IDS Working Paper 237

**Participatory social auditing: a practical guide to developing
a gender-sensitive approach**

Diana Auret and Stephanie Barrientos

December 2004

Diana Auret is a Consultant and Social Auditor specialising in participatory approaches. Stephanie Barrientos is a Research Fellow with a focus on gender and ethical trade. This report arose from a project on 'Ethical Trade in African Horticulture' coordinated by IDS. [1]

Summary

A participatory approach to codes of labour practice comes from a different perspective to more compliance focused "snapshot" social auditing. It puts greater emphasis on involvement of workers and workers' organisations in the process of code implementation and assessment. It is based on developing partnerships between different actors (companies, trade unions, NGOs and preferably government) in developing a locally sustainable approach to the improvement of working conditions. This approach is sensitive to uncovering and thus addressing more complex issues such as gender discrimination and sexual harassment. These are issues more likely to be experienced by insecure non-permanent workers, who are often women, whose voices "snapshot" audits usually fail to pick up. They are less "visible" issues, that are unlikely to be resolved through a simple compliance approach. The goal of a participatory approach is a process of awareness creation and improvement that is more gender sensitive.

A participatory approach can be developed at different levels. At a minimum it involves the use of participatory tools in the process of social auditing to ensure that the views and voices of workers, especially women workers, are captured in an audit. More genuine participation by workers also requires the involvement of workers' representatives or shop stewards at site level, and sector trade unions and NGOs, both in awareness creation and auditing process. At its broadest level, it involves the development of local "multi-stakeholder" initiatives that bring companies, trade unions and NGOs together with government in forming an independent body able to oversee the implementation, and monitoring of a locally relevant code of labour practice. Such an approach faces many challenges, but it represents a shift away from a formal top down compliance orientation, to the greater empowerment of workers and their representative organisations as an essential part of the process of improving labour standards and working conditions.

This paper is aimed primarily at policymakers and practitioners with a practical interest in developing a gender-sensitive approach to participatory social auditing and codes of labour practice.

Keywords: codes of labour practice; participatory social auditing; gender.

Contents

Figures

Table

Boxes

1 Introduction

Over the past decade an increasing number of global buyers have introduced codes of labour practice, which aim to ensure minimum labour standards are adhered to by suppliers within their global value chains. Compliance with these codes has increasingly become a condition of global supply for many companies. This has spawned a growth industry of organisations that carry out social audits of suppliers against different buying company codes of labour practice. Third party social audits normally involve a "snapshot" visit by an external professional auditor or auditing team to a firm or farm to monitor compliance. However, snapshot audits often fail to pick up issues that are not easily verified by company records or physical inspection, such as gender discrimination. A participatory approach to social auditing and codes of labour practice comes from a different perspective: it focuses on auditing as a process. One that more directly involves workers and worker organisations in order to create the basis for more sustainable improvement in working conditions and compliance.

A significant number of workers in export production are women. They are often concentrated in insecure work (seasonal, casual, migrant, homework and contract work) and found in the most vulnerable forms of employment with little protection. It is amongst these groups of workers that the worst conditions of employment are usually found – low wages, long hours, lack of contracts, weak unionisation, poor health and safety, lack of social insurance or employment benefits. They rarely have access to formal legal rights or social protection, even though they work for global export suppliers.[2] It is amongst these workers that the risks of non-compliance are therefore highest. "Snapshot" social auditing often focuses on assessing the formal record-keeping and responses of firms and managers, which tend to relate to more established and permanent employees. Worker interviews are often brief or not sufficiently inclusive of all categories of worker, and thus fail to pick up the problems of the more insecure and vulnerable. In contrast, a participatory approach stresses the involvement of all categories of worker, especially non-permanent, in the auditing process. It is particularly important in identifying issues related to gender discrimination in the implementation of all aspects of codes of labour practice.[3] A participatory approach is therefore more likely to reveal issues of non-compliance, especially amongst the more insecure and vulnerable workers.

At a broader level, a participatory approach involves companies, trade unions, NGOs and government in local initiatives that provide independent forms of monitoring and verification of codes. Local "multi-stakeholder" initiatives require active engagement by all relevant actors that have knowledge of employment issues on the ground. This helps to provide space for the interests of more vulnerable unorganised groups, such as women, to be articulated. The process of code implementation by multi-stakeholder initiatives, rather than external governance, is sustainable locally as an ongoing process of

---

[2]   The ILO revised its definition of informal work in 2002, to take account of the significant numbers working in the formal economy without formal legal protection (ILO 2002).

[3]   The focus of this paper is on gender discrimination, but the issues addressed are also relevant to all forms of discrimination, including on ethnic and religious grounds.

improvement. The aim of a participatory approach is to ensure the engagement of all relevant actors in achieving the goal of minimum labour standards and sustained improvement in working conditions, rather than formal "policing" of compliance by individual buyers and auditors.

This paper examines a participatory approach to social auditing and codes of labour practice. It draws on the experience of Diana Auret as Coordinator of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) horticulture pilot in Zimbabwe, and Vice-Chair of the Agricultural Ethics Assurance Association of Zimbabwe (AEAAZ) which developed a National Agricultural Code. During the ETI pilot, the methods and tools of participatory social auditing were developed, which involved the setting up of a local multi-stakeholder initiative in Zimbabwe. The paper does not cover each step of the audit process, as this has been covered in detail elsewhere (Auret 2002). Those with experience of auditing who are specifically interested in how to advance gender sensitivity in social auditing are recommended to focus on Sections 3–5 of this paper, which supplement Auret (2002).

This paper also draws upon a subsequent research project on gender and ethical trade in African horticulture, full details of which are reported in a previous *IDS Working Paper* (Smith *et al.* 2004). The research provided insight into how a participatory approach to social auditing can enhance gender sensitivity and awareness of more marginal insecure workers. This paper draws on examples from the project, but is written for a wider audience than agriculture alone. It is our belief that a participatory approach is relevant to workers in all export production, although the experiences given here would need to be adapted to the specific contexts of different sectors and countries by local actors to reflect local issues and concerns.

Following the Introduction, Section 2 gives an overview of social auditing and a participatory approach. Section 3 examines why a gender-sensitive approach to social auditing is required to ensure that codes of labour practice help to protect more vulnerable temporary and casual workers, who are often women. Section 4 highlights aspects of the social auditing process which have particular implications for gender, through the participatory gender-sensitive approach. Section 5 focuses on participatory methods and tools that can best facilitate the maximum participation of female workers and elicit accurate and authentic data. Section 6 examines how a participatory approach to codes of labour practice can be extended through the development of local multi-stakeholder initiatives that involve companies, trade unions, NGOs and government.

2 Overview of social auditing [4]

There are a large number of codes of labour practice, implemented by different companies and organisations.[5] The better codes of labour practice are based on Core International Labour Office (ILO) Conventions covering international labour standards, and require compliance with relevant national legislation. Some codes have been produced by multi-stakeholder initiatives that involve different stakeholder groups, including companies, trade unions and NGOs. Two examples are Social Accountability International (SAI) in the US and the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) in the UK, both of which are based on core ILO Conventions. SAI provides a standard (SA8000), against which companies can be certified. The ETI uses its Base Code as a minimum, which all company members are required to incorporate into their own company code. The ETI Base Code is not itself a certifiable standard, but companies applying it may audit against their own company code. The ETI also plays an important role in promoting learning and good practice through its tripartite working groups.[6] The key elements of the ETI Base Code are outlined below:

Box 2.1 ETI base code

- Employment is freely chosen
- Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected
- Working conditions are safe and hygienic
- Child labour shall not be used
- Living wages are paid
- Working hours are not excessive
- No discrimination is practised
- Regular employment is provided
- No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed
- Employers are also expected to comply with national and other applicable law, and apply that provision which affords the greater protection.

Source: Ethical Trading Initiative (1998). See www.ethicaltrade.org for the full ETI Base Code.

At a broader level, social auditing is a way of 'measuring and reporting on an organisation's social and ethical performance. An organisation which takes on an audit makes itself accountable to its stakeholders and commits itself to following the audit's recommendations' (www.nef.org.uk). A social audit undertaken to ascertain compliance with a code of labour practice is one specific form of audit. It is normally based on measuring and reporting against a buyer's code, or an independent auditable standard. Where this code

---

[4]   This section focuses specifically on social auditing of codes of labour practice applying to global suppliers, and not the wider practice of social auditing and accounting of organisations and firms (see www.caledonia.org.uk for more general references on social auditing). The section draws on Barrientos (forthcoming).

[5]   This paper does not discuss codes of labour practice themselves. For more detailed discussion of these see for example Jenkins, Pearson and Seyfang (2002); Urminsky (no date); Utting (2002).

[6]   See www.ethicaltrade.org for more details.

incorporates core ILO Conventions, an audit will be reporting compliance in relation to core international labour standards. A company using the ETI Base Code above would use this as the basis of an auditing checklist, with which all suppliers have to comply.

A social audit can take different forms, and there normally are three types:

- First Party – where a company undertakes an assessment of itself.
- Second Party – where a company audits one of its suppliers against its own code or an external standard.
- Third Party – where a company is audited by an independent and external body.

First party auditing is often done in advance of a visit by an auditor or certification body, although some global companies accept self assessment by their suppliers against their code. Second and third party auditing are most often undertaken either by a global buyer, or by a professional auditing company to check compliance by its suppliers.[7] It is often carried out over a fairly short time period, based on a one-off visit, although this will vary according to the requirements of the client and the type of auditing body used. The social auditor will be given or will draw up a checklist for the code they have been asked to audit against. Sometimes the components of the checklist will be graded according to "must/should" ("must" referring to international standards and national legislation, while "should" covers work-related social issues and sector requirements). If a supplier fails an audit on the basis of a non-compliance with a "must", they are deemed to have failed the audit. A partial non-compliance in a "must", however, warrants an immediate correction, before compliance is conferred. If the supplier fails on a "should", there is likely to be a similar recommendation to address the issue. Non-compliances or partial compliances are followed by a recommendation for remedial action to be put in place, within an agreed timeframe.

Third party audits of suppliers against independent codes also provide global buyers with a recognised form of external verification that minimum labour standards are being adhered to within their supply chain. A number of firms now provide social auditing services. These range from not-for-profit organisations set up with the specific aim of auditing amongst workers in developed or developing countries; as well as companies with a long tradition of auditing in management, environmental and health and safety standards. Financial auditing companies have also moved into corporate social responsibility and social auditing, including Price Waterhouse Cooper and KPMG.

2.1 Limitations of a "snapshot" approach to social auditing

The advantage of this type of social auditing is that it provides a quick and easy means to assess the level of compliance. Companies like it because it provides a set of verifiable indicators that can be quantified and checked off in the same way as a health and safety, financial or technical audit (many professional

---

[7]   In this paper we are focused on the methods used by external auditors engaged in second or third party audits.

4

social auditors come from that background). A number of criticisms have been raised, however, with regard to snapshot social auditing, and a narrow compliance approach. One is that social issues are often difficult to assess for non-compliance. For example it is possible to look at a fire exit door in the case of a health and safety audit to see if it is accessible or not in emergency, but it is not possible to look at a worker and tell by observation whether they have suffered discrimination or abuse by a supervisor. Some professional auditing companies use foreign auditors who pay "flying" visits, during which it is very difficult to genuinely assess the types of employment grievances that might exist. Standard approaches that are company-compliance-based are carried out from the perspective of management, and often only superficially seek the views of workers in relation to their employment conditions. The supplier normally (though not always) pays for the audit, and this can put a severe strain on small companies or those that supply multiple buyers, who have to pay for repeated audits against different codes.[8]

Audits are normally confidential, but one open study was undertaken of two Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) audits conducted in factories in China and Korea.[9] This study provided a detailed critique of the monitoring systems and methods used by PwC auditors. It argued that they relied on information gathered primarily from managers rather than workers, and depended largely on data provided by management with little or no "triangulation" or cross-checking. As a result, it was argued that the auditors failed to pick up a number of issues relating to freedom of association, health and safety, wages and hours. The revelation of problems in relation to social audits has left some companies open to criticism and adverse publicity.[10]

2.2 Developing a participatory approach to social auditing

An alternative approach, which helps to address some of these problems, has been developed through the use of participatory social auditing (Auret 2002; Bendell 2001). This adapts and applies tools from Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) developed in the disciplines of anthropology and rural sociology to the process of social auditing.[11] It involves a different philosophy, which is more worker-centred, and aims to engage workers as central to the whole auditing process. It rests on a process approach, which involves management and worker education and aims to instil learning and improvement rather than simply checking for one-off compliance.

---

[8]   One Chinese firm reported being audited by teams from 40 customers in a single month, from a combination of buying firms, external audit firms, and NGOs, see Kaplinsky and Morris (2001).
[9]   A detailed critique of professional social audits carried out by Price Waterhouse Cooper of garments factories in Shanghai and Seoul are given by O'Rourke (2002).
[10]   One example was a BBC Panorama programme (15 October 2000), which exposed breaches in the codes operated by Gap and Nike in a factory in Cambodia, relating to hours of work, overtime, wages and child labour. The factory had been audited, but it had failed to identify these problems, which a Panorama team did through outside interviews with workers.
[11]   For more information on Participatory Rural Appraisal see Chambers (1997). Further resources on PRA and PLA can be found on: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/information/index.html and www.iied.org/resource.

A participatory approach emphasises the importance of using local auditors trained in the use of participatory tools, who understand the language and culture, have greater knowledge of local issues and ways in which workers can be exploited. Local auditors are more likely to approach workers in ways that gain their confidence and voice their concerns freely. A participatory approach also emphasises the importance of engaging local stakeholders, especially trade unions and NGOs, outside the company. This helps to check or triangulate information, and ensure all issues concerning workers are being raised. This approach is particularly important in relation to sensitive issues such as freedom of association, discrimination, verbal abuse and sexual harassment; and also the use of child labour, which may be difficult to discern from documentation or formal questioning.

3 Why a gender-sensitive approach to social auditing?

A large number of female workers are employed in export production. In many sectors, women have a high concentration in insecure work (seasonal, contract or casual workers), and a lower concentration in permanent work. Women in non-permanent work face heightened employment vulnerability, and an increased risk that codes fail to protect them. Particular problems include unequal wages, lack of freedom of association, discrimination in training and promotion, verbal and sexual abuse by supervisors, and difficulties in combining childcare with long hours and compulsory overtime (often at short notice).[12]

Developing a gender-sensitive approach to social auditing requires understanding of "gender" as a social construct. Sex relates to the biological differences between women and men, which are the same over time and place. Gender, on the other hand, relates to the socially- and culturally-determined roles attributed to women and men. These can vary between countries, societies, and generations. Gender is learned through a process of socialisation, and relates to the cultural and social norms that pertain in any society. The gender division of labour in most societies attributes men primary responsibility for productive paid work, and women primary responsibility for unpaid and/or reproductive work such as

---

[12] For an overview of female employment levels and issues see Barrientos, Hossain and Kabeer (forthcoming). For a more detailed discussion of gender issues relating to codes of labour practice see Smith (2004).

household tasks and childcare. Where women are in paid employment, the gender division of labour is reflected in the types of work allocated to women and men, and in the fact that women normally combine paid work with their unpaid reproductive role. This creates gender differences in employment practices and affects the way codes relate to women and men workers as a result.

Box 3.1 Key issues for a gender-sensitive approach to social auditing

The following characteristics, typical of female workers in developing countries, are of key importance when considering the nature of the approach and methods to be used in the social audit process, if the "developmental" aspect is to be realised:

- a low literacy level
- a lack of awareness of their rights as workers in civil society
- cultural norms and beliefs that dictate the subordinate role of women in society.

Underlying the challenge of identifying problems faced by many women in insecure and vulnerable employment is their lack of "empowerment" as workers.[13] This can be reflected at different levels.[14] At an institutional level, women in insecure work often lack protection in labour law that would allow them to legally claim rights as workers. At an employment level, they often lack access to information that would enlighten them to their rights, either by law and/or through a code of labour practice. Lack of organisation or representation reinforces that position and ensures they lack voice or ability to influence change. At a personal level, women's employment conditions are often embedded in gendered norms and practices which they have been conditioned to accept; therefore they are less likely to challenge a situation, even where it is in violation of the law and/or a code of labour practice.

In consequence women workers, particularly where their work is insecure, often lack awareness of their rights, and the confidence to voice complaints to outsiders. Social auditors need to be particularly sensitive to gender issues if they are to reveal non-compliances in such situations. Capturing the specific issues faced by women workers needs careful planning to ensure their inclusion in a social audit. In this context, maximum involvement of women (according them "the right to be heard") must be facilitated throughout the entire social auditing process. In order to provide an accurate "picture" of the social performance of a company, especially where there is a high ratio of female employment, this must include the participation of women workers.

---

[13] The term "empowerment" is used in different ways. Here it is used to relate to the choices and actions people can make on their own behalf from a position of economic, political and social strength. For further discussion see Kabeer (1994); Rowlands (1997); VeneKlasen and V. Miller (2002).

[14] This draws on notions of visible, hidden and invisible power. See VeneKlasen and Miller (2002).

3.1 Gender issues in codes of labour practice

Of considerable importance here is the knowledge that few "gender issues" are explicitly covered in social codes, and many gender issues are of a sensitive nature. It is therefore necessary for an auditor to be thoroughly aware of such issues, and also adequately trained in the use of appropriate methods and tools to access such information. In addition, past experience has shown that traditional audit tools do not succeed in uncovering many sensitive gender issues. To do so, more participatory tools are required; which then involves workers previously reluctant to reveal their own issues. Examples of the gender dimensions of each element of the ETI Base Code are set out in Box 3.2.

The research study on Ethical Trade in African Horticulture analysed gender issues in social code principles (Smith *et.al.* 2004), as well as studying participatory research and auditing methods and techniques. One aspect was to look particularly at the manner in which women and men respond to different research tools that are used in social auditing. Also of importance in the study was the difference in quality and quantity of data collected through the use of different tools. It examined the different interactions between same-sex or different-sex auditors and participants in individual interviews and group discussions. The study also identified a range of issues which had important implications – in terms of gender sensitivity – both for the preparatory stages of the audit and for the methods and tools used in the actual audit.

Maximum participation of male and female workers is important at each step of the audit process: this has major implications for the methods and techniques used. Participatory methodology, with its wide variety of techniques and tools, was used in the ETI pilot in Zimbabwe. It was found to be very successful with regard to gathering data from a wide range of management and workers, especially women. Female workers were found to gain confidence from the participative approach, which encouraged them to "open-up" particularly when working in groups, resulting in a number of key gender issues being highlighted. One of these was "sexual harassment", which had not been previously identified in "snapshot" social audits in Zimbabwe. This shows that a participatory approach focuses on revealing less visible and more sensitive issues of non-compliance, which a snapshot approach is less able to pick up.

Box 3.2 Examples of gender-sensitive issues in relation of code compliance [15]

Employment is freely chosen. In some countries, a condition of a male worker's employment in agriculture is that his wife (or female relatives) are available to work when required by the employer, restricting her ability to freely choose her employment.

Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected. Women are often concentrated in temporary, casual and home work, where insecurity of employment increases the fear that unionisation would result in recrimination by employers denying them access to future work, undermining their right to freedom of association.

Working conditions are safe and hygienic. Male workers who are handling chemicals should have access to adequate personal protective equipment, and training in their use. However, women workers who are not directly handling chemicals are rarely protected, even though they might be exposed to them indirectly (such as through spray, or handling products that are still wet from chemical treatment). An additional concern relates to the possibility of an unborn child being affected by chemical contamination, through the reluctance of a female pregnant worker to notify the employer of her condition. The requirement for adequate access to potable water and sanitation has implications for both male and female workers, but lack of bins in toilets for female sanitary towels is a gender-sensitive issue.

No discrimination is practised. Women workers regularly experience discrimination, for example through lack of access to certain jobs, training or promotion. It is common for women to form the majority of the workforce, yet men make up the majority of the skilled, supervisory and management staff (which a gender breakdown of the workforce will reveal).

Regular Employment is provided. Women workers are more often concentrated in insecure work, with less access than men to permanent or regular employment. A gender breakdown of the different categories of worker will reveal this as another form of gender discrimination.

Living wages are paid. Many workers in export production receive less than a living wage. But female workers are *more* likely to receive unequal wages compared to male workers for similar types of work, reducing their likelihood even further of earning a living wage.

Child labour shall not be used. Child labour is more likely to be found where workers, especially low paid women workers, are receiving wages too low to sustain their households or pay for childcare provision.

Working hours are not excessive. Long working hours and excessive overtime, often addressed in code principles, have extensive implications for childcare responsibilities. Women workers often find they have no child-carer, either through lack of money or late notification of overtime.

No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed. Verbal harassment of workers is common for male *and* female workers, but sexual harassment, whether verbally or physically, is usually a sensitive issue which affects women.

It is important that an auditor is aware of these "implicit" rather than explicit gender issues in Code principles, and that they have the skills and tools to uncover such issues, both in individual and group interviews.

---

[15]   Many of these examples are drawn from research in African horticulture. See Smith *et al.* (2004).

4 Social auditing as a gender-sensitive process

Central to a participatory approach is the process involved, of which the final social audit is an outcome rather than the means in itself. This process involves various stages. The first and most important is that of **awareness creation** amongst employers and workers. The second is the **pre-audit**, where issues are revealed and assessed, accompanied by engagement with the employer, workers and worker representatives to develop an implementation plan which will lead to improvement. The third stage is the **final audit**, where the employer is formally assessed for compliance. If the first and second stages have been effective, passing the audit should be the logical final outcome. The philosophy from the beginning is helping the employer to achieve successful compliance, rather than being policed or reprimanded for failure to comply.

The social audit process focuses on the involvement of both management and workers in each and every phase of the process. Such involvement serves to heighten the consciousness of the key role played by the workers, male and female, and of the interdependence of management and workforce in the process of compliance. Given a largely female workforce, it is necessary to constantly adapt the process to ensure adequate female worker participation. This must take place at each step of the social audit. In this section we will examine the three stages of a gender-sensitive participatory social audit: awareness-creation, pre-audit and final audit. In the following section we will examine the specific participatory tools that can be used in the process.

4.1 Awareness creation

Awareness creation of the standards and principles of the code of labour practice among local producers and workers is important for increasing familiarity with a social code.
In addition it leads to:

* heightened awareness of related worker rights and legislation
* increased understanding that producer and worker are both involved in the process
* a growth of commitment to comply with the standards and the development of a sense of ownership of the code.

Creating awareness of code principles also raises awareness of other issues, such the importance of communication between management and workers. Few producers or senior staff are aware of the "managerial significance" of communicating with a workforce which is predominantly female. This relates particularly to policy and work-related information which is normally passed through a "chain of command" involving middle and junior managerial staff that are predominantly male. This chain of command often creates barriers in communication between senior management and female and insecure workers. For this reason, normal communication channels cannot be relied upon to create awareness with regard to the principles of the social code, and other means need to be found.

Box 4.1 Awareness creation – suggestions for a more gender-sensitive approach

Bearing in mind cultural attitudes with regard to the subordinate position of female workers in the workplace, it is important to ensure that:

- awareness creation of the principles of the code of labour practice be undertaken separately for male and female workers
- the awareness-raising of female workers be made the responsibility of a senior female employee, where possible a member of management, or a senior supervisor
- the actual education and awareness creation of female employees be undertaken in groups, based on job category. Practically this could be done by the manager "creating awareness" among female worker representatives, such as members of a Worker Health and Safety, or Gender Committee. This should include any female shop stewards, and they in turn can "create awareness" among all female workers in a group or team.

To facilitate the sharing of information with employees of low literacy level, it is recommended that consideration be given to the re-formulation of code principles into clear and simple language, in the "mother-tongue" of the majority of female workers. The code can also be illustrated in pictorial form, aiding understanding by workers who have even lower literacy levels.

4.2 Pre-audit

The pre-audit (or baseline inspection) provides an opportunity, especially for workers who would have had little or no previous involvement in audits, to become familiar with the various steps in the process, their role in aspects of the final audit and the participatory tools and techniques to be used.

The latter is of considerable importance given that the objective is to maximise the involvement of female workers. Participatory tools are used in focus group discussions, especially in all-female groups, in order to encourage women to participate and share information. It can also involve a transect walk with female workers accompanying the auditor through their working areas. This not only offers an opportunity for informal sharing of information, but also builds confidence in female workers in their capacity to successfully participate in the auditing process – of crucial importance for a successful final audit. Participatory tools will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The timing of the audit is also important in ensuring temporary, casual, migrant and other non-permanent workers are available for interview, as women are often concentrated in these categories. This means that audits usually have to be undertaken at the peak of the season, or of production activity. This might create some resistance from management, who would prefer a slacker period. But the risk is that only permanent workers are on site at this time, and the audit would miss more vulnerable workers who are often women.

The records check at the end of the pre-audit also provides an opportunity for the auditor to investigate key gender issues such as "equal pay for equal work", or "equal access to training and

promotion" as well as verifying data obtained verbally or visually. It can help to reveal the degree of female workers' involvement in trade unions and/or workers' committees, where they can participate in meaningful decision-making processes.

4.2.1. Composition of the social audit team

The audit should be carried out by two independent, appropriately qualified and experienced social auditors; this allows one auditor to focus solely on the facilitation of focus group discussions, while the second records all data elicited. The use of two, rather than one, social auditors is particularly necessary if the participatory methodology is used.

Experience in the ETI pilots and research project highlighted the importance of using local social auditors, who are:

- able to speak the language of the interviewees
- aware of the cultural background of the workers concerned
- knowledgeable about the country legislation and constitution, and
- qualified and experienced in the use of the participatory methodology.

The gender composition of the workforce has particular significance for whether the social audit team should be male and/or female. Wherever there are large numbers of female employees, the social audit team should be composed of two female auditors in order to:

- facilitate ease of access to female interviewees
- create a conducive, accepting environment for the sharing of sensitive issues
- encourage the participation of female employees, especially the shy and semi-literate.

How the auditors approach and relate to workers, especially those who are more vulnerable and possibly with low literacy and confidence levels is also very important. A formal, authoritative style of interviewing can easily lead workers into remaining silent and disengaged from a social audit. The use of participatory tools when conducting worker interviews however, can help workers to open up and engage more actively in the process. In the next section we discuss different approaches to interviewing and participatory tools which can enhance gender-sensitivity and worker participation in the process of social auditing.

Finding local auditors with the relevant experience and characteristics can be a challenge, especially for an individual company. This is particularly so in countries or sectors where participatory social auditing has not been used before. Participatory methodology is increasingly used in social science and civil society research in many countries, creating a network of people with relevant understanding of the tools, but not necessarily social auditing *per se*. Alternatively local social auditors may be available, who have not been trained in the use of participatory tools. In the initial stages, selection and training of local participatory

social auditors may be a requisite step. This could be done by individual companies, but would require resources. Another approach, which will be examined in Section 6, is the pooling of resources through the development of local multi-stakeholder initiatives able to develop this capacity.

4.2.2 Feedback and remediation

Management feedback of the results of the pre-audit to workers (male and female) is crucial to the success of the final audit. Feedback should include both positive findings and those areas which require improvement, as well as the remedial action to flow from the pre-audit. Feedback promotes worker trust in the auditors, as it is at this stage that they learn that their anonymity has been kept – especially important to women who may be afraid to lose their jobs. It also facilitates management discussion of ways and means "to improve" the existing situation. This indicates to the workers that their observations and perceptions have been taken seriously by management, and that female workers are important to the company. Ensuring that non-permanent members of the female workforce are adequately represented in the feedback process requires careful planning.

Box 4.2 Suggestions for more gender-sensitive feedback and remedial action

Remedial action in regard to specific issues affecting female workers would be better received by them if the procedures for addressing and rectifying non-compliance were first discussed with both senior female employees and representatives of different worker categories (including women).

This would serve to emphasise the seriousness with which management treat the opinions of *all* workers, as well as providing an opportunity for both women workers and management to participate in the decision-making about the changes in regulations and policies necessary to remedy the existing situation.

For example discussions on regular overtime hours could centre on :

•   what worker-friendly options are available to ensure targets are met
•   how management could accommodate women who are unable to work overtime
•   what would need to be put in place to meet the needs of working mothers
•   what would safe travel arrangements necessitate.

4.3 Final audit [16]

Prior to the final audit report, it is recommended that a general meeting be held with management, and worker representatives (including women workers) where possible, to inform both management and employees of its details.

The final audit is generally undertaken approximately six months after the pre-audit, but can be at any time within the following year. It goes through the same stages as the pre-audit, other than including

---

[16]   A more detailed outline of the methods for undertaking a final audit are contained in Auret (2002).

feedback and remedial action recommendations. The social audit design and sample also has important implications for the audit methods and tools used, and will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

4.3.1 Completing the audit checklist

Once the social audit team has gathered information from all sources during the process of the audit, the team needs to fill out the compliance checklist. This is done using information gathered from management, company records, and worker interviews (based on Semi Structured Interviews (SSIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which are examined below). This provides the list of the criteria of the code of labour practice against which compliance is being assessed.[17] Members of the audit team involved in the FGDs (both facilitator and scribe) need to meet to assess the results of each FGD. They should then collate and cross-check the data collected from all the interviews and information sources (management, company records, worker SSIs and FGDs). From this they can assess the degree of compliance or non-compliance against each component of the code, and accordingly compile their auditor's report; which is then forwarded to the commissioning buyer or accreditation body.

5 Participatory tools for gender-sensitive social audits

This section looks particularly at the various methods and tools that are recommended for use in a participatory social audit, highlighting the different "gender-responses" and preferences for certain tools. These have significance not only for the quality and quantity of data collected, but also for its accuracy, and ultimately for a successful analysis of the social performance of a company. The section is divided into two parts: the first looks at methods used in a participatory social audit; the second examines participatory tools that can be used in group exercises.

5.1 Methods used in a participatory social audit

5.1.1 Audit design and sampling

The social audit design is informed by the "profile" of the farm or firm which is formed prior to the audit. This profile contains basic information relating to the size and nature of the operation to be audited and a breakdown of the total number of employees (management and worker) by gender, work category (e.g. type of work) and job status. This information facilitates appropriate planning for the size and nature of the sample, and is crucial if women's voices are to be heard. The size of the sample involved in the audit should ideally range between 5–10 per cent of the total management and workforce population. Sample size will, however, vary according to the timing of the audit, as a large number of female non-permanent workers only work seasonally. Care must be taken to ensure that the sample includes:

---

[17]   For an example of an audit check list see Auret (2002), or Ethical Trading Initiative (2003).

- male and female interviewees proportionate to the overall numbers in the workforce and within management
- representatives from all the major work categories, and non-permanent workers (seasonal, casual, part-time, migrant and home workers).

Sampling "on-site" is particularly important when selecting female participants, as it allows the auditor to include a wide range of differing age groups and personalities: young, old, talkative, quiet as representatives from permanent, seasonal, or migrant workers. This manner of selection also avoids any possible management briefing before the audit.

Interviewing management, and especially workers, is a central focus in participatory social audits, achieved through a combination of individual interviews with managers and supervisors, as well as SSIs and FGDs with workers.[18] Different forms of interviewing allow different types of data to be captured, and also provide a means to "triangulate" information. FGDs also allow workers to cross-check issues between themselves, helping the verification of information.

When designing the audit, it is important that all categories of workers are included in the selection for SSIs and FGDs. However, workers often feel more comfortable discussing issues in groups when they are with other workers of a similar employment status, so care is needed to ensure some homogeneity within each focus group in terms of bringing together similar types of worker. Worker selection should also reflect the gender composition of the workforce, and FGDs can be single or mixed sex. Interviewing women in every social audit in "single sex" groups as well as part of "mixed sex" groups allows them space to reflect on gender-sensitive issues with and without the presence of male workers (who might tend to dominate).

5.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are defined as interviews with key informants drawn from management and different categories of worker, where the code of labour practice checklist is used as a guideline for the questions asked. Here the facilitator has the flexibility to probe or clarify any relevant information raised by the informant. Care needs to be taken that individuals selected include appropriate numbers of male and female workers. The Africa horticulture study found that the question and answer approach to data collection was useful in gathering information on workers' personal lives and experiences. This was typical for both women and men. There were, however, some different gender responses to this tool, some of which are culturally influenced.

---

[18] At a minimum any social audit will involve 4–6 individual semi-structured interviews with workers, and 2–3 Focus Group Discussions with 8–10 workers each. The total number of interviews and focus groups will depend on the size of the labour force.

Very sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS and the lack of sanitary bins in toilets in the packhouse, were raised by women in SSIs rather than in FGDs. Sexual harassment on the other hand was raised in only one SSI, in relation to a woman's own personal experience with her husband.

The possibility for interviewees to give incorrect information in SSIs, often intentionally, is common. For example men often deny the existence of sexual harassment in the workplace in face-to-face interviews, but readily discuss its existence in FGDs. This serves also to emphasise the cross-checking roles of the different tools.

Facilitators in the African horticulture study raised two issues of procedural importance. Firstly, questions should be very specific, rather than vague or general. Secondly, holding SSIs before the FGDs allows auditors to gain an insight into the local situation before facilitating group discussions.

5.1.3 Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions within audits involve approximately eight participants. These FGDs are informal, conversational group interviews which allow discussions between facilitator and participants, and between participants.

In the African horticulture project the focus group discussions played a very important role in raising and exploring gender issues, even those of a sensitive nature. In-depth information around such issues, however, was generated primarily in "single sex" groups. For example, women working in a packhouse openly and frankly discussed the issue of job harassment by male supervisors, including sexual harassment. An all-male group discussed the emotional and psychological deprivation experienced as a result of having to live apart from their children due to earning low wages, (the children remain with their grandparents). Of considerable significance in FGDs was the "common experience" of the workers and the freedom to discuss issues in the security of a homogeneous group who worked together every day.

Other issues of significance were that FGDs stimulated a more open attitude and active participation among participants. They enabled the auditors/facilitators to elicit different opinions and perceptions, and facilitated deeper exploration of issues and of root causes, through workers' support of each other in the

group discussions. It was felt that FGDs provided a clearer picture of an issue, developing greater understanding of issues raised in SSIs and promoting understanding of attitudes and behaviour. Further, they enabled verification or correction of issues raised in SSIs. Discussing issues amongst themselves helped to build worker confidence and facilitated consciousness of group potential and encouraged a sense of group cohesion.

The following are insights gained by facilitators during the course of FGDs in the research project.

Box 5.2 Participation of men and women in Focus Group Discussions

Although both men and women participated well in group discussions, women enjoyed them more than men. This varied, however, according to the structure of the group – all-female groups producing the greatest amount of participation. Gender issues were particularly well discussed, by both old and young female workers, regardless of work category. In general, FGDs:

- actively involved people, producing in-depth and wide-ranging information, all-female groups and all-male groups openly discussing relevant gender-sensitive issues
- most female participants also preferred all-female groups, older women found it very hard to relax and respond in mixed-sex groups
- the majority of female interviewees preferred participation in FGDs, rather than SSIs, because 'they felt more confident together and could remind each other, check information and correct each other'
- more articulate participants (often synonymous with higher job status/education, for example permanent workers) contributed more information
- male participants in mixed-sex groups preferred participation in FGDs to individual interviews
- groups of non-permanent, male workers in a single-sex group were very vocal, talking openly and freely, whereas female groups required more encouragement and time to do the same
- in mixed-sex groups, whether or not males dominated the discussion largely depended upon the age and seniority (in years of service) of the women in the group – younger, more educated women, being very vocal in mixed-sex groups.

A considerable range of issues were discussed in FGDs and a great deal of information was gathered about the "commonly experienced work situation". Issues raised particularly by women included:

- female workers' exposure to chemicals from spraying being undertaken in the greenhouse while they were working, or through non-observance of re-entry times, raised in mixed-sex and all-female groups
- verbal abuse and sexual harassment by male supervisors, which was common in most packhouses and in some production sites, was raised and discussed at length in all-female FGDs, and was also at times raised in both mixed-sex and all-male groups
- impact of income on family responsibilities and other childcare issues was discussed openly and at length by female workers, and especially non-permanent female workers, yet SSIs had provided inadequate data on these

- pregnancy issues including job insecurity, no light work for pregnant women, and inability to care for babies after deliveries, were aired in-depth in most all-female FGDs, especially by non-permanent workers

- frustration experienced by female workers about the lack of communication with management through male supervisors

- inadequacy of toilet facilities, particularly in the field, and the gender-sensitive issue of toilets shared between men and women.

There were a number of procedural issues raised by the facilitators of the FGDs, which have particular gender importance. It was felt that FGDs based on workers with common work categories and status produce the most in-depth discussions around issues. This is particularly significant in relation to the discussion of gender-sensitive issues. The more common, shared factors there are in a group, the greater the group closeness and trust, resulting in less shyness and fear of exposure to authorities. This produced more data, and was relevant for women and men, but especially for women. It was felt that in-depth discussions are very dependent upon the facilitator using the language of the interviewees (contributing to trust building), revealed particularly when dealing with migrant, non-permanent workers.

Facilitators found that mixed-sex groups required more skills to facilitate and took more time. In the African Horticulture study this was partly because of different experiences and reactions of women and men, and also from different work categories as well. The same work experience is key, but single-sex groups allow the free discussion of sensitive issues. Imbalances can occur in single-sex groups if female workers are drawn from different work areas. This has become very obvious where workers from a packhouse are combined with workers from different production sites. The former may be younger with more knowledge, education and skills, while workers from the other areas may be older women who have fewer skills and less education. The greater the homogeneity of a focus group, the more easily the discussion flows. This is of importance when planning FGDs, and trying to ensure an age- and work-balanced sample. Most facilitators further felt that different people should be used for the SSIs and FGDs to maximise the range of experiences and information obtained during an audit.

Facilitators also provided insights in how to best conduct FGDs. Male facilitators in particular articulated the need to take time to introduce themselves properly, 'to make jokes and to use some local slang' and to create links to the group members. All facilitators felt that the venue for the FGDs was a very important issue for the participants – the majority preferring to be at some distance from managerial offices and from fellow workers – to avoid being overheard, outside under a tree or in a discreet venue was preferred.[19] The research facilitators also observed different patterns of participant reaction to the facilitators, many of which were gender-linked.

---

[19] In situations where workers are clearly afraid of talking on-site, some auditors conduct the FGDs off-site, though others are hesitant to do so. Selection should still take place on-site to ensure representation of different worker categories and gender.

Box 5.3 Gender reactions between participants and facilitators

The following are issues raised both by the participants and the facilitators:

- mixed-sex groups felt that a similar combination of male and female auditor/ facilitator was best suited to a mixed group
- the majority of female interviewees expressed a preference for all-female groups to be facilitated by two females, saying 'we can talk about things freely because you are a woman and you understand', however younger women felt that having a male and female facilitator was acceptable
- the majority of men claimed that it did not matter what sex the facilitators were
- the majority of facilitators across the three countries (both male and female) felt that single-sex groups should be facilitated by same sex auditors/researchers

5.2 Participatory group exercises

FGDs include "group exercises", during which the group are asked to depict visually, in role play or drawings, key issues raised in their discussions, or to rank a set of work or gender issues in terms of degree of importance, and to present these visually in a wheel or spider diagram. Experience has shown that there are definite gender preferences with regard to these exercises, linked to the capacities and knowledge of male and female workers. The following are specific participatory tools used in the research in African horticulture.[20]

5.2.1 Mapping

This is a simple exercise which involves the group participants in drawing on paper a map of their work surrounds (see example in Figure 5.1). This exercise helps a group to relax together – a good "ice-breaker". It also proved to be a very good "starting point" for questions, in the guise of discussing the facilities and working conditions depicted. This was very useful in assisting shy people to "open up and become involved". It was enjoyed by both illiterate and semi-literate workers. Men found it easy to use but women took longer to understand what was required, although once they did they participated well. In mixed-sex groups where men dominated the women, one solution was two maps, with one done by the women and the other by the men.

---

[20] Different tools may work better in different contexts and cultures. The examples cited here are based on research in African agriculture and may need to be adapted for other countries and sectors. Further resources and information on the use of a participatory approach and tools can be found on: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/information/index.html and www.iied.org/resource.

Figure 5.1 Mapping

Figure 5.1 Mapping

PACKSHED ROSES

COLD ROOMS

CUTTER
ASSEMBLING
MACHINE

POSt HARVEST Soln

GREEN HOUSE

TOILETS

All-Female Group of Casuals

BANDING TABLE

REJECTS TABLE

GRADING TABLES

GRADING TABLES

O TAP

STORE ROOM F

STORE ROOM M

OFFICE

LOCKER

FGD 1
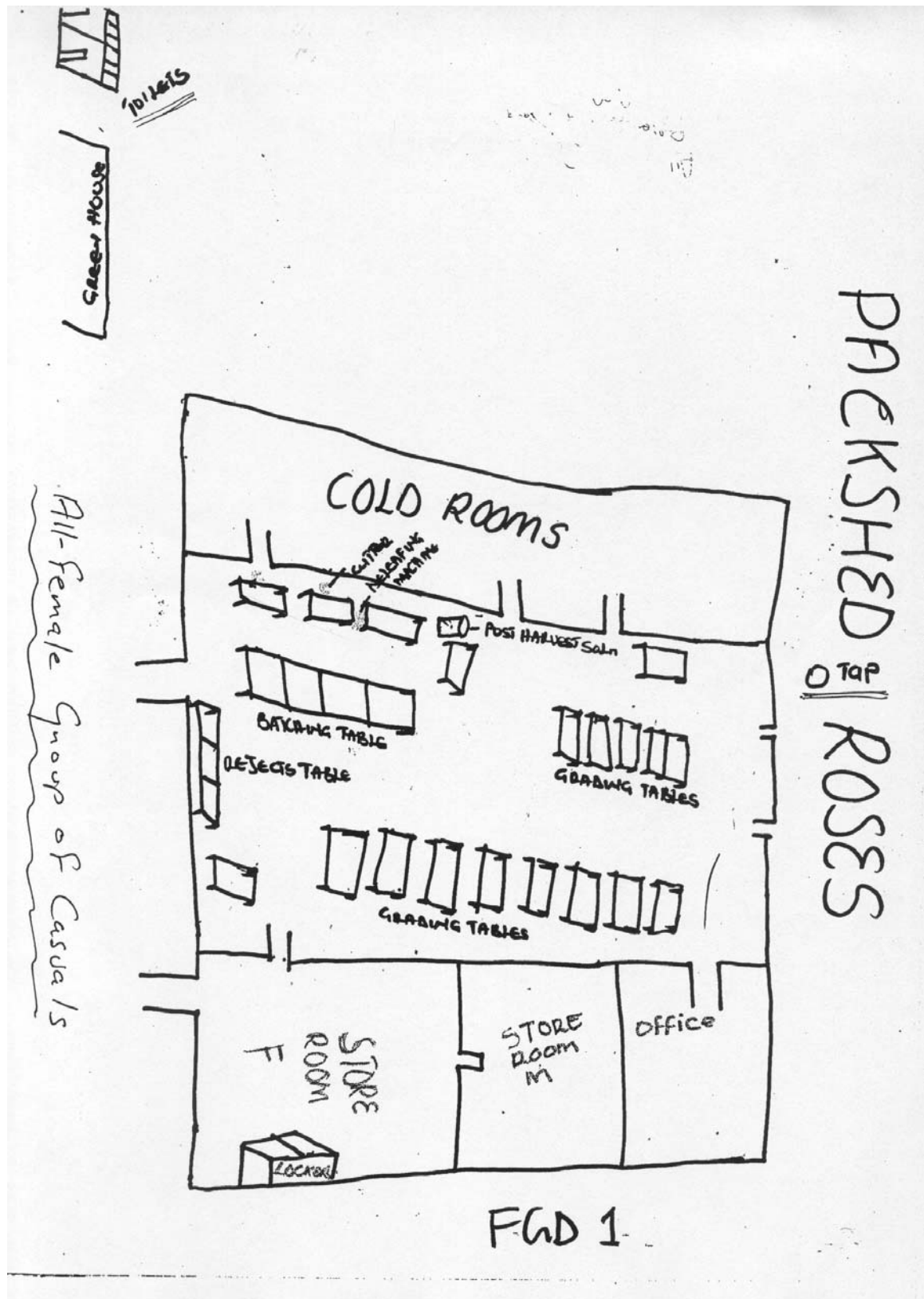
5.2.2 Role-play

Role-play involves the participants in a group "acting out" for the auditor an issue which they feel very strongly about. Auditor/facilitators perceived role-play to have been particularly useful for increasing researcher/auditor understanding of the "burning issues" raised by workers in the FGDs, rather than adding additional information. Role-play facilitated the inclusion of all group members and promotion of group cohesion, it also encouraged the greater participation of shy and quiet group members.

Box 5.4 Gender preference for role-play

Role-plays were liked particularly by female workers, and mixed-sex groups also found them easy to engage with. Others issues were:

- in all-female groups women worked well together in role-plays; they felt free and relaxed in each other's company, expressing their enjoyment of acting as they, 'laughed and became totally involved in the play'
- both young and old female workers found it easy to participate
- where women acted male roles they exaggerated them, perhaps acting out their perceptions of the aggressive behaviour of male supervisors
- in some mixed-sex groups role-play worked less well, with males taking the lead and insisting on playing roles of "authority and seniority" such as the supervisors, while women were the workers, illustrating the culturally determined perceptions of women's position in society
- the all-male group enthusiastically entered into role-play

Workplace issues highlighted by role-plays were often limited to a single one – that of verbal harassment by supervisors. Almost all the role-plays in the research project on ethical trade in African horticulture focused on verbal harassment on the job, illustrating the harshness and abuse meted out to workers by the supervisors. This was the major theme enacted by all particularly female and most mixed-sex groups, with one mixed-sex group of young people including sexual harassment too. Other aspects, in addition to the verbal abuse, included:

- supervisor favouritism towards some female workers in the packhouse, and the enormous job insecurity suffered by others – generally non-permanent female workers – with whom supervisors constantly find fault (female group)
- abuse of powers by the supervisors, showing their tendencies to refuse permission to take sick leave or go to the toilet, cancel work tickets, and not record work done (mixed-sex group)
- supervisors refusal/inability to communicate workers' issues to management, generally telling management something totally different (mixed-sex group)
- gender issues came out, such as pregnant women who are not given light work, a mother's difficulty getting time off to take her sick child to hospital, and spraying in the green-house while women were picking flowers.

5.2.3 Ranking tools

Ranking exercises were undertaken in all FGDs, either in relation to gender- or work-related issues. During all FGDs a number of issues were discussed, and some evoked strong reactions. In order to clarify the relative order of importance given to each one by the participants, a visual tool was used after the discussion – a wheel or spider – which reflected the order of priority given to each issue.

- Female participants were able to rank issues after explanation as to what was required of them, accompanied by simple examples.
- Women found it easy to rank the first three issues, but thereafter found it difficult to decide upon the relative importance of others.
- Young women had the greatest difficulty in understanding what was expected of them
- Male participants and better educated females were more able to rank issues.

The wheel or spider was visually depicted once a set of issues had been ranked. An example of a wheel diagram is provided in Figure 5.2, and Spider in Figure 5.3. Of importance was the discovery that the ranking exercises produced new information – data not raised in any other exercise or by any other tool.

There was considerable difference in the responses of men and women to the two different ranking tools – the wheel and the spider – in the research project, highlighting some important gender differences.

Box 5.5 Gender preferences in the use of the wheel and spider

- Most female participants liked using the wheel, enjoying its creative nature and their own chance to draw, showing real interest in what symbols others chose to use
- Wheels drawn by females showed more variation in issues than those by males: men concentrated more on wages and work related issues, while women included childcare and health
- The wheel was considered by female facilitators to be good 'for enhancing group spirit and motivating people'
- Men were better than women at the organisational aspect of drawing the wheel, and all-male groups found both wheel and spider easy to produce
- Mixed sex-groups also found the wheel easy to use; men dominating in the organisational aspect and women vying to do the drawings, some describing it as 'more visual than the spider – also more colourful, and permitting more involvement'
- Some women found the spider less interactive
- Where women in all-female groups had difficulty using a spider ranking tool, facilitators felt that this was because they could not conceptualise it, and therefore apportion relative importance to its parts
- A migrant labourer male group preferred the spider to the wheel, describing the former as 'less complicated and taking up less time'.

Figure 5.2 Wheel diagram

Mixed-sex group : Casuals

PROBLEMS

1. Low wages
2. Long period for Casual
3. No benefits for casual eg funeral, Medical
4. No overtime
5. No tea-break
6. Poor Meals
7. No Personal Protective Clothing e.g Gumboots
8. No Job Security

FGD 12

3- FEMALE
3- MALE
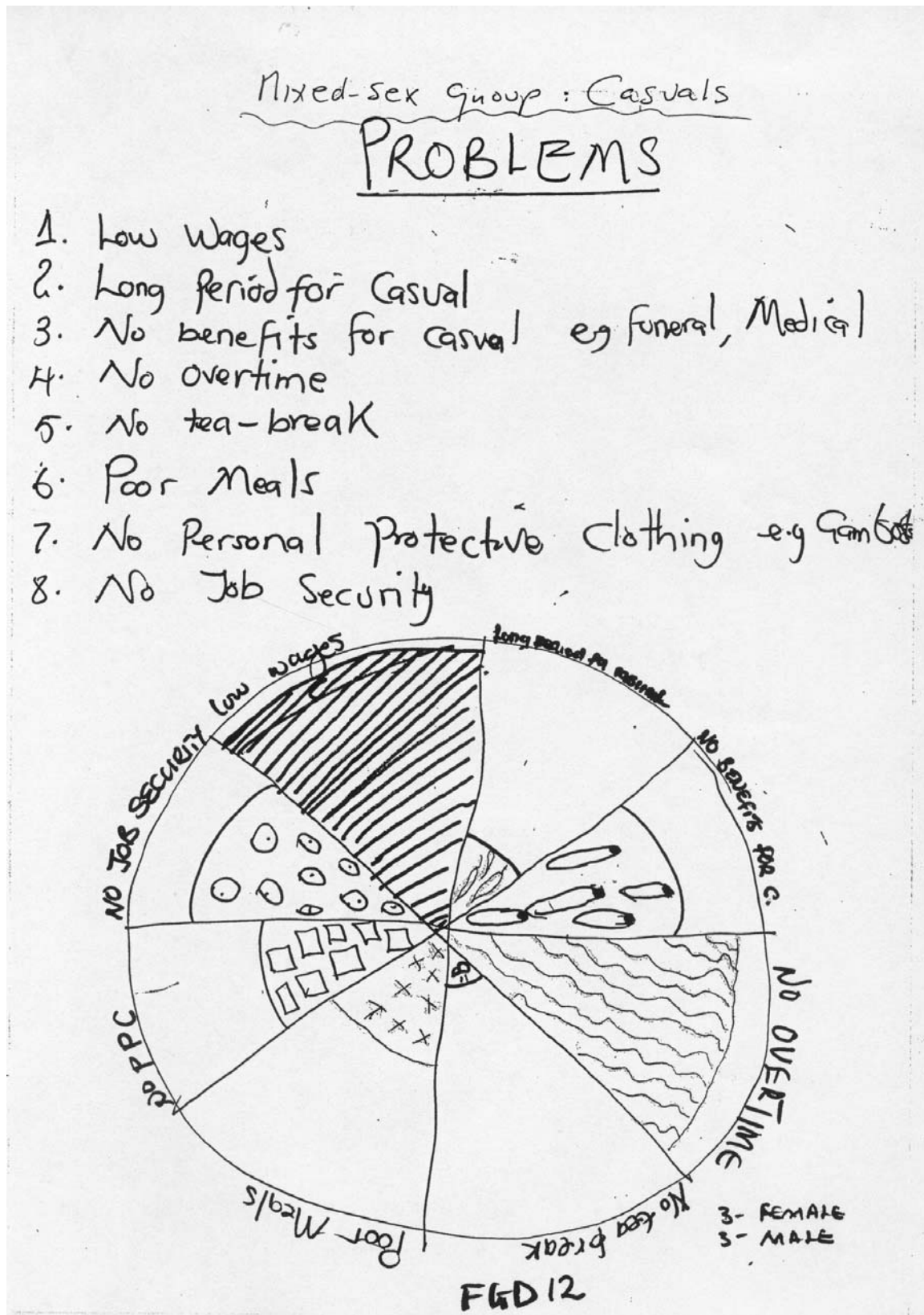
Figure 5.3 Spider diagram

Spider diagram showing obstacles to change

Kamati ya wafanyakazi
Non-Functional Workers
Committee

Kukosa mahali pa kusema
Lack of communication channels
to air grievances

Wafanya kazi kuogopa
kuywa
Workers
fear of
dismissal.

Wakubwa kuwa wakali
Strict/harsh Management
+ Supervisors

Kutokuwa na kazi ya kudumu

Wasimamizi wanaume
Only male Supervisors

All female Group: 4 Packers 2 Pickers

Table 5.1 Summary of participatory tools

Participatory tool	Gender responses
Mapping	The layout of a specific work area, or the worksite as a whole: males would be better at the latter than females, as spatial perceptions are linked to literacy and exposure to "a larger world". However, once women understand what is required they can very easily draw their own working area.
Role-play	Females often enjoy role play – especially in relation to any sensitive issue e.g. sexual harassment, job harassment from male supervisors, late working hours, or lack of money to care for their children.
Wheel	Both men and women can draw the wheel equally well. Women appear to like the wheel because (a) its roundness is like their perception of life itself; and (b) they like to participate in the drawings within each segment of the wheel. If men use a wheel for ranking issues they often fill in the segments using lines and angular designs, while women will draw patterns, ranging from flowers to children, to circles and birds.
Spider	Men prefer using the spider to rank as it can be done by one person, although in most cases the group members are all encouraged to "draw a leg". Women who do not like spiders in real life if given a choice would rather not use it.
Transect Walk	Generally undertaken with 2 or more females from the FGDs, because once again it's natural to walk and talk in a group.

5.2.4 Participatory observation

Participatory observation – termed a transect walk – involves walking through the working and/or living areas on the worksite, providing insights into the diversity and differences that exist among groups there, and serving to cross-check the verbal data collected. The inclusion of 2–3 workers in this walk enabled it to serve also as a "listening survey", to facilitate the acquisition of a deeper understanding of social relations, attitudes and behaviour through looking and listening.

Such walks were generally undertaken with women who were happy to accompany the facilitator, and the observations made were used to check data verbally shared. Female facilitators found this tool to be useful in deepening the relationship with the group, if undertaken at the tea or lunch break, during the course of the FGD.

These group exercises, which take place either before, during or at the end of the FGD, all play a very important role in highlighting and expanding upon data gathered verbally. For example in the role-play which deals with a "strongly felt issue", the women reproduce 'actual scenes of job or sexual harassment', highlighting details that had not been thought of as having sufficient value to communicate verbally in an individual or group discussion. Similarly, ranking tools not only prioritise various difficulties raised in a discussion, but serve to highlight the degree of importance of a specific issue which may alter the auditor's perception of it, changing a partial to full non-compliance for example.

There are a number of tools that can also be used which are not discussed here. These include timelines and historical mapping, which examine changes over a certain period. Another is to map out daily routines, encouraging workers to discuss all aspects of their work and household activities, including transport to and from work. This helps to depict the specific problems faced by women workers with childcare and domestic responsibilities. Mobility maps can be used to measure time spent undertaking a specific task – using two variables; the number of times a person has to undertake a task and the time or distance covered to complete it. These are very good if used with women in trying to understand "time usage" involved in a single day of their lives.

6 Participation and a multi-stakeholder process

The use of participatory tools in the audit process can play an important role in highlighting gender issues, which a more formal snapshot audit can fail to uncover. But the use of such tools is only one aspect of a wider participatory approach to codes of labour practice. The philosophy behind this approach is that workers should not simply be passive objects of an external audit, but should become more actively engaged in a process of improvement of their working conditions. Worker engagement can be extended through developing ongoing local independent monitoring and verification involving worker representatives as part of a more sustainable approach.

An important limit to worker engagement in social auditing is their insecure economic position relative to their employer or senior management. Workers individually are often fearful of losing their jobs if they express their concerns too openly. This is particularly so for vulnerable insecure workers, who are more likely to experience labour abuse. Social audits must involve, wherever possible, trade unions and elected worker representatives. Shop stewards and elected worker representatives should be interviewed as part of the pre-audit process, in awareness creation, and during the audit. They should also be involved in feedback and remediation at every stage. They are able to play a vital part in ensuring compliance is maintained, and that improvements made in working conditions are sustained after an audit is completed.

At a broader level, a participatory approach to social auditing should include the involvement of industry trade unions and other relevant NGOs. This can be done through consultation prior to an audit, to ascertain the key issues facing workers in a particular sector, including important gender issues. Auditors are then alert to potential problems of non-compliance when they visit a site. This is particularly important where the site itself has little or no unionisation. However, local trade unions and NGOs often lack the resources or capacity to become involved in numerous individual social audits in a large number of companies, given the many other pressures on their time.

Social auditing that forms part of a "process", rather than a one-off visit by auditors completing a checklist inspection, can be further extended through the development of local multi-stakeholder

initiatives.[21] Local country codes of labour practice, promoted and supported by a multi-stakeholder association which includes industry, trade unions, relevant NGOs and government representatives, would provide greater local accountability. It extends beyond the concept of compliance with international standards by individual firms, and focuses more widely on the sustained improvement of the working and living conditions of workers of a particular sector or country.

Local multi-stakeholder initiatives ideally involve companies, trade unions, NGOs and government. Such bodies are able to draw on the wide range of knowledge and experience of the different stakeholders in a sector or country. They involve participants who have in-depth knowledge of relevant national law, industry, employment and social context, as well as key issues facing workers. They can play a role both in relation to facilitation, and monitoring and verification of a code of labour practice. The services of such a body can help in:

- the promotion and implementation of the Code of Labour Practice
- the development of a harmonised code that is locally relevant
- the organisation and provision of services such as awareness-creation, pre-audits and remedial action advice to producers
- the provision of information services to external stakeholders, industry associations and other related bodies, nationally and internationally
- the task of contracting local independent, qualified social auditors to undertake social audits
- ongoing independent monitoring that involves worker representation.

All of the above contribute towards the improvement of labour conditions and standards, of management/worker relations and ultimately of the growth of more ethical trading. The development of local multi-stakeholder initiatives is still at a fairly early stage, and experience so far indicates that there are many challenges involved. In the following section we briefly describe existing multi-stakeholder initiatives which have been established in countries relating to our research in African horticulture.

6.1 Examples of local multi-stakeholder initiatives

6.1.1 Agricultural Ethics Assurance Association of Zimbabwe (AEAAZ)

The Agricultural Ethics Assurance Association of Zimbabwe (AEAAZ) was set up following the ETI pilot project in Zimbabwe. It is an autonomous body, governed by representatives of producers, trade unions and NGOs, that aims to promote and ensure compliance with the Zimbabwean National Agricultural Code of Practice. It seeks to improve social, chemical and environmental standards on agricultural export farms, with a view to maintaining and improving access to export markets. By the end

---

[21]   The term "stakeholder" is used here to refer to 'any individual, community or organisation that affects or is affected by the operations of a company . . . All stakeholders are not equal and should not be treated equally. The workers whose working conditions are the subject of codes of labour practice are recognised as having the greatest "stake" in ethical trading' (*ETI Workbook* 2003: 107).

of 2001, 300 producers had registered with the association to implement the code and be certified to export to Europe and the UK. The success of the ongoing process of awareness-creation, pre-audits and final audits using the same participatory methods resulted initially in a rapid expansion of membership, due in large measure to the vastly improved relationship between employer and employee, and the increasing number of growers who complied with the social code. This was reinforced by overseas buyer's acceptance of the AEAAZ Social accreditation. Unfortunately, in 2002, the political problems in Zimbabwe, and particularly the land invasions in agriculture, subsequently restricted its work (Auret 2002).

6.1.2 Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA), South Africa

A similar type of body was officially launched in 2003 in South Africa, following the ETI wine pilot in the Western Cape. The Wine Industry Ethical Trade Association (WIETA) is an autonomous body which all companies, trade unions and NGOs linked to the wine industry, and committed to its objectives, can join. It has an Executive Committee which comprises representatives from each constituency group plus government, and has its own code of practice (linked to the ETI base code and South African legislation) and sets out in more detail what each of the ETI principles entails within the wine industry context. It has the mission of:

- Formulating and adopting a code of good practice governing employment standards for those involved in the growing of grapes for wine-making purposes and the production and bottling of wine
- Promoting the adoption of, and adherence to, the code of good practice amongst all wine producers and growers
- Educating producers and workers on the provisions of the code
- Appointing independent social auditors to ensure that members of the association observe and implement the code of good practice
- Determining ways of encouraging implementation of, and compliance with, the code and determining measures to be taken in the case of non-compliance.

By February 2004, WIETA had 48 members, and was engaged in developing social auditing and monitoring procedures for its member wine farms and estates.[22]

6.1.3 Horticultural Ethical Business Initiative (HEBI), Kenya

During 2002, local civil society organisations spearheaded a campaign against poor working conditions on Kenyan flower farms, spawning a series of articles in the Kenyan press. These activities generated concern about the reputation of the industry in overseas markets, and were responsible for bringing together a range of stakeholders to engage in dialogue on the labour practices of flower farms. A Steering Committee – the Horticultural Ethical Business Initiative (HEBI) – was formed to guide social accountability in the

---

[22] For more detail see WIETA webpage on www.wosa.co.za/wieta.asp. For background information on the ETI Wine Pilot see ETI (2004).

horticulture sector. It is a tripartite body composed of members from government, civil society organisations and trade associations/employers. Unions were invited to participate, although to date they have declined to take part. A number of organisations have also been involved as observers. HEBI has had a number of teething problems stemming from the difficulties entailed in managing the expectations of stakeholders with varying interests. Nevertheless, there is consensus among the committee that a multi-stakeholder approach to code implementation (including worker participation) may be the only way to resolve some of the persistent employment problems facing workers in the industry, and maintain Kenya's access to European markets (Dolan, Opondo and Smith 2004).

6.2 Advantages and challenges of a local multi-stakeholder approach

Developing local multi-stakeholder initiatives has potential benefits over a more formal externally audited compliance-based approach. The setting up of an independent body that represents different stakeholders provides a degree of independence from any one organisation dominating the process. Importantly it facilitates workers' representation through trade union participation, giving voice to workers who may normally be fearful of speaking out. Involvement of NGOs can help to ensure that sensitive issues, such as gender and racial discrimination are raised, as well as work-related issues such as childcare and social provision. Where government is involved, it can also provide a bridge between voluntary initiatives based on codes, and national regulation and enforcement of labour standards. Such a body can provide guidance, oversee code implementation and facilitate auditing on a basis that is mutually agreed between all stakeholders. Bringing different stakeholders together is important in building new alliances, and forging new ways forward.

Developing local multi-stakeholder initiatives also poses significant challenges. One of the main obstacles to developing a local initiative is resourcing, particularly in the early phase when it is just getting off the ground and does not yet have sufficient membership to generate funds of its own. Which stakeholders should legitimately be involved, and how the process is managed, will vary in different locations, with no set formula for success. In some countries not all trade unions are independent of employers or the state with democratically elected officials. NGOs are a heterogeneous grouping with no formal accountability to workers, and some NGOs do not have the same level of local community engagement as others. There are issues around the relative power of different groups, and the economic resources available to employers relative to trade unions and NGOs. There are often inherent tensions between stakeholders (as there should be if they are reflecting their constituency interests), with deeply held suspicions on different sides. These can be difficult to overcome, need careful management, and it often takes time to build trust.

From a gender perspective, local multi-stakeholder initiatives present both opportunities and challenges. Women in insecure employment are often least likely to be organised or unionised, reinforcing their fragmentation and vulnerability. Multi-stakeholder initiatives that involve trade unions and NGOs sensitive to the needs of such women workers are more likely to ensure gender issues facing such workers are addressed. The combination of participatory social auditing and independent monitoring based on

stakeholder engagement can thus help to give voice to such vulnerable workers. However, gender discrimination is often deeply embedded in employment practice and social relations. Local organisations (trade unions and NGOs) which are steeped in that social context could also serve to reinforce existing gender norms. Hence, whilst local multi-stakeholder initiatives can open up the space for gender and racial discrimination to be addressed, this is not automatic. They create an opportunity, but not a guarantee, for the enhanced participation of insecure women workers in the implementation of codes.

Developing a harmonised local code can also help to overcome the problem of proliferation of diverse codes that face many suppliers. Engagement by trade unions and NGOs sensitive to gender issues can help to ensure a harmonised code addresses core labour standards and gender discrimination. But there remains the challenge of international recognition by buyers, even if the code is benchmarked against an internationally recognised code such as that of the ETI, and incorporates all Core ILO Conventions. All the local initiatives in African horticulture discussed above have faced this difficulty, and it has not been easy to overcome (even though their linkages to the ETI have helped in relation to the UK market). Despite these challenges, local multi-stakeholder initiatives are becoming more established, and represent an important move away from a northern led top-down approach to codes of labour practice.

7 Concluding remarks

A participatory approach to social auditing is viewed as part of a process that involves awareness creation and dialogue between employers, workers and their representatives. It aims to ensure that more insecure and vulnerable workers, who often have low confidence and literacy levels, have a voice in social audits. It involves the use of tools drawn from participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning and action. It stresses the need to use local auditors, with local knowledge and language and sensitive to gender issues. This is in contrast to the culture of "snapshot" social auditing, based on brief formal visits by outside professional auditors. Here the focus is on "policing" suppliers, who in turn carry out the minimum changes needed to pass an audit, rather than making sustainable improvements in working conditions. Through awareness creation, a participatory approach attempts to change the "mindsets" of employers, and increase understanding of their rights by workers. The focus is not only to ensure that minimum labour standards are met, but also that improvement in employment practices reach all groups of workers.

A participatory approach can be developed at different levels. At a minimum it involves the use of participatory tools in the process of social auditing to ensure that the views and voices of workers, especially women workers, are captured in an audit. More genuine participation by workers also requires the involvement of workers' representatives or shop stewards at site level, and sector trade unions and NGOs both in the awareness creation and auditing process. At its broadest level, it involves the development of local multi-stakeholder initiatives that bring companies, trade unions and NGOs together with government in forming an independent body able to oversee the implementation, and monitoring of a locally relevant code of labour practice. They provide local rather than external governance of the process of code implementation that is sustainable locally, as an ongoing process of improvement. Such

an approach faces many challenges, but it represents a shift away from a formal top-down compliance orientation, to the greater empowerment of workers and their representative organisations as an essential part of the process of improving labour standards and working conditions.

References

Auret, D., 2002, *Participatory Social Auditing of Labour Standards, A Handbook for Code of Practice Implementers*, Harare: Agricultural Ethics Assurance Association of Zimbabwe

Barrientos, S. (forthcoming), *Corporate Social Responsibility, Employment and Global Sourcing by Multinational Enterprises*, Geneva: International Labour Office (ILO)

Barrientos, S., Hossain, N. and Kabeer, N. (forthcoming), 'The gender dimensions of the globalisation of production', *Background Paper to the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization*, Geneva: International Labour Office (ILO)

Bendell, J., 2001, *Towards Participatory Workplace Appraisal: Report from a Focus Group of Women Banana Workers*, Bristol: New Academy of Business

Chambers, R., 1997, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications

Dolan, C., Opondo, M. and Smith, S., 2004, 'Gender, rights and participation in the Kenya cut flower industry', *NRI Report* 2768, Greenwich: Natural Resources Institute

Ethical Trading Initiative, 2004, *Inspecting Labour Practice in the Wine Industry in the Western Cape, South Africa, 1998–2001*, London: ETI, www.ethicaltrade.org/Z/lib/2004/02/sawine-rept/index.shtml [Access date August 2004]

—— 2003, *ETI Workbook, Step by Step Guide to Ethical Trade*, London: ETI

—— 1998, *Purposes and Principles*, London: ETI www.ethicaltrade.org

International Labour Organisation, 2002, *Decent Work and the Informal Economy*, International Labour Conference, 90th Session, Geneva: ILO

Jenkins, R., Pearson, R. and Seyfang, G. (eds), 2002, *Corporate Responsibility and Labour Rights, Codes of Conduct in the Global Economy*, London: Earthscan

Kabeer, N., 1994, *Reversed Realities*, London: Verso

Kaplinsky, R. and Morris, M., 2001, *A Manual for Value Chain Research*, International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, www.ids.ac.uk/ids/global/man&hand.html [Accessed 6 December 2004]

O'Rourke, D., 2002, 'Monitoring the Monitors: A Critique of Third-Party Labour Monitoring', in R. Jenkins, R. Pearson and G. Seyfang (eds), *Corporate Responsibility and Labour Rights: Codes of Conduct in the Global Economy,* London: Earthscan: 196–208

Rowlands, J., 1997, *Questioning Empowerment, Working with Women in Honduras*, Oxford: Oxfam

Smith, S., Auret, D., Barrientos, S., Dolan, C., Kleinbooi, K., Njobvu, C., Opondo, M., and Tallontire, A., 2004, 'Ethical trade in African horticulture: gender, rights and participation', *IDS Working Paper* 223, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

Urminsky, M. (ed.), no date, *Self Regulation in the Workplace: Codes of Conduct, Social Labelling and Socially Responsible Investment*, Geneva: International Labour Office (ILO)

Utting, P., 2002, *Regulating Business via Multistakeholder Initiatives: A Preliminary Assessment. in Voluntary Approaches to Corporate Responsibility: Readings and a Resource Guide*, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V., 2002, *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics*, Oklahoma: World Neighbours, www.wn.org