

Improving Workplace Communication in Egyptian Textile Factories: Effective means of representation through training and establishing worker committees



Workers in Egyptian textile factories take part in participatory training activities and cast their votes for representatives on new worker committees

A common challenge companies face in ethical trade is enabling workers within their supply chains to access an effective means of representation. Where there are no mechanisms for workers and management to communicate there are likely to be more ethical issues, as well as higher staff turnover and strikes thereby lowering productivity.

Egypt is one of the largest producers of long staple cotton, with a reputation for producing high quality textiles and apparel through vertically integrated industries. However a common issue for many factories is the absence of mechanisms for worker representation, with the root cause being an absence of structured communication channels between workers and management.

Working with Marks & Spencer in 2012/2013, Partner Africa designed and developed training materials to help improve workplace communication in three textile factories in Egypt. Workers and management were selected to undertake a two-day course covering:

- Introduction to workplace communication
- Workers committees, roles and responsibilities
- Electing representatives and officials
- Running workers' committees
- Action planning

Partner Africa's participatory approach to training encourages learning through experience, using techniques such as role plays, case studies, leadership skills, team work, icebreakers and energizers.

"performing such training will increase the workers' trust in factory management to create a better work environment based on trust. The workers committee should reduce the strikes and that affects production " HR Manager, Textile Factory, Egypt

The course also included a 'Train the Trainer' module using a toolkit developed by Partner Africa, to give the selected workers the skills to run in-house workplace communication training sessions for all their colleagues. This approach ensured all workers understood the basic messages and worker committee model, as well as giving the factories in-house capacity to deliver any necessary future trainings.

Using the action plan developed as part of the training, the three sites went on to develop mechanisms for worker representation by establishing workers' committees through a democratic process.

Key Outputs:

- **127 workers (including 11 managers) at 3 sites received training**
- **These workers trained another 3175 of their colleagues**
- **All three sites set up worker committees**

At one textile factory following the training and establishment of a worker committee '100% of workers (baseline 38%) now feel it is easy to raise concerns with management' - Partner Africa/M&S impact report.

Following the success of this training in the textile sector, Partner Africa applied the same model to the agricultural sector in Egypt and Morocco. **132 workers at 8 sites were trained who then they went on to train 3300 of their colleagues. Six worker committees were established.**