-life balance policies for employees with care responsibilities and the provision of childcare services to workers with young children, provision of safe transportation, provision of equal pay and benefits etc; all contributing to women's access to secure and decent employment opportunities.



This goes in line with the **overall improvements of working conditions for both women and men workers** (*Principle 3 - Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers*), that can be made possible by investing in changes in infrastructures to improve employees' health; by taking into account women workers' specific safety and security needs (in terms of reproductive health; protection from specific gendered forms of violence (e.g. sexual harassment, etc.); or by fostering open communication between workers and their management.



In accordance with the WEPs (*Principle 4 - Promote education, training and professional development for women*), the participating companies developed **innovative training schemes**, opened to both women and men, and targeting workers with different levels of responsibilities.



The WEPs also recommend taking action to **promote gender equality upstream** (in the company's supply chains) and **downstream** (in the company's marketing practices) (*Principle 5 - Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women*), **as well in the surrounding communities too** (*Principle 6 - Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy*). Taking into account the context in which they operate, the participating companies took actions to empower local women (by integrating women entrepreneurs, as suppliers or sub-suppliers, or promoting women's financial inclusion) and to support women's regular employment (through corporate partnerships). Community-based awareness raising activities were also organised in the surrounding villages.



Finally, the participating companies took steps to **establish a strong monitoring framework to track progress and identify potential backlashes** (*Principle 7: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality*), by adopting an automated sex-disaggregated data collection system.

## Business benefits resulting from the implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles

Ensuring equal access to employment opportunities and investing in better jobs and working conditions for both women and men has led to improved workforce and organisational outcomes for the ten companies who took part in the WEPP.

**The main business benefits reported by the companies include:**

- Higher retention rate and reduced absenteeism;
- Improved communication between employees and management;
- Improved workers' satisfaction and motivation;
- Improved productivity and higher performance; and
- Enhanced corporate reputation in the surrounding communities and compliance with international markets expectations.



Figure 1:EgyTrust Pack-house, Minya.

Photo credit: UN Women/Arascope



## Foreword

In Egypt, women account for a significant proportion of the agribusiness workforce throughout the agricultural value chain, providing inputs and functions that are critical to businesses' performance. Yet, due to the challenges they face in accessing and remaining on the labour market, their enormous potential remains untapped. Restrictive gender norms and discriminatory practices in the workplace hinder women's access to their economic rights and limit their opportunities, capabilities and choices. And those also have a strong impact on economic growth and society's wellbeing at large.

Fostering women's economic empowerment is at the heart of UN Women's work in Egypt. UN Women firmly believes that investing in addressing the structural barriers to women's decent employment, retention and equal opportunities to exercise their full potential is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do. In this work, the private sector should be considered as a critical partner. Indeed, it holds a key role in the realisation of inclusive socio-economic development, by leveraging economic dividends and the overall growth towards achieving women's empowerment.

The **Women's Employment Promotion Programme (WEPP)**, supported by the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** and implemented in partnership with **CARE International in Egypt**, aimed to improve women's working conditions in the agribusiness sector. Through the adoption and concrete implementation of the **Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)**, the programme aimed to support actions towards more gender-inclusive work environment and practices in Egyptian agribusiness companies.

Photo credit: UN Women



Figure 2: Daltex Farm, Minya

In line with finding from previous research conducted at international level, the results of this programme showed that improving women's decent employment and taking steps towards their equal inclusion in the workplace can not only strengthen women's economic empowerment but can also lead to significant businesses' benefits and increased wellbeing for their entire community. This report aims to show how this can be done, and to provide some insights on the

business benefits that resulted from the concrete implementation of the WEPs.

We are grateful to the ten companies (*Blue Nile, Green Egypt, Beni-Soliman, Al Dawlia, Daltex, Dakhlia Agriculture Investment Company, Agriculture Investment and Development Company (AIDC), EgiTrust, Trinity and Wady El-Neel*) who agreed to open their doors and to make substantial changes to their procedures and practices. By volunteering to participate in this programme, they showed their willingness to contribute to the advancement of women in the agriculture sector, and their strong commitment to achieve a more gender equal society.

The positive results show that targeted and concrete actions can be successful in changing companies' policies and attitudes and in building gender-balanced and inclusive workplaces that address sexual harassment, promote equal job opportunities and equal wage for work of equal value, and provide incentives for women employees' retention.

UN Women now looks forwards to scaling up this work and ensuring sustainable and long-term changes by joining forces with new private sector partners.

Blerta Aliko, Representative, UN Women Egypt

## Introduction

**Agriculture is a major component of the Egyptian economy. In 2017, agriculture, forestry and fishery represented 11.5% of the country's GDP<sup>1</sup>.** With over 1,900 companies operating in the agriculture sector, Egypt counts as one of the largest agricultural markets in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region<sup>2</sup>. In 2016, the Egyptian agribusiness sector accounted for a revenue equivalent to 36 billion USD (this number includes revenues from agriculture, forestry and fishing)<sup>3</sup>. Producing a wide variety of crops, the agriculture sector's horticultural products continue to hold the highest value and profitability for Egyptian farmers. Until 2010, 80% of the Egyptian agricultural export earnings came from edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruits, and melons<sup>4</sup>. Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. However, despite its economic importance, the sector is underperforming in part because women, who are a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy in general (the sector employs around 45% of the women workforce in Egypt<sup>5</sup>), face specific constraints that hinder their potential productivity.

### ***The Women's Employment Promotion in the Agriculture Sector: Creating Safe and Women-Friendly Workplaces Programme (WEPP)***

In 2015, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) partnered with the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** to develop safe, secure, and

women-friendly workplaces within the agribusiness sector in Egypt under the ***Women's Employment Promotion in the Agriculture Sector: Creating Safe and Women-Friendly Workplaces Programme (WEPP)***.

The programme aimed to foster a more gender-inclusive work environment in the agricultural value chains, through improving the working conditions for women workers in a number of agribusiness companies through the adoption and concrete implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). WEPs are a set of principles developed as the result of a collaboration between UN Women and the UN Global Compact and are adapted from the Calvert Women's Principles. Based on real-life business practices and inputs gathered from companies across the globe, the WEPs emphasize the business benefits from promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and offer businesses with guidance on how to adopt a holistic strategy to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community. They are used as a blueprint to identify and monitor the cultural and organisational changes needed to develop a better working environment for women.

Following the WEPs framework, the WEPP aimed to address the social and cultural barriers that impede women's equal participation in the agribusiness value chains and their limited access to employment opportunities.

The programme was piloted in ten agribusiness companies in three governorates (Giza, Beni-Suef, and Minya).

Governorate	Company	Main type of business	Main products
Giza	Blue Nile	Farm and Pack house	Green beans, fine beans, onions, peas, chili pepper, grapes, strawberries, and shallots
	Green Egypt	Pack house	Green beans, grapes, strawberries, spring onions, chilies, and sweet potatoes
Beni-Suef	Beni-Soliman	Pack house	Grapes, vegetables and fruits
	Al Dawlia	Farm	Grape
Minya	Daltex	Farm and Pack house	Potatoes, citrus, grapes, onions, wheat, corn, barely, bell peppers, capsicum, green beans, and chili
	Dakhliya Agriculture Investment Company	Farm and Pack house	Strawberry, pomegranates, grapes, citrus, dates, sweet potatoes, onions
	Agriculture Investment and Development Company (AIDC)	Farm	Pomegranate, grape, peaches, citrus

<sup>1</sup><https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=EG>

<sup>2</sup> GAFI, 2014

<sup>3</sup><https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.KD?locations=EG>

<sup>4</sup> Torayeh, N. M. (2013). "The Competitiveness of The Egyptian Agricultural Export in The EU Market; Should Egypt Diversify Its Trade Pattern?" *Applied Econometrics and International Development* 13(2): 129-148.

<sup>5</sup> Najjar D., Percic M., Baruah B., Aw-Hassan A. and Stloukal L. (2016), *Women, Decent Work and Empowerment in Rural Egypt*, ICARDA



Governorate	Company	Main type of business	Main products
	EgyTrust	Pack house	Grapes, garlic, onions, pomegranates
	Trinity	Food processing	Dry onions and garlic
	Wady El-Neel	Pack house	Grapes and pomegranates

The ten companies were supported in their efforts to develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and to apply a set of tools aiming to improve women's employment and working conditions.

Guided by the WEPs, the process of promoting women's participation in the agribusiness sector involved the implementation of a set of activities including the revision of internal human resource policies and procedures; improvement of the working conditions through the provision of new services and implementation of safety and health measures at workplace; setting up of new worker-management communication channels to respond to workers' needs; capacity development, knowledge building and advocacy; and partnership building, coordination and engagement of multiple stakeholders. Through the implementation of these actions, the companies aimed to reposition themselves as models of gender-responsive workplaces and inclusive work environments.

This pilot programme also contributed to leverage the role of the private sector for employment of women in the agriculture sector while overcoming negative cultural stereotypes and building bridges of trust with the related communities.

UN Women is grateful to the ten companies who participated in this pilot programme for their commitment and willingness to contribute to the advancement of women in the agriculture sector, adopting the Women's Empowerment Principles and implementing a set of innovative actions to improve women's working

conditions and challenge social barriers that impede women from contributing to development and growth. The present business case aims to provide policy makers and private sector with overview good practices examples implemented by the ten agribusiness companies as part of the programme, and to present the benefits gained by businesses and communities as a result of promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment through the implementation of the WEPs principles.

This document is structured in six sections.

- **Section I** provides an overview of the issues faced by women to access equal opportunities in the agribusiness sector;
- **Section II** explains how those issues impact on agribusinesses' productivity;
- **Section III** presents the WEPs and provides examples of implementing the principles in practice through showcasing the work done by the ten companies participating in the WEPP project;
- **Section IV** provides an overview of the benefits gained by the agribusiness companies who invested in improving women's employment and working conditions.
- **Section V** summarizes the conclusions; and
- **Section VI** gathers the annexes.

## I. Women in the agriculture sector in Egypt

### *Women in Egypt's Economy*

- In 2016, women's labour force participation was 22 % and men was 73%.
- Women's unemployment rate was 23.3% compared to 7.8 % for men<sup>6</sup>.
- Gender-based wage differential (unexplained gap) reaches 20% in the public sector; 39% in the private sector; and 40% in the informal private sector<sup>7</sup>.
- Only 20% of women workers are covered by social security<sup>8</sup>.
- Women business owners (including self-employed) represent 9% of the total number of self-employed/business owners.
- Only 1% of Egyptian women own land<sup>9</sup>.

### *Legal and Policy Framework for Gender Equality in the Economy*

- **Article 11 (2014): Constitutional Provision for Gender Equality in economy**

<sup>6</sup> The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) (2017), Egypt population Census.

<sup>7</sup> 2016, UN Women RO Country Gender and Economic Profiles

The World Bank (2014), *Inside Inequality in the Arab Republic of Egypt: Facts and Perceptions across People, Time and Space*

<sup>8</sup> OECD, 2014

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, 2009/10

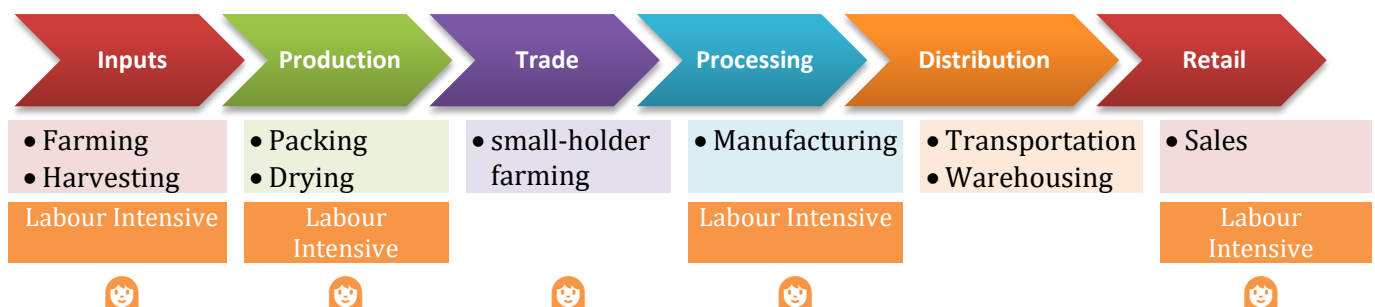
- Law No.12/2003: Prohibition of discrimination on the ground of pregnancy and maternity
- Article 35, Labour Law No. 12/2003: Equal pay
- Articles 306 a) and b) of the Penal Code: Law against sexual harassment at work
- Article 53 (2014): Prohibition of gender-based discrimination

In Egypt, women generally account for a significant proportion of different segments of the agricultural value chain and are particularly involved in the stages that require labour-intensive workforce, such as harvesting, trimming, cleaning, sorting and packing. Overall, women occupy low paying functions in the

supply chain, although those are critical to business performance (such as production, processing and the retail stages).

The companies participating in the study rely heavily on women workers (they represent approximately 50% of the supply chain under intervention).

### Women's role in the Agribusiness Value chain



Adapted from: IFC (2015), *Private Equity and Emerging Markets Agribusiness: Building Value through Sustainability*

*Despite their significant role for the sector's productivity, women face specific issues and challenges, including social and cultural barriers, to access decent and secure employment in agribusinesses.*

Rural areas are characterised by stricter patriarchal familial and societal structures than urban areas<sup>10</sup>. Data gathered during the latest population census shows that 13% of rural women under the age of 20 have been or are married, almost twice the rate of early marriages among young women residing in urban areas (7%)<sup>11</sup>.

Women in rural areas are also likely to have more children, and they also become mothers at a younger age than women residing in cities. As a result, rural Egypt (and especially rural Upper Egypt) is characterised by a high fertility rate, especially among women between 20-24 and 25-29. In 2014, whilst rural Upper Egypt accounted for only 25% of Egypt total population, the area accounted for 41% of all births. In rural areas, the total fertility rate was 3.8 births per woman, around 30% higher than the rate in urban areas (2.9 births)<sup>12</sup>. In 2017, 55% of the population in rural areas is under 20 years old, in comparison to 49% in urban areas<sup>13</sup>. In the rural areas of the three

governorates where the pilot project was implemented, the share of youth in the overall population is even higher: in rural Beni-Suef, 58.5% of the population is under the age of 20; 57.9% in rural Minya and 57.7% in rural Giza<sup>14</sup>. Women in rural Egypt tend to marry earlier than those residing in urban areas.

Unequal gender division of labour at home hinder rural women's possibility to enter and remain in the labour market. In the areas where the ten companies operate, it is common practice for women to start working at a young age and leave work after marriage to assume care and domestic responsibilities. Rates of absenteeism are also higher among young married women. Separation from the labour market impacts on women's access to social and health insurance (according to last Census data, the share of rural women with no insurance amounts to 53.4%. By contrast, 46.3% of men in rural areas are not insured<sup>15</sup>).

*Women and girls' socially prescribed roles as carers undermine their economic rights and limits their opportunities, capabilities, and choices.*

Women's economic participation is also limited by women's lack of necessary skills, especially in rural areas.

<sup>10</sup> Najjar D., Percic M., Baruah B., Aw-Hassan A. and Stloukal L. (2016), Women, Decent Work and Empowerment in Rural Egypt, ICARDA

<sup>11</sup> Data includes the following categories: women who are married, women who have signed a marriage contract, widows, divorced women.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Health and Population [Egypt], El-Zanaty and Associates [Egypt], and ICF International (2015). Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Cairo, Egypt and Rockville, Maryland, USA: Ministry of Health and Population and ICF International.

<sup>13</sup> CAPMAS (2017), Egypt Population Census

<sup>14</sup> CAPMAS (2017), Egypt Population Census

<sup>15</sup> CAPMAS (2017), Egypt Population Census

Limited access to education remains a major issue for women in rural areas, and negatively impact their economic and social opportunities. Significant gender gaps in education persist in rural Egypt, especially in Upper Egypt. In 2014, the difference between women and men's median number of years of schooling was higher in rural Egypt (4.6 years for women and 6.2 years for men) compared to urban Egypt (8.2 for women and 9.2 for men)<sup>16</sup>. The existing gender gaps in the likelihood of ever attending school are much higher in rural Egypt. In Upper Egypt, men are 16% more likely to enrol in education<sup>17</sup>. Such trends have an impact on literacy rates, resulting in 39% of women in rural Egypt being illiterate<sup>18</sup> (at national level, 30.8% of women are illiterate). In 2010, up to 80% of women agricultural workers were considerate illiterate<sup>19</sup>.

The agricultural sector is gender segmented, and women are more likely to hold low-wage, precarious jobs in comparison to men who occupy more rewarding and higher skilled positions<sup>20</sup>. Overall, seasonal work is common among women working in the agricultural sector<sup>21</sup>. About 38% of women employed in agriculture work only part of the year, while this is only the case for 5% of women in non-agricultural occupations<sup>22</sup>. For instance, preliminary research carried out prior to the implementation of the pilot programme showed that women are overrepresented among seasonal staff and temporal contracts in the ten companies, while men are more likely to be on a fixed term contract.

Moreover, due to the tasks they perform, women workers are more exposed to certain health conditions resulting from exposure to harmful pesticides and chemicals. Poor working conditions (e.g. open large farms; sun exposure; long working hours; absence of break times; lack of toilet facilities and first aid boxes) increase women's risk of suffering from work-related illness, and act as disincentive for women to remain on the labour market.

*"The only toilets we could use were close to the management's office, and they are mainly for men. So, it was difficult for us to access them when we were out in the field".*  
Woman worker, Dakahlia, Minya

Although interviews with the management of the different companies revealed that it is commonly considered that women workers are more productive and that their work is of higher quality than men's, they are usually paid twice less than their men colleagues. This differential treatment is due to the prevailing gender norms, and the idea that men are (or should be) the main breadwinners in their family.

As women workers often work on a seasonal and temporal basis, they often need to deal with labour contractors to find a job. Thus, they are more prone to abusing practices of labour contractors. Findings from the preliminary assessment revealed that in some cases, labour contractors can keep up to 30% of women workers' wages<sup>23</sup>.

Women workers are also exposed to specific forms of violence, such as sexual harassment. A survey of 156 women workers carried out during the preliminary assessment showed that 40% of women expressed some fear of being harassed at work. Moreover, research has shown that the location of the pack-house is found to be crucial in determining whether women will be able to remain on the labour market after marriage. The distance from factories acts as a deterrent, since during the daily travel to the field in open pick-up trucks, women are more exposed to physical and psychological violence. Travelling with foreign men to a distant pack-house can expose women to stigma and makes it less acceptable for them to work, especially if they are married.

Field work carried out in several agribusiness companies in Egypt showed that there is a general disapproval of women travelling in trucks with unknown men. Married women tend to leave the job when the pack-houses are located outside their villages while the pack-houses located in the village tend to have a lower rate of turnover of trained women workers.

Photo credit: UN Women



Figure 3: Participating firms during recognition of their commitment to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

Women's work in agribusiness is also hindered by prevailing perceptions that married women should only work in agribusiness in case of extreme necessity, given the poor working conditions, risk of experiencing sexual harassment and limited financial remuneration. Initial research carried out prior to the implementation of the programme has shown that there is a stigma (for both women and their families) associated with married women working for a daily wage, resulting in many

<sup>16</sup> EDHS, 2014

<sup>17</sup> EDHS, 2014

<sup>18</sup> CAPMAS (2017), Egypt Population Census

<sup>19</sup> Abdelali-Martini M. (2011), *Empowering Women in the Rural Labor Force with a Focus on Agricultural Employment in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)*, UN Women in cooperation with FAO, IFAD and WFP

<sup>20</sup> ITC ILO and UN Women (2016), *Thematic brief on Gender, Agriculture and*

*Rural Development*, Resource package on Gender Mainstreaming in EU Cooperation.

<sup>21</sup> The World Bank (2014), *Arab Republic of Egypt, More jobs, better jobs: a priority for Egypt*, Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> UN Women (2016), *Gender Sensitive Assessment for Agribusiness Companies and Value Chains in Egypt*, Final Report.

husbands preventing their wives from working (this is particularly prevalent in Beni-Suef).

Prevailing discriminatory practices in employment (low pay; lack of recognition for the work they do; no prospect of promotion or fixed term contract; seasonal work; etc.)

contribute to the agribusiness sector being not attractive for women.

## II. Snapshot of the business challenges for the agribusiness industry

### Low retention and high absenteeism rates

Egyptian agribusiness companies face significant challenges in securing their workforce, especially the workforce that should perform value-adding activities<sup>24</sup>. The participating companies reported a low retention rate, and a particularly high turnover of women workers, reaching 50% in some of the companies. This high turnover is attributed to several factors, including socio-cultural traditions and poor working conditions in the agribusiness sector.

Traditionally, women often leave paid work when they marry or have children.

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*“The problem is that we invest and train the girls until they master what they do, then most of them leave once they get married, which would be at a very prime age. So, we have to start the cycle again”. Mohamed Mohamady, Quality Assurance, Blue Nile*

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Another issue identified was the high level of absenteeism among staff (especially among women workers). Research in agribusiness at global level has shown that absenteeism is higher among young, married women, and that it is often linked to care responsibilities of younger women who have children.

### Costs of recruitment and (re)training

The recruitment of seasonal farm workers through labour contractors has been a widely spread practice for several years around the world and especially in third world countries. In the absence of well-functioning private or public institutions that would formally match companies and workers together, the labour contractors act as intermediary between the company and the worker. Labour contractors receive on average EGP50 per day and per recruited worker from the company. The labour contractors then pay the worker, deducting from this amount EGP15 (covering commission and workers' transportation to the workplace).. Initial research carried out prior to the implementation of the programme has shown that such recruitment practice usually increases workers' vulnerability, as labour contractors take a large percentage of the workers' daily wages. Indeed, in some case, this amounted to 30% of the women's wages. Moreover, labour contractors' personal interests might collide with the companies' ones. Indeed, to maximise

their gains, labour contractors might be interested in rotating the skilled labour in different companies, while the companies where they acquired their skills would prefer higher retention of those skilled workers.

The need to rely on labour contractors was mentioned as one of the main challenges by the participating companies. It was reported that in Egypt, labour contractors tend to rotate workers between different companies almost daily. Such practices have significant impact on productivity, as companies spend time and effort being introduced to new employees daily, they need to continuously invest in (re) training, there is lack of consistency on the quality of work due to constant changes in staff, there is limited accountability from both sides etc.

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*“I had had enough of the labour contractors. They kept rotating the women between farms to make sure they didn't develop any loyalty to the company. We rarely had a team that worked for more than few days at a time. We would have to retrain almost daily. It was inefficient and frustrating.”*

*Ashraf Hafez, Manager, AIDC*

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### Poor quality of production and its impacts on productivity

The lack of skilled workforce remains a major challenge for agribusiness companies in Egypt, especially the export-oriented ones.

Post-harvesting activities are crucial in the process of preparing the products for export. Quality control and compliance with international certification standards determine the placement of produce in international markets. Accordingly, post-harvest activities and processes require a high degree of precision, cleanliness, infection and food safety control mechanisms and qualified staff to perform those activities. One of the main factors affecting the competitiveness of Egyptian agricultural exports in European Union (EU) and other foreign markets remains poor compliance with food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary standards. With the EU importing over 40% of Egyptian horticultural exports<sup>25</sup>, Egyptian companies struggle to consistently meet the European food safety and quality standards.

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<sup>24</sup> UN Women (2016), *Gender Sensitive Assessment for Agribusiness Companies and Value Chains in Egypt*, Final Report.

<sup>25</sup> Asem Abu Hatab, and S Hess, (2013), *Opportunities and Constraints for Small Agricultural Exporters in Egypt*, International Food and Agribusiness Management Review 16 (4).



*“Retaining women workers was our biggest challenge, and we were under the control of the contractor to provide us with the requested numbers of women whenever needed. Whatever he brought in, we had to accept and train, because the agriculture season would not wait until we find the right skilled workers. It is after all a lost investment due to the recycling of the workers through the labour contractors”.*  
Ayman Hemeda, Minya site manager, Dakahlia

### Poor communication between staff and management and work-related dissatisfactions

Poor communication between the companies' management and the workers (attributed to several factors, including the seasonality of the work; absence of formal communication channels and of collective workers' organisation; and workers' lack of skills to communicate their needs) has negative impact on workers' motivation and retention rate.

However, due to the systematic high turnover rate and the lack of long-term strategy, this problem was considered as secondary and its causes were not properly investigated.

## III. What can be done to create a more gender friendly environment in agribusiness sector: The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

Research suggests that gender diversity helps businesses perform better. Investing in women's employment and adopting policies aiming to improve their working conditions have short and long-term impact on agribusinesses' economic returns in terms of improving the supply chain reliability, developing retainable workforce, enhancing productivity and efficiency<sup>26</sup>. In addition, it can foster inclusive economic growth, supporting the development of rural communities and reducing unemployment rate and poverty.

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of principles developed as the result of a collaboration between UN Women and the UN Global Compact and are adapted from the Calvert Women's Principles. The WEPs are designed to support companies in improving their policies and practices towards greater gender equality. It provides guidelines and tools to companies to review their policies and practices, identify potential gender bias that hinder gender equality in the workplace and make these policies gender-responsive fostering women's empowerment. The seven principles are briefly presented below<sup>27</sup>:

- Principle 1: Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
- Principle 2: Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination

Competition and cost pressures mean that agribusiness companies need to ensure that they can employ and retain the most qualified and productive workers at all levels of the organization. Taking steps to build gender sensitive workplaces can help retain and attract women workers in an industry that has traditionally been considered as not women-friendly.

Photo credit: CARE International



Figure 4: Blue Nile Pack-house, Giza

- Principle 3: Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
- Principle 4: Promote education, training and professional development for women
- Principle 5: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
- Principle 6: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
- Principle 7: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

Photo credit: CARE International



Figure 5: Beni-Soliman Pack-house, Beni-Suef.

The principles are used as a blueprint to define and

<sup>26</sup> IFC (2016), *The Business Case for Women's Employment in Agribusiness*, IFC, Washington.

<sup>27</sup> For a full description, see: <http://weprinciples.org/>



monitor the necessary cultural, and organisations' changes needed to develop a better working environment for women in the workplace, marketplace and community. Using the WEPs' gap analysis tool, companies are able to assess their business practices against a set of indicators over a scale that ranges from "very critical to not relevant". Based on the results of this self-assessment, companies develop and implement policy changes to ensure compliance with their commitments to build a gender-friendly workplace and to promote women's empowerment.

*Over 1,937 business leaders around the world including 22 companies in Egypt have demonstrated commitment*

## *and leadership on gender equality through the adoption of the WEPs.*

The section below presents the Women's Empowerment Principles and examples of how those principles have been concretely implemented by the different companies who took part in the WEPP project in Egypt.

Some principles can be easily implemented, others require more structural changes and all lead to the same results – sustainable growth through women's economic empowerment.

## Implementation of the WEPs by the ten participating companies

The table below summarizes the principles by which the companies participating in the programme have guided their work towards promoting gender-equality and women's empowerment:

Table 3.1: Partner companies in the WEPP project and their focus on the WEPs

<i>Company / Principle</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Leadership Promotes Gender Equality	Equal Opportunity, Inclusion & Non-discrimination	Health Safety and Freedom from Violence	Education and Training	Enterprise Development, Supply Chain & Advertising	Community Leadership and Engagement	Transparency, Measuring and Reporting
Blue Nile	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Green Egypt	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Beni-Soliman	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Al Dawlia	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Daltex	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Dakhlia Agriculture Investment Company	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Agriculture Investment and Development Company (AIDC)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
EgyTrust	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Trinity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wady Al-Neel	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

## Principle 1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality

### Examples of Actions

- *Affirm high-level support and direct top-level policies for gender equality and human rights*
- *Establish company-wide goals and targets for gender equality and include progress as a factor in managers' performance reviews*
- *Engage internal and external stakeholders in the development of company policies, programmes and implementation plans that advance equality*
- *Ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive – identifying factors that impact women and men differently – and that corporate culture advances equality and inclusion*

### WEPP Egypt Experience

#### **Conduct a gender-sensitive value chain analysis:**

Global markets such as the European markets are increasingly paying attention to supply chains' working conditions and placing women's quality employment as a key feature for their businesses. This means that exporters who want to work with these markets should demonstrate compliance with voluntary codes of conduct that ensure decent and quality jobs for their workers.

The ten companies which participated in the Women's Employment Promotion programme (WEPP) conducted a gender sensitive self-assessment of their business policies and practices. This assessment included a gender-sensitive value chain analysis of their internal and external operations. Based upon the findings of this exercise, they developed detailed workplans describing a set of actions required to improve their business performance in relation to women's empowerment.

The CEOs of the companies *Blue Nile*, *Green Egypt*, *Daltex*, *Dakahlia* and *AIDC* have formally joined the global effort to advance gender equality by signing the WEPs committing to take continuous concrete actions to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. This entails conducting regular self-audits and reporting on progress achieved through the WEPs website on an annual basis and companies own communications channels with their clients, business partners and communities

#### **Develop gender-sensitive human resource policies:**

Developing and enforcing company policies that support the principle of equal opportunity for women and men is an important part of establishing women's employment as an organisational priority and underpins the company's effort to support the recruitment of women and accommodate their specific needs.

This requires ensuring that internal human resource policies set out a clear commitment to gender equality at all stages of the employment relationship, including: recruitment, training, promotion, pay, access to benefits and termination of employment. Policies should also clearly set out access to maternity benefits, grievance mechanisms and anti-harassment procedures. The communication of these policies to managers and staff at all levels of the company is critical, to ensure that policies are consistently applied and that workers are aware of their rights and entitlement to existing or new benefits.

The ten companies who took part in the pilot programme reviewed their human resources' policies and manuals against the WEPs' gap analysis tool indicators<sup>28</sup>. This review resulted in the production of a comprehensive gender-sensitive human resource manual dealing with several issues such as equal opportunities, equal pay, safe working environment, and anti-harassment policies.

This activity was followed by a series of workshops for the companies' staff, targeting top-and-mid level managers and employees from different functions and departments. The workshops included gender-sensitisation sessions and open discussions on women's economic rights, to ensure better understanding and stronger buy-in of the newly developed policies adopted by the companies.

In addition, the new policies were disseminated widely. An employee handbook explaining workers' rights and duties under the new policies was handed-over. The policies were also displayed in strategic places and communicated through the corporate's internal web.

Finally, progress indicators were developed to follow-up on the implementation of those policies through collected feedback and surveys from employees.

## Principle 2: Treat all women and men fairly at work - respect and support human rights and non-discrimination

### Examples of Actions

- *Pay equal remuneration, including benefits, for work of equal value and strive to pay a living wage to all women and men*
- *Ensure that workplace policies and practices are free from gender-based discrimination*

<sup>28</sup> See annex 1.

- *Implement gender-sensitive recruitment and retention practices and proactively recruit and appoint women to managerial and executive positions and to the corporate board of directors*
- *Assure sufficient participation of women – 30% or greater – in decision-making and governance at all levels and across all business areas*
- *Offer flexible work options, leave and re-entry opportunities to positions of equal pay and status*
- *Support access to child and dependent care by providing services, resources and information to both women and men*

### **WEPP Egypt Experience**

**Improve women's access to secure and decent employment opportunities:** Taking steps towards women's equal access to employment opportunities involves investing in better jobs and better working conditions for women (e.g. providing them with fixed-term contracts, offering inclusive workplaces etc).

Most of the agribusiness companies offered seasonal contracts to employees hired through third-party labour force contractors. This translated into higher costs for the company and the risk of consistency in the quality given the continuous rotation of employees. On the other hand, the type of employment women received through this arrangement was not sustainable and was not built on the principles of equal opportunities. The companies partnering in the WEPP programme understood the business benefit from providing longer-term and more inclusive employment opportunities for women.

In order to make the workplaces more attractive and to retain their most qualified seasonal workers, companies like *Daltex*, *Green Egypt*, *Blue Nile*, *Dakahlia*, *AIDC*, and *Trinity* provided 225 seasonal women workers with long-term or fixed-term job contracts, thus enabling those women to secure regular wages of equal level to those received by men for work of equal value. 125 of those 225 women were employed by *Dakahlia*. In addition to the 125 women workers who were employed under a long-term contract, *Dakahlia* have directly employed, through a word of mouth and network with the related community-based organization that the WEPP supported in building, 625 women on a seasonal basis, without making use of labour contractor's services. Those women receive the same salary as the rest of the women employed under fixed-term contracts, and also have access to free transportation. Out of those 625 women, 450 will be employed under long-term contracts by 2019. Packing-houses like *EgyTrust* and *Beni-Soliman* provided fixed-term employment contracts to the most committed and skilled workers, irrespective of their sex. These contracts also granted women access to social protection, pension plan, medical insurance and lunch allowances.

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*"No one can deny that women are the backbone for any agribusiness. So, it goes without saying that securing their financial status throughout the year is the right and the smart thing to do to sustain our business".*

Hisham Elnaggar, CEO, *Daltex*

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Improving women's employment opportunities also means that women should enjoy the same opportunities

as men in terms of career advancement and promotions. Transparent human resources management practices, where decisions about hiring and promotions are made based on merit, are of substantial importance to guarantee women's equal access to management positions.

*Daltex*, *Blue Nile*, *Dakahlia*, and *Wady El Neel* took steps to concretely implement the principle of equal opportunity in their recruitment practices, promotion schemes and succession plans. This resulted in the promotion of ten women to supervisory roles.

The companies in this business case employ around 32,000 women workers, 10% under permanent contracts and 90% as seasonal workers. Following the WEPP, and the cost-benefit analysis that the companies calculated based on their former worker structure, several companies started to move towards more secure job contracts, with the aim to maintain and retain their skilled workers. Hence, they succeeded in securing employment for around 225 women, with a target to reach 1,060 women under permanent contracts in the following year.

**Support access to childcare:** Family friendly measures, such as supporting working parents' access to childcare services or to flexible work arrangements, contribute to creating a more attractive environment for workers with caring responsibilities<sup>29</sup>. It is estimated that working mothers saved up to EGP 334,646 due to the provision of childcare services at their workplaces. This also helped retain skilled working mothers.

The ten agribusiness companies under study all employ a large number of mothers whose children have not yet reached the school entry age. In the absence of available and/or affordable childcare structures, their caring responsibilities often collide with the time they can spend on paid work. Thus, ensuring working mothers have access to childcare services (whether it be at the company's premises or through a subsidised scheme that facilitates access to established childcare structures) is important to ensure working mothers can stay in employment.

Companies like *Blue Nile*, *Green Egypt*, and *Beni-Soliman* decided to invest in childcare structures at their premises, to provide working mothers with free childcare. The structures could provide care to a total of 120 children (40 children between 3 months and 6 years old in each company). Approximately 60 working mothers benefited from this service.

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<sup>29</sup> IFC (2016), *op.cit.*

Companies located in the desert areas like *Daltex*, *Dakahlia*, *EgyTrust* and *AIDC* chose to develop community partnerships. They collaborated with community-based organizations (CBOs) to subsidize the provision of childcare for their employees' children at the CBOs' premises.

*"The available nursery encouraged more families to consent to having their women out to work. It also helped us retain our women workers beyond the age of marriage, while keeping our credibility and good image within the surrounding community".*

Tamer Kamal, HR Manager, Green Egypt, Giza

Photo credit: UN Women



Figure 6: Working mothers, Green Egypt Pack-house, Giza.

### Principle 3: Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers

#### Examples of Actions

- *Taking into account, differential impacts on women and men, provide safe working conditions and protection from exposure to hazardous materials and disclose potential risks, including to reproductive health*
- *Establish a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence at work, including verbal and/or physical abuse and prevent sexual harassment*
- *Strive to offer health insurance or other needed services - including for survivors of domestic violence - and ensure equal access for all employees*
- *Respect women and men workers' rights to time off for medical care and counselling for themselves and their dependents*
- *In consultation with employees, identify and address security issues, including the safety of women traveling to and from work on company-related business*
- *Train security staff and managers to recognize signs of violence against women and understand laws and company policies on human trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation*

#### WEPP Egypt Experience

**Take into account women workers' specific safety and security needs:** A work environment that takes into account women's needs can have a positive impact on women's employment rate. Safe transport to and from work can enable women to take up and stay in employment, especially in rural areas where the availability of safe transport is often limited.

To improve their employees' working conditions, farms like *Daltex*, *Dakahlia*, *EgyTrust*, *Blue Nile*, *Green Egypt*, *Wady El Neel* and *AIDC* provided women workers with safe transportation by chartering special buses to take them to work and drive them back home. They also made significant improvements to the workplace facilities, building up mobile lavatories, lockers, shading tents, cafeteria settings and provided equipment and tools to ensure occupational safety and health at the workplace, such as safety shoes, gloves, first-aid supplies, uniforms and head covers/hats.

**Adopt and enforce strict rules on sexual harassment:** Women farm workers (and particularly seasonal workers)

tend to be most vulnerable to sexual harassment, due to lower levels of education and limited awareness (sexual harassment often being confused with rape); limited access to justice; and fear of losing their jobs in areas where employment opportunities are scarce. Hence, only a small number of incidents of sexual harassment are reported<sup>30</sup>.

The ten companies have introduced a zero-tolerance policy and enforced strict rules against sexual harassment, alongside effective worker grievance mechanisms and proactive awareness raising activities on discrimination and harassment, have created safer working environments for everyone, particularly for women.

To tackle sexual harassment, the ten companies who participated in the WEPP adopted a comprehensive anti-harassment policy. Awareness raising and information sharing activities were undertaken using animated posters and signals to ensure that workers independent of their education levels and backgrounds are fully aware of the new anti-harassment policy in place and understand

<sup>30</sup> UN Women (2016), *Mapping Study on Agribusiness Firms in Upper Egypt - Women Employment Promotion Programme*

UN Women (2016), *Gender Sensitive Assessment for Agribusiness Firms and Value Chains in Egypt*, Final Report.



the procedures and steps to follow to report incidents of harassment.

As violence against women goes beyond the companies' boundaries, it is essential to tackle this issue at the community level as well. The workplace interventions were combined with awareness raising activities carried out in collaboration with local CSOs. Those activities addressed the issue of harassment in the companies' surrounding communities through the dissemination of knowledge products on harassment and gender-based violence; the participation in global movements like the "16 Days of Activism against violence against women"; setting up art therapy activities; the training of gender advocates among community members; and the provision of training for trainers (ToT). These activities helped create an open space for discussion and address misconceptions on the nature, causes and forms of sexual harassment.

**Invest in employees' health:** Initiatives to support employees' health programs, with specific attention to women's needs, can have a significant impact especially in rural areas, where health care services may be under-resourced or situated far from the workplace.

To promote better health outcomes for workers, companies *Daltex*, *Blue Nile*, *Dakahlia*, *Trinity*, *AIDC*, and *Green Egypt* provided women workers with medical and life insurance. Access to maternity leave is also provided as part of contractual arrangement, ensuring that they do not face the risk of losing their job or position within the company.

**Foster open communication between (women) workers and the management:** Installation of clear communication channels and complaining systems at the workplace helps implant feelings of security for women workers and enhance their trust and confidence that their issues will receive fair judgement. Mechanisms for worker-management communication provide a crucial two-way information channel to understand the needs of workers, including women, and help anticipate and manage conflict, allowing management to detect issues before they escalate.

The companies who participated in the WEPP have all established labour committees. Those labour committees are composed of six to eight elected members who meet on a regular basis. They act as a liaison between the workers and the companies' management. They provide employees with open communication channels to voice their needs freely and discuss about potential solutions. Out of the total 54 members, 44 are women. Those

committees have been very vocal and effective in conveying workers' demands and managed to achieve significant improvements. Those included:

- An increase in the base salary in companies like *Daltex*, *EgyTrust* and *AIDC*;
- Air-conditioned buses for transportation and recreation activities at *EgyTrust*; and
- Childcare facility at *Blue Nile* based upon the example of the adjacent company *Green Egypt*.

The formation of labour committees proved effective in bridging previous communication gaps between company management teams and their human capital.

In parallel, new employee grievance systems were set up. Under the slogan "*Speak-up, we will listen*", transparent complaint boxes were placed in strategic locations in the ten companies, to encourage both women and men workers to provide feedback and suggestions on their working conditions. The content of the boxes is retrieved by the members of the labour committees and the issues raised are then discussed with the management. The effectiveness of these complaining mechanisms was carefully monitored to ensure that they are trusted and used by workers without fear of retaliation. Training sessions were also provided to the workers on how to formulate their grievances.

*"The trust we gained from our colleagues for the labour committee was extremely rewarding, even though it adds to our responsibilities, yet, it raised our self-esteem. Colleagues now come to us with their concerns and we do all that we can to address them on a timely manner".*

Iman, *Dakahlia Co.*, *Minya*

Photo credit: CARE International



Figure 7: Beni-Soliman Pack-house, Beni-Suef.

## Principle 4: Promote education, training and professional development for women

### Examples of Actions

- *Invest in workplace policies and programmes that open avenues for advancement of women at all levels and across all business areas, and encourage women to enter non-traditional job fields*
- *Ensure equal access to all company-supported education and training programmes, including literacy classes, vocational and information technology training*



- *Provide equal opportunities for formal and informal networking and mentoring*
- *Articulate the company's business case for women's empowerment and the positive impact of inclusion for men as well as women*

### **WEPP Egypt Experience**

**Develop inclusive training schemes:** Companies that committed to provide women and men workers with equal access to training and education opportunities can better support women to develop professionally and have access to higher paid jobs<sup>31</sup>. In the agriculture sector, providing training on some strategic parts of the business processes (such as post-harvest operations and food safety, sanitary and phytosanitary compliance) can help businesses meet the required quality and hygiene standards required for exporting in international markets.

Several training sessions were provided to both women and men workers on topics that included food safety, hygiene, pack-house management, pre- and post-harvest operations. All of which have reflected in better productivity and efficiency.

*"Being a girl is not easy if you are moving with a fearful tone and attitude. At school, I always had the answers ready for teachers' questions, but I never had the courage to speak up. I am so proud of what I was able to achieve, and I feel I have a lot more to achieve. This is just the beginning".*  
Member of the labour committee, Beni-Soliman, Beni-Suef

Training sessions were also organised to strengthen women's soft skills, such as negotiation, communication, and presentation skills, supporting women in building both personal and professional competencies. As a result of such training, women reported to be better positioned

in asserting their rights to access paid work when these rights were questioned by their spouses and/or siblings. Women workers used these skills in communication with their supervisors to emphasize their rights to a decent work environment, equal pay, promotion and recreational activities.

*"For the first time in my life, I feel full of positive energy and that I have a purpose in life. I am even different with my children and will do whatever I can to secure my income until they finish their education and get married".*

Samar, Daltex, Minya



Photo credit: UN Women

Figure 8: Samar, Daltex, Minya.

## **Principle 5: Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women**

### **Examples of Actions**

- *Expand business relationships with women-owned enterprises, including small businesses, and women entrepreneurs*
- *Support gender-sensitive solutions to credit and lending barriers*
- *Ask business partners and peers to respect the company's commitment to advancing equality and inclusion*
- *Respect the dignity of women in all marketing and other company materials*
- *Ensure that company products, services and facilities are not used for human trafficking and/or labour or sexual exploitation*

### **WEPP Egypt Experience**

**Support gender sensitive finance, through group savings and lending mechanism:** According to CAPMAS, the annual consumer inflation rate remained at 30.9% in June 2017, and the annual food and beverage inflation rates increased by 40.8 %<sup>32</sup>, which led to an increase in poverty rates as stated by the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR). Accordingly,

CAPMAS changed the Egyptian poverty line to EGP482 per month and EGP5,787.9 per annum. Due to this inflation, 57% of rural residents of Upper Egypt were unable to meet their basic needs according to the official data on poverty within Beltone's "Income, Expenditure and Consumption" report, with women being disproportionately affected.

Hence, Beni-Soliman, Daltex, and EgyTrust were pioneers in fostering the development of group savings initiatives

<sup>31</sup> IFC (2016), *op.cit.*

<sup>32</sup> <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/273345/Business/Economy/Egypt's-annual-headline-inflation-remains-stable-a.aspx>

through the modality of ‘Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs)’ to help their women workers increase their income. The VSLAs act as an informal savings and credit mechanism. Groups of 15 to 25 members meet on a weekly basis and can lend money to members in return of an agreed interest rate. Out of those credits, members establish their own income generating businesses based on their area of expertise. The collective savings per group act as a social solidarity fund that supports women in their household expenses whenever needed (e.g. support for marriages expense, school fees, etc.). The VSLAs also serve as a conducive space for learning, awareness raising and skills’ development for women.

Through the WEPP, eight VSLA groups were formed, with a total number of 165 women members, fostering the emergence of small businesses for packaging, poultry, and bakery and the possibility for women to sell their products within their workplaces. This initiative supported by the companies’ management helped increase women’s monthly income and provided them with a source of income during the agriculture off-season periods, especially in *Beni-Soliman* and *EgyTrust*.

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*“We look forward to our weekly gathering to discuss collectively our issues and problems. We learned that*

*savings can be for three reasons, either investment, personal, or emergency. We also contribute with a small amount of money in “solidarity” to others. We are there for anyone of the group who may face an emergency and might need financial support”.*

*A member of the VSLA group, Daltex, Minya.*

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### **Integrate women entrepreneurs as suppliers/sub-suppliers:**

Supporting women entrepreneurs in overcoming gaps in accessing finance, business development or networks is crucial for companies that want to strengthen their supply chains or distribution systems. Research has shown that diversity in supply chains allows companies to access a wider variety of high-quality suppliers and can also lower costs<sup>33</sup>. Further, promoting good supplier relationships with women entrepreneurs is associated with enhanced corporate responsibility and customer loyalty. *Trinity* employs 15 women workers within its premises. However, the company has provided additional 40 women from the surrounding community with the opportunity to work remotely on the company’s produces and crops (onions, garlic), integrating them in its supply chain as sub-suppliers.

## **Principle 6: Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy**

### **Examples of Actions**

- *Lead by example – showcase company commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment*
- *Leverage influence, alone or in partnership, to advocate for gender equality and collaborate with business partners, suppliers and community leaders to promote inclusion*
- *Work with community stakeholders, officials and others to eliminate discrimination and exploitation and open opportunities for women and girls*
- *Promote and recognize women’s leadership in, and contributions to, their communities and ensure sufficient representation of women in any community consultation*
- *Use philanthropy and grants programmes to support company commitment to inclusion, equality and human rights*

### **WEPP Egypt Experience**

**Support women’s regular employment through corporates’ partnership:** In the agriculture industry, companies often establish partnership with others to substantiate their businesses. These partnerships can be used to raise the profile of companies that are promoting greater inclusion of women in their workforce; to provide guidance on successful approaches that can be replicated in other companies; and to communicate the business rationale for improving women’s working conditions.

*Daltex, Dakahlia, AIDC, EgyTrust* and *Wady El Neel* are neighbouring companies, characterised by the seasonality of their operations. They started a business collaboration to promote better employment opportunities for women and men through the ‘rotational labour modality’. Through

this modality, companies agree to rotate their workers based on companies’ seasonality and on a pre-set coordination of their agriculture operations in order to fully utilise the human resource throughout the year. Such approach helped guarantee a more sustainable access to qualified women workers during the peak and off-season operations through the establishment of a common pool of workers. At the same time, it provided women workers with a stable inflow of income throughout the year round while also ensuring that they continue to benefit from enhanced working conditions. This is an example of a vested interest for the companies to partner and support women’s empowerment through sustainable employment opportunities.

Some of the participating companies also implemented the “Business to Business” (b2b) modality through backward

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<sup>33</sup> IFC (2017), *Investing in Women - New Evidence for the Business Case*, IFC, Washington.

and/or forward integration<sup>34</sup> between the farms and the packing-houses. *AIDC* and *Al Dawlia* applied the forward integration with *Ben-Suliman* packing-house, and *Al-Dakahlia* farm did the same with *EgyTrust* packing-house. *Blue-Nile* partnered with *Beni-Soliman* pack-houses to address the logistics costs associated with transportation and farming. These arrangements resulted in increasing the direct recruitment of women, decreasing the companies' dependency on labour contractors.

This approach was coupled with the organisation of visits to companies who led the way in implementing innovative gender-inclusive strategies like *SEKEM/NatureTex Co.* Those visits helped the companies concretely observe the positive impact of adopting and applying women-friendly policies.

**Implement community-based awareness raising activities:** The companies who participated in the programme implemented several activities addressing women workers' issues and needs within their communities. Those activities aimed to address the cultural barriers, prevailing gender roles and stereotypes in the community. Innovative tools and approaches were used, such as interactive theatre sessions and sports days for change. Through these tools, women were given the space to express themselves and to discuss their rights and needs openly with their men co-workers, husbands and relatives. This created a conducive environment to foster women's employment in safe and secure workplaces. Through acting performances and games where women discussed issues such as the value of their involvement in the paid economy, their rights to social insurance, equal pay, and the different forms of violence against women, over 9,000 direct and 45,000 indirect community members were reached out in Upper Egypt.

Those activities resulted in delivering clear messages on the value of women's empowerment and involvement in the labour force, gender roles and stereotypes, and contributing to build the social capital of women and men through training on self-expression, team-work, gender-equality, and non-discrimination. Other advocacy activities included the production and dissemination of knowledge products using a slogan like "*Your Future is Your Sole Decision*" under the *Ta'aa Marbouda* national campaign, addressing the issues of personal hygiene, harassment, the value of employment and career advancement for women, and animated clips on the same topics for wider outreach through social media. These products were well received by women workers at the companies and in the related communities and helped boost their morale and self-esteem.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)/ Sustainable Business Modality:** Corporate Social Responsibility involves the social responsibility of businesses and the

extent to which they meet legal, ethical and economic responsibilities.

Photo credit: CARE International



Figure 9: *Dakahlia Farm, Minya.*

In Egypt, the ten companies that participated in the pilot programme implemented activities that directly benefit their women workers. Under the principle of "*Zakah*" (*Charity*), those companies provided various forms of support to women and men workers, such as helping them pay for their marriage costs, home appliances, and/or improving the infrastructure of the village or the workers' houses etc.

Some companies (including *Daltex*, *EgyTrust*, *Beni-Soliman*, *AIDC*, and *Wady El Neel*) provided support to the surrounding villages and coordinated their actions with the relevant CBOs, while others (*Green Egypt*, *Blue Nile*, and *Trinity*) focused their charitable activities on their pool of workers.

One company (*Dakahlia*) has taken steps towards the implementation of a sustainable business model through the building and sponsoring of its own education and training centre at its premises. The company aims to provide access to equal learning opportunity to a large number of villagers (400 women and men) and to provide them with the required technical skills, coupled with practical and hands-on experience in all the agriculture operations with the overall objective to create a qualified potential pool of labour supply.

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*"The quality of the produce depends on how well women are trained and how well they are treated. Appreciation, equal opportunities, and respect of their rights, are key ingredients for our workers' motivation and excellence".*

Hend Kassab, Quality and Corporate Affairs Manager, *Daltex*

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<sup>34</sup>To reduce risks and interdependencies with external business partners and to increase their control over the supply chain, companies might implement backward and/or forward integration. Backward integration is a strategy involving the purchase of the company's suppliers to reduce its dependency and avoid issues such as delays in deliveries, quality concerns, etc). Forward

integration involves the expansion of the company's activities to control the direct distribution of its products.



## Principle 7: Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

### Examples of Actions

- *Make public the company policies and implementation plan for promoting gender equality*
- *Establish benchmarks that quantify inclusion of women at all levels*
- *Measure and report on progress, both internally and externally, using data disaggregated by sex*
- *Incorporate gender markers into ongoing reporting obligations*

### WEPP Egypt Experience

**Automated Sex-Disaggregated Data Collection:** Companies that regularly monitor the proportion of women (and men) within their workforce are better positioned to implement good practices toward gender equality internally and to support existing or new initiatives to support women workers.

The ten companies under study have implemented significant changes in their data collection practices. They went from the traditional means of manually recording data using paper-based type of filling for fixed-term employees to a digital/automated system available online<sup>35</sup> that collects sex-disaggregated data, enabling a comparative assessment of women' and men's situation in the company.

The system links field with head-offices and allows to better monitor productivity, costs/expenses, purchase orders, process financial transactions and payroll, generate reports and analysis automatically against a number of indicators etc. The continuous sex-disaggregated data collection is useful to identify differences in relation to pay, type of contracts, productivity, etc. between women and men. Data analysis reports can be used as rigorous basis to set the baselines and set the targets to achieve gender-equality and women's empowerment by developing and implementing measures that aim at equal pay and non-discriminatory practices, including gender responsive planning of training and promotion schemes.

Relevant indicators tracked and disaggregated by sex are captured as follows:

- Overall numbers of workers by field office and function
- Numbers of supervisors and managers
- Employment status (permanent/seasonal/part-time)
- Direct employment versus indirect employment (through labour contractors)
- Comprehensive data on employees including training and education background
- Wages and salaries (distribution and increase rates) while calculating income tax and insurance/allowances expenses
- Employee retention and absenteeism rates
- Promotion rates and distribution
- Productivity and incentive scheme



Figure 10: [www.agrierpsystem.com](http://www.agrierpsystem.com)

## IV. Impact of those actions on businesses

The results of the WEPP clearly showed that taking steps towards more gender sensitive workplaces go in hand with increased business performance and benefits<sup>36</sup>.

In the ten companies where the WEPs have been implemented, improvements to the human resources procedures, workplace settings and business practices, and increased attention to women workers' needs, resulted in a range of business benefits, including overall organisational performance, productivity and profitability

and improved the companies' image in the surrounding communities.

*"We have come to realise that investing in our women workers is most rewarding to our business".* Mohamed Abdou, CEO, EgyTrust, Minya

<sup>35</sup> [www.agrierpsystem.com](http://www.agrierpsystem.com)

<sup>36</sup> Due to the lack of sex-disaggregated data collected by the companies prior to the implementation of the WEPP, the baseline study was not able to collect sex-disaggregated quantitative data on issues such as lost production

time per worker; work-related accidents per worker; number of sexual harassment incidents; etc. Thus, the evaluation mainly relied on qualitative data.

## Improved retention rate and reduced absenteeism

Improved retention and reduced absenteeism of women workers are two of the most visible impacts of the adoption and implementation of the WEPPs by the participating companies.

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*"Retention of female workers was one of the biggest challenges the company faced, until we started investing in the well-being of our workers through the right policies and services, such as childcare and flexible hours, then things changed dramatically". Mohamed Mohamady, Quality Assurance, Blue Nile, Giza.*

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The implementation of women friendly measures, changes in human resource practices and improvement of the working conditions were successful in tackling two of the main issues faced by the companies, including high turnover and the monopoly of labour contractors on workforce supply (as seen in section 2).

Findings from the evaluation of the WEPP showed that women workers and their peer villagers acknowledged the improvements in the working conditions and the efforts made by the companies' management to better accommodate their needs. Improvements to the workplaces such as setting up mobile toilet facilities for women workers; shading tents; uniforms, lockers and safety shoes/gloves; and creating regular communication channels with the management were very well received by women and contributed to increase the attractiveness of the sector.

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*"We are very happy that we have access to toilets and clean water all day. The kind of decent treatment we receive is encouraging us to always meet the expectations of our supervisors".*  
Woman worker, Dakahlia Co., Minya

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Moreover, the provision of new services (e.g. transportation in the company buses; childcare facilities at the pack houses; cafeteria settings) for women workers have strengthened women's loyalty toward the companies and prevented leakage of trained workers from a season to another. Those measures ensured a higher retention rate which underpins higher productivity and lower costs for the companies.

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*"We were overwhelmed by the amount of happiness and satisfaction among workers, once we availed a fully paid air-conditioned bus for them. Women are more dedicated and attached to the company than before which resulted in a more productive environment and a positive vibe that you sense in the air".*  
Abouel Azzayem, Board Advisor, EgyTrust

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Safer and more secure working environment for women resulted in a higher rate of women employees' satisfaction with their current job. Data gathered at the end of the WEPP revealed that 79% of women expressed feeling safer at work, and 95% expressed their willingness to keep working in the future.

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*"The best thing that happened here is the nursery. Now I can get married without the fear of having to quit my job".*  
Woman worker, Blue Nile, Giza

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Adopting policies and practices that support women's employment, ensuring a good work-life balance and a culture that is free of harassment, led to higher levels of satisfaction for all employees (women and men alike), making them less likely to take days off or look for new jobs elsewhere.

Initially, it was expected that the programme would lead to a 5% of the employees would return from the previous season. Following the implementation of the programme, regular monitoring of the programme's indicators on the retention and absenteeism showed that the overall retention rate improved by 24.9%. The adoption of regular working hours for women workers resulted in improved attendance. Absenteeism for example decreased by 31% in EgyTrust, 17% in Daltex and 9% in Trinity.

## Reduced costs linked to recruitment and induction of new employees

Moreover, most of the participating companies were successful in reducing their recruitment costs, by restructuring their recruitment practices and establishing a more direct link with the surrounding communities and their potential new workers. Both workers' and companies' dependency on labour contractors have decreased, as participating companies have either integrated the recruitment processes and procedures internally (e.g. integrating the labour contractors to their production plan, providing them with training on safe and women-friendly working policies, and with a monthly salary to ensure their loyalty and adherence to the companies new ethics and women-friendly policies), or are benefiting from women workers' recommendations to source potential new employees.

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*"It's in our best interest to retain these women. We have to provide them with a sense of security and belonging. We've invested in them and we've seen the return on our investment".*  
Refaat Ghobrial, CEO, Trinity, Minya.

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Improved retention rates also contributed to reducing the cost of recruitment by reducing the time dedicated to train new employees.

It takes approximatively ten days to train new employees (five days to train them on pre-harvest techniques and five days for them to master packaging techniques). Training is usually carried out by a more senior employee, who, during those ten days of training, is not able to perform the usual tasks. On average, a company may need to train up to 50 women (if seasonal) during the agriculture season. Those women receive an average pay of EGP 50 per day, which means that companies may spend up to EGP 25,000 for (re)training women each season, in addition to the cost associated with the lost production during this process. This figure may be doubled due to the malpractice of the



labour contractors who may rotate trained women, and hence, may not provide the same workforce to the contracting company. Thus, prior to the programme implementation, companies were spending a significant amount to train new recruits.

### Improved communication between employees and management resulted in increased women workers' satisfaction rate and motivation

The implementation of the labour committees and the provision of complaint boxes helped create and maintain regular and effective communication between staff and management. In addition, the provision of soft skills training on topics such as communication, negotiation skills, problem solving, and complaining systems to women workers and management staff alike contributed to foster a better understanding and communication between the staff and the management team.

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*"We were bold enough to ask the management to organize literacy classes for illiterate women workers. And I am willing to give up my daily break time to assist with the teaching".* Member of the labour committee, Daltex, Minya.

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Issues that negatively impacted on women are now more easily brought up to management, and suggestions for potential improvements are collectively discussed and addressed (e.g. provision of potable water, provision of childcare facility, recreational activities, salaries and allowances).

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*"Honestly, I did not realize how these labour committees are empowered and well-equipped with negotiation and communication skills until I met them myself. To my surprise, they were able to negotiate an increase to their salary. There is no doubt, in no time, these young women will be promoted to an advanced leadership position".*

Hend Kassab, Quality Assurance Manager, Daltex.

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All companies having implemented those new communication channels confirmed that those had had a positive impact on the communication with women workers. Again, improved communication was found useful in reducing turnover and in increasing staff motivation.

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*"We finally feel that the role we play in the company is being appreciated. The value we add as women in the process of production and to act as a liaison in the employer-employee relation is being recognized as a key to success and profitability".*

Member of the labour committee, EgyTrust, Minya.

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### Improved productivity and higher performance

Research has shown that taking steps towards gender sensitive workplaces can bring real productivity gains for employers, both from emerging and high-income

economies<sup>37</sup>. Findings from a 2010 survey of companies based in emerging and developing markets that have invested in programs targeting women found that at least one third had measured improved profits and a further 38% were expecting returns<sup>38</sup>.

Findings from the WEPP seem to confirm those trends. Indeed, agribusiness companies that have adopted women-friendly policies noted an increase in their productivity. Most of participating companies reported a 20% to 30% increase in productivity as reported by managers in five months period. In a few cases, for companies where women were employed over ten months, increase in productivity reached 70%. Production per labour unit increased by 61% (versus the 50% target).

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*"Surprisingly, the case for us is different. Normally, companies witness improved productivity over a lengthy period of time. However, for us, after the first intensive on-the-job training month, we saw an 80% increase in women's productivity. I could see how they were gaining confidence and developing a feeling for the plants as living, breathing beings in need of care. It is not just a job anymore. They had pride in their work."*

Waheed Abdel Hakeem, Minya site manager, Daltex

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The companies improved their performance and product quality. Some companies reported a decrease in the recorded number of defects and a consequent increase in production quality of 20%.

Participating companies associated this increase of the quality of the production as a direct impact of the vocational training courses. Those courses contributed to increasing productivity and efficiency of the women workers. For instance, prior to the post-harvest training, the average productivity in packaging in some pack houses was from 40 to 50 baskets per day. After the training, the productivity reached 70 baskets per day with higher quality and better efficiency.

In some companies, activities have been executed ahead of schedule, enabling them to catch-up the agriculture season ahead of its due time. For instance, *Daltex* did not have a packing house in Minya, due to the existing difficulties the company faced to recruit workforce in this area. Following its participation in the WEPP, the company was able to recruit enough women workers in this area, enabling the creation of a new packing house.

Similarly, *Wady El Neel* company was facing issues to secure its operations due to logistics problem. A gender analysis of its value chain enabled to identify the issues and recommended moving to a new area. Yet, this raised a new challenge of securing its workforce, due to the remote location of the new pack house. Subsequent to its participation in the WEPP, the company was able to extend its operations from one to four months over the year, and

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<sup>37</sup> IFC (2013), *Investing in Women's Employment - Good for business, good for development*, International Finance Corporation, Washington.

<sup>38</sup> McKinsey and Company (2010), *The Business of Empowering Women*. Available at : [http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Economic-Development/EmpWomen\\_USA4\\_Letter.pdf](http://mckinseysociety.com/downloads/reports/Economic-Development/EmpWomen_USA4_Letter.pdf)

to secure its part-time workforce through coordination with the related community-based organisation.

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*"I was always worried about finding the right skilled labour in a poor area like Minya. Thankfully, now, I am 100% secure. I have my own labour force. I even started planting 2 months earlier, and I accepted all the purchase orders safely for the upcoming season. Currently, we employ 150 women and we are planning to employ 250 more in 2019. Surprisingly, when given the space, women do excel and surpass their male counterparts".*

Ayman Hemeda, Minya site manager, Dakahlia.

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Moreover, research suggests that more women in management can lead to improved business performance and increased productivity, by giving more space for innovation in increasingly competitive global markets.

Daltex, Blue Nile, Dakahlia, and Wady El Neel took steps to concretely implement the principle of equal opportunity in their recruitment practices, promotion schemes and succession plans and promoted ten women to supervisory roles. Based on management interviews, women supervisors brought different perspectives, ways of thinking, improved communication with women subordinates and problem-solving strategies that led to improved employees' loyalty, motivation, better productivity, and decreased absenteeism.

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*"I proudly supervise 34 women workers. One of my tasks is to ensure that their needs are met, and issues are addressed. When women are happy, they are more productive".* Asmaa, Dakahlia, Minya.

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Furthermore, the participating companies agreed that the investments they made to improve women's working conditions led to increased revenues and return on investment.

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*"Building a true connection with your human capital is a win-win relation for businesses. You invest a dollar in improving your workers' working conditions and extending a CSR to your related community, you reap millions of dollars in love, respect and revenues".*

Sherif Attia, CEO, Green Egypt

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### Enhanced corporate reputation in the surrounding communities and compliance with international markets expectations

The efforts made by the companies to improve women's working conditions by adopting and implementing women-friendly policies and practices as well as promoting women to managerial positions contributed to enhance their reputation and image within the related rural communities. Such efforts are important tool for communicating on a new image of modern and women-friendly companies in a male-dominated industry. The result of which attracted women workers and convinced working mothers to remain in the paid-economy and in the agriculture industry.

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*"I wake up every morning and look forward to my journey to the packing house in the bus with my child on my lap".*

Woman worker, Green Egypt, Giza

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Some companies have also considered setting up their own training centre on their premises to act as a "training-hub" for the surrounding communities. By providing training to potential new workers, the companies can ensure that their needs in terms of workers' skills and knowledge are met, like the case of Dakahlia (as mentioned in section 3 under WEPs principle 6).

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*"Upper Egypt rural communities have not been educated about the importance of investing in human capital to reach one's highest potential. Therefore, efforts should be oriented towards education and building the technical capacities, following the steps of HEYA Foundation in Lower Egypt".*

Abouel Azzayem, Board Advisor, EgyTrust, Minya.

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Following the WEPP, the participating companies are now able to demonstrate compliance with codes of conduct that ensure decent working conditions, including compliance with non-discrimination and anti-harassment principles, as well as quality certifications focusing on food safety and hygiene standards. Consequently, they have succeeded in either maintaining or acquiring international quality certifications, such as the GLOBAL G.A.P. Certification.

Photo credit: CARE International



Figure 11: Girls with fixed-term job contracts, Dakahlia, Minya.

Those efforts were also successful in strengthening the companies' strategy to expand their access to higher value markets such as the EU, and market themselves as gender-responsive companies given their signage, commitment, and adoption to the Women's Empowerment Principles.

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*"Signing an employment contract with the company makes me, and all other women, secure in many ways. We will always benefit as long as we excel in our job. We feel loyal to the company. It's our place and we want to have the best for it".*

Woman worker, AIDC, Minya

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Photo credit: UN Women

Figure 12: Girls with fixed-term job contracts, Blue Nile, Giza.

## V. Conclusions

The implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) showed that developing safe, secure, and women-friendly workplaces goes in hand with strong business benefits for the participating companies.

The ten companies that participated in the Women's Employment Promotion in the Agriculture Sector: Creating Safe and Women-Friendly Workplaces Programme (WEPP) took steps to improve their human resources procedures, workplace settings and business practices to take into account women workers' needs. They reported a range of business benefits, including overall organisational performance, productivity and profitability, and improved image within their surrounding communities.

This pilot programme was also useful in identifying some important factors to ensure a successful implementation of the WEPs, including:

- Ensure sex-disaggregated data is regularly collected on specific issues such as employees' retention, turnover and absenteeism rates; work-related incidents; productivity; training attendance; etc. In order to establish a proper diagnostic of the situation of women and men in the company, sex-disaggregated data should be collected prior to the implementation of the programme. Baseline and end line studies should be supported by sound quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data.
- Ensure high-level management is committed to change. It is necessary that decision-makers are aware of the needs to work towards the improvement of the situation of women at work,
- in order to ensure that the promoted changes receive the necessary support to be sustainable.
- Work with the surrounding communities to foster long lasting changes. The workplace is only one of the multiple spaces where gender inequalities manifest themselves. Gender inequalities find their roots in the prevailing norms in society and as a result, it is necessary to address those issues at the community level as well.

- Monitor the impact of the actions aiming at improving women's situation in the workplace. The WEPs implementation requires close follow-up. Monitoring is necessary to ensure that the actions implemented to develop a safe, secure and women-friendly workplace are successful, and to mitigate the possible backlashes any action towards progressive change can incur.

Photo credit: UN Women



Figure 13: Green Egypt Pack-house, Giza.



## VI. Annexes

### Annex 1: WEPs Gap Analysis Tool

Based on the list of questions or indicators, companies are invited to review the indicators for clarity, priority, and completeness. By **priority**, we mean: the most powerful indicators to capture company performance on women's empowerment over a scale that ranges from very critical, to critical, to not relevant/ not feasible.

Indicator	Priority		
	Very Critical	Critical	Not Relevant
<b>Workplace</b>			
1. Has the Board of Directors or CEO made a public statement on their commitment to women's empowerment and non-discrimination?			
2. Has the company developed an organization-wide gender strategy based on the business case to advance gender equality in the company and the sector?			
3. Does the company consult with stakeholders on company gender policies or performance?			
4. Does the company have an equal opportunities and non-discrimination policy?			
5. Does the company have a company Action / Equal Opportunity Policy that is declared at the point of hiring, inclusive of all under-represented groups?			
6. Does the company have a policy or practice extended to men and women to promote diversity in terms culture/ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and physical ability?			
7. What percentage of the company's employees are women?			
8. What percentage of the company's board is composed of women?			
9. What percentage of the company's executive team (direct report to CEO) are women?			
10.Does the company have policies and practices to recruit and retain female talent?			
11.Does the company have a policy for equal pay for equal work and does it monitor it regularly?			
12.What is the ratio of compensation between men and women taking into account employees at all levels?			
13.Does the company track percentage of women in traditionally male roles in the company, including P&L roles and technology?			
14.Does the company offer maternity leave?			
15.Does the company offer paternity leave?			
16.What percentage of eligible female employees take advantage of the full extent of maternity leave benefits?			
17.What percentage of eligible male employees take advantage of the full extent of paternity leave benefits?			
18.Does the company provide support to women during maternity leave and to transition back to workplace?			
19.What is the percentage of female employees that take maternity leave that do not return to work?			
20.Does the company provide support for child care or dependent care?			
21.Does the company take proactive steps to accommodate work/life balance of employees?			

Indicator	Priority		
	Very Critical	Critical	Not Relevant
22.What percentage of eligible female employees take advantage of these benefits?			
23.What percentage of eligible male employees take advantage of these benefits?			
24.Does the company take into account differential impact on women and men of health and safety protocols?			
25.Are there security arrangements for all workers, including women travelling on business or commuting?			
26.Does the company have a code of conduct or similar with zero-tolerance against the use of the sex industry in relation to business travel, meetings or conferences?			
27.Does the company have a policy on violence at work and sexual harassment?			
28.Does the company provide trainings to its managers and security staff on workplace violence, sexual harassment, violence against women, or human trafficking?			
29.When the company develops health insurance packages and services, does it take into consideration to specific needs of men and women?			
30.What percentage of female employees have access to company-provided health coverage?			
31.What percentage of male employees have access to company-provided health coverage?			
32.Does the company invest in women's professional development by providing specific opportunities or financial support for women?			
33.What percentage of female employees take advantage of professional development offerings?			
34.What percentage of male employees take advantage of professional development offerings?			
35.What percentage of male employees are involved in regular performance feedback and career planning sessions?			
36.What percentage of female employees are involved in regular performance feedback and career planning sessions?			
37.Does the company actively promote the business case for gender equality and take steps to create a company culture that supports women and men?			
<b>Marketplace</b>			
38.Does the company set procurement goals for the amount and percentage spend with women-owned businesses (51% of the business is owned, managed, and controlled by one or more women)?			
39.What is the company's percentage spent with women-owned business for procurement?			
40.What is the company's percentage spent domestically with women-owned business for procurement?			
41.What is the company's percentage spent globally with women-owned business for procurement?			
42.Does the company take steps to support supplier performance on gender equality?			
43.Does the company proactively recruit women-owned businesses for its supplier base?			
44.Does the company have a responsible marketing policy ensuring review of how women are portrayed in marketing material?			

Indicator	Priority		
	Very Critical	Critical	Not Relevant
45.Does the company have products or services that specifically target or have been developed to meet women's needs?			
<b>Community</b>			
46.Does the company take into consideration the needs of and engage both male and female stakeholders when developing community projects and initiatives?			
47.Does the company consult with women in communities that are directly impacted by the company's operations?			
48.What is the percentage of female beneficiaries of the company's community projects and initiatives?			
49.What is the percentage of donations to women's programs and/or financial contributions to its women-focused programs?			
50.Does the company have memberships to women's empowerment platforms in collaboration with variety of different actors active in this issue?			
51.Does the company use its influence to publicly advocate for gender equality and non-discrimination?			
52.Does the company publicly report on gender diversity?			
53.Does the company report publicly on its progress against its WEPs commitments?			
54.Does the company collect and use diversity, customer, supplier, and revenue data that is disaggregated by sex?			



Figure 14: Hosn Mohamed, beneficiary of the WEPP during the post-harvest training, Daltex farm, Minya.

### DALTEX – Fresh produce (export), Minya



Daltex is a leading producer and exporter of fresh fruits and vegetables that was established in 1964 as a joint stock company. It is run by a CEO and a board of directors. Daltex vision is to place development as a core value to produce best

quality products and services, compatible to both local and international market demands. Daltex is based in Cairo and owns 10 farms, among which one is located in Minya (50,000 feddans), another in Aswan, and a third farm in Sharq Al Owainat 650 kms from Aswan (15,000 feddans) but that does not recruit women due to its remote location. In addition, the company has eight pack houses. The company is specialized in potatoes, citrus, grapes, onions, wheat, corn, barely, bell peppers, capsicum, green beans, and chili (planted in green houses) with plans to extend its facilities to have another 20,000 feddans for olive oil. Daltex has different quality certificates namely; Global G.A.P, British Retail Consortium (BRC), Organic Farming Systems, LEAF, TESCO Nature Choice, Field to Fork, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), and Fair Trade (a German Certificate). Daltex targets the Russian, the Gulf States, as well as the Far-East markets.

Daltex has an average of 4,400 total number of employees (1,400 on fixed-term basis out of which 10 to 15% are women, and 3,000 seasonal workers out of which 35 to

40% are women). 90% of the pack house workers are women except for remote locations. Workers in general are involved in the various activities of planting, harvesting, and post-harvesting, where 80 to 90% of the female labour force are involved in post-harvest activities. Yet, all the shipping functions are carried out by men only. Recruitment is carried out either directly especially for the administrative positions, or through labour contractors for seasonal workers. Labour contractors are paid for the entire season, or by productivity per worker. The percentage of women in leadership positions varies between 18-20% ranging from administrative managers to pack houses line supervisors.

Daltex is highly reliant on machinery for pre-planting activities especially land preparation. The management had to resort to imported packaging machines in remote pack houses due to the lack of skilled labour. Daltex provides a set of technical on-the-job trainings, plus occupational safety and health (OSH), hygiene, in addition to soft skills and team building exercises for the administrative staff. Yet, due to the high turnover rate, the

company has to provide almost the same set of basic level trainings every year.

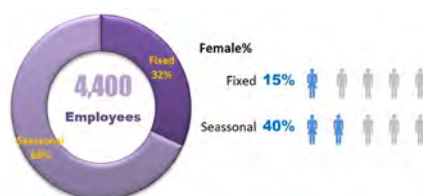






Figure 15: Beneficiaries of the WEPP during the pre-harvest training, Dakahlia farm, Minya.

### DAKAHLIA AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT – Fresh produce (export), Minya



Dakahlia Agriculture Development Co. is a leading producer and exporter of fresh fruits and vegetables that was established in 1992 as a family business and a joint stock company. It is run by a CEO. Dakahlia vision is to become a brand internationally synonymous with fresh and healthy produce. The company aims to cultivate the best that nature provides using a unique combination of organic methods and scientific protocol. Dakahlia is based in Cairo and owns 8 farms and pack houses in Minya, Wadi El-Natroun, Ismailia, Aswan (new site), Mansoura, Obour, Sadat, and Cairo. The company is specialized in sweet potatoes, grapes, onions, strawberry, pomegranate, citrus, and dates. The company has different quality certificates namely; Global G.A.P, British Retail Consortium (BRC), TESCO Nature Choice, and ISO9001. Dakahlia targets the international markets mainly.

Dakahlia has an average of 53,000 total number of employees (3,000 on fixed-term basis, and 50,000 as seasonal workers). The average percentage of women varies between sites and crops, i.e. women workers comprise 40% or less in Upper Egypt farms, and make up to 70 to 80% of the total labour force in the northern sites. Recruitment is carried out either directly especially for the administrative positions, or through labour contractors

for seasonal workers. Women workers are involved in handling, sorting and packing (planting activities represent only 10% of the overall chain of activities). Women mainly work at the pack houses that recruit around 700 to 800 seasonal workers each, out of which at least 50% are women. Whereas, the percentage of women in leadership positions varies between 10-15% mostly in administrative positions.

For its processes, Dakahlia relies from 10-20% on machinery. The company provides training on topics that include basic technical skills, hygiene, and occupational safety and health (OSH). Training for the managerial staff includes soft and managerial skills, in addition to, technical courses for engineers.







Figure 16: Beneficiary of the WEPP during the post-harvest training, AIDC farm, Minya.

## AGRICULTURAL INVESTMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMPANY (AIDC), Minya



Agricultural Investment & Development Company (AIDC) produces, distributes, and markets a variety of fruits and vegetables. AIDC aims to improve commercial agriculture in the Middle East and North Africa. The nature of the region creates an ideal environment to grow produce that is savoury, flavourful, and meets the highest quality standards. The company owns a farm in the Western Desert of Minya namely, in Mallawy. Currently, it doesn't own a pack-house of its own, so it rents the pack-house services from Beni-Soliman (BS) that is located in Beni-Suef. Relying on the pack-house of BS, means not only renting the facilities in the pack-house, but also subcontracting BS's workforce which is largely composed of women workers, yet, under the supervision of BS's management. AIDC plans to construct its own pack-house in the near future in Minya, once it secures its labour force.

AIDC head office is located in Cairo and it owns in total 7,000 feddans of desert land, out of which it already reclaimed 1,200 feddans. The company has developed a master land reclamation plan, based on reclaiming part of the overall land each year, and has been generally adhering to it. While the company relies mostly on exporting the produce of its farm, it buys, nonetheless, small quantities of agricultural produce from the market to complete some customer orders, if and when, its

Figure 13: Green Egypt Pack-house, Giza.

production falls short of covering its purchase orders. The bulk of its exports are grown in its farm, however.

AIDC is specialized in pomegranate, grapes, peaches, and citrus. It has couple of quality certificates namely; Global G.A.P, and British Retail Consortium (BRC). It targets the markets in Europe, Gulf, and Spinneys Chain. The company's operations extend to 8 months a year with an average number of seasonal workers that may reach up to 200 per day, out of which 80% are women.

Recruitment is carried out either directly especially for the administrative positions, or through labour contractors for seasonal workers. The percentage of women in leadership positions varies between 10 to 15% mostly in administrative positions. AIDC believes that social responsibility starts at home, and encourages growth and wellbeing of employees and the communities in which they operate. The company provides training basically in agriculture operations but nothing on soft or managerial skills

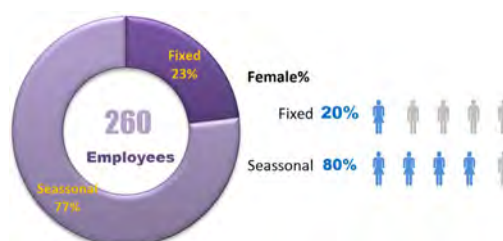






Figure 17: Beneficiaries of the WEPP during the pack-house training, EgyTrust pack-house, Minya.

## EGYTRUST FOR IMPORT-EXPORT, Minya



EgyTrust pack house is located in the Western Desert of Minya, namely, in Samalout, 20kms from the city, with its head office in Minya. It was established in 2013

through a supported investment by UNIDO-SALASEL project as a joint stock company. The owner was part of a training initiative aiming at training farmers on post-harvest management. The company started with a seed fund granted by the USAID. EgyTrust's vision is to create a reputable status as an exporter and expand the range of products it provides. The pack house is equipped with cooling devices and has good integration with other surrounding farms, one of which is Dakahlia Co. in Minya. EgyTrust is specialized in pomegranate, grapes, onions, and garlic. It has different quality certificates namely; British Retail Consortium (BRC), ISO2200, Food Safety, and Quality Management System. Until 2013, EgyTrust was targeting the European markets, then the company started shifting gradually to some Arab and African states as well as Eastern European countries.

EgyTrust operations extend to six months a year. It has an average of 45 total number of employees (out of which 5 men are employed on fixed term basis and around 30 to 40 women on part-time or seasonal basis; almost 90% of its total labour force). The company has a turnover rate of

Figure 13: Green Egypt Pack-house, Giza.

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50% among its female workforce. The operations depend mainly on women, without dependence on any machinery. Women perform the main tasks of sorting, grading and packaging, yet, none of them is in a managerial position.

The company provides trainings on topics that include; food safety, occupational safety and health (OSH), hygiene, in addition to technical skills on quality and packaging, at the pack house to eight months and provide a fixed-term employment modality to women.

EgyTrust aims at expanding to produce nectars, which can help provide a fixed form of employment for women. In addition, nectars are safer and easier to produce with lower losses than fresh fruits.

Through coordination with nearby farms and companies, EgyTrust is open to share labor resources pool to fully utilize its skilled human resources across the year without the dependence on labour contractors.

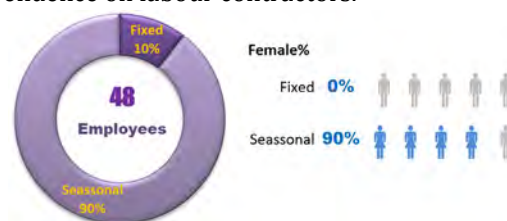




Figure 18: Beneficiary of the WEPP during the pack-house training, Wadi Al Neel pack house, Minya.

### **WADY AL NEEL COMPANY, Minya**

Wady Al Neel Company is located in the Western Desert of Minya, namely in Beni-Mazaar. The company owns a pack house where women workers are concentrated in the operations of sorting and grading mainly. Men workers are for storing tasks. The founders of the company designed it as an elaborate, large, cold store for fresh potatoes and grapes that offers its storage service to external clients.

Potential customers for the company are normally medium to large manufacturers of potatoes products and/or large potato wholesalers, who need storage facilities either to boost their logistics or to capitalize on peak season prices.

The operations at the pack house originally were for one month, however, with coordination with other nearby

farms, the operations extended to four months a year. The company workforce is 60 women recruited on seasonal basis. Most of its female labour force are supplied through labour contractors.

The company aims to coordinate and network with the nearby community-based organization to depend on it for labour supply instead of the labour contractors.







Figure 19: Beneficiaries of the WEPP pre the project's interventions, Trinity, Minya.

### **TRINITY COMPANY, Minya**

Trinity Company is located in Maghagha in Minya. It is a vegetable dehydration facility that buys, processes, and exports three main agricultural crops; onions, garlic, and leek. The company has the ability to dehydrate and process other vegetables for external customers, as demanded.

Most of the company's export sales target customers in the European union and Russia. Trinity does not target any local customers and does not export much to other markets. The company is already successful mainly with stable onion drying operation of the region. Trinity

capitalized, once again, on an already existing and relatively efficient supply system that is based on recruiting families in the region to provide the company with services that focus mainly on peeling onion and garlic.

The company's workforce is 15 women recruited on fixed-term basis and another 45 women on seasonal basis recruited through the company's network with the nearby community.





Figure 20: Beneficiaries of the WEPP during the pack-house training, Beni-Suliman pack house, Beni-Suef.

### **BENI-SOLIMAN PACK-HOUSE, Beni-Suef**

Beni-Soliman (BS) is a pack house located in Beni-Suef (Beni-Soliman District). It was established in 2006 through a USAID fund. Although BS was initially constructed to pack the agricultural produce from its surrounding farmers to help them export, BS eventually moved to rent its facilities and serve businesses in the region.

The pack house mainly operates on grapes, and other vegetables and fruits through the coordination with other agribusiness companies namely AIDC (in Minya) and Al Dawlia (in Beba in Beni-Suef).

Women workers are concentrated in the operations of sorting, grading, and storing. BS's workforce is 60 women recruited equally on part-time and seasonal basis.

### **AL DAWLIA COMPANY, Beni-Suef**

Al Dawlia Company is located in Beni-Suef (Beba). The company owns a farm specialized in grapes. However, it does not own a pack-house of its own, so, it rents Beni-Soliman pack house services.

As BS doesn't directly export its production, but rather specializes in processing agricultural produce for other exporters, accordingly, it is in no position to target a specific market of its own, and it has to cater for the market of its clients who target mainly the European Union markets and to a lesser extent Russia.

BS' vision is to move on by forming an export company of its own in the future.



Al Dawlia workforce is 15 women recruited on part-time and other 25 women on seasonal basis. Recruitment is done through labour contractors.







Figure 21: Beneficiaries of the WEPP during the pack-house training, Blue Nile pack house, Giza.

## **BLUE NILE COMPANY, Giza**



Blue Nile was established in 1998 as a joint stock. It is run by a CEO and a board of directors. Its head office is located in Cairo. The company owns three farms in Ismailia, Ayat (Giza), and Salhyia (Alex Desert road), in addition to three pack houses. Blue Nile's mission is to assume and maintain a leading role in fresh produce exports, achieving maximum gains for the company's stakeholders, while maintaining an ethical approach. Blue Nile is specialized in green beans, fine beans, onions, peas, chili pepper, grapes, strawberries, and shallots. It targets the markets in the UK, Holland, Germany, France and Russia. The company has different quality certificates namely; Global G.A.P, British Retail Consortium (BRC), TESCO Nature Choice, Field to Fork, Sedex, and Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI).

Blue Nile recruits around 1,000-2,000 workers (70% of which are women). Only 20% of its workforce are employed on fixed-term basis which includes all its men workforce and only women supervisors. The company invests in the capacity building of its staff members through training and on-site mentoring for quality

assurance. The training package focuses basically on Hygiene, OSH, and basics of handling and sorting.

Recruitment is carried out either directly especially for the administrative positions, or through labour contractors for seasonal workers. The company has around 40% turn-over rate, mainly among its seasonal workers. The policies of Blue Nile prohibit hiring workers under the age of 15, as part of the firm's adherence to international standards. Moreover, the company is audited by TESCO Nature Choice as well as other independent auditors.

Farm workers are responsible for planting and harvesting activities, while the pack house workers are responsible for sorting, grading and packaging. Blue Nile was able to extend its operations from six months to ten months by adding crops to its original produce.

Blue Nile provides some community services through support for building schools, facilities for sports, and providing support to the handicapped and orphans. It increases its business collaboration by opening communication channels with other businesses and recruiting labour contractors in their supply chain.



Figure 22: Beneficiaries of the WEPP during the pack-house training, Green Egypt pack house, Giza.

## GREEN EGYPT, Giza



Green Egypt was established in 1996 as a joint stock following the merge of Green Egypt and Green Source Company (two of the leading horticulture producers). Green Egypt is considered one of the biggest volume for fresh produce in Egypt. The company's head-office is located in Cairo and is run by its CEO. Green Egypt has six pack houses (either owned or rented) with a total of approximately 10,000 feddans, largely in Giza (Ayat), Luxor, Sohag, Assiut, Minya, and Badrasheen. Some of the rented farms are owned by smallholders including women that Green Egypt supervises to ensure the safety and the quality of the products. Each pack house requires at least 250 women to operate to its fullest capacity.

The company is specialized in green beans, grapes, strawberries, spring onions, chilies, and sweet potatoes. It has several quality certificates namely; Global G.A.P, British Retail Consortium (BRC), TESCO Nature Choice, Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), and Egyptian Centre for Organic Agriculture (ECO) certificate. It targets 21 international markets out of which 85% are to the markets in the UK, where the company has an office there. The total number of employees is around 2,137 where 137 workers are recruited on fixed-term basis (29 of which are women representing 21% of the total permanent employees, out of which 6 are managers), whereas 2,000 workers are employed on seasonal basis (80% of which are women). Women carry out post-harvest activities i.e. sorting, handling and packaging, whereas men are responsible for planting, most of the harvesting activities, and shipping. The company has a turn-over rate of up-to 30% especially among the married women. Recruitment is carried out

through regular channels for fixed-term employees and labour contractors for seasonal labour.

The crops grown are labour intensive, so there is a minimal level of machinery involved that include transportation belts, and irrigation systems, etc. In order to achieve its vision, Green Egypt strives to develop its human capital and to be a competitive employer. The company provides set of training on topics that include hygiene, harvesting, storing techniques, and OSH for its field staff, and leadership skills and monitoring/ auditing for its managerial posts.



The company tried to overcome the labour contractors' issues and the lack of skilled seasonal labour by hiring the contractors as part of its core staff with fixed salaries, yet their performance dropped significantly with the fixed-salary modality. Furthermore, the company tried to coordinate with community-based organization to recruit seasonal labour, nevertheless, it was not effective. Green Egypt has overlapping seasons due to the wide variety of crops they offer. Thus, it has the capacity to accommodate more workers and extend its operations from 6 to 10 months with the capacity of producing up to 150 tons per day of fresh produce. Green Egypt has a charity fund "ZAKAH fund", which is used to support its women workers in marriage, debt, and medical services, whenever is needed.



