

Rainforest Alliance response to the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

The Rainforest Alliance is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the case study, *Allegations of sexual harassment and abuse in Unilever's Kericho plantation; Kenya*, by Libby Abbott. As an organisation committed to conserving biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods, we see this case study as a useful contribution to our understanding of issues relating to human rights and gender inequality and exploitation within the important social dimensions of the sustainability Paradigm.

Since the report by SOMO into the allegations pertaining to sexual harassment on the Unilever owned Kericho tea estate were first brought to our attention, we have continued to look at ways we can improve our contributions to addressing these important issues. The Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) standard against which we certify is continually reviewed and improved. We meet with farmers, farmworkers and other stakeholders in each area to better understand the local issues. This information is used to continually improve the training given to auditors so that they are sensitive to the social and ecological issues in each local context.

The Rainforest Alliance considers its certification program as a means to pursue the broader goal of sustainable production and consumption systems. Our experienced auditors are trained to distinguish between isolated or uncommon incidences of non-compliance and systemic problems. Audits are based on reviews of documented information, observations, and interviews with workers and community leaders. Rainforest Alliance auditors know how to ensure that workers are comfortable and can speak their minds without fear of repercussion. They – and the owners and workers of the farms being audited – understand that their identities are not revealed in our reports. Further, audits are usually done by local professionals. The audit of the Kericho plantation was done by the Nairobi-based AfriCert, whose experts are both knowledgeable and sensitive to realities on the tea estates. Audits are important but only one part of our approach to sustainable production that also includes technical assistance and trainings to farm managers and workers. We are in continuous dialogue with stakeholder groups to help to improve our knowledge and understanding of issues around human rights and gender inequality. This has involved, besides local engagement, visits and support from the senior management of the organization.

We have developed a program in partnership with the Ethical Tea Partnership to provide training to managers and supervisors, based upon the Ethical Trading Initiative methodology and program, *The ETI Supervisory Training Programme: promoting equal treatment of workers*. We have commissioned training programs in five Kenya Tea Development Agency factories in the past four months. Likewise, in partnership with the Ethical Tea Partnership and Solidaridad, we are planning to scale up the supervisory training program to cover the wider tea industry (i.e. across Kenya and in other tea producing countries) in the next two years. We are currently looking for further funding to carry out this work.

Human rights abuses require continuous monitoring, training and awareness raising, both among supervisors and management, but also among workers within the tea industry (and elsewhere). We appreciate the work that Unilever reports to have done in response to the SOMO report and encourage them to continue these efforts for the greater welfare of the communities as a part the sustainability movement in the tea industry globally. The Rainforest Alliance will play its full part in this process while recognising that any auditing and certification system, while valuable, does have limitations and thus can only be part of a broader commitment by companies and society to tackle these issues.

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