

The Benefits of Collective Bargaining for Women Workers in Morocco



Photo: CDT

IN MOROCCO, as in many countries, the lowest-paid workers typically labor in informal employment, many of them in agriculture where the reach of national labor laws and regulations is poor at best. When labor laws are not upheld, frequent and ongoing violations of worker rights occur. Workers often are forced to work long hours, are paid less than the minimum wage and rarely receive retirement or other benefits that they are guaranteed under national law. This is especially true for women who are typically the most precarious and lowest-paid agricultural workers in many value chains and who are especially subject to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence at work.

This brief is based on findings in *The Benefits of Collective Bargaining for Women: A Case Study of Morocco*, which explores the landmark collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in Morocco's agricultural sector that the Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT) negotiated with Domaines Brahim Zniber¹ Diana Holding Group in 2015.

Morocco adopted its current Labor Code in 2004, after a long series of negotiations and consultations with many

“We now get three months leave and food for the babies. We even get bottles for the babies.”

—Woman, permanent worker,
Domaines Brahim Zniber Diana

stakeholders.² The labor code guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms at work and establishes mechanisms for social dialogue at the national and enterprise level. The Labor Code specifically established the right to form and join a union and collectively bargain. The Moroccan constitution also grants workers the right to form and join unions, strike and bargain collectively.³ Yet despite these guarantees, few collective bargaining agreements exist at private companies in Morocco.

Because collective bargaining significantly improves workers' wages and working conditions, the CDT reached out to workers on Domaines Brahim Zniber Diana, helping them form unions since 1992. After a series of conflicts and strikes that lasted many years, CDT succeeded in negotiating a collective bargaining agreement. The landmark agreement made significant improvements for workers, and particularly for women workers.

The agreement established new wage rates, salaries, seniority and merit-based payments; specified training opportunities; improved production facilities; and enhanced health and safety compliance. There had been significant inequality between male workers and female workers in terms of pay, opportunity and job security, and the agreement enabled women to take on production and processing roles that they had previously not held, with greater opportunities for advancement and higher wage rates.

KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Women workers prioritize benefits and protections differently from men.** While the CBA guarantees better benefits and more job security across the board for workers, focus groups and in-depth interviews showed that women workers were more likely to emphasize access to social security and pensions through the National Social Security Fund, provision of electricity and water and maternity benefits. As women's participation in the union becomes more normalized, their unique concerns can be addressed, including those that go beyond issues related to their reproductive roles.
- ▶ **Women made key workplace gains in reducing gender discrimination.** Men and women workers are now paid equally for equal work because of the CBA. Women workers report that for the first time, they receive training to improve job skills, enabling them to qualify for higher-skilled positions with better wages that previously were available only to male workers. With the CBA, women say they are no longer discriminated against during pregnancy;



they receive three months of leave after childbirth in addition to receiving a delivery allowance of 1,000 dirhams (\$105). Men also receive three days of paternal leave. Nursing mothers are allowed a one-hour break to breastfeed for up to two years after giving birth.

“... when you must stay home, it is guaranteed that you will be paid. You will not starve.”

—Woman, permanent worker,
Domaines Brahim Zniber Diana

- ▶ **The CBA significantly improved overall wages and working conditions.** Men and women report that their wages are more stable, predictable and transparent. They are now paid for the full day, regardless of hours worked. Prior to the CBA, workers were paid only a portion of the daily wage if bad weather or other unforeseeable events impacted their workplace participation. In addition to regular weekends off and (select) national and religious holidays, there now are provisions for taking time off for illnesses, deaths in the family and other emergencies.
- ▶ **The collective bargaining agreement has ensured stability and sustainability in employment all year,** particularly for temporary workers, the majority of whom are women. Temporary workers also have been integrated gradually as permanent workers.
- ▶ **Promotion and bonuses are generalized for temporary workers.**
- ▶ **The CBA has offered other advantages on social benefits beyond the labor code for women.** Women benefit from 15 days' leave from work in case of death of the woman's husband (with 6,311 dirhams/\$500 as allowance).

“Before the CBA we worked extra hours but were not paid for them. Now we are paid for them.”

—Woman, permanent worker,
Domaines Brahim Zniber Diana

- ▶ **The CBA standardized processes and increased workplace transparency.** The CBA set clear guidelines for how supervisors and workers should treat each other and the ways in which conflicts and work-related concerns should be addressed. Women workers reported that as a result, they feel more respected and that their interactions with supervisors significantly improved. A clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities and of the extent or limit of the tasks involved has created a more peaceful and stress-free work environment for both supervisors and workers. Women workers also reported that hours and bonuses are more transparent as a result of the CBA and, in particular, that overtime hours and pay are observed more closely. Work hours are more regular and predictable, and weekends off are binding.

- ▶ **Productivity and investment have risen on the farms covered by the CBA.** The employer reports that productivity has risen and investment conditions have improved as a result of the CBA.
- ▶ **Key stakeholders and government officials support the CBA.** The employer has repeatedly expressed support for this agreement and the Morocco Ministry for Labor has also praised it, citing its exemplary negotiations process and farsighted vision of cooperation.

The CDT's strategy seeks to use collective bargaining to ensure labor code implementation and go beyond the scope of national legislation to improve terms and conditions of employment. Were such an agreement to be effectively generalized to other farms and agricultural employment, more than 3 million agricultural workers throughout Morocco would benefit from formal employment and improved terms and conditions of employment.

Endnotes

1 Domaines Brahim Zniber engages in multiple businesses including wine and olive oil production, horticulture, poultry and animal feed, seafood, packaging and fertilizer production. In addition, the company has a bottling franchise for Coca Cola.

2 ILO, "Good Practices on the Promotion of Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining Rights in Morocco," International Labor Organization, Morocco, 2015.

3 With some exceptions, most notably members of the armed forces, police, and some members of the judiciary.