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Women Workers Voice and Codes of Conduct in the Cut Flower Industry.  
The Case of the Oriente Antioqueño Region - Colombia

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# Women workers voice and codes of conduct in the cut flower industry. The case of the Oriente Antioqueño Region- Colombia.

By

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## Abstract

*The Paper looks at the experiences of women's workers in the Oriente Antioqueño Region (Colombia) and the impacts that their entrance to the cut flower export industry have had over their livelihoods. A code of conduct framed into a CSR initiative is taken as a case study to analyse its relevance in improving women workers conditions. To do this it looks at the global debate of Decent work labour standards and the entrance of global value chains. Moreover there is a link with the socio-political and cultural arena that shapes institutional regimes and local livelihoods. The paper finalizes with a discussion around the importance of including workers and other stakeholders representation in codes, to make them more responsive to local needs, contribute to social dialogue and enhance security of rural livelihoods.*

Keywords: Codes of conducts, Cut Flower Industry, Labour conditions

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### III. Acronyms and Abbreviations

ASOCOLFLORES	Colombian association of flower exporters
BASC	Business Anti Smuggling Coalition
DAMA	Departamento Técnico Administrativo del Medio ambiente.
CEO	Corporación Oriente empresarial
CORNARE	Corporación del Río Nare
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ETI	Ethical Trade Initiative
FLP	Flower Label programme
FNV	Netherlands Confederation of Trade Unions
FUNDE	Foundation for the Development of Oriente
FUPAD	Pan-American Development Foundation
GVC	Global Value Chain
ICA	Colombian Agricultural Institute
ICC	International Code of conduct
ILO	International Labour Organization
LTO	Federation of Agricultural and Horticultural Organisations
MINCOMEX	Colombian Ministry of foreign commerce
MPS	Dutch Horticultural Environmental Programme
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
SENA	Colombian National Education Service
USAID	United Status Agency for International Development



## 1. Introduction

Rural livelihoods in developing countries have been deeply impacted by changes in the world market of agricultural commodities, the advent of global value chains and internal socio-political context. Therefore, rural households diversify their survival strategies to reduce vulnerability towards poverty. One of these strategies is the engagement in export producing industries.

The cut flower industry in Colombia started being export driven since 1965. It is primarily a private sector initiative, supported by Government and receives special treatment by the United States and the European Union. It is estimated that 60 percent of the Colombian labour force involved in the flower industry is female (Asocolflores, 2004). But the case of Oriente Antioqueño Region is particular in itself, because females' workers are the minority, approximately 40% (ENS 2004). This is due to historical and cultural reasons, and gives a different perspective to most of the studies done about horticultural value chains.

It is not possible to generalize over labour conditions in the whole spectrum of cut flower industry in Colombia. Macroeconomic constraints, rural poverty and the way the industry has developed in time has brought several problems. First, it has left sectors in informal labour conditions under the logic of the market. Secondly it has excluded workers and stakeholders possibilities of action weakening their bargaining strategies. Therefore, this research is going to examine the case of a part of the industry within the context of codes of conduct and Corporate Social Responsibility.

Changes in the global economy, the rise of Global Value Chains and the importance of brands and companies reputation; are among the main causes for the proliferation of corporate codes of conduct. Due to consumer's pressure and other organizations, "Responsible behavior" is the image that companies want to show to the world. within this context Codes have developed as voluntary initiatives. They can vary from declarations of companies' principles applicable to their local and overseas operations to more committed efforts of self regulating in two main areas for social conditions and the environment (Jenkins 2001).

If Codes of Conduct are designed to be useful tools of political debate for improving workers' labour conditions, then it is important to analyse workers' voice and the context where they come from. Moreover, other stakeholder's perspectives need to be also analysed, as they lead to community permeability of social development programmes and the promotion of social dialogue.

This research looks at the experiences of women's workers in the Oriente Antioqueño Region, and the impact that their entrance to the cut flower industry has had over their livelihoods. It looks at the global debate of fair labour standards in cut flower industry and link these standards with the socio-cultural arena and gender constraints that shape the way these women live locally. By exploring their insights and their voice this study pretends to bring a broader understanding of code relevance to upgraded labour conditions under a Decent Work framework.

### **1.1 Background and statement of the problem**

Women are the majority of production employees in the world cut flower industry according to Oxfam international<sup>1</sup> (2004). These women are located at the end of global supply chain and in many occasions they face precarious conditions of employment. Some of the issues that workers have to face on a daily basis, according to studies made by labour right's organizations (Diaz 1994, Corporación Cactus 1998), were: work under time pressure, low wages, excessive overtime, low rates of union membership, exposure to pesticides and seasonal contracts.

The cultivation of flowers in Colombia generates approximately 94.300 direct jobs and 80.200 indirect jobs<sup>2</sup>. Most of the farms are located in rural areas close to urban centres or airport facilities, in order to export easily their production. There is a marked gender division of labour where women are involved in activities such as planting, crop care, cutting, classifying and complex packaging.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam International (2004) *Injustice in the fields*. In "Trading away our rights. Women working in the global supply chains".

<sup>2</sup> Asocolflores 2004-2005 Social and environmental report.

The Colombian flower exporters association (Asocolflores) has been implementing different social programs since early 90's. In 1996 this organization designed its own code of conduct named "Florverde" (Spanish for green flower) that defines environmental and labour standards for affiliated farms. Nowadays Florverde is evolving into a certifying programme that offers farms support to improve their performance and achieve economic, social and environmental sustainability.

According to studies made by the International Labour Organization ILO<sup>3</sup>, most of the codes of conduct address the following concerns: Freedom of association, Child labour, Forced labour, Discrimination, Environment, Health and Safety (EHS), Harassment, Working hours and Overtime, Living conditions, Wage rates, Atmosphere and Turnover. Codes depend on their credibility among stakeholders, which means, how transparent and effective they are for assuring decent labour conditions.

Since the establishment of this code, it has been criticized by different stakeholders for the lack of inclusion of workers in its design which has let important matters, such as promoting freedom of association. out of the code scope. This then raises other questions over the effectiveness of this code in upgrading labour conditions of workers, for example being gender sensitive towards women worker's needs and whether it provides space for active participation and community involvement.

## **1.2 Research objectives and question**

The research has the following two objectives

-To gain a better understanding of the labour conditions and gender specific needs that woman workers have within the cut flower industry in the Oriente Antioqueno Region.

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<sup>3</sup> International Labour organization (1996). Bureau for workers activities. Corporate codes of conducts

-To analyze the effectiveness of the implementation of the code of conduct “Florverde” and other institutional arrangements upon voice and participation.

And it was done in order to answer to the following questions

- 1.2.1 Who are the main stakeholders involved at the local level in the value chain of the cut flower industry in the Oriente - Antioqueno region, Colombia?
- 1.2.2 In terms of labour conditions, what particular problems do working women face within the cut flower industry in this area?
- 1.2.3 Can the implementation of an internal corporate code of conduct in the cut flower industry be effective in upgrading socio labour conditions of women workers at the lower end of the value chain?

### **1.3 Research Methods**

According to the characteristics of the social phenomena analysed, the methodology chosen for this research was based on a qualitative approach. It used participatory tools in order to obtain primary data, consisting of case studies of women working in the lower levels of the value chain, and direct interviews with representatives of the main stakeholders involved in the business of the cut flower industry in Oriente Antioqueño region.

A first moment of the study consisted of the design of the research. This included an exploration of the subject of analysis, data available, writing the theoretical framework and finally making contacts with possible key informants.

A second moment was the data collection per se. Due to the characteristic of the study, field research was required to have direct access to primary data. The worker's sample consisted in 12 women workers, eight of them where covered by the code and four where out of the its scope (Permanent and contract farming workers). The key informants where representatives of stakeholders involved. Therefore semi-structured



interviews of one and a half hours were held with them. In total 29 interviews were held and there are disaggregated in the following way:

INTERVIEWS		TOTAL
Women working	Temporary	2
	Permanent	8
Contract farming	Men	2
	Women	2
Small entrepreneurs		2
NGO's		4
CBO's		2
Public sector		2
Private sector		2
Asocolflores		3

The third moment of the study was the analysis of all the collected data and answering the initial questions set by the research design. After completing the primary data collection the interviews with the women workers were transcribed and organized according to the categories shown in the table below. Answers were classified and summaries made based on common aspects and emergent ones. The responses were crosschecked and triangulated with available secondary data. Moreover, a recent study of 317 women workers was used to complement some of this information<sup>4</sup>. Other secondary sources were: official WebPages of actors involved, interviews done by email and statistics concerning impacts of Social development programs held in the region by the cut flower association.

The following table synthesizes the variables taken in account, with it's correspondent concept. For each concept different indicators were selected and used to design a standardized questionnaire<sup>5</sup> for the interviews with women workers. The issue of security of livelihoods was used as a benchmark for social impacts, giving central attention to two specific areas of interest. The first category is conditions at the workplace, and the second relates to gender specific needs and the household.

<sup>4</sup> Women in the cut flower industry in Oriente Antioqueno. Unpublished study done in 2003-2004 by the Escuela Nacional Sindical.

<sup>5</sup> See annexes

CATEGORY	VARIABLE	CONCEPT	INDICATOR
Employment relations in the workplace	Security and social protection	Security of income	Regularity of wage
			Legal Minimum wage or above
		Access to social insurance system	Access to health care facilities and sickness
			Pension scheme
	Representation and social dialogue	Freedom of association	Membership to a trade union
			Membership to other organizations of employees
		Representation in decision making processes	Define spaces for communication/complaints
			Level of participation in committees
	Rights at work	Discrimination practices	Occupational Distribution
			Records of hiring/ laid off procedures
Asocolflores / florverde	Knowledge of the industry	Involvement in Asocolflores	
		Participation in the Program Florverde	
Gender specific needs and households	Reproduction role	Childcare	Existence of child care facilities
			Community arrangements for child care
		Special permissions	Records of special permissions(paid/unpaid)
			Payment and time of Prenatal or postnatal medical care
	Pregnancy	Records of renewal of contracts	
	Actual household conditions	Income expenditure	Possibility to accumulate savings
			Other members strategies
		Gender relationships	Percentage of Income used in women specific needs.
			Level of involvement in other activities
Survival strategies/ aspirations for the future		Enrolment in education/Literacy programs	
		Other networks available	

Table #1. Methodology indicators

There was a mapping according to a sociological model of the main stakeholders involved in the local production. A table was elaborated in order to include their positions within the industry and how they are related to codes of conduct. This helped to have a complete picture of the subject of research.

#### **1.4 Limitations of the study**

This study was designed based on the literature available about value chains and horticultural production. This literature emphasizes over the social impacts of the implementation of codes of conduct for women, as they are the majority of the work force employed in this production globally.

However, during the field data collection, it was observed that in this specific region of Colombia, female labour force corresponded only to 35% - 40% in contrast to the national average of 65% of women workers in this industry. Nevertheless a women centred research was still done for several reasons. First its main interest was over the code's relevance over women worker's labour conditions and their voices therefore this was not an impediment. And second because of the significance to analyze how the socio-cultural context in this particular case affected women labour conditions.

Due to the big spectrum of firms involved in the business and the lack of accurate information available it becomes impossible to generalize the labour practices of the whole industry. Therefore the main analysis focuses only on the farms that are affiliated to the Colombian flower growers association in the region and its own code.

The study did not attempt to be a complete assessment of the corporate code of conduct Florverde, but to explore different social outcomes for a group of women workers from their own perspective. Therefore the size of the sample is not statistically representative for the size of the active population. However the conclusions about in depth insights may be helpful for stakeholders and others attempting to improve labour conditions of these workers.

#### **1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

The paper is organized as follows:

Chapter two contains the theoretical framework and is divided into three main areas. First the global value chains (GVCs) approach is discussed. Second, the theories of the ILO over decent work are linked with a review over women's rural livelihoods to

understand important issues over women workers labour conditions. Finally, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and codes of conduct are presented as they are used by GVCs to control the impact of their operations in workers socio-labour conditions.

Chapter three refers to the context of the cut flower industry in Colombia. It starts with an overview of the economic importance of the industry and how it is located in the global value chain. The discussion continues with a socio historical analysis of the development of the business in the Oriente Antioqueño region and includes a mapping of main stakeholders involved. It concludes with a discussion of the vulnerability of workers in global value chain contexts.

Chapter four addresses the specific issue of women workers in the cut flower industry. It explores the three different types of employment available in the area. There is an analysis over employment relations in the workplace and gender specific needs. It ends up with a reflection on overall working conditions that lead the discussion into the importance of representation.

Chapter five covers the issues of voice, codes of conduct and social dialogue in the Oriente Antioqueno region case. It starts with a description of different CSR programs implemented by Asocolflores and the code of conduct Florverde. Then it explores women views over their possibilities of voicing, representation and bargaining inside the workplace. The chapter concludes with a discussion of different stakeholders position around the usefulness of the code.

Chapter six synthesizes the main insights from the previous chapters. It is intended to draw conclusions about the importance of worker's representation community involvement and stakeholder's participation in codes of conducts and CSR projects.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There are multiple variables involved in the debate over the insertion in global value chains and the labour conditions for local workers. Therefore this theoretical framework is divided into three broad topics.

First, it starts with at the theory of global value chains as it helps to understand the scope of the cut flower industry in a global market perspective. Second, it explores the role of the ILO in generating consensus over labour rights and what decent work should be, as a way to achieve a better balance between economic and social development. However, as rural women are the main workers involved in the study, a Rural Livelihood's approach is included to tackle some consequences that wage labour may have.

The last section deals with the onset of Corporate Social Responsibility and codes of conducts as a mechanism to self regulate companies' behaviour. Finally the chapter ends with the contribution of recent gender studies over codes of conducts.

### **2.2 Global value chains and the cut flower industry**

The market and trade of cut flowers can be understood as a commodity chain. Gereffi (1994) defines global commodity chains as *rooted in transnational production system that give rise to particular patterns of coordinated international trade. A production system links economic activities to technological and organizational networks that permit companies to develop, produce and market specific commodities.* Horticultural flowers exports require a labour intensive process and sophisticated marketing skills to be able to fulfill consumers' demands. As a perishable good, there is a need for proper infrastructure, technology and fast and efficient communications systems to deliver the product any place in the world.

According to Gereffi (1994) Global Value Chains can be divided into two types. First, there are Producer-driven chains in which TNCs play a central role in controlling the

production systems. Secondly Buyer-driven chains, characterized by large retailers, brand name and trading companies that are central to coordinate production networks

Horticultural commodities' production can be classified as buyer driven chains. Generally, production takes place in developing countries that become highly competitive in comparison to industrialized ones; due to the availability and low cost of labour. In order to decrease costs of production and increase competitiveness, employers tend to reduce wages and other non-labour costs at the expense of working conditions.

The usefulness of this approach is that it illustrates how the distinct process involved in turning a raw material into a retailed product can be mapped. The GVC analysis provides useful information about the links of local production, poverty, employment and export market production. For the interest of the study, the global value chain approach gives an overview of the flower since its production until it gets to the final buyers, as well as the institutions and other organizations that may influence directly or indirectly the commodity chain.

In the process of mapping a commodity chain it is possible to identify actors involved in the production process and the complex interrelations that exist between local suppliers and global buyers. Generally, the main stakeholders include key buyers, intermediaries and producers. But in fact there are more stakeholders involved, like home based workers, subcontractors, temporary or part time workers and input suppliers in the chain. An example of this mapping of actors involved will be shown in chapter three for the cut flower industry in Colombia.

Gereffi found essential the governance structure for the coordination of the GVC. Governance refers to the authority and power relationships that determine how financial, material and human resources are allocated and flow within the chain (Gereffi, 1994) The influence of actors in the chain can vary, affecting their ability to determine the parameters of production including what is produced, how, when, and at what price (Humphrey and Schmitz, 2000).

There is a common assumption that the generation of employment as a result of the insertion of GVCs can generate economic growth and therefore impact positively on people's well being. But one must question if an increased income generates sustainability and social development as well. In the next area of literature review, the concepts of labour rights and decent work will be explored as they serve as a benchmark for decent labour standards in the world of work.

### **2.3 Labour Rights and Decent Work**

The concept of Labour rights is related to the adoption of humane conditions of labour. They have been widely promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and different actors involved. Moreover, labour conditions of workers become a national concern and a matter of global interest, due to the nature of global market competition.

In 1998 the ILO issued a Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at work, which has been used as an instrument to establish homogeneity of labour rights among the ILO's member states<sup>6</sup>. The core labour standards of the ILO are Freedom of association, Abolition of forced labour, Elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation, and Abolition of child labour.

The international labour conventions and recommendations of the ILO set guidelines for States' national regulatory laws to secure that the fundamental rights of workers are being respected<sup>7</sup>. However, new sources of employment may have to be adapted to local labour laws and institutions. From Kabeer's (2003) perspective, global labour standards should not be imposed from outside. They should be carefully adapted to local conditions, according to the workers priorities and constraints<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> According to Palley (2004) the labour standards have had opponents that argue that they are a form of hidden power that would prevent developing countries from free competition in areas where they have a better comparative advantage. Singh and Zammit (2000) sustain on this regard, that attempts to enforce labour standards through trade sanctions are likely to cause economic harm to most export developing countries, while doing little or nothing to improve their labour standards. On the other hand, the followers of the establishment of these standards sustain that the enforcement will help to rise living conditions and rates of growth.

<sup>7</sup> However, state members of the ILO are not bind to ratify the conventions. It is expected that the States will bring this conventions to their own national authorities in order to be ratified and implemented.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to remark that the international labour standards should not be confused with the promotion of workers' Rights, which can vary according to particular circumstances.

In this regard, the role of the State is key to ensure that national policies and programs are being directed towards the amelioration of workers conditions. States have the power to enforce firms to follow national labour regulations. However, this is a risky assumption because they may not be powerful enough nor willing to ensure that TNC's and national firms are following certain minimum labour standards. This can be caused as a result of macroeconomic constraints, structural adjustment programs, pressure to attract Direct Foreign Investment and other political factors.

On the other hand, social conflict and tensions arises when workers are left vulnerable to unfair conditions imposed by their employers. Therefore, labour rights are explicitly connected to social security, industrial relations and balance bargaining power. In this venue, labour rights go beyond the ILO's core labour standards and acquire a social, ethical and economical dimension in order to achieve equity and poverty reduction goals.

Thus, economic and social development are two interdependent issues that must be combined in the path towards the security of livelihoods, human development and social dialogue. For these reasons, the ILO has set up the concept of "Decent work" as their primary framework: *"To promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity"*<sup>9</sup>.

The next table synthesizes the four pillar standards of decent work and the main topics that are taken in account for each one.

1. Work and employment	Working time, work intensity, wage levels, safe working condition, opportunity to develop new skills
2. Rights at work	No discrimination (Equal opportunities), freedom of association, freedom from force labour and elimination of child labour.
3. Security and social protection <sup>10</sup>	Security of income, investment in workplace safety, access to social insurance systems and safety nets

<sup>9</sup> Report of the General director of the ILO on Decent Work. 87th Session International Labour Conference. Geneva 1999

<sup>10</sup> The measures of Security and social protection are fundamental aspects that help in the process of poverty alleviation and minimizing the risk of individuals to fall into poverty (ILO 2005)



4. Representation and social dialogue	Framework in which workers voices can be heard, trade unions, organizations of employers, representation in local decision-making process and at national level.
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Table #2. Decent work

Employment generation cannot disregard quality and regularity of jobs offered and to whom it is addressed. Therefore, “Decent Work” and its four pillars are used in this study as a broader reference framework to analyse women worker’s working conditions in the cut flower industry and the ones affected by a corporate code of conduct. The potential impacts on how working in this industry may affect their livelihoods are set in the following section.

#### **2.4 Rural women’s livelihoods and entrance to wage labour markets**

Small scale rural livelihoods<sup>11</sup> survival in developing countries is threaten by an overall increase in rural poverty. As Ellis (2000) has examined, rural households diversify their portfolio of activities in order to increase the possibilities to have other income sources, increase their assets and improve their standard of living.

One way to diversify household strategies is by entering into the labour market, which gives the opportunity to earn income and reduce their vulnerability towards poverty risk. Nevertheless, an analysis of the impacts of entrance into wage labour has to be taken further than the household unit, in order to understand the effects for each member.

Intra-household relationships and the role of women have attracted academicians since the work published by E. Boserup (1970). Gender studies have highlighted how there is a need for a detailed analysis of the different constraints that rural women face to pursue diverse livelihoods strategies when coping with poverty and adaptation to the changing market economy<sup>12</sup>. Some of the main issues that affect men and women in differentiated ways are: access, allocation and control of resources, credit, land and

<sup>11</sup> Livelihoods comprises the assets (Natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the activities and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determined the living gained by the individual or household

<sup>12</sup> Kabeer and Van Anh (1994) suggest how a gender-disaggregated analysis of households’ livelihoods can provide insights into relationships between household strategies, poverty and opportunities

education; distribution of income; land property rights system; the ability to engage in wage labour; differentiated wages; mobility constraints and voice and participation.

Men do not always represent household's headship due to several factors like long-term migration, death, sickness or simply their absence. This leaves some women in charge of covering household's needs and decisions. The entrance to the labour market is done under unequal conditions, because women have a double role to play. On the one hand the reproductive role (unpaid domestic work and childcare) and on the other hand the productive role (paid) as wage earners.

There are two main areas of studies over the entrance of women to labour markets.

- I) Income Inequality. On this issue Maria Mies (1982) has used the concept of "Housewifization<sup>13</sup>" that explains, in most of the cases, differentiated wages among men and women. This argument reflects women's subordinated position in society and the assumption that they are not the principal source of family income (Safa, 1986).
- II) Occupational Segregation. In labour intensive industries, women are valued due to their socially created skills. Elson (1981) describes this phenomenon as "Nimble fingers", an argument used to impose a sexual division of labour and the segregation of women to certain types of delicate tasks<sup>14</sup>.

In terms of conditions of employment, the obstacles that women face are varied. First, constraints could be inherited from a patriarchal conception of dependency on a male breadwinner. This has several consequences like differentiated wages and male biased divisions of task. Second, constraints may be structural; they reveal the constraints in access to the labour market, being unprotected by labour laws, the absence of legal contracts and difficulties in accessing to credit and financial help.

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<sup>13</sup> This is the process by which women's work in the production and reproduction of life, generally called housework, was made invisible. The term is used in contrast with the one of proletarianization of men defined as wage earners and breadwinners.

<sup>14</sup> In a study done by Barrientos (1999) regarding women and agribusiness in Chile, she found how a gendered division of tasks has taken place in the NTAE's production and the export industry.

Nevertheless, access to permanent contracts increases security of livelihoods, as it gives rights to social benefits and income. In this regard Safa (1995) has seen how the role of women's income, and control over it, changes their intra-household bargaining power. In the social sphere there are benefits related to the establishment of new networks and spaces for socializing, which increases rural women's social capital. In addition, it brings Psychological well being in terms of enhanced self-esteem; self confidence and independence. These issues are going to be explored in chapter 4 of this study.

From these different debates generated around the entrance to wage labour, it then becomes necessary to question how Corporate Social Responsibility may play a role in improving these conditions. In the following section the role of the private sector and its responsibility towards workers and communities is analysed for this study.

## **2.5 Corporate social responsibility and codes of conduct**

The role of the State is fundamental in improving quality of life for their citizens, implementing rules to ensure the protection of labour rights and the environment. But, States that are under Structural Adjustment Programs, Neo-liberal policies and privatisation; have seen their capacity to design and implement effective employment regulations diminished. Due to lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms for labour rights and environmental issues, the need for responsible and ethical behaviour from trans-national corporations and local industry has increased. As a result the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been widely articulated among companies and international organizations. According to Hopkins (2004) the wider aim of CSR is to create higher standards of living, while preserving the profitability of the corporation, for peoples both within and outside the corporation.

Corporations have used the concept of CSR as a way to obtain and improve social and environmental standards in a framework of ethical behaviour towards society (Schmidheiny, et al 1997, cited by Utting). Therefore multilateral agreements with

Trans-national corporations<sup>15</sup> were established during the 1970s as a way to generate corporate self-regulating mechanisms and voluntary initiatives in the field of CSR. Companies have developed different mechanisms to assess the impacts of their operations. These measures included codes of conducts, environmental reporting, corporate social investment and social auditing, among others.

Codes of conduct differ greatly in their scope, coverage and content. It is difficult to follow the implementation of specific codes along all the suppliers of value chains, particularly to subcontractors and “contract farming” workers. They depend entirely on their credibility<sup>16</sup> and on how other sectors of the industry, trade unions, government and consumers see them. This has also been labeled Transparency and deals with the way different stakeholders are aware of their existence and meaning.

To understand how firms’ concerns are included in code and how inclusive of different stakeholders’ needs the code is, a differentiation may be clarified<sup>17</sup>. This shapes the nature, design and implementation of codes. There are 5 different types:

- *Corporate Codes of Conduct*: (CCC) adopted unilaterally by companies
- *Trade Association Codes*<sup>18</sup>: adopted by a group of firms in a particular sector.
- *Model Codes*: Provide a benchmark for company good behaviour.
- *Inter-governmental Codes (IGC)*: Promoted by the ILO and the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises
- *Multi-stakeholder codes (MSC)*: adopted as a result of negotiations between different stakeholders.

The problem with the company’s CSR and corporate codes of conduct is their self-regulatory nature and voluntary character. This is translated in the unavailability of enforcement mechanisms to ensure that what is stated in such corporate commitments

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<sup>15</sup> OECD Guidelines for Multinational corporations, ILO’s tripartite declaration of principles concerning Multinational enterprises and social policy.

<sup>16</sup> Report on Labour Standards in the Asia-Pacific Region Tripartite Working Party on Labour Standards, February 1996

<sup>17</sup> Hopkins (2004) explains how CSR is concerned with treating the stakeholders of the firm ethically or in a responsible manner. “Ethically or responsible” means treating stakeholders in a manner deemed acceptable in civilized societies. Social includes economic responsibility. Stakeholders exist both within a firm and outside the natural environment is a stakeholder for example.

<sup>18</sup> This study is going to be looking at a Trade Association Code

is actually practiced. Moreover critics among stakeholders have been raise towards this self-regulatory system accusing it of “Greenwash<sup>19</sup>” (Greer and Bruno, 1996). During the 1990’s pressures from consumers and NGO’s managed to increasingly shift the mechanism of auditing firms’ behaviour to third parties in search of a more transparent, responsive and verifiable assessment of these practices.

To ensure that CCC<sup>20</sup> are actually being practiced properly, continuous monitoring<sup>21</sup> is required. Monitoring and auditing the implementation of such codes can be done by the suppliers themselves or by external agents. However, the cost of this is often paid by the suppliers and rarely by the buyers, which is reflected in an increase in production costs. Nevertheless, the inclusion of other stakeholders for monitoring and evaluation processes gives codes more credibility in the market. This issue is followed through in chapter five when codes of conduct, voice and representation are analysed.

Ideally, CCC should effectively self-limit the firms’ power to ensure that a more equalitarian balance can emerge from the collective representation of the workers and those affected by its operations (Murray 2002). But in reality there have been gaps between the social standards stated in these codes and real practices in the production process. In the study made by Barrientos (2002) on tracing Codes along GVCs, she found how unequal power positions can be found in the buyer-supplier relationships. A dominant position of some buyers gives them power to impose codes and control conditions of production. They can sanction producers if they find that they don’t follow their codes’ standards by finishing their contracts as suppliers.

The following section looks specifically at codes of conduct that has been developed in the cut flower industry. In order to put these issues in the sector context of this study.

### **2.5.1 Codes of conducts in the cut flower industry**

Since 1990 various Trade Unions, Non Governmental Organizations and European activists, launched an International flower campaign “Flowers for Justice”. It’s main

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<sup>19</sup> Disinformation disseminated by an organization to present an environmentally responsible image”

<sup>20</sup> From now on (CCC) Corporate Codes of Conduct

<sup>21</sup> Monitoring is a mean to ensure that theory corresponds to the implementation and that the goals of improvement are been satisfied.

objective was to create consciousness among consumers of the precarious situation of workers in export flower producing countries and to generate safe environmental and humane labour conditions<sup>22</sup>. During this decade there was a proliferation of “Trade association codes”<sup>23</sup> and labels sold by private organizations that have different requirements and regulations criteria.

The multiple initiatives of guaranteeing labour and environmental conditions in the flower industry raise several problems. First, certifications, labelling and monitoring has become a new business as there is a lot of money involved in these processes. Secondly, having different codes in the same industry increases costs and makes difficult to manage, implement and monitor them properly. And finally consumers and other stakeholders do not get complete information about the standards required from each label, leading to confusion and market disruptions.

Therefore, in 1998 the International flower campaign launched an International Code of Conduct (ICC) that was based in a joint work of trade unions and NGO's<sup>24</sup>. This code is based on a human rights approach, rather than on a fair trade approach (Brassel-Rangel 2001). The ten fundamental principles of the ICC are: Freedom of association and collective bargaining, Equality of treatment, Living wages, Working hours, Health and safety, Pesticides and chemicals, Security of employment, Protection of the environment, Child labour, Non forced labour.

Nevertheless the abundance of codes continues, and it is challenging to organize the stakeholders, producers and traders towards a common agenda<sup>25</sup>. At this point there are other questions that must be raised. For example, how these multiple initiatives beneficiate rural women? Are they actively participating in the design and monitoring of these codes and their needs being adressed?

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<sup>22</sup> To achieve these objectives the Campaign organises public action and dialogue with flower producers, traders and representatives from governmental bodies, consumer associations, development experts, horticultural specialists and European chemical companies. (FIAN 2001)

<sup>23</sup> Kenya Flower Council (KFC), Florverde in Colombia, Flower label program (FLP) and Milieu project Sierteelt (MPS Netherlands). It comprises national associations of all the Dutch flower auction houses, LTO Netherlands and LTO Glasshouse Cultivation.

<sup>24</sup> In Germany: the protestant funding agency Bread for the World, the international human rights organisation FIAN, and the children rights organisation Terre des homes. In Holland Both Ends and OLAA, and the FNV trade union confederation, in Sweden, Fair Trade center

<sup>25</sup> In September 2003, the international flower trade sector launched a new international consumer's label for Fair Flowers & Plants “FFP”, which is based in FLP and MPS.

### **2.5.2 Codes of Conducts, Women Workers and voice**

One major area arising from codes of conduct are their inability to tackle gender specific concerns. In response, from the global value chain and gendered economy approaches Barrientos, S. Dolan, C. and Tallontire (2001) have developed a “gender pyramid” that provides a framework for mapping the gender content of codes of conduct. This pyramid helps to differentiate three areas directly affecting gender concerns and codes:

- I) Formal employment: issues covered by national legislations and ILO conventions.
- II) Informal employment: types of employment, provisions and regulations that give other benefits not provided in contracts such as social benefits, childcare provision and maternity leaves.
- III) Reproductive work: issues not related to the workplace but that affect the employment needs.

Furthermore, studies done with women maquila workers by the Central American Women’s Network (CAWN 1999) indicate some key issues that must be included in a gender sensitive code of conduct. Pearson and Seyfang (2002) summarize a list of demands arising from women working in export oriented production. These are: wages tend to be low, the absence of protection for pregnant women, frequent physical and psychological abuse, poor occupational health standards<sup>26</sup>, social security rights as health and pensions often do not cover seasonal workers, subcontractors or home-based workers, and lastly overtime as it interferes with the care role.

Nevertheless these issues are faced differently by rural women, according to their livelihood context, assets and capabilities (Bebbington 1999). Thus there are additional socio-cultural matters that should be taken in account in codes implemented in rural settings. They can be divided into two dimensions

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<sup>26</sup> lack of protective gear, contact with toxic chemicals and pesticides, ergonomic problems, preventions of risk in the workplace, controlled access to toilets and absence of proper places for breaks

I) In the labour sphere: The ability to understand labour contracts, Child labour, cultural patterns of bargaining strategies and associations, mobility constraints, bond contracts and patron-client relationships.

II) In the social sphere: the availability of community based organizations; educational levels; ethnic, class and religious background; and the socio-political context of the areas. Moreover cultural attitudes towards work, femininity, reproductive role, authority figures and equals.

These concerns are used as indicators in chapter 4 as it broadens the picture of the socio-cultural context in debate.

Finally, in terms of guiding themes for this study, Marina Prieto Carron (2004) takes corporate codes of conducts as places of “Political contestation” and develops a gendered analysis of the policy implications of them. According to her, women’s subjective experience, their voices and perspectives can help to give recommendations to improve women’s workers conditions within the framework of CSR. Women workers have a legitimate voice to raise the issues that are affecting them specifically, and they are also agents to bring change in order to make codes more responsive to their needs.

On the other hand, regarding the subject of agency and voice, Kabeer (2003) argues that traditional trade unions have acquired male-biased culture and procedures that do not correspond with the lives and priorities of working women. Women have managed to find alternative ways to be heard and represented that differ to the conventional bargaining strategies of the unions. Exploring these alternative ways of association and voice may give valuable insights for improving labour relationships and increasing rural women’s participation within the cut flower industry. this is the topic of Chapter 5.

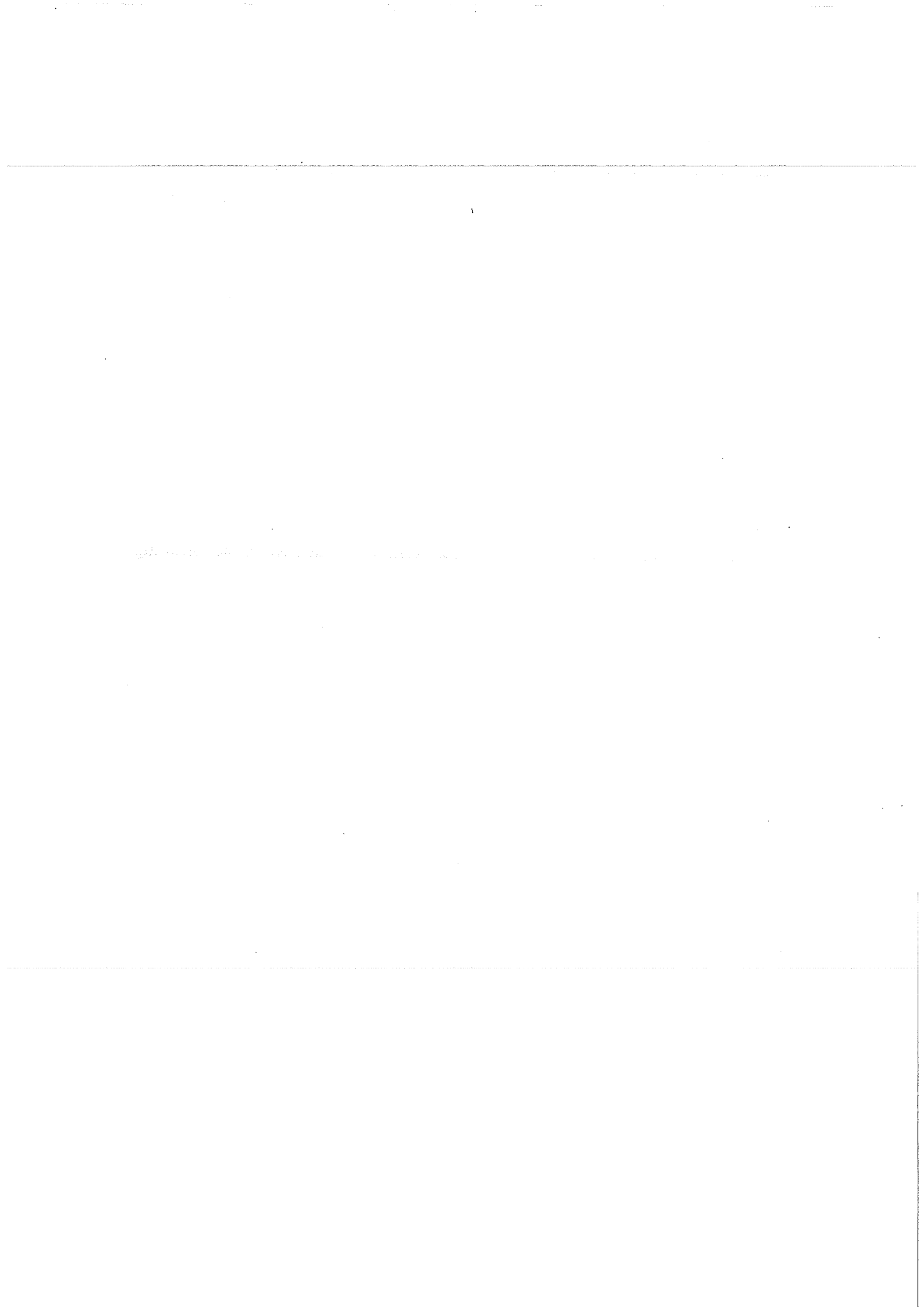


## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown different areas of study that are key points to understand the discussion over labour conditions of women workers in a global value chain under the framework of codes of conducts.

The linkages between global buyers and local producers brings into the debate the concept of Decent work as a framework for universal Labour Rights. Nevertheless companies use codes of conduct to justify firm's concerns over local labour management and sustainability of their operations. It was seen how the specificities of these codes have a deep impact over rural women workers labour conditions, as they face particular problems which need to be addressed by codes.

The cut flower industry in Colombia works as a buyer driven chain in the global production network. The local context of the business is illustrated in the following chapter.



### **3. THE CUT FLOWER INDUSTRY IN THE ORIENTE ANTIOQUEÑO REGION**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

In this chapter the global and local context of the cut flower industry in Colombia is going to be explored. First, there is a characterization of the value chain in world trade and of the economic importance it has for the country. Then the way the industry was developed regionally is discussed, paying attention to social and historical facts that influenced the conditions in which this sector emerged in the Oriente Antioqueño region. Finally this chapter includes an identification of different stakeholders in the value chain.

This discussion serves to locate the global industry in a particular region and show how it has evolved until becoming a complex value chain. It helps us to understand the position of workers in the lower base of a production system and how does codes of conduct intertwines in the chain, as it is discussed in the following chapters.

#### **3.2. Overview of the Cut Flower industry in Colombia**

The world market for cut flowers had an export volume of 700 million US dollars in 2004 (Asocolflores 2004). Most of the flower production takes place in countries of the south with the exception of Holland that is considered, in economical terms, the main trader and exporter country<sup>27</sup>.

Colombia is the world's second largest exporter of cut flowers. 85% of Colombia's flower production is exported to the United States of America<sup>28</sup> and Canada and 10% goes to the European market. Only 5 % of production remains in the domestic market. This is important because it shows how workers in this industry have been integrated into global markets and become highly dependent on international buyers.

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<sup>27</sup> ILO (The world cut flower industry, 1996) International trade is, to a large extent, organized along regional lines. Asia-Pacific countries are the main suppliers to Japan and Hong Kong. Hong Kong's principal suppliers are China, Taiwan (China), Malaysia, Singapore and New Zealand. African and other European countries are the principal suppliers to Europe's main markets. United States is supplied mainly by Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica.

<sup>28</sup> In USA, the Colombia Flower Council was founded in 1987 by the Colombian flower growers and the Miami importers in an effort to promote the Colombian's flowers consumption in this country.

Among the major factors that make the country attractive for this agricultural production is its relatively proximity to their main market, the eastern region of the United States of America. Its geographic location makes it ideal for cultivating several flower's varieties. Also, the climatic conditions, abundance of sun light, water, and cultivable land, allow operations all year around. Finally, an available cheap labour force gives Colombia a comparative advantage in contrast to developed countries.

The total area cultivated in flower production during 2003 was 6.013 hcts. As can be seen in the map below, the Sabana de Bogotá (Cundinamarca) in the centre of the country represents 85% of total production. The Oriente Antioqueño Region (Antioquia) produces 12% of flower exports. Lastly, the final 3% of production is located in other regions<sup>29</sup>.

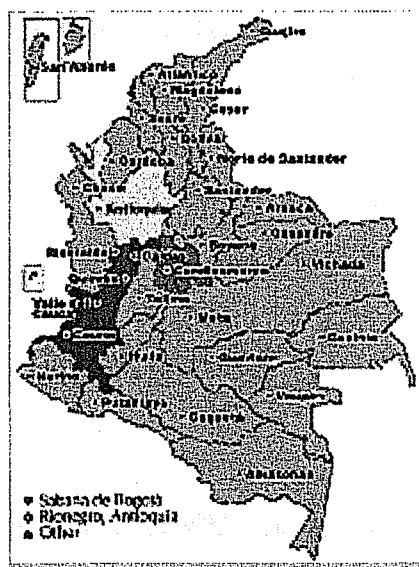


Fig # 1. Map of the main flower producing areas in Colombia

The industry is considered a Non-traditional Agricultural Export Product (NTAE's). Non-traditional exports represent 46% of total export values in Colombia and flowers hold 10.53% of that percentile<sup>30</sup>. According to Asocolflores (2005) between the periods of 2003- 2004 this business exported US\$681.396.497 millions, which represents 5.67% of total exports in Colombia. Thus, this production is very important for the country's economy and a major source of employment for a significant sector of the population.

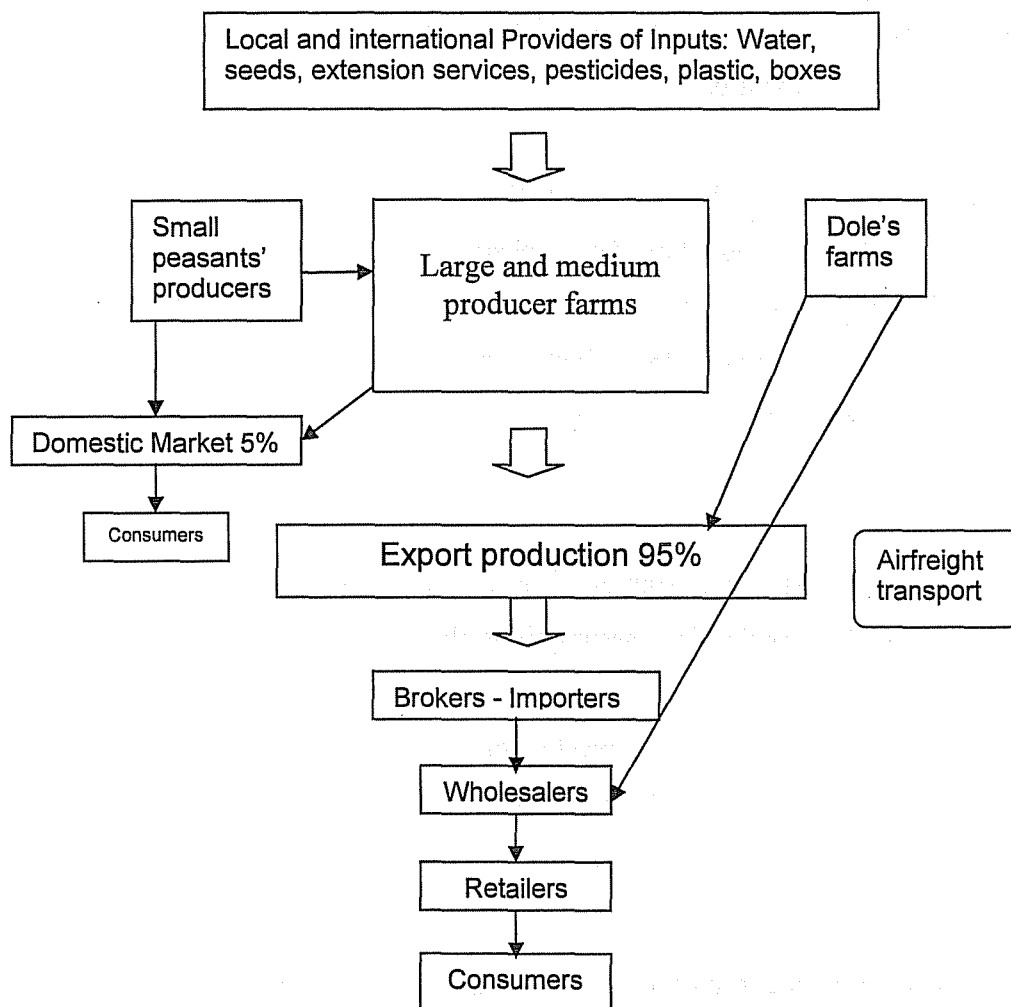
<sup>29</sup> In the Provinces of Cauca, Risaralda, Valle del Cauca, Caldas and Quindio

<sup>30</sup> Traditional exports, i.e. oil, coal and coffee represent 54% of total exports.

The Cut flower industry commodity chain is mainly buyer-driven. The international trade and production system is highly organized. The flowers are produced locally to quality standards required by the global market. Due to the short life of the product, advance communication technologies and coordination are pivotal to ensure the delivery. Flowers are shipped via airfreight mainly to the Miami international Airport and then, delivered to different brokers that negotiate them to wholesalers, retailers, and finally consumers. Nevertheless it is possible to observe some variations in the value chain according to each case.

The graph below illustrates the highly complex process of production and delivery from Colombia to the United States market, using the value chain approach.

Fig. #2 Colombian Cut flower industry Value Chain. Graph made by the author.



The illustration of the GVC has helped provide at a macro-perspective the production within the cut flower industry. What is important is to see how global stakeholders and local firms are linked with local's actors. As a result, the nature of the GVC is influenced by local institutions, national laws and cultural regimes, which set specific characteristics according to each context. The following section will describe then the main events that helped the emergence of this industry in the region and how rural people became integrated as workers into a lower position in the GVC.

### **3.3 Socio-Historic view of the cut flower industry in the Oriente Antioqueño**

The generalized violent socio-political context of rural areas in Colombia has to be taken in account<sup>31</sup>. Phenomenon of massive force- displacements, violence, murder and poverty has had extreme impacts in society and trauma over rural populations. Nonetheless, this section focuses on the Oriente Antioqueño region<sup>32</sup>. A number of stages can be grouped to illustrate the particular development process of the cut flower industry in the area.

The initial stage can be located before the 1970's. During this time there was a long tradition of flower production for domestic sale. It was done in small scale, with simple techniques and it was seen as extra income for small peasant households. Nevertheless, the growth of the industry was during the 1970's. Colombian traditional landowners started the export led production in their own farms using high inputs of capital.

Rapidly this industry was supported as part of Colombia's diversification strategy, based under the neoclassical assumptions that labour intensive growth would lead people out of poverty and risk. Various measures were taken by the government and the private sector to increase production of flower exports.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, USAID encouraged this kind of production in Colombia as a way to offer alternative crops cultivation for illicit drugs growers. The country has enjoyed in different periods

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<sup>31</sup> The period of 1950's - 1960's is known as "*La violencia*" The Violence (Fals Borda 1969)

<sup>32</sup> The region is conformed by the "Altiplano", also called the "Oriente cercano (Close East)" due to its close location to Medellin, the capital of the Province. It comprises the Municipalities of Rionegro, Marinilla, Carmen del Viboral, El Retiro, Santuario, Guarne, La Ceja, La Unión y San Vicente.

<sup>33</sup> These includes the Vallejo Plan in 1967, the Fund for the Promotion of Exports (PROEXPO) and the introduction of credit programmes, technical assistance and marketing services.

preferential tariffs treatment granted by the European Union and the United States as recognition of Colombia's fight against drug trafficking.

Secondly, during 1980's several infrastructure investments gave the area advantages to continue its industrial development process. The construction of the International airport<sup>34</sup>, happened together with a boom in the industry worldwide. Thus the demands for flowers increased progressively, as it was easier to airfreight them to foreign markets. By the end of the 80's and beginning of the 90's the arrival of drug trafficking money made land prices rise. Violence became common in the area as this period was also marked by the onset of paramilitary armed groups. Due to unemployment and violence, rural migrating populations became a massive source of cheap labour.

Thirdly, the decade of the 1990s was characterized by an industrialization period with the establishment of new businesses nearby<sup>35</sup>. Increasingly peasants moved into towns searching for jobs in the agro-industrial and manufacture sectors. From this decade until now the cut flower business continued to grow in the region and became one of the main income generating activities of the area<sup>36</sup>.

In sum, political instability, industrialization and macroeconomic constraints have brought severe social impacts in the area. The population has increased dramatically, bringing problems of constant migration, insecurity and social fragmentation. Households have changed their survival strategies for sources of secure income by entering in to the labour market. Therefore, their ability to demand decent working conditions is constrained by their vulnerable position and the limited alternative sources of employment available.

At the global level, the entrance of other countries in the business during the early nineties has made producers face new requirements. Capital is needed to have better infrastructure and cover environmental and labour legal conditions. New markets

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<sup>34</sup> Jose María Córdoba Airport, located in Rionegro.

<sup>35</sup> Surrounding the Airport a special zone has been delimited as "Zona Franca", where several industries and Maquilas have set their industries taking advantage of the special tax reduction of the zone.

<sup>36</sup> Tourism, exploitation of timber and food production are others source of income for settlers.

have to be explored and alternative crops developed in order to remain competitive in the world markets and satisfy buyer demands.

The development process of the cut flower industry has generated new types of production among local producers. These include contract-farming schemes, subcontracting labour and the multiplication of small independent producers. Nevertheless this transformation has occurred as well in higher levels of the value chain. Progressively international firms have been inserted in the business. For example, according to the research made by Corporación Cactus (2003), Dole Food Company bought 23 flower farms in Colombia and Ecuador in 1998. This brought a change in the value chain production structure and its governance, as now 20% of the total Colombian production is controlled by this group.

The implications of this insertion may be that production ends up being dominated by Multinational corporations. It is necessary then to ask several questions:

- How this transformation in the governance structure may affect workers labour conditions, as international labour standards are required to be implemented?
- How can other actors help to make codes of conduct more accountable for value chain operations and protect workers in this changing environment?

The companies operations affects workers, their communities and local institutions. Thus, the next section will map these local stakeholders. This is intended to give a broader view of the social and political relationships influencing the conditions of production in the area. From this standpoint it is feasible to understand their own possibilities to manoeuvre in a global value chain.

### **3.4 Main institutional stakeholders involved in flower production.**

There are different stakeholders involved locally in the business of the cut flower industry. They include the State, the Association of Colombian growers, Trade Unions, and NGO's. The context gets more dense when actors at other levels are included<sup>37</sup>, taking in account that each one of them has the ability to impact the

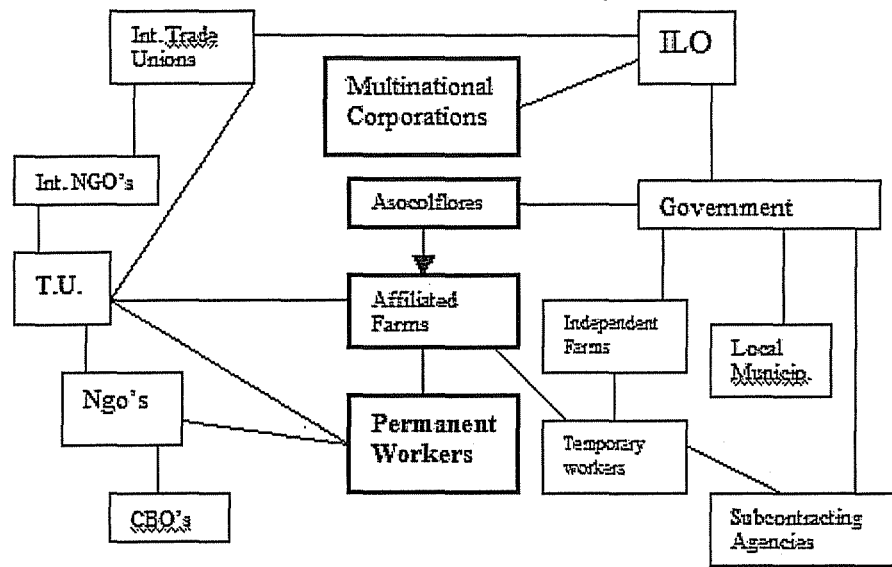
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<sup>37</sup> These actors include international NGOs like BothEnds based in Holland, the international confederation of free trade unions (ICFTU), the international flower trade sector and the ILO.



market. According to Barrientos (2003:10) it is useful to combine value chain mapping and an analysis of the related institutional actors, because together they "can both affect the way in which a code of conduct operates down a value chain, and how the efficacy of a code for poor workers can be improved."

Fig. 3 Mapping of main institutional stakeholders. Graph made by the author.



As was discussed in the framework, often stakeholders like subcontracting agencies are not included in corporative agreements as they are considered independent service providers. But as is observed in the graph, they have an important role in securing decent labour conditions due to the direct relation they have with workers. Moreover, other actors often ignored, such as CBO's<sup>38</sup>, The Church<sup>39</sup>, private organizations, and consumer's groups become, relevant in the social arena as they have close interactions with workers, therefore acting as an effective supportive net.

The institutional stakeholders are interrelated in different ways. Each one of them has their own needs, interest and positions regarding the business. Partnerships have been created among some of them in order to align their agendas and get a better bargaining position. However, what is interesting is to see how they interact on political grounds and how workers at the end of the value chain might be effectively

<sup>38</sup> The region doesn't have a strong tradition of CBO's political involvement. Nowadays their creation is being encouraged by The European Union to become active in "Peace building Projects".

<sup>39</sup> The Diocesis Sonson-Rionegro (Religious Institution) plays an active role in the area as most of the population is catholic.

helped. The next paragraphs give a brief description of the main institutional actors involved in this case study. This help us to understand the intricate relationships among stakeholders.

**1. Asocolflores:** Asocolflores was established by entrepreneurs in 1973 as a non-profit grower/exporter association to promote the Colombian cut flower industry in the world markets<sup>40</sup>. This association is a very powerful actor in economic and political terms. They congregate 202 firms and have international partnerships with the buyers and intermediaries in the value chain. Apart from upgrading farms and representing them in the local and international arena, Asocolflores develops different social investment strategies in association with the government and international actors like USAID and the FUPAD. These strategies of social investment will be looked carefully in chapter 5.

**2. Affiliated Entrepreneurs:** They represent around 75% of the export enterprises in Colombia. The majority of the traditional farms are members of the association; they use Asocolflores as their representatives in most of the political decision at national and international level. Membership gives them an opportunity for upgrading their conditions of production as they get covered by total quality management programs. At local level they have more leading role as individuals than as a group as each farm develops their own initiatives towards their workers and local communities.

**3. Independent Entrepreneurs:** They represent 25% of Colombian producers. Their non affiliation to Asocolflores is due to a number of reasons: the short period of existence of the farm, the small size of production, the membership fee cost and finally the hierarchical structure of the association. Even though they act independently, in the last three years they are creating spaces to work as a group<sup>41</sup>. This has as an educational objective and includes the promotion of new local small and medium brands of producers, assistance in production requirements and generating better links with different providers and buyers of the flower value chain.

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<sup>40</sup> It also works supporting the members in technical matters related to flower production. Four main areas: Research (developing technological development) Phytosanitary campaigns, Training and events, and managing a documentation centre.

<sup>41</sup> In the last three years, small and medium producers have organized an event called "Expoflora".

**4. State:** The Colombian government is directly involved in establishing labour regulations and environmental conditions of production monitored by public institutions<sup>42</sup>. Its role is central to provide a proper institutional framework where decent labour conditions are available for its citizens. The State has signed specific agreements with the private sector and international developing institutions (USAID, FUPAD) to create social development programmes.

The government and Asocolflores have special partnerships to consolidate production in the world market<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore it has the power to lobby in the US senate and the European community in order to get better export treatment for flowers<sup>44</sup>. This increases business profitability and generates more sources of employment.

**5. Local Municipalities:** Even though Colombia has gone through a process of decentralization, local municipalities still have a limited budget, which constraints their ability control all the working conditions of the people working in farms in their areas. There is a high dependence on central government decisions and other public institutions<sup>45</sup> for environmental standards of production.

Local municipalities inclusion in the industry's debate is pivotal to insure sustainable livelihoods and development programs. Partnerships have been created with the private sector to benefit the local population (housing programs, literacy campaigns, recreation). But, the municipality and the cut flower farms have different agendas with regard to local investment and development plans. Moreover, cut flowers export farms do not pay local taxes due to this special condition as exporters (Safa 1986). This condition impacts local municipalities' sources of income.

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of the Environment, Housing and Territorial Development; Cornare ICA Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario.

<sup>43</sup> See Colombia Competes: A program lead by the Ministry of Foreign Trade that has as goal the consolidation of Colombian exports in a period of ten years.

<sup>44</sup> Internally they also have generated special trading conditions to benefit the export producers in times when there has been devaluation of the local currency. These measures are taken in specific cases to avoid the raise of unemployment levels due to risky export conditions.

<sup>45</sup> Like the Colombian Agricultural Institution (ICA) and Cornare Regional Corporation of the Nare River is a public institution that deals with the environmental legal framework of the activities in the Oriente Antioqueño region.

**6. NGOs:** The Escuela Nacional Sindical (ENS Trade Union School) is a local active NGO that gives education on labour related issues, legal assistance and support research. Corporación CACTUS is another important NGO based in Bogotá that focuses its work in the cut flower industry. Their main called is for a freedom of association and collective bargaining. Both institutions recognizes that the cut flower industry generates a lot of economic income to the owners of the farms, but the economic redistribution should be higher, with more corporate social responsibility projects to the area and its communities.

The International NGO's<sup>46</sup> that are part of the flower's value chain, support workers and local NGO's by funding special events (Seminars, papers, training courses) and making international pressure. They propose the idea of an international code of conduct for the cut flower industry. From their perspective, the low levels of Unionisation are a result of the conditions imposed by the employers.

**7. Other agents for collective Representation:** One absent stakeholder in this whole picture is trade unions. The role of trade unions in the cut flower industry in the Oriente Antioqueno region is ambiguous due to their actual non-existence.

According to Quiroz and Cardona (2003) due to cultural differences, the situation of trade unions in Oriente Antioqueno and Sabana de Bogotá are very different as currently there are active trade unions in the latter. In 1975 according to the research done by Biervliet (1994) there was the establishment of one of the first trade unions in the municipality of La Ceja. This union lasted for ten years but it closed due to several agreements with the management of the farm<sup>47</sup>. Other cases of Unionisation in the Oriente Antioqueno flower industry happened at the end of the 70's but this where rapidly diluted with the closure of some farms or the replacement of the workforce by new ones.

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<sup>46</sup> BothEnds in Holland support the implementation of the ICC International Code of Conduct, as explained in the framework. The International Labour Rights Foundation (ILRF) based in Washington has it's own campaign "Fairness in Flowers." Addressed Ecuadorian and Colombian's flowers farms.

<sup>47</sup> These agreements included special commitments with the community and programs oriented to worker's welfare.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has set the scene of the cut flower value chain in preparation for the analysis of women workers conditions in the Oriente Antioqueño region in the following chapter. In the Value chain approach it was observed how the insertion of a multinational company in production has change the structure and dynamism of the business. Moreover, the high dependence of sources of employment in this sector is a risky situation for workers as they get absorbed by global markets.

It is necessary then to think on the impacts of the governance structure of this industry as a development model in a weak socio-political context. The state has encouraged, via flexible legislation, the rise of this business. It has also controlled the private sector with regard to environmental practices and social protection measures. However, this type of employment seems to not be taking in account all the social impacts that it has brought to workers in the lower levels, in terms of reducing vulnerability towards risk and assuring decent labour conditions.

The entrance of new stakeholders at international, national and local levels has changed the arena of socio-political debate. Due to the economic importance of this industry, new alliances between stakeholders have appeared leaving certain actors in a weak bargaining position. As a result of this situation, foreign and local stakeholders are demanding measures to protect and include communities in important decision making processes. Furthermore, the role of the Trade unions in the area is still questionable, as it seems that there is no space for social representation of workers concerns.

Within this global value chain and local context, the next chapter explores carefully women workers social and labour conditions are going in order to clarify how changes in the cut flower industry have affected them.



## **4. WOMEN WORKERS IN THE CUT FLOWER INDUSTRY**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter starts characterizing the labour context of women workers in the cut flower industry in the Oriente Antioqueno region. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the type of contract women get determines their labour conditions.

In the region studied three main types of employment are available, contract farming arrangements, temporary, and permanent labour in export production farms. Permanent workers in affiliated farms are the ones more likely to be covered with institutional policies and the code of conduct Florverde<sup>48</sup>. Therefore the categories of “Employment relations in the workplace” and “Gender specific needs” are carefully analyzed for this particular group.

This would help to understand different attitudes, livelihoods strategies, labour constraints and social outcomes. Finally the chapter ends with a discussion comparing actual labour conditions and decent work for the three different groups.

### **4.2 Women workers socio-labour conditions in Oriente Antioqueño**

Women are the majority of the labour force in the cut flower industry in Colombia.<sup>49</sup> But, farms in the Oriente Antioqueno region employ more men than women. The percentage of women workers in the area is only between 35% and 45% (ENS 2004). This may be due to social and cultural factors. Firstly, the availability of lots of men workforce due to rural poverty and unemployment, and secondly, the idea of men as the breadwinner continues to be a pervasive cultural behaviour.

What the data suggest is that before engaging in the cut flower industry women used to work in agricultural activities, domestic work, in the public sector or informal sector. A few women had previous jobs in the private sector, nevertheless in positions such as cleaning or cooking. What this means is that, nowadays in this region, women

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<sup>48</sup> To the date not all the affiliated farms have received the Florverde certification. This will be explained in chapter five.

<sup>49</sup> Female labour force national average corresponds to 60% (Asocolflores 2004)

have restricted opportunities of employment as there is a marked gender division of labour<sup>50</sup>.

In general, most of the women start their jobs in the flower industry at an early age<sup>51</sup>. Secondary studies suggest that the largest percentage of women employed are between 26 and 32 years old. Even though the literature about women in horticultural export led industries argues that there is a preference for women under 30, in this case it is observed that there are frequently older women getting employed.

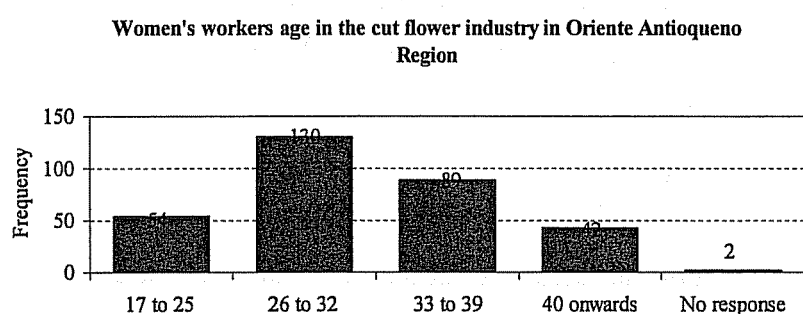


Fig. 4 Adapted from: Clara Elena Gómez y Luz María Londoño, *survey with 317 women working in the cut flower industry*, 2003.

The most common reason cited by women to employ themselves in the cut flower industry is the need for income to contribute actively to their families, and as a way to have independence. In this line, break ups with their partners, becoming a widow or being single parents are other important factors. In a macro-context of economic constraint, the industry of flower becomes a reliable source of employment for rural women.

Most of the migrant households have moved closer to the villages around the farms to obtain the advantages of its infrastructure. *“At least I’m still in touch with nature, in a farm, and not in a factory sewing hundreds of t-shirts”*. For rural migrating women it becomes a valid option to be involved with agricultural tasks, rather than employed in other industries like Maquilas in the area.

<sup>50</sup> The issue of class is another important dimension for Colombian rural context, but is beyond the scope of this research. For further exploration refer to Friedman-Sanchez (1999-2002)

<sup>51</sup> After several criticism for the employment of people under 18, the minimum age set by Asocolflores affiliated farms to be able to work is 21 years, higher than the established by the Colombian labour law.



It is important to differentiate between three types of employment in the area:

- I) Contract farm schemes
- II) Workers working through subcontracting agencies
- III) Permanent workers

There is not enough data available in the area over workers involved in the first two categories. Nevertheless for illustrative purposes the next chart summarizes the types of farms as they determine broadly the type of employment.

Table# 3. Type of farm vs. type of employment

TYPE OF FARM	SIZE OF FARMS <sup>52</sup>	TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT
Peasants farms	Micro	Informal, Contract Farming
Independent farms	Small, Medium,	Permanent, Temporary
Affiliated Farms	Small, Medium, Large	Permanent*, Temporary

Even though the study focus specifically on permanent women workers, a brief description of the each type of employment is going to be included. This will help to contrast the labour conditions of women workers, and why there is a general preference to be under permanent contracts.

#### 4.2.1 Contract farming

Contract farming is an activity that has been increasing in the areas nearby the centralized export producing farms. There are two types of farmers, the first one is done by traditional micro-scale growers and the second one corresponds to small entrepreneurs<sup>53</sup>.

Micro-scale growers are characterized by a household strategy of self-exploitation. Families are characterized by a division of labour where women perform domestic and harvesting tasks. Economic constraints and low educational levels gives this

<sup>52</sup> Micro-farms refers to small scale production farms, generally related to small scale contract farming. Small Farms have between 50 and 225 workers, medium farms between 225 and 599 workers, and large farms have more than 600 workers.

\* This are the workers most likely to be covered by the Code of Conduct Florverde.

<sup>53</sup> This corresponds to the division observed by Watts (1990) "independent peasants and newly settled pioneer farmers are drawn into new corporate forms of social organization under the state or private auspice."

group a weak bargaining and precarious position towards buyers. Furthermore, they are not covered by legal labour regulations and insufficient security measures are taken to protect them and the environment.

The second kind is a heterogeneous group. It refers mainly to growers with higher educational levels that own land in the area. Often they receive extension services from buyers to use appropriate technology. Nevertheless, they supply other exporting companies as they do not fulfill the requirements for export certification<sup>54</sup>. They employ male or female tenants and as well permanent or temporary workers.

In both situations, high standards of quality are required for flowers. Risks associated with climatic conditions and production failure are taken by growers. In addition, late payments from buyers and the lack of a binding mechanism due to verbal agreements demonstrate their lack of power in the value chain<sup>55</sup>.

#### **4.2.2. Temporary and Subcontracting workers**

Temporary and subcontracting employment continues to be the minority in the sector (ENS 2003). However, since the 90's there has been a rise in subcontracting arrangements via temporary service companies. Two of the ten women interviewed for this research had a temporary status. Critics raised up by them include their labour insecurity due to short contract, longer working periods than permanent workers, not being covered by social security schemes.

In addition, the IMF Stand By Arrangements gave conditioned new loans to the government in 2002 which led to a national reform on labour policies. The 2002 Colombian labour system reform, has made labour regulations more flexible. As a result "Work Partnerships Cooperatives" can be observed working under "civil law contracts", therefore they are not covered by the labour regulations<sup>56</sup>. National trade unions and workers are concerned with the long term consequences of this changes.

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<sup>54</sup> In terms of lack of capital, land, technology and certifications: to supply directly the foreign market.

<sup>55</sup> Also observed by Barrientos (2001) in her studies of the export networks in Chile and South Africa.

<sup>56</sup> Other forms of temporary work include "apprenticeship". The National Education Service (SENA) has started new programs to train young women in partnerships with the private sector. By law, the private sector has to employ as certain number of students for a period of 6 months. But, these special contracts do not need to pay the regular wages as other formal employees.

Nevertheless, temporary employment is seen by them as an opportunity to get permanent contracts and to gain some experience, for further hiring periods. *“When I heard that they were going to keep some of us, I did my best, because I like a lot the farm.”* In terms of security of livelihoods, permanent status is regarded as a better condition than their actual one.

So far, women working under contract farming arrangements and subcontracted (Temporary status) have been explained. Their type of employment has informal characteristics that put them in precarious conditions. Nevertheless they are often ignored when tracing populations involved in the industry. The next section looks at permanent workers to see how their position differs from the two first ones.

#### **4.2.3 Permanent women workers in the production farms**

Permanent employment is present in affiliated or independent farms. The legal contracts established with permanent workers binds farms to follow the labour law and makes reliable information. Therefore there are farms that are more likely to be continuously monitored by local institutions over labour and environmental regulations<sup>57</sup>. According to secondary data collected from affiliated farms, almost 94% of female workers have permanent contracts. Thus is by far the largest group in comparison to the two above.

From the 10 working women interviewed in this study, 8 had permanent contracts and 6 of these were in affiliated farms. Even though the number of workers interviewed is not statistically representative for the scope of the population, when triangulated with other information available, some conclusions can be made. The main differences observed between the two groups (Independent, affiliated) are noted in the next table.

Table #4. Main differences between farms according to women workers.

	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Affiliated</b>
Size of the farm	Small	Small, Medium, Large
Extra benefits	no	Yes
Covered by CSR programs	no	Yes

<sup>57</sup> Micro farms and contract farming arrangements are also bind to follow these regulations, but due to budget constraints and other issues explained in chapter 3, it is harder for local municipalities to monitor them.

However, it cannot be assumed that only affiliated farms are the ones committed to follow labour legislations, as there are several independent growers that comply with them and that may be covered by other social and environmental initiatives.

#### 4.2.4 Summary Table

The way the cut flower industry has been structured has made different conditions of employment appear in the area. Subcontractors and contract farming arrangements have been often overlooked by the state and the private sector initiatives. As a result there is a lack of enough information available over these groups. Nevertheless certain indicators have been portrait over actual labour conditions which are summarized in the next table.

Table 5. Summary Actual Labour Conditions

INDICATOR	PERMANENT WORKERS	SUBCONTRACTORS	CONTRACT FARMING
Labour contracts	Clear	Seasonal, not clear	verbal contracts, not binding mechanism
Wages	Minimum legal wage or above	Minimum legal wage	According to production
Extra legal benefits	Yes, extra bonus, saving accounts, educational and housing benefits	No	No
Protection for pregnant women	Covered by legal labour laws	Not clear	Not clear
Physical and Psychological abuse	High levels of stress. Workers are protected by labour regulations.	Not clear, major uncertainty about contract renewal	self exploitation, uncertainty
Occupational health	Good: Working gear provided, potable water, separate toilets, controlled use of chemicals	Not clear, it depends on the farm allocated	None. Occasional training provided to improve product quality standards
Social security rights	Health, pensions and paid holydays provided	Health and pensions must be covered by each worker	Health and pensions must be covered by each worker
Overtime	Yes, but controlled according to legal labour laws	Yes	Yes
Child labour	Minimum age 18	Not clear	Not clear
Freedom of association	Legally yes. Collective Agreement strategies. Absence of Trade Unions in the area	Not clear	Not clear

### **4.3 Permanent workers covered by the code of conduct**

Once explained the different employment conditions in the cut flower industry in the area, the next session will explore the categories of “Employment relations in the workplace” and “Gender Specific Needs” for permanent women workers that are covered by the code of conduct Florverde.

#### **4.3.1 Employment relations in the workplace**

**Security and Social Protection** Workers are paid regularly, with wages corresponding to the minimum established by the government<sup>58</sup> or above (1.25% MW). The permanent workforce is covered by social benefits that include Health insurance, pension schemes, paid holidays and other extra benefits<sup>59</sup>. Farms have occupational health programs to assure hygienic and industrial safety for workers. This aspect has improved significantly in the last decade with the implementation of quality production standards, security measures and training<sup>60</sup>.

**Selection and recruitment processes** When workers are hired by farms, the three first months are a testing period<sup>61</sup>. Depending on their performance, often they become permanent workers. As the industry has evolved and the tasks require more attention, educational levels become highly valued<sup>62</sup>. Workers come recommended by another worker, a family member that already works there or by direct contract. Therefore showing good skills for a physical demanding job is taken into account, but the social networks of the person also takes importance.

Women workers feel under pressure to fulfil the production targets because they know that their contract depends on their daily performance. The sanctioning procedures start with a verbal call of attention, then a written memorandum, and finally work dismissal. The most common reasons for dismissals have to do with not compliance

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<sup>58</sup> It corresponds to \$381.500 pesos (140 Euros at October 2005)

<sup>59</sup> Extra benefits include saving schemes, extra bonus, educational and housing credit, marriage and disaster assistance among others.

<sup>60</sup> Security measures include fix times for fumigation and control access to the areas, identification of all toxic material, shifts to organic fertilizers, introduction of new technologies, implementation of recycling process, water and waste management programs, proper gear provided availability of drinking water and separate toilets and finally periodical training to staff.

<sup>61</sup> As in any other industry in Colombia, this is a legal practice

<sup>62</sup> Quality standards of products are the line between selling and losing the production; therefore there is continuous pressure to improve them.

of work targets, fights inside the farms, attending shifts under effects of alcohol and stealing.

Companies' promotion policies do not use gender as a formal discriminatory practice. Promotion decisions relates to responsibility and the skills show by workers. Most of the women continue doing the same job for several years. *"It's something that becomes natural, you go, you do your job, you have good friends and a nice working environment, I don't see myself doing anything different"*. Yet, it is interesting to observe that becoming a supervisor is not commonly desired by women workers. Women express that they prefer being part of the group, rather than in power positions.

Most of farms higher positions are occupied by men. However, this has to do with the trained personnel requirements, as males are predominantly in agricultural professions. In contrast, women are present in the hierarchy but mainly in socially oriented professions, secretarial positions and sales. However, training is given on a periodic basis to all workers to improve performance in terms of skills, security measures and new technologies.

There is as well an occupational segregation of task based on physiological factors and gender stigmas. *"For example when they are going to fumigate, they ask us (The women) to be out of the fields, they want to protect us..."* From women's workers perspective this division is not perceived as a discriminatory practice.

#### **4.3.2 Gender Specific Needs**

**Reproduction role** Strategies among women to arrange family care includes using kinship social networks or recurring to childcare services provided by some farms and the municipalities<sup>63</sup>. Normal shifts finish around 15:00 which is seen as positive, because it allows mothers to be with their children as it coincides with school schedules for children. Nevertheless overtime is frequently required, which makes the performance of the care role difficult.

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<sup>63</sup> ICBF Colombian Institute of Family Welfare

Overtime shifts, can become very physically demanding and require discipline to fulfil the production goals. It is used for some to improve their incomes, but in most of the cases, workers accept this because they don't want to be identified as uncommitted with the company. *"At the end of the shift I just feel like watching TV. as I am too exhausted"*.

Practices over special permissions are hard to generalize as these are deal according to each farms management policies. Pregnant women are covered by legal standard procedures of prenatal and postnatal labour regulations.

**Actual Household conditions** The study of made by ENS(2004), shows that 64.1% of the women live with their partners, the other 28.1% correspond to single women and only 5.7% are separated or divorce<sup>64</sup>. These data correlates to the sample of this study from the 10 women 6 were living with their partners, and 4 were living with their families<sup>65</sup>. This proportions can be explained by the strong influence of religion in the area and the availability of kin social networks that give a better position for women in terms of safety nets.

Households look at the income as a way to save for housing or education purposes for their children. In consequence, once women have achieved these goals they retire from the employment. Nevertheless other women decides to continue with their jobs not just a cause of the economic factor, but a cause of the independence and socializing role it gives them. *"I used to stay at home doing nothing and fighting with everybody there, now I go out to work, I laugh with my mates, I even bought my own stuff without asking anybody."*

In general there is a reduced time for involvement in other activities different than their job and household care. Their participation in recreational activities and educational workshops are reduced to the ones provided by farms. This training and the space for women raising specific concerns will be explained in next chapter.

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<sup>64</sup> This situation differs from the households in the Sabana de Bogota. According to Dolan and Sorby (2003), in Colombia, close to 80% of the households that are dependent from the income generated by the wage labour in the cut flower industry are headed by women.

<sup>65</sup> Two of them were single mothers.

### 4.3 Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted a number of key labour conditions of women workers in the cut flower industry in the Oriente Antioqueno region. This region is marked by a strong patriarchal legacy that sets a gender division of labour. It was suggested how most of these women enter to the cut flower labour force due to economic constraints, and lack of other formal opportunities for women in this area. This makes this industry a viable option to be employed and reduce vulnerability towards poverty.

Three types of employment can be identified in the area, contract farming arrangements, subcontracting and permanent work. Even though it is hard to make generalizations over labour conditions in the whole production machinery, the data suggested that the first two options are done under precarious conditions due to the high risk associated, instability and recent changes in labour laws.

On the other hand, in the recent years permanent women workers seem to be in better labour conditions than the previous groups. Women that are covered by the code of conduct have achieved in economic terms, access to security and social protection, permanent income, and other extra benefits. Nevertheless, issues of levels of work stress plus voicing concerns inside the farms, are still not clear.

Vulnerable workers that are facing insecure labour conditions need to be protected and their situation improved. This is achieved when they are recognized formally by society, and their needs and concerns raise in the public sphere. That is why voice and participation in the labour sphere is important for local socio-economic development as it has direct impact in community processes.

On a global level achieving workers representation inside GVCs is essential for decent work labour standards. In the next chapter the case of the code of conduct developed by the cut flower growers association and implemented in some farms is explored. It looks at the spaces that a code gives to workers' voice and stakeholders' participation in the road to create social dialogue.



## **5. CODES OF CONDUCTS AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Immersed in a global value chain, the cut flower industry in Oriente Antioqueno region has quickly evolved becoming a complex production system that generates an important source of employment for the local economy.

It was seen that permanent workers are doing better in terms of labour conditions, than other types of workers. But it is not clear if this also applies to the issues of voice and representation. Therefore, this chapter is going to analyze the effectiveness of a code of conduct to improve workers representation and social dialogue in the sector.

The chapter starts with a brief description of the code of conduct and other special social programs that are being implemented by the private sector. Afterwards women workers' voice and perceptions about the code are analyzed. Moreover different stakeholders' concerns towards the code of conduct are also taken into account. The contrast with their views serves to highlight the strengths, weakness and possibilities of action of codes of conduct with regard to social dialogue and inclusion.

### **5.2 Corporate Social Responsibility Programs and Florverde**

As discussed in the framework, the role of the state as a provider of guarantees for workers diminished as a result of the changes in the world trade, the insertion in GVCs and the conditions of foreign direct investment, among others. During the 80's international trade unions and NGO'S raised their concerns about companies' behavior and responsibility over their areas of operation. Colombia's flower industry was a center of serious criticism during the 80's and 90's regarding working conditions. Ultimately, these condemnations produced negative impacts for firm's credibility, which may cause lost market opportunities.

The Colombian flower export producers' association (Asocolflores) has developed programmes to counteract negative impacts that the cut flower farms generate in the environmental and social sphere. It has also supported social development under the motto of "Sustainable floriculture with social responsibility" since 1990's. These projects have direct impact on workers, their families and communities.

The initiatives can be classified in two areas<sup>66</sup>:

- I) Social Development: “Cultivating peace in the family<sup>67</sup>” a model for peaceful conflict resolution workshops, “Asocolflor-es-hogar (Asocolflores is home)” that subsidized housing programs, school reinforcement projects and childcare facilities for worker’s children.
- II) Training and personal development: literacy campaigns, employment plans<sup>68</sup> massive recreation, newspaper, eradication of child labour<sup>69</sup> and partnerships with municipalities to support traditional festivities and other social events.

As was discussed previously, issues like migration, violence and gender discrimination are common in the areas of operation. Therefore the corporate strategies mentioned above have been developed and adapted to local conditions. This brings back Kabeer’s (2003) debate about the outcomes of imposing from outside global standards without taking in account workers priorities and constraints. It is interesting to observe in this specific case, how the association gets then in the middle of the dispute about global labour standards and particular local circumstances.

This debate raises questions regarding the interest of the global market, firms and workers needs. Two positions can be taken, an optimistic one, arguing that there is a real concern from these farms to generate social development. And a second position that argues that these measures are just an attempt to cover up for negative publicity in the market. One way to address this latter position and allow accountability from different stakeholders has been the creation of a corporate code of conduct.

Asocolflores created “Florverde” (green flower) code of conduct in 1996 as an auto regulatory mechanism of social and environmental activities. It works under three strategies: benchmarking social and environmental standards; supporting and accompanying farms in the change process; and finally managing an information system between members. The overall goal of the program is to move from a code of

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<sup>66</sup> Asocolflores (2004) Social, Environmental and Florverde Final Report.

<sup>67</sup> In partnership with USAID, its goal is to promote a “Culture of Peace” between workers, their families and the community.

<sup>68</sup> “The School of Floriculture” to address Colombia’s vulnerable displaced people and “Moras de San Jose” to support alternative productive projects.

<sup>69</sup> In partnership with the ILO

conduct to an integrated management system with performance indicators, to generate local development and industrial upgrading<sup>70</sup>.

Florverde is a CCC that has 150 participating companies and until May 2005, 56 farms have been certified. This program aims to promote optimal practices for human resource and natural resource management. However, not all firms in the cut flower industry are willing or have the capacity to adopt this programme. Complying with the standards required is a costly process that needs continuous upgrading.

There are several reasons given by producers for adopting Florverde in their farms. First, improvements in production process which is reflected in better environmental performance and organized human resource management. Secondly the association network strengthen giving more competitiveness to farms. Finally stakeholders credibility about their commitment to sustainable growth and social development. At the end of the day these are translated in higher productivity and a better position to enter into international markets.

It could be argued that the relevance of the other CSR programs for improving workers social conditions are more relevant for workers livelihoods. Nevertheless, these programs have been aligned in a coordinated direction with the code's social goals, becoming a whole package of measures inserted into a CSR framework.

From what was seen in Chapter 4 most of the permanent women working in affiliated farms have better labour conditions than the groups not covered by these programs. The next section looks at outcomes in the areas of voice and participation with the implementation of this code. First the views from the women workers are going to be explored and then some attention is given to the views of other stakeholders.

### **5.3 Voice and representation at the flower farms**

The importance of having the capacity and proper spaces for workers to raise their concerns and participate in conflict resolution goes beyond the sphere of labour rights.

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<sup>70</sup> It has nine basic principles, three regarding social aspects: Personnel administration, Welfare and occupational health and Training and development. The other six principles refer to environmental factors (inputs, soils, water, landscapes, residues, and finally regarding the air and the ozone layer).

It has to do with social and political development, what happens inside the farms is a reflection of general social context. Therefore, voice and participation are preconditions for achieving representation and social dialogue.

In order to explore voice and participation is necessary to look at different indicators that reflect women workers views and opportunities of exercising their agency. These indicators include the existence of Trade Unions and other ways of collective bargaining, membership to other organizations of employees and define spaces for communications and complaints. Finally, education about the industry and the code of conduct gives important information about the possibilities of representation.

### **5.3.1 Existence of Trade unions and other ways of Representation**

According to the secondary Data<sup>71</sup>, for the year 2004 around 15% of the workers in affiliated farms in Colombia are members of a trade union. Yet 44% of the workers have signed collective labour agreements and 47% belong to a worker's fund (Cooperative working association) For Colombian trade unions standards, the cut flower unionised sector has increased particularly since the mid 90's. And the actual rates are considerably higher in comparison to other sectors of the economy.

However, the role of trade unions is very ambiguous among workers in the Oriente Antioqueno Region, as it was explained in chapter 3. Socio cultural and political circumstances created a negative collective imaginary of Trade Unions<sup>72</sup>. *"I remember she was always complaining and creating problems, I think she was a trade unionist, that's why she didn't get her contract renewed."* It is observed that there are mix feelings regarding the role of Trade Unions. There is fear and apathy towards the subject as it is implicitly seen causal for loosing their jobs and social rejection. This implies that there is not a clear understanding of the role of a Trade Union as a representation body of workers.

From the data collected, the following table was elaborated showing the main concerns raised by women inside the farms and the strategies used to deal with them.

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<sup>71</sup> Asocolflores 2004 op.cited

<sup>72</sup> Bankruptcy, lack of employment, impoverishment, violence and even left radicalism are perceive as results of Trade unions initiatives by a big sector of the population.

Table # 6 Common conflicts and Strategies

Common conflicts	Strategy
Special permissions (Gender related)	HRM - individual bargaining
Working hours	Collective agreements
Working targets	Recurring to supervisors
Uniforms	Collective agreements- Individual bargaining
Wages	Collective agreements
Discomfort with supervisors/ other workers	Creating Alliances with people in higher positions, mobilizing small groups

What these findings suggest is that the vast majority of women workers used alternative strategies to negotiate labour issues and gender specific needs. These strategies include creating alliances with people in higher positions, recurring to social workers, organizing small groups with some representatives or individual bargaining. Therefore there is contestation among women and use of agency in the workplace but not in conventional ways. This goes in line with Kabeer's (2004) position about women's needs and priorities through forms of collective action that "do not necessarily adopt confrontational tactic often associated with traditional Trade Unionism.

Nonetheless, this may suggest that workers are not being protected and independently represented to bargain problems and changes over labour conditions. Moreover, questions remains about how effective are this alternative strategies implemented by women to voice their particular needs in a levelled bargaining power position.

### 5.3.2 Spaces for communications and complaints

The interviewees noted that certified farms have substantially improved communication mechanisms inside farms. When there is conflict, they contact their supervisors. If this can not solve the problem then it goes to an engineer or the person next in the authority line. Human resource management departments are seen as a reliable source for solving labour related conflicts.

According to women workers the implementation of visible norms and regulations has increased their awareness over the firms view of rights and obligations in the workplace. Moreover, the internal monitoring of production processes done by workers and continuous surveys is seen by workers as new spaces for their involvement and participation. Even though it seems that workers are benefiting,

all these measures reflects the firms views and take the form of top-down managerial decisions.

Within this context of firms and CSR, there are educational and training workshops inside the farms that address issues such as better self-esteem, empowerment and a culture of peacefully resolving problems. These spaces are highly valued by women workers. According to them, the workshops are being used to engage in discussion over personal and social related issues with the aim of improving the relationships<sup>73</sup>. What this implies is that cultural values are brought into the workplace, in this arena they are prolonged, transformed or contested. Nevertheless, it is necessary to do further research over how these changes promoted by the code are being translated into agency by women workers and how these changes are being used to address labour related issues, power relationships within the industry and improving communication.

A strong argument that questions these initiatives has to do with the purposefulness of this new management approach. Are there real transformations of the work environment that allows workers and communities to become active subjects rather than passive receptors of these programs?

### **5.3.3 Knowledge of the industry and the code of conduct**

**The industry:** There is generalized vague knowledge of the flower industry among workers. Only the ones that have administrative positions and are located in the middle and high hierarchy are better informed about the complexities of the transactions. Most women workers limit their role to inside the farms and to their daily tasks. *"I think the gringos<sup>74</sup> ask always for colors according to seasons, they want them all clean and perfect"* Quality standards of the product are mention as the mayor problem that business face in the foreign markets. But there is not clear understanding about the whole logic of the business and their role in the whole chain.

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<sup>73</sup> In line with this argument Friedemann-sanchez (Forthcoming), concludes how *"the flower industry is disassembling the public transcript of male power within the lower-class rural community, and it is doing so in a public way"*.

<sup>74</sup> Gringos: local way to called people from the United States of America, the main buyers in the chain.

**Asocolflores:** The data of the study suggest that most of the workers identified Asocolflores as a powerful institution. Women immediately associated it with the special programs that have been developed regarding housing, recreation and childcare. This implies that there is recognition about the role of the institution in the programs and changes implemented in the farms in the past years.

It is interesting to observe high levels of committed feelings to the employers. Gratitude to their employers and the labour standards that have been reached in comparison with other sectors or past experiences is constantly mentioned. The different social programs implemented by farms and the new management approached reinforces cultural themes, as it creates a “family type” harmonic atmosphere, where it seems that there is no need for opposition or independent representation.

**Florverde:** Workers in certified farms have special training about the implications of the programme. Florverde is associated with better environmental procedures like waste management, recycling, and security at work, cleanness and better organization. Workers acknowledge improvements in the working environment but also the requirements for increased precautions and paperwork. *“Now we are more careful with what we are doing because everything is clear and strictly supervised.”* A greater control over production processes is achieved by the code. But nothing is mentioned by workers in relation to the management of independent labour issues.

Workers are included in the implementation of the programme, in processes like filling production indicators, and informing supervisors about daily issues. But monitoring is done by a third party<sup>75</sup>, which includes worker’s interviews in order to have a more legitimate process. *“They come and they make funny questions like if they are paying us in time.”* The farms have achieved a progressive transparency among workers and stakeholders as they have a say, but there is lack of power to influence the code.

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<sup>75</sup> In 2002 Florverde started an independent party certification process with an international certification body Société Générale de Surveillance (SGC) As a way to obtain local and international recognition and avoid criticism regarding self regulatory monitoring processes. SGC visit farms for certification procedures and continuous monitoring. This has to be with the four different levels that the programme is divided. The inspections include a visit to all the areas of the farms, interviews with workers, managers and people from the administrative areas.

The interviewees responses suggest that there is no sense of ownership of the code or the specifications that it contains. It is seen by women workers as an external element imposed by the farms and external forces. In this regard, Prieto-Carrón (2004) has observed in other sectors how “Women workers' voices and their organisations are excluded even if they are intended to benefit from corporate codes of conduct”.

Every year new indicators are adopted in the program as there are new requirements. These are dictated by the market, changes in the legal regulations, the availability of new technologies, and other social initiatives or by internal feedback from farms. However, these are executive decisions that leave little room for the inclusion of workers and others stakeholders perspectives. These are discussed below.

#### **5.4 Florverde and its meaning for other stakeholders**

Most of the **workers** that are not employed in certified farms do not know what a code of conduct is. This has to do with little information and education about this mechanism in the rural areas. In contrast, the name “Florverde” is recognized by workers, and there is an immediate association with better environmental and social practices. It is seen as a positive programme addressed mainly to large export oriented farms.

*“I will like to have those courses as well, they are more organized”*. From the interviews it was observed that the code is starting to set a differentiation regarding labour standards, among locals. Which becomes a positive outcome as is observed by Kabber (2004) who says that codes of conduct *“... provide a legal framework that may set levels for workers to claim for their rights*. It is interesting then to think on how this benchmarking achieved by the program may help other workers in the global chain.

Even though the data of the study was not big enough to be representative of **Independent Producer's Position**, from the data it can be inferred that there is recognition of Florverde as a good initiative. Its importance is based on the credibility that it has in foreign markets. The Programme is sometimes used as a reference benchmark by small and medium producers that are improving production processes



and labour relations. Nevertheless, the availability of other certifications in the market is a viable alternative for them. As these entitle them to export under the external requirements and makes them also accountable for their operations.

Thus, the NGO's ask for more inclusiveness of workers voice and representation into decision-making process. According to the interviews they believe that due to the particular paternalistic approach of managers in the Oriente Antioqueno region, workers in this area have better socio-labour conditions than the ones located in the Sabana de Bogotá. The Florverde program is seen as a helpful mechanism that has improved workers of the farms associated to Asocolflores.

On the other hand, their view is that there is still a lot of potential into that mechanism to make it more participatory. Moreover, different actors such as community based organizations, local government, community leaders; Ngo's and Trade unions should be part of the monitoring and evaluating process to increase its credibility.

So far, there are specific criticisms that have been raise towards Florverde:

- I) The content of the code, as it mainly addresses environmental issues and does not include the right to collective bargaining
- II) The verification procedures, lack other stakeholders involvement
- III) That it is a CCC rather than a multi-stakeholders code
- IV) Lack of coverage towards subcontract workers and others affected by the GVC configuration.

### **5.5 Summary Table**

There are different views and positions towards the effectiveness of the code of conduct in the area of representation and social dialogue. The next table summarizes different view points held by the main actors involved in order to give clarity to their position over the code of conduct.

Concept	Women Workers	Entrepreneurs	NGO's
<b>Labour conditions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-General improvement in labour standards</li> <li>- Enhance opportunities for training and upgrading</li> <li>- Better working environment</li> <li>- More stress due to targets and monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Efficiency in HRM</li> <li>- Development of social indicators, diagnostics and action plans</li> <li>- Farms' Accountability</li> <li>- Integration of Better practices beyond legal requirements</li> <li>- Joint planning -</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Good mechanism for farms' accountability.</li> <li>- Decreased negative environmental impacts</li> <li>-Lacks of coverage towards other workers (subcontractors, contract farming)</li> </ul>
<b>Voice and representation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased participation in workers funds.</li> <li>-Membership to collective agreements.</li> <li>-Alternative Bargaining strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Trade unions accepted</li> <li>-Promotion of collective bargaining agreements.</li> <li>-"New Management Approach "</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Not mentioned the right to free association.</li> <li>-Workers are treated as passive benefactors rather than active subjects</li> </ul>
<b>Involvement in process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Top-down process of implementation and monitoring.</li> <li>-Increased responsibilities with indicators.</li> <li>-No sense of ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is a continuous improvement process.</li> <li>-It requires time and commitment from affiliated farms and workers.</li> <li>-It involves other stakeholders in the chain (buyers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Clarity on laid off and disciplinary procedures.</li> <li>-There is more voice but not power</li> <li>-Unidirectional Process</li> </ul>

Table #7 View points over the code of conduct

## 5.6 Conclusions

This chapter has portrayed various outcomes that a corporate code of conduct has brought in the area of voice and representation. It was seen how the Colombian flower export producers' association designed a code of conduct for a part of the cut flower industry. This code has evolved into an integrated management system that certifies farms according to their performance in the environmental and social sphere.

Permanent women workers in certified farms recognized new strategies that have been created to improve communications and industrial relations. Training and workshops given inside the farms promote participation an open dialogue among the community. However, this is a top-down narrow process that lacks of proper spaces for women workers active involvement and real voice in labour issues. This is reflected in low levels of ownerships towards the code and passive agency inside the workplace.

Workers representation structures have adopted alternative ways like collective labour agreements and workers funds. That so far, has improved actual labour conditions according to changes implemented by a new management approach. However, it is not known how this substitution of trade unions may be effective in broader issues such as representation at a national level, dispute settlement mechanism and the inclusion of other informal sectors not yet covered by the code.

This standpoint of socio-political contexts, where independent representation has lost its main role, raises matters about what measures can be taken among stakeholders at local and international level in the cut flower industry to promote social dialogue. Furthermore what should be the role of the private sector and codes of conduct generating an enabling environment for active participation of woman workers.



## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has noted how an export production of cut flowers and private initiatives have been criticized as a cause of lack of responsibility towards workers. Yet the argument of this paper is that these mixed impacts can not be studied out of the macro and micro context, of how and under what circumstances, these businesses are developed and operate in less developed countries. To overlook these issues may lead to make inaccurate generalizations and to blame the "Usual suspects" without understanding the complete scenario of socioeconomic and political debate.

The insertion of global value chains to local economies has a dangerous feature. Multinational corporations operate under their own rules. As a consequence it allows the production machinery to easily transfer from one location to another according to market and political interest. This is a risky outcome of the world trade configuration that leaves workers and communities under precarious conditions of employment and vulnerable survival strategies.

Whereas the international trade and access to the markets are regulated by neo-liberal policies, there is always room for alternative approaches counteract negative impacts over local communities. The commodity chain approach helped to understand the way the cut flower market works globally, and it unveiled different stakeholders directly involved. Moreover, it gave clues about their interest in creating partnerships for further improvements.

From this study it was possible to observe that the measures taken by the public and private sector are not yet covering all the population involved in the cut flower export production business. These have multiple reasons. First, due to an horizontal and uncontrolled proliferation of suppliers (small contract farming and subcontractors). Second, a reduced State capacity to control and protect workers with effective regulatory mechanisms. Furthermore, an overall fragile environment is generated by the lack of ethical commitment by some entrepreneurs; poor educational levels among workers and the general exclusion of local communities in consultation and public action.

The settlement of export oriented farms in rural areas of the Oriente Antioqueño region need to comply with national regulations and institutional regimes. Industries are framed by sociopolitical factors like migration, force displacement, violence and rural poverty that puts workers in vulnerable conditions. Moreover, women worker's engagement of in the cut flower labour market is marked cultural factors and institutional gendered regimes that shape the nature of labour relations. Therefore power structures are rarely questioned by a subordinated workforce trapped in a survival race.

In terms of voice and participation it was found that there was a limited involvement by women workers in labour issues, which is also reflected in the low rates of trade unionism in the area. The data suggest that, apart from the socio-economical context, this can be due also to a lack of awareness of the legal labour framework, a deslegitimization of independent representation and, patterns of submissive behaviors and inequalities that remains unchallenged.

Florverde was taken in this research as a code of conduct study case in the cut flower industry. It was found that certified farms in the Oriente Antioqueño region were characterized for good standards of production and improved working conditions for employees. Women workers covered by the code are better off in terms of income, good occupational and security measures, training and extra benefits. These changes were helped by other corporate projects framed into CSR schemes addressed to the surrounding (vulnerable) population. Another positive feature of the code is the development of social indicators to generate joint planning over social investment projects. In addition, the social recognition achieved, allows workers and independent entrepreneurs to set a benchmark for sustainable production standards. But, to date only a small percentage of farms have been certified, which means that there is still a long way to go.

Nevertheless, one major problem of this program is its lack of active involvement of workers and main stakeholders. This reflects the absence of the code's ownership by women worker's and questions its gender responsiveness. In terms of voice and representation the absence of an independent representative body for workers shows a precarious condition with regard to socio-labour protection. There is a need for

changes to be done to make this mechanism more participatory of workers and community direct involvement; crucial to build consensus and enhance social dialogue.

To conclude, the process of achieving sustainable development and Decent Work conditions needs to become more inclusionary. Given the circumstances it requires effective political and institutional changes to create a more democratic and contestable system. It is necessary to develop pedagogic strategies to educate workers over their possibilities of maneuver and enable capacity building among communities. Lastly, enhanced partnerships between the state, the private sector and local communities may increase the viability and sustainability of firms with corporate social strategies in rural sectors.





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## Web Pages Resources

Asocolflores	<a href="http://www.asocolflores.org">www.asocolflores.org</a>
Both ends	<a href="http://www.bothends.com">www.bothends.com</a>
Corporación cactus	<a href="http://www.cactus.org.co">www.cactus.org.co</a>
Escuela Nacional Sindical	<a href="http://www.ens.org.co">www.ens.org.co</a>
Ethical Trading Initiative	<a href="http://www.eti.org">www.eti.org</a>
Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging	<a href="http://www.fnv.com">www.fnv.com</a>
Foodfirst Information & action network FIAN	<a href="http://www.fian.de">www.fian.de</a>
Labour Rights Organization	<a href="http://www.labourrights.org">www.labourrights.org</a>
Milieu Programma Sierteelt	<a href="http://www.my-mps.com">www.my-mps.com</a>
Oxfam international	<a href="http://www.maketradefair.com">www.maketradefair.com</a>

Dole <http://www.dole.com/CompanyInfo/About/Worldwide/LatinAmerica.jsp>

International Labour Organization

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/papers/ctflower/index.htm>

Ministerio de la Protección Social Colombiano

<http://www.minproteccionsocial.gov.co>



## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Disaggregate table of interviews done by the research

<b>Place</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Description</b>
Amsterdam	Int. NGO	OLAA Latin America activities Organization. Supports the International Flower Campaign.
Amsterdam	Int. NGO	Representative of Both Ends International NGO promoting the ICC
San Antonio	Working woman	Permanent
El Carmen	Working woman	Permanent
La Ceja	Working woman	Permanent
La Ceja	Working woman	Permanent
La Ceja	Working woman	Permanent
La Ceja	Working woman	Permanent
Rionegro	working woman	Permanent
Santa Elena	Working woman	Permanent
Santa Elena	Working woman	Temporary
El Carmen	Working woman	Temporary
La Ceja	CBO	Leader "Casa de La Mujer"
La Ceja	CBO	Psychologist of a "CBO"
Santa Elena	Independent Entrepreneur	Small Entrepreneur
Rionegro	Independent Entrepreneur	Small entrepreneur
San Antonio	Contract farming	Male
San Antonio	Contract farming	Female
Santa Elena	Contract farming	Female
Rionegro	Contract farming	Male
La Ceja	Worker	Coordinator Florverde implementation in a Farm
Bogota	Local NGO	Representative Cactus (Written interview)
Medellín	Local NGO	ENS Working women research coordinator
Rionegro	Public sector	Representative environmental Institution
La Ceja	Public sector	Representative of the Municipality
Rionegro	Private sector	Coordinator Private sector Association
Rionegro	Asocolflores	Manager Asocolflores Antioquia
Rionegro	Asocolflores	Asocolflores Social program's coordinator

## 7.2 Model of the semi-structured interview applied to workers

Questions
1. How often do you get paid?
2. Does your payment corresponds to the LMW? Below or above
3. Are you cover with a health insurance with your contract
4. When you are sick who arranges the appointment with the doctors
5. Are you subscribe to a pension scheme?
6. Is there a trade union on your farm? Are you a member of a trade union
7. Are you member of any other organization like women's group, sports committee, savings, etc?
8. When you have problems or suggestion who do you contact on the farm? What is the procedure?
9. Are you part of any committee that takes internal decisions like schedules, activities, etc?
10. What specific responsibilities do you have at your job?
11. How long have you been working here? How did you get the job?
***Is your farm member of Asocolflores? What do you know of it?
***Have you hear about Florverde? What do you know of it
12. Is there any childcare facility provided by the company?
13. Do ou use any of these facilities? What do you think of them?
14. When you require a special permission what is the procedure you have to follow? Is it paid or deducted?
15. If you have been pregnant while working: what kind of special treatment did you receive?
16. Do you think that having a family has been a constraint to get hired by the company?
17. Are you able to save money whit the income from your job? What do you use that income/savings for?
18. What activities does other members of your family do to generate income resources?
19. Who manage the household budget/expenditure at home? Who takes the expenditure decisions?
20. What other activities do you do apart from working and household responsibilities?
21. What educational level do you have? Have you participated in any other training courses while working?
22. Are you member of any other community group? Religious, sports, study, political?