

MWW – Building local capacity



Who are MWW?

MWW are a fresh produce grower and importer. Operating in multiple sites both in the UK and overseas they grow and supply a range of fruit and vegetables for the UK market.

Summary

Over the past 3 years MWW have carried out extensive work with their partners in Kenya, East African Growers Fresh Produce Ltd (EAGFP), to build capacity and target improvement within their supply base. This involved working with the management team, external NGOs as well as the wider farming supply base. Toolkits, training and external expertise were provided to ensure their own internal management of labour standards was effective. Recent opportunities with government funded COVID-19 projects have also been utilised to broaden the impact for their workers. Not only have they seen significant improvement from a compliance perspective but also have received insightful and positive feedback from the workforce.



This case study has been developed with the support of Co-op as part of Co-op's 2021 'Treating People Fairly Awards' at which MWW was shortlisted. Co-op is one of MWW's largest customers, whom they have supplied for over 20 years. The awards celebrate excellence in human rights practice, encourage suppliers to learn from each other and inspire new ways of mitigating future threats to worker welfare. Supplier entries were assessed by an independent, expert panel and awards were presented at a Co-op supplier event. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to learn more about human rights at Co-op.

"I have seen good cooperation from the farmers. It has improved working relationships. The ethical trade programme we have put in place is a good forum for exchange of ideas and feedback from the farmers and farmer workers, especially on social compliance."

– Nipul Dodhia, Managing Director of EAGFP

Taking action

Capacity building for Ethical Trade

The purpose of the project with MWW's partners in Kenya, East African Growers Fresh Produce Ltd (EAGFP), was to build their capacity to conduct internal audits and to take ownership of ethical trade progress. This took place over 18 months. During that time Partner Africa conducted training sessions, six farm audits and gathered feedback from 68 telephone interviews and worker questionnaires across all levels of EAGFP's workforce and supply chain. During the same period, the EAGFP internal auditors conducted nine internal audits. This was all part of the aim to bring all farmers under EAGFP contracts in line with the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) Base Code and Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA) requirements.

The first step was a full day training session, carried out by Partner Africa, for EAGFP staff and farmers to give a foundational understanding of ethical trade, explaining the need for audits, what they involve, and the benefits of responsible business practices and compliance.

Upskilling for EAGFP teams

The focus of this work was the transfer of social auditing skills and knowledge into EAGFP's internal social compliance systems. This was done in collaboration with Partner Africa (PA), which has extensive social auditing experience in Africa. The internal team received training and resources on responsible business practices and ethical trade standards, how to assess these practically, and how to adapt these in the smallholder farming context. This also led to a deeper buy-in and understanding for the business around labour standards.

A PA Lead Auditor attended an audit led by the EAGFP internal auditor every 6 months, to assess the audit performance and to identify areas for improvement.

Resources for farms

A toolkit was developed to provide farms with practical guidelines regarding human rights policies, covering topics such as underage workers, harassment, fair wages etc. It includes contracts and payslip templates, as well as policies and best practices checklists. EAGFP created files for each farm, based on their individual needs and where they were at in the responsible business journey.

Worker engagement

Various worker engagement tools have been used to monitor progress through PA directly, through another organisation called Wider and also with the development of their own tools for use by the on-farm technical teams. The data from this feedback has been used to target work and improvements.



Taking action

COVID-19 Support

Vulnerable Supply Chain Facility (VSCF) was a successful collaborative bid for UK Government funding, led by the Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), which funded the project 'Securing workers' rights in a COVID-19 context in East African agriculture supply chains'. The companies that worked in partnership on this project were Co-op, Flamingo, MM Flowers, MWW, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Union Roasted, Waitrose, together with Partner Africa.

The project started with a needs assessment across several agricultural businesses in Kenya before any of the work streams were defined, to get feedback from management teams and workforce, to ensure the projects truly reflected the real needs and not just the ideas of the companies involved.

EAGFP was able to carry out targeted projects, which included:

- Worker groups received COVID-19 awareness training, alongside an SMS awareness campaign. A series of learning events and knowledge packs were developed and used alongside the training, to spread awareness and share the learnings with the wider supply base. Elements of the resource pack have been used to support work streams elsewhere, most notably with MWW's Dominican Republic farm workers.
- EAGFP received COVID-19 management and business continuity training.
- Worker engagement call cycles, conducted by the organisation '&Wider', highlighted a key issue of "wages run out before the month end". In response to this, financial literacy training was provided to the workforce. Training supported workers in setting financial targets and drafting monthly budgets. The workers who were trained have rolled out the training and will continue to share the lessons learned with their colleagues and friends.

At the end of the project, review meetings were held with all the stakeholders to ensure the learnings were incorporated into future plans. The learnings of the project have been shared through government led learning events, in forums such as Food Network for Ethical Trade (FNET) and also Co-op's Ethical Trade events and forums.

"I was curious to find out about COVID-19, how it is treated, and what I can do to protect myself. We followed what we were taught and I then taught people at my church, co-workers and my family. It has really helped, hygiene has improved and we have not had a single positive case since."

- Janet Nyamwitha, attendee of the COVID-19 training

Making
an
impact

Impact

Capacity building for Ethical Trade

The results of the worker interviews and questionnaires were insightful and overwhelmingly positive. The internal audits over the period showed noticeable improvements in key compliance areas, such as worker health and safety, hygiene and record keeping (payroll, working hours, etc). Worker knowledge of expected standards has also increased. The number of non-compliances has reduced and the use of formal policies and procedures has increased.

EAGFP workers mentioned during interviews that their voices are being heard by management and action has been taken based on their requests, including the provision of shaded areas for lunch, improved washrooms and mothers having reduced hours yet being paid for a full shift, to accommodate breastfeeding and care of newborns.

Vulnerable supply chains/ COVID-19 support projects

Feedback from the financial literacy training was positive and MWW have commissioned further call cycles to measure the impact. In the Dominican Republic, after the farm workers received financial literacy training, the worker feedback scores changed from 16% negative to 4% negative, with an overall site score improvement of 8.1 to 9.3.

Moving forward

The partnership between EAGFP and Partner Africa is ongoing and PA will continue to provide support and guidance where needed. This includes carrying out 'shadow audits' and reviewing reports to check the effectiveness of the internal auditors and to support them to improve; providing feedback in training sessions and providing regular training to farm owners and key personnel.

MWW have developed and standardised worker engagement questionnaires for use by EAGFP's technical team, who have direct contact with workers on the ground. In addition to this, they have seen the value of the &Wider worker engagement tools and have commissioned further call cycles elsewhere in their supply chain.

In terms of the VSCF project, the learnings, resources and tools have been widely distributed and will continue to be used in different areas of MWW's supply chain.



Lessons learnt

- Capacity building and skills transfer to suppliers/ local partners and their teams grows buy-in, ownership and enables change to be more sustainable.
- It is essential to have a thorough assessment of needs before taking action, so actions are based on the views and concerns of those impacted, not the assumptions of those organising the project.
- Worker voice tools were key to give a realistic picture of impact on workers and the improvements on the ground.



What makes this a leadership approach?*

Proactivity

MWW was proactive to take part in the funding bid that facilitated projects to support and equip workers in their supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ownership

MWW took ownership of improving labour standards in their supply chain by building buy-in, ownership and capacity with their Kenyan partners East African Growers Fresh Produce Ltd. By raising up local capacity and skills, the effectiveness and sustainability of labour standards monitoring and improvement has been increased, rather than depending on external audits and checks.

Partnership

MWW has a deep level of partnership with EAGFP and has also established an ongoing partnership with Partner Africa, to support them in building capacity at EAGFP. The partnership with &Wider enabled them to gain insights from direct worker interviews. The COVID-19 support project also involved partnership with a number of different suppliers and supermarkets.

"In the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, we found that those really strong partnerships and relationships that we've had in place have been absolutely key to our response. Through this project, we were able to come together really rapidly to respond to the crisis that workers in the agriculture sector in Kenya were facing."
Aisha Aswani, Senior Human Rights and Ethical Trade Manager at Co-op.

* Key behaviours that Co-op champion are proactivity, ownership and partnership. Click [here](#) to learn more about Co-op's supplier engagement programme. Co-op's 'Supplier's Guide to Ethical Trade' sets out the standards suppliers are expected to meet.