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Chiquita highlights human rights efforts

Children's rights and empowering women remain high on the list for the global fresh produce giant



Chiquita has identified women and children as two of its most vulnerable groups of stakeholders and has taken on the task of championing human rights initiatives to combat injustices throughout the regions where the brand operates.

The fresh produce giant has commissioned the industry's first child rights impact assessment at its farms in Costa Rica and Panama, working with human rights consultancy, Article One, to adjust UNICEF impact assessment tools for Chiquita's operations.

It is essential that Chiquita ensures its operations respect child rights within the communities of operation, and the group has chosen to focus on education, pediatric health and access to play as a vital to a child's upbringing and future opportunities.

"We believe that Chiquita's commitment to child rights exhibits strong leadership amongst its peers in the industry," said Faris Natour, co-founder and principal of

Article One. "We are happy to confirm that we found no evidence of child labour at Chiquita farms in the Costa Rica and Panama farms."

Gender equality is a significant challenge on the banana plantations of Latin America. In this labour-intensive line of work, traditionally dominated by men and situated on remote farms, women are often particularly vulnerable to violence, discrimination, intimidation and sexual harassment.

Chiquita says it has a zero tolerance for such acts and is working hard to ensure its guidelines, codes of conduct and tools eliminate such incidents.

"At Chiquita, we believe it is vital for all of our employees to feel safe and benefit from the best possible working conditions, free from any harassment," explained Jamie Postell, director of sales North America for Chiquita. "We want our employees to feel empowered and we are always striving to promote more opportunities for engagement to help us continue to grow in this area."

Tools

To further empower its female workforce, Chiquita has created several tools to safeguard women's rights and promote opportunities.

One key tool is the company's helpline system available for all employees, 24hours, 7days per week, 365 days per year, for them to report in an anonymous way any discrimination or harassment complaint. The system is actively communicated and promoted from farm to farm by company representatives.

Another of the main tools Chiquita uses to pursue equality and empowerment is an IUF-COLSIBA-Chiquita agreement that has been in place since 2001. This agreement, unique in the banana industry, promotes workers' rights and since 2013 also specifically protects women's interests.

A final tool is promoting education and awareness as critical ways in changing

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the culture. Efforts include women talking to women about their rights in their own language and tackling the challenge of changing male views about women's rights and sexual harassment.

According to Chiquita, the group is currently analysing gender pay and opportunity gaps throughout the organisation, and it is aiming to have a plan in place to address these by the time of the next 2020 sustainability report.