





# Social and Economic Opportunities and Implications of Cut flower Industries in Ethiopia: *The case of Rose Flower Farms in the Rift Valley and Sebeta.*

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**Declaration**

I, Tizita Abate Beyene, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

(Tizita Abate Byene )

Date: 15 May 2014





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## Abstract

Rose flower production and export has emerged as major foreign exchange earner and source of employment in Ethiopia. This young and fast growing industry gave rise to social and economic concerns which were also part of the wider debate about the social and economic implications of global trade under liberalized trade regimes. This thesis attempts to explore the economic and social opportunities and challenges of rose flower production and export in Ethiopia. Specifically, it looks at the benefits of flower industry for workers who are employed in the sector. It has also examined the labor, health and safety conditions and regulations. In this regard flower farms adherence to core labor standards and government efficacy in enforcing ILO core labor standards and national labor laws proclamation are scrutinized. Finally, it discusses the gendered impacts of the industry by analyzing the characteristics of the workforce and the nature of employment. The study employed qualitative research approach as the principal method to collect, analyze and interpret primary data. The empirical data of this study was collected using techniques such as semi-structured interview, focus group discussion, key informant interview and observation.

The findings indicate that flower farms opened up employment opportunity particularly enhanced women's participation in labor market. They remained attractive sources of employment as they provided stable income in the context of economic vulnerability rooted in landlessness; high youth unemployment and few available livelihood alternatives in rural areas. Nonetheless, low quality jobs with limited employment benefits and barely no legal entitlements especially for majority of women who remained at the bottom rung of the industry's workforce calls for serious concerns. In conclusion the labor, safety and health conditions reflect the challenges to adhere to ILO core and technical labor standards and efficacy in enforcement of national labor proclamation in the context of flexible labor arrangement. It also raises a concern regarding the potential social and economic impacts of labor intensive industries in towards poverty reduction in developing

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

ART-Article

B2B- Business-to-business

DFID-Department for International Development

EHPEA-Ethiopia Horticulture Producers and Exporters Association

EPA- Environmental Protection Authority

ETB-Ethiopian Birr

EU-European Union

FDI-FDI

FGD-Focus Group Discussion

GAP- Good Agricultural Practice

HVAEs-High-Value Agricultural Exports

ICFTU/ ITUC- International Confederation of Free Trade Unions/International Trade Union Confederation

IFI- International Financial Institutions

ILO- International Labor Organization

IMF- International Monetary Fund

IPM-Integrated Pest Management

MoLSA- Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

MPS-Milieu Programma Sierteelt

NGOs-Non- Governmental Organizations

PPE-Personal Protective Equipment

UK-United Kingdom

WTO-World Trade Organization



## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Background and Justification**

Flower industry is a major foreign exchange earner and source of employment in Ethiopia. The country became the fourth largest flower exporter in the world and second largest in Africa (after Kenya) within the last five years (Taylor, 2010, EHPEA, 2011). Rose flower production and export in particular played a leading role in creating jobs, mostly for female workers who account around seventy five percent of the total employment in this sector (ibid). However, this young and fast growing industry gave rise to social, economic and environmental concerns which are also part of the wider debate in relation to adverse impacts of economic growth in general and globalized systems of production in particular.

Studies conducted in developing countries suggest that cut flower industries have a range of social and economic implications (Dolan et, al., 2003, Hale & Opondo, 2005, Taylor, 2010, Ute, 2013). Some of the key issues of concern in relation to labor conditions include wages, job security, and implementation of international labor laws (ibid). Moreover, findings from gender analysis showed that in spite of increasing number of women participation in paid work, majority remain in temporary, low skilled and low paid positions and face problems of inequality (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Ute, 2013). Scholars asserted that such challenges might be rooted in the domestic gender relations and socio-cultural norms that also shaped working conditions in globalized systems of production such as flower industries (Wick, 2010, Tanya & Olga, 2007).

Research findings from Ethiopian Flower industry resonates with the aforementioned patterns (Nigatu, 2010, Ute, 2013). Flower farms have created labor opportunities and economic growth. Nonetheless, there have been challenges in efficacy in the production sites in reference to implementation core labor standards and national labor proclamation (ibid). In addition, it has been pointed out that there is government reluctance in relation to enforcing adherence to labor, health and safety standards that are also part of the wider debate about developing countries adherence to core labor standards and efficacy in enforcement of comprehensive national labor laws and judicial procedures (Ute, 2013, Chan, 2003, Pahle, 2011).

## Study Purpose and Research Questions

The fact that the floriculture industry is fairly young in Ethiopia and is growing at an exponential rate within a short space of time presents opportunity to raise important questions in relation to the possible economic and social implications. Regardless of the industry's rapid rate of growth much remain to be known about its impact on the livelihoods, labor standards and health and safety conditions among flower workers. Hence the aim of this study was to explore the economic and social opportunities and implications of flower industry in Ethiopia. In particular, it explored the economic benefit and value of flower industry to employees. Secondly, it examined the labor and employment conditions within the industry based on domestic realities and alternatives, i.e. employment alternatives, labor standards and quality of life in the country. Thirdly, it assessed the occupational health and safety regulations and implementation procedures put in place. In this regard awareness of workers and self-regulatory code of practices developed and implemented by the industry were scrutinized. Finally, it examined the gendered impacts of the industry by analyzing the characteristics of the workforce and the nature of employment.

The following questions were set to guide the study:

- What are the economic benefits and values of flower industry for workers employed in the sector?
- What are the gendered impacts of flower industry and how do men and women evaluate their experience of working in flower industries?
- What are the cores national and international labor standards and international best practices the flower farms in Ethiopia adhere to?
- Do the employment policy and code of conduct address gender inequality and employment conditions?
- What type of occupational health and safety provisions are put in place and to what extent are they implemented?



## **Organization of the Study**

The thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter one presents study background, justifications, research purpose and questions. This is followed by chapter two that presents study area physical setting. The third chapter discusses the literature review organized in accordance with the major topics examined. Chapter four presents the methodological approach and method that the study employed to collect and analyze both primary and secondary data. In addition it discusses ethical considerations as well as study scope and limitations. Chapter five presents the study findings and discussions' while the final chapter provides a conclusion.

## Chapter II: Study area Physical setting

This chapter briefly presents the physical setting and socio-economic context of the study area. It also gives general description of flower farms studied. The data collection was carried out in two selected flower farms namely AQ Roses located in Ziway in the Rift Valley area and Ethio-highlands located in Sebeta, Central Ethiopian highlands. Ziway lies within the Rift Valley, 165 Km south of Addis Ababa and adjacent to Lake Ziway, the only fresh water lakes in the central Rift Valley (Tadel, 2012). The town of Ziway has 43, 660 inhabitants (CSA, 2007). Sebeta is a small town located in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, 24 Km west of Addis Ababa, with a population of 50,000 (CSA, 2007). Both towns are located in Oromia regional state where the majority of the flower farms are found in Ethiopia. The Oromo people inhabit both in Sebeta and Ziway that represent the largest Ethnic group in Ethiopia with approximately 30 million people (35%) of the total population (CSA, 2007).

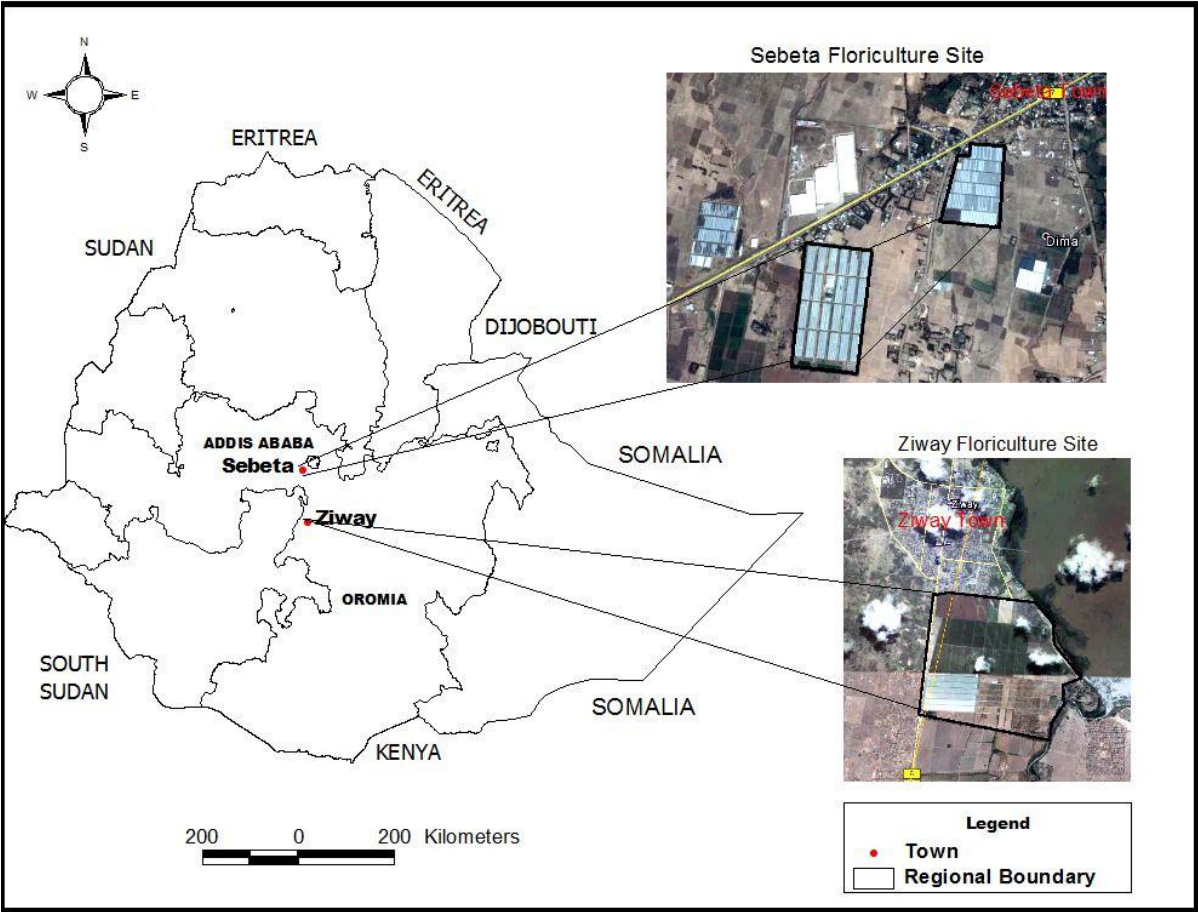


Figure 1 Location Map of the Study Area

Livelihood sources for the majority of household in both Ziway and Sebeta area are subsistence farming, combining crop cultivation and livestock rearing. According to Ziway district agriculture office expert, farmers in Ziway also grow horticulture mainly vegetables on irrigated plots alongside Lake Ziway. The area is also an important vegetable source to the capital Addis Ababa.

In Ethiopia Flower farms are mainly concentrated in the outskirts of Addis Ababa and in the Rift Valley area (Mano & Suzuki, 2011). Ziway is one of the districts with high concentration of flower farms and the farms use irrigation water from Lake Ziway for production of flowers. It hosts the biggest flower farm in Ethiopia owned by a company called Sher, a Dutch company which builds greenhouse infrastructure and rents them out to other flower companies (Tadele, 2012). Sher Company has established greenhouses on 480 hectares of land (EHPEA, 2011). According to the information from AQ Roses human resource manager, AQ Roses is one of the flower farms that rented a 40-hectare greenhouse infrastructure from Sher Ltd. It is a Dutch family owned flower farm business which has been operational in Ethiopia since 2005. The company employee's 1,270 flower workers of which 75% were women.

The Sebeta area is also another rose flower growing area with fragmented flower farms owned by individual flower growers. The area has an altitude ranging from 2,200 - 2,300 meters above mean sea level. Ethio-highlands is among the pioneer flower farms in Sebeta owned by an Ethiopian investor (EHPEA, 2011). According to the information from production manager it was established in 2005. The farm lies on 20 hectares of land with 23 greenhouses and 12 hectares of production area. The company employs 400 flower workers.

## Chapter III: Literature Review

### Trends in Flower Industry

Globalization brought an intense integration of the global economic systems. Accordingly developing countries have undergone economic restructuring in an effort to maximize opportunities from globalized trade. They embarked upon a range of trade liberalization policies and fiscal disciplines<sup>1</sup>so as to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Davids & Driel, 2005, Wick, 2010). Along with this, international financial institutions (IFIs) advocated for diversification into labor intensive non-traditional export products as an alternative export promotion strategy in the face of declining revenue from traditional commodities (Taylor,2010, Mano & Suzuki, 2011). Hence, trade liberalization encouraged developing countries to diversify into labor intensive high-value agricultural exports (HVAEs) such as horticulture and floriculture to achieve economic growth.

Relocation of cut flower industry from traditional hubs of production such as the Netherlands, Latin America and African countries is a typical example of the changing nature of global production systems under liberalized trade. Because of the perishable nature of flowers, major flower producers have historically been near the main consumers. In recent years production centers have moved to places with comparative advantages of trade, i.e. relative abundance of labor (Mano & Suzuki, 2011, Tanya & Olga, 2007). In this process the traditional producers have shifted from flower production to trading (ibid). This relocation of labor-intensive industries to developing countries with abundant unskilled and cheap labor, was largely motivated by neo-liberal trade thinking “the lowest cost to operate” in order to meet competitiveness in global market (Fuchs & Lederer, 2007, Taylor, 2010).

In liberalized trade, low labor costs and deregulations in labor market were among important factors in the relocation of flower farms to developing countries (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Taylor, 2010). Accordingly, abundance of unskilled and cheap labor are among the production factors that attracted global horticulture producers to African countries because operations such as planting, harvesting, grading, and packaging traditionally require hand labor, making labor inputs a significant component of production costs (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Mano & Suzuki, 2011). In addition labor market deregulation under Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the World Bank and IMF lead to flexible labor laws in an effort to attract FDI (Dolan, et, al.,

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<sup>1</sup>tax reform , interest rate liberalization, a competitive exchange rate, privatization, deregulation

2003, Ute, 2013). The international financial institutions claimed that labor deregulation and relaxation of labor laws would bring increased employment opportunities and eventually enable developing countries to benefit from trade (Ute, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007).

East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia are among the leading exporters of flower to EU countries which accounts for the largest share of global flower market (Rikken, 2010, Mano & Suzuki, 2011). For countries like Ethiopia relocation of flower industries have presented the opportunity to diversify the economy in to high value agricultural exports such as horticulture (Mano & Suzuki, 2011, Taylor, 2010). The country has been successful in adopting diversification strategy and achieved spectacular production growth which enabled to achieve economic growth mainly increased foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities (Gebreyesus & Iizuka, 2010, Taylor, 2010). The expansion of flower industry in particular increased women's participation in labor market and women account 75 percent of the workforce in Ethiopian flower farms (ibid).

### **Social and Economic Impacts of Flower Farms**

The relocation of cut flower industries to developing countries has created new labor opportunities and foreign earning. Nonetheless, there have been concerns about the need to weigh the economic boom of this sector against its human and social implications. Studies that examined the social and economic impact of flower industries showed that while flower production and export can be significant engine for economic growth, it might not always bring enhanced welfare and acceptable employment conditions for flower workers (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Barrientos, et, al., 2004, Tanya & Olga, 2007). It is argued that in response to the requirements of SAP and in the context of competitive bidding to attract FDI, developing countries made concessions in relation to labor standards that lead to flexible labor arrangements (Fuchs & Lederer, 2007, Dolan, et, al., 2003, Ute, 2013). Such arrangements are typically characterized by low quality jobs with job insecurity, low wages, limited social benefits and legal entitlements (ibid). Eventhough concerns with regard to the labor conditions in flower industry has emerged since 1990s , the afore-mentioned characteristics of labor conditions have hardly changed over the decades (Tanya & Olga, 2007, Riisgaard, 2009). This study tries explores the reasons behaind the persistance of low labor standards and labor condtions in flower farms with emphasis on the context of Ethiopian Flower farms.

Studies conducted in developing countries suggest that cut flower industries in particular have challenges in relation to labor conditions and labor rights. Some of the key issues of concern include freedom of association, working conditions and wages (Taylor, 2010; Tanya & Olga,

2007, Dolan, et, al., 2003). Research findings from countries such as Kenya, largest cut flower exporter in Africa, have shown that a range of challenges persist in relation to regulatory frameworks on labor conditions and labor rights in spite of the country's export success ( Hale & Opondo, 2005, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). The studies revealed that low payment, exploitative labor practices, job insecurity, failure to properly implement health and safety rules, and denial of workers right to organize in trade unions are the issues that persist in the farms studied (ibid).

Feminist discourses argue that restructuring of international economies under neo-liberal trade policy has a gendered impact (Standing, 1999, Davids & Driel ,2005). There found to be a growing trend of new forms of employment that are commonly referred as feminization and in-formalization of labor (Standing, 1999; Wick, 2010). Davids & Driel (2005) argue that feminization of work' is not only characterized by increasing women participation in the labor force but also changes in job structures and quality such as increase in low-paid, part- time and casual positions. In the same vein, Standing (1999) asserts with the emerging trend of full-time and secure employment being replaced with new "feminized" jobs.

In addition, inadequate maternity cover, discrimination and occupational segregation are some of challenges that women face in flower farms (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). The gender analysis demonstrated that such challenges are deeply rooted in the domestic gender relations and socio-cultural norms and perceptions that shape their working conditions (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007). These challenges are found to be limiting women from equal access to employment rights and benefits (ibid).In this regard, women appear to have separate concerns from men regardless of the fact they share a number of common problems in the globalized chain of production (ibid).

According to studies on high value agricultural export farms, gender inequality arises because women are predominantly employed as temporary worker, with few labor rights and little social protection in contrary to men who are more likely to occupy permanent positions (Riisgaard, 2009, Ute, 2013). These range of challenges are limiting the women's access to the rights and benefits associated with permanet employment. Such challenges are also deeply rooted in the domestic gender relations and socio-cultural norms and perceptions that shape their working conditions (Ibid).

Developing countries have poorly enforced labor and social regulations ( Riisgaard, 2009, Fuchs & Lederer, 2007, Taylor, 2010). There is also a reluctance to include labor standards in trade agreements that contributes to more flexible labor laws with lower labor standards. In

this regard a range of policy options are constrained and some policy proposals are never discussed in a bid to attract FDI (ibid).With series of deregulations and policy reforms developing countries compete with each other and may end up in a phenomenon termed as ‘the race to the bottom’ on labor standards (Ute, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007).

Even though state actors enforce national and international labor standards there appears to be a considerable variation among countries with regard to the capacity of enforcement of the laws (Riisgaard, 2009, Gibbon & Riisgaard, 2014). Flower farms compliance to such standards has been also mentioned as a concern that is related to state capacity to enforce policy guidelines and monitoring mechanisms (Ibid). Meanwhile the flower industry has faced growing pressure from European consumers to meet improved labor, safety and health standards (Rikken 2010, Leipold & Morgante, 2013).The industry has responded to such pressures by adopting various private social standards and self-regulatory code of conducts with a focus on labor, safety and health issues (Gibbon & Riisgaard, 2014, Rikken, 2010). Private social standards and flower industry self-governance standards or code of practice are discussed in the next section.

The successful emergence of Ethiopia in to the global flower market has also come with similar concerns in relation to labor conditions, issues of health and safety as well as gender concerns. Existing studies documented evidence of low wages, sub-standard working conditions, forced overtime and insecure employment (Getu, 2009, Nigatu, 2010, Weldeghebrael, 2010). Empirical studies from Ethiopian cut flower industry found out that minimum wage for manual labor job is 9 Ethiopian Birr (ETB (\$0.75 US)) per day, with most firms paying between 9 and 12 ETB (Nigatu 2010, Weldeghebrael, 2010). Such a low wage is hardly enough for survival. Furthermore widespread discrimination in terms of promotion, lack of basic facilities, failure to properly implement health and safety rules, and denial of workers right to organize in trade unions are the range of issues that still persist in the farms studied (ibid).

Generally women comprise the majority of the workforce in flower farms in Ethiopia. Flower farms created job opportunities for women and improved their financial position (Taylor, 2010, Weldeghebrael, 2010). However the majority of women who work in the flower farms are mainly involved labor intensive jobs that required limited skill such as harvesting, packing, tending beds, watering and so on (ibid). Hence, gender segregation was reported with men occupying skilled and permanent positions and women engaged in unskilled, casual and insecure positions. The allocation of jobs reflects gender inequality in terms of wage, labor

rights and entitlements because women are predominantly employed in jobs with limited labor rights and protection (Ute, 2013, Weldeghebrael, 2010).

### **International and National Labor standards**

International conventions are legally binding documents among signatory states. The ILO (International Labor Organization) plays a central role in defining core labor standards. Accordingly, it lays out conventions and recommendations that establish basic standard on labor rights. In this regard, the ILO ‘declaration on fundamental principles and rights at work’ (ILO 1998) is a major achievement in establishing internationally recognized labor rights agenda (Hale & Opondo, 2005, Tanya & Olga, 2007, Pahle, 2011). This declaration was adopted by 174 member countries in order to promote and realize four core labor standards of the declaration<sup>2</sup>. ILO technical standards further define conditions of employment that are essential to protect the basic rights of workers that include the right to a living wage, working hours with no forced overtime; a safe and healthy workplace and employment relationship with social protection (ILO, 2014). Such technical standards referred as “acceptable conditions of work,” are controversial as they are related to labor market outcomes and working conditions (Liemt, 1989, Chan, 2003).

All ILO member states that ratified the core conventions and unanimously agreed to respect labor standards. The declaration points out that these rights are universal and apply in all countries regardless of their level of economic development (ILO, 2014). Nonetheless, developing countries adherence to core labor standards and efficacy in enforcement of comprehensive national labor laws, and judicial procedures persisted as a challenge (Hale & Opondo, 2005, Pahle, 2011). Even though, ILO plays a central role in the process of defining such labor standards, it lacks strong sanction mechanisms when it comes to implementation especially in cases of violation of labor standards (Ibid).

There is lack of agreement between advanced and developing countries and their respective unions with regard to measures to be taken against countries failing to uphold core labor standards (Pahle, 2011, Chan, 2003). Developing countries argue that proposals such as trade-labor linkage commonly referred as social clause might be used for the purpose of protection against access to global market rather than a genuine concern about labor conditions in developing countries (ibid). Advanced countries labor unions also allege relocation and

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<sup>2</sup> (i) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (Convention No. 87 & No. 98); (ii) elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor (Convention No. 29 & No. 105); (iii) the effective abolition of child labor (Convention No. 138 & No. 182) and (iv) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (Convention No. 100 & No. 111) (ILO, 2014).



imports from the south has brought unfair competition and adversely affected their labor market conditions (Ibid). There are also political and moral issues involved beyond the economic arguments that makes the question of labor standards very contentious. This section explores Ethiopia's commitment and realization of core labor standards with a review of legal and policy documents as well as previous studies undertaken on the topic under scrutiny. In addition it brings on the wider debates with regard to countries adherence to core labor standards and the respective measures to be taken against countries deemed to be failing to uphold core labor standards.

### **Ethiopia labor Proclamation**

Ethiopia has ratified ILO's core labor conventions and the general principles of labor rights are also an integral part of the constitution (ILO, 2014). The national labor law which is the primary means of state intervention goes in conformity with the international conventions (Nigatu, 2010, ILO, 2014). International labor standards have also been instrumental in shaping national labor proclamation No.42/1993 which was developed in the post-socialist time following the adoption of market oriented economy and the SAP (ibid). The country's parliament has also ratified 12 technical conventions that are notable in protecting the right of workers<sup>3</sup>. The latest national labor proclamation No.377/2003 was further amended to include freedom of association and protection of unions from interference by public authorities including protection from cancellation (ibid).

The current labor proclamation protects women and men equal right to employment and related entitlements such as equal pay for equal work, promotion, and pension entitlements (Nigatu, 2010, Ute,2013). There are also gender specific issues included in policy and legal frameworks such as the right to 30 days of prenatal and 60 days of maternity leave with full pay. The Criminal Code outlaws sexual harassment and prescribes imprisonment of the perpetrator (Art. 625). In this regard the national labor proclamation and criminal code meet international gender sensitive legal instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which is laid out to deal with specific problems of women (Ibid).

Even though Ethiopia ratified international labor conventions and adapted in to national labor proclamations, there are challenges when it comes to adherence to core labor standards. Studies conducted on labor practices and conditions of work in Ethiopia showed that labor

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<sup>3</sup> The key technical conventions include right to association 1919 (No.2), Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), Minimum Age Convention (No. 138); and Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158) (ILO, 2014).

conditions tend to be low (Ute, 2013, Weldeghebrael, 2010, Nigatu, 2010). This was because of two main reasons: a) there are lower standards in labor laws and regulations because of the changes made in the advent of trade liberalization b) There is also a lack of capacity for effective enforcement of existing labor laws (Ibid). Similarly, when assessing the Ethiopian labor proclamation in view of the above mentioned international labor convention; working conditions and labor arrangements tend to be flexible particularly in areas such as minimum wage, working hours, health and safety (Ute, 2013).

The labor proclamation No. 377/2003 leaves both wage and contract terms open to be determined by the market with the backdrop of flexible labor ideology (Ute, 2013). There is also no separate legislation for a minimum wage in Ethiopia and the law is open for the use of a wider variety of temporary employment contracts up on the agreement of the parties involved (Decent Work Check, 2013). Studies noted that the labor law in Ethiopia also appears flexible when compared to other countries in reference to dismissal and accompanied benefits and/or costs, occupational health and safety, and working hours (Ute, 2013, Nigatu, 2010).

In relation to termination of employment the proclamation opens up room for unfair and arbitrary dismissal as it states contract terms could be terminated without notice on the basis of quarrel at place of work and employees manifestation of loss of capacity (Nigatu, 2010, Ute, 2013). Even though the labor proclamation provided right to strike there is a lengthy procedure in order to materialize and are long list of restrictions about unauthorized strikes. This eventually frustrates workers right to strike (Decent Work Check, 2013).

## International Best Practices

Even though countries ratify international labor conventions and adapt to national labor proclamations, adherence to core labor standards and efficacy in enforcement of comprehensive national labor laws remained an issue of concern (Chan, 2003, Pahle, 2011). Hence, ratification of labor standards did not ensure implementation or enforcement because ILO does not have sanction mechanisms at its disposal when it comes to implementation especially in cases of violation of core labor standards. It relies on voluntary compliance and peer pressure (ibid). There are divergent perspectives with regard to countries adherence to core labor standards and the respective measures to be taken against countries deemed to be failing to uphold core labor standards (Chan, 2003, Tanya & Olga, 2007, Pahle, 2011). Working conditions and standards in developing countries generally tend to be lower than those in advanced countries. In the context of liberalized trade working conditions and labor arrangements in developing countries' continued to be more flexible in a bid to attract FDI investment and are leading to 'social dumping' and a 'the race to the bottom' in labor conditions (ibid).

Unions and business from advanced countries argued that low labor standards are being used as development strategy that results in unfair trade competition (Chan, 2003, Gibbon & Riissgaard, 2014). Low labor wage and poor working conditions are regarded as a threat and adversely affecting labor conditions in advanced countries (Ibid). Human rights group also advocated against absence of workers' right to organize and to engage in collective bargaining as the undelaying cause of low labor standards. This moral argument asserts that the human rights of workers in developing countries are being violated and they are limited from obtaining a fair share of the product of their labor (Dolan, et al., 2003, Pahle, 2011). Thus *unfair* labor practices in developing countries have been presented as both on economic and moral grounds (ibid).

In contrast developing countries contend they are committed to improving core labor standards by building on their comparative advantage of relatively cheap labor to attract labor intensive industries and achieve economic development (Ute, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007). However the current economic circumstances are hurdle to efficacy in implementing core labor standards. They assert that labor standards normally evolve and will improve along with economic growth through international trade (ibid). And the case made by advanced countries trade unions and business about unfair trade competition considered as having intent of

protectionism than out of a genuine regard to the wellbeing and rights of workers in the global south (Pahle, 2011, Tanya & Olga, 2007, Ute, 2013).

Effective implementation mechanism of international core labor standards also remained controversial. There are opposing views and lack of agreement with regard to policy measures to be taken to improve labor conditions in developing countries and against countries deemed to be failing to uphold core labor standards (Liemt, 1989, Chan, 2003, Rikken, 2010). Trade-labor linkage i.e. using trade sections in response to violation of core labor standards commonly referred as ‘social clause’ has been proposed to the forefront of various sessions’ of international trade policy agendas in order to ensure level playing field in global trade as well as bring a race to the acceptable in labor standards (ibid). Private social standards and labeling initiatives as well as self-regulatory codes of practice were also advocated as alternative mechanisms towards the realization of improved labor conditions in developing countries (Rikken, 2010, Gibbon & Riisgaard, 2014). The next sub-sections discuss how far the aforementioned alternatives i.e. social clause (trade-labor linkage), private social standards and corporate codes of conduct or self-regulatory systems help to address challenges of labor conditions in developing countries.

### ***Social Clause***

Social clause is a proposal initiated by ICFTU<sup>4</sup>/ ITUC<sup>5</sup> and its allies mainly human rights activities, labor unions and some governments from the North to bring in the issues of core labor standards into WTO rules and disciplines (Liemt, 1989, Chan, 2003, Pahle, 2011). The intent is using trade sanctions for non-compliance to core labor standards and to try to raise labor standards internationally. WTO rules and disciplines are considered as an incentive for developing countries to raise labor standards and stronger enforcement mechanism to offset social dumping and the race to the bottom on social standards (Ibid). However, this proposal failed to get enough support from trade unions and civil society organization in developing countries. It also faced a strong opposition from developing countries governments because of the fear that trade-labor linkage has a protectionist agenda (Pahle, 2011, Chan, 2003).

Developing countries governments argued that introduction of social clause undermine and compromise their comparative advantage in global trade i.e. low wages. It is considered as *a stick to beat the third world* (Pahle, 2011, Chan, 2003). This group also argued that ILO is best suited organization in pursuit of improved labor standards internationally than WTO

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<sup>4</sup> International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

<sup>5</sup> International Trade Union Confederation

which is originally established for trade facilitation. Historically labor standards were improved with higher levels of per capita incomes. Thus, developing countries are rather asking for more opening up global market with technical and financial assistance from advanced countries in order to facilitate economic growth that could eventually enable them to improve labor standards (Liemt, 1989, Chan, 2003). The introduction of social clause is also regarded as counterproductive to the workers in the global south as trade sanction generally apply to the whole country rather than the specific industry where labor rights are violated (Ibid).

In summary, repeated attempts to push trade-labor linkage agenda in the context of the WTO has been turned back by WTO members. Effective implementation mechanism of core labor standards remained controversial and the views of pro and against the social clause proposal have not narrowed down (Liemt, 1989, Pahle, 2011, Chan, 2003). The latest attempt made by United States and Norway for a structured discussion of trade and labor standards in WTO was suspended on the ministerial meeting held in Singapore in December 1996 proposal. The fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha in 2002 reaffirmed their 1996 Singapore Declaration marking the continued lack of agreement on the use of trade sanction for enforcing compliance to core labor standards (Chan, 2003).

### *Private Social Standards*

On one hand in the advent of trade liberalization the power of labor has been weakened and promotion of labor rights and addressing labor issues through traditional trade unions has become difficult (Gibbon & Riisgaard, 2014, Riisgaard, 2009). But on the other hand the international nature of the flower sector and increased consumer concern in Europe and Northern America about the conditions under which flowers are produced has put an upward pressure on flower growers (ibid). Kenya and Colombia, largest flower producers in the world, have been the targets of criticisms from media and environmental campaigners on the grounds of poor social and environmental standards (Dolan et al 2003, Riisgaard, 2009). The consumer concern led to proliferation of various private social standards and labeling initiatives since the mid-1990s and flower farms were put under pressure to join different accreditation bodies (ibid).

Private social standards are relatively new systems of regulation with main focus on labor and environmental conditions that fall under the category of consumer labels as well as business-to-business standards (Riisgaard, 2009, Hale & Opondo, 2005). The standards are initiated and promoted by various groups that include buyers such as supermarkets, business

associations, international NGOs, and trade unions (ibid). International certification and labeling initiatives emerged to meet consumer demands and consumers pay for what they consider morally acceptable. This mechanism is believed to potentially keep production and marketing standards in check as firms are sensitive to public and media attention (Fair Trade, 2011, Rikken, 2010). Private social standards are alternative market solution based on consumer labeling that might facilitate a move towards ethical business practice and could potentially raise labor standards internationally (Rikken, 2010, Riisdgaard, 2009).

Among a range of business-to-business (B2B) international standard organization named MPS (Milieu Programma Sierteelt) is a key player in flower sector certification and the biggest in number of certified producers (Riisdgaard, 2009, Rikken 2010). MPS developed in Netherlands in 1995 and focuses on environment, health safety and terms of employment policy (Ibid). GLOBAL GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) is the second largest standard in the sector with wider range of product coverage including crops, and livestock (Riisdgaard 2009). Other standard schemes in flower sector include FFP, Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), FLP, and FLO Fairtrade Labeling Organization mainly initiated by NGOs and trade unions (Fair Trade, 2011, Rikken, 2010).

Fair trade is popular standard among consumers that requires companies to go beyond basic market expectation and channel a certain portion of their profits to corporate social responsibility projects at the production sites (Rikken, 2010, Fair Trade, 2011). Fair trade promotes acceptable labor standards and a fair share of business to farmers and workers. It has a strong focus on improving core labor rights such as decent wage, and freedom of association. It also focuses on other issues such as maternity leave and access to health care to workers and their families (Ibid). Fair trade set out internationally agreed standards and certifies flower farms on the basis specific criteria concerning the social and environmental conditions of production (Fair Trade, 2011). These standards focus on establishment of community premiums jointly managed by the workers and the management, prohibition of forced and child labor for those under 15, freedom of association, minimum wage standard, and health and safety measures in handling chemicals (Fair Trade, 2011, Hale & Opondo, 2005). Fair trade puts 12% premium on products to support community projects and workers cooperatives (ibid).

Studies from Kenya and Tanzania showed that the introduction of private social standards has contributed in improving labor conditions across cut flower industries (Hale & Opondo, 2005, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). Private social standards have significant impact on improving

workplace conditions such as overtime pay, health and safety. In relation to labor rights there has been improvement on unionization and collective bargaining agreements. Experiences from fair trade certified flower farms in particular showed that the introduction of such scheme has contributed in solving the structural disadvantages of flower workers as it brought significant improvement in job security i.e. permanent contracts for workers (Riisgaard, 2009, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). In Ethiopia out of one hundred twenty flower farms, only 36% are certified with international private standards<sup>6</sup> (Rikken, 2010). This shows a low percentage of internationally certified farms in the country and a significant tendency of flower growers' participation in local certification schemes which is discussed in the next section.

Nonetheless Private social standards are not without criticisms in terms of their practical impact on labor conditions. Rissgard (2009) argues that the existing private social standards focus on outcome entitlement and fail to include issues of right that could potentially empower workers and their trade unions to claim their rights. There are also concerns that the standards might potentially serve as new trade barriers to entree to global market and adversely affect developing countries producers because they are initiated and driven by European countries and North America (Rikken 2010, Rissgaard, 2009, Hale & Opondo, 2005). Private social standards are particularly criticized for failing to address non-permanent workers who are mostly women with poor labor conditions (Rikken 2010, Hale & Opondo, 2005). The percentages of farms with these accreditation standards and fair trade schemes cover are still low (Rikken 2010). In summery private social standards emerged among the key instruments in governing global trade and have a significant impact in improving working condition but accreditation bodies could only serve as a complementary and supportive mechanism given their limited structural impact towards the realization of improved labor rights in developing countries (Rissgaard, 2009).

#### *Self-regulatory systems: Ethiopia Horticulture Industry code of practice*

Industry specific self-regulatory systems that with labor related provisions commonly referred as code of practice are among alternative mechanism proposed in the debates over improving core labor standards internationally (Hale & Opondo, 2005, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). The EHPEA code of practice for sustainable flower production is among developing countries standard initiative that has been developed in producer country as opposed to the majority of private social standard initiatives that have been developed in Europe and North America

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<sup>6</sup> There were 25 firms with MPS, 4 with GLOBALGAP, and 10 with other private labels such as British Retail consortium (BRC), Fair Trade, or Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI).

(Rikken, 2010). The code of practice is among standard initiative Global GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) equivalence that has been developed in producer country (Rikken, 2010).

The code of practice came in to effect in 2007 and serves as a guideline for Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) to horticulture producers and exporters in the country (EHPEA, 2011). It has a strong focus on core aspects of sustainable agricultural practice mainly environmental protection and flower workers safety and employment practice (ibid). According to the Ethiopian horticulture and producers' association manager the code has labor related provisions based on ILO's fundamental labor standards. The code of conduct is part of the association's initiative to put the industry up to the requirements of international marketing requirements. It has three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. The Bronze level was introduced first in order to get all flower farms in the country to meet basic standards and obtain EHPEA Code of Accreditation (Rikken, 2010, EHPEA, 2011).

In implementing the code of conduct the association took a leading role and undertakes capacity building and training programs for its member (EHPEA, 2011). On-site inspections and independent external audit are also used as tools for monitoring progress. The audit is conducted by Control Union Certification (CUC), a global network of inspection and certification programs (Rikken, 2010). Nonetheless the association manager confirmed not all flowers farms in Ethiopia participate in onsite inspection and audit program which raises concern over the working conditions of in such farms. Even among participating farms differences exist in the quality of management systems that might affect their compliance with the code of conduct. Studies from other countries indicated that codes of practice are most often unknown, unavailable or not translated at production sites (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Rissgaard, 2009). It was also found that even where available, workers may have limited access and awareness about codes of conduct (Ibid).

In summery the debate over countries adherence to core labor standards and the respective measures to be taken against countries deemed to be failing to uphold core labor standards continued to be controversial. The aforementioned discussions on alternative mechanisms towards the realization of improved labor conditions in developing countries showed the potentials of the respective alternatives in addressing labor practices and improving conditions of work. However, identifying a feasible alternative with meaningfully system of implementation and bring in structural impact remained open to further international



discussions and negotiations given the moral, economic and political interests of various nations, business and interest groups involved.

## **Occupational Health and Safety**

In greenhouse working environment the use of agrochemicals poses threat to both human health and safety (Marcela , et al., 2012, Magauzi, et al., 2011, Nigatu, 2010). Flower workers are also labeled among those at a high risk of occupational health problems due to their high level exposure to agrochemicals. In relation to health and safety of workers, the common concerns across flower farms include inadequate training on health and safety procedures as well as the level of follow up on re-entry intervals after pesticide applications (ibid). The provision and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) are also among the common issues raised in relation to health and safety (ibid).

In an effort to address aforementioned concerns of occupational health and safety standards and guidelines have been developed by ILO and adopted in policies of member countries. However, studies suggests that the adoption of these standards and guidelines did not bring significant impact on realization of workplace safety and health across flower farm in developing countries (Marcela , et al., 2012, Magauzi, et al., 2011, Dolan, et al., 2003). This sub-section presents an overview of occupational health and safety practices in flower farms in Ethiopia and further examines why government is reluctant to enforce existing legal and policy frameworks.

In recent years the emergence of the flower industry in Ethiopia has led a wider application and substantial increase in the use of pesticides (Getu, 2009, Hanssen, et al.,2014). Overview of research findings shows that occupation health and safety practices across flower farms in Ethiopia present various challenges and may be causing adverse health effects among flower workers (Hanssen, et al.,2014, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002). According to the findings flower workers had high prevalence of respiratory and skin symptoms with increased prevalence among females who worked in the greenhouses (ibid). Studies also found that provision of PPE and facilities were inadequate given the level of workers exposure to pesticides (Nigatu, 2010, Hanssen, et al.,2014). There has also been limited training and follow up on the use of PPE and compliance to flower farms safety procedures such as re-entry rules to greenhouses following spraying. This was demonstrated with the low level of awareness and attitude of flower farm workers on safe pesticide handling practices (ibid). Various levels of exposure to pesticide were reported causing chronic respiratory problems

given the short re-entry intervals and inadequate PPE (Hanssen, et al.,2014, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002).

With regard to the current health status of flower workers, flower farms were not required to undertake health check at the start of work. In addition there was no periodical assessment on the health of flower workers thus their health status remained un-documented (Hanssen, et al.,2014, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002). It was noted that there is a high proportion of young female workers in the greenhouses but sex-related reproductive health effects were not documented especially the effect of pesticide exposure for pregnant women (Nigatu, 2010). It is suggested that the above mentioned unhealthy and unsafe practices in flower farms might cause adverse health effects and compromise flower workers right to health (Hanssen, et al.,2014, Nigatu, 2010, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002).

Ethiopia has developed policies and regulatory frameworks that corroborate with ILO standards and guidelines. However, flower farms were not fulfilling standards with regard to pesticide use, storage and disposal conditions (Nigatu 2010, Getu, 2009). In addition Getu (2009) and Hanssen et al., (2014) reported that poor pesticide management and unsafe pesticide routines were common in the studied flower farms. In view of these results there are gaps in terms of compliance to international and national standards and policy guidelines. In examining why the responsible government bodies i.e. Ministry of labor and social affairs (MoLSA) and Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and their affiliates at regional and district level were reluctant to enforce the policy measures, studies suggest that the ministries are poorly resourced both in terms of finance and human resource (Getu 2009, Nigatu, 2010).

Evidently given the financial limitations of the country, health and safety surveillance and inspection might not come as a prime concern in government allocation of budget either to MOLSA or Ethiopian environmental protection authority (EPA). The country's budget limitations partly explain such reluctance. Nonetheless, the occupational health and safety challenges need to be seen in the context of liberalized trade regime whereby developing countries compete among each other in a bid to attract FDI. Ethiopia has been sensitive in meeting the demands of flower growers given its contribution to foreign exchange earnings and job creation thus adopts flexible approach in regulating occupational health and safety practices in this sector (Ute, 2013). In summery the government's reluctance to enforce existing legal and policy frameworks has both capacity and policy limitations.

## Chapter IV: Methodology

### Research Design and Data Collection Methods

The study employed qualitative research approach as the principal method to collect, analyze and interpret primary data. Qualitative research is considered to be robust approach for the acquisition of knowledge through employing interactive techniques and enable the researcher to get the respondents views, experiences and attitudes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, Miller, et, al., 2012). This approach enables to explore and discern people's multiple perspectives in natural field settings. Employing this approach enables to focus on participants' perceptions and experiences and the way they make sense of their lives (ibid).

Qualitative approach was used to analyze and interpret data as it engages in naturalistic inquiry and in real local setting (Gray, 2004, Miller, et, al., 2012). This required a combination of various qualitative research techniques in order to study and interpret phenomena in relation to the meaning people attached to them (ibid). Semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and observation were the main techniques that were found more applicable to this particular study. Some quantitative questions used to capture livelihood issues in this particular study. Employing the combination of these techniques would enable to get the views, experiences and attitudes of the respondents with the research questions in mind. Furthermore adopting multiple methods was also useful in order to achieve triangulation in the process of analyzing and interpreting everyday activity, social relations and specific local contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, Miller, et, al., 2012). Thus, each of these methods is briefly described below.

The semi-structured interview was intended to allow certain degree of flexibility and freedom to the interview process as compared to structured interview (Gray, 2004). It also gave room to entertain different viewpoints expressed about the same topic. An interview guide was used to indicate the main topics to be covered and keep the focus of the conversation. Focus group discussion was used to explore and clarify issues and views in a group setting and interaction that might not be covered in one-to-one conversation. In addition, throughout the entire fieldwork period personal observation was helpful in getting additional insights into the experience of men and women working in flower industry. Observation also provided the opportunity to be familiar with the local context. Therefore, through using multiple research techniques the study captured the various issues and perspectives with regard to the topic under investigation.

Secondary sources were reviewed mainly academic studies and grey literature related to the topic under investigation. Major documents such as international and national labor legislations, proclamations and code of conduct were referred. In addition reports, policy documents and archives from EHPEA and from relevant government institutions were consulted.

### **Research Setting and Sample Size**

The study was conducted by collecting data using the aforementioned qualitative research techniques. The participants were men and women who are working in different sections of flower farms. A total of twenty informants (six men and fourteen women) from two flower farms participated in this study. The participants were selected using snow ball technique. The social networks of flower workers whom I have established initial contact has enabled me to access the rest of participant. The data collection was carried out for two months between July 15 and September 15, 2013 in two selected sites namely Ziway in the Rift Valley area and Sebeta area.

In addition, key informant interviews were carried out with management representatives and leaders of trade unions from two flower farms in Sebeta and Rift Valley area. Discussions were also held with leader and sections representatives of EHPEA in order to get the associations perspectives in relation to the topic under investigation. During my stay in the field I sought additional information through informal discussions with local people including supervisors who did not participated in the study to further broaden understanding of the flower farms and working conditions. Data was recorded from observations that were composed of systematic observations and description of events.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The potential participation of people in research, can affect their lives directly or indirectly. For this reason, scholars assert that researchers must take note of issues such as ethics, consent, and power relations which arise while carrying out research especially with the ever changing landscape of qualitative research and using mixed methods in knowledge production (Miller, et, al., 2012, Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). According to Miller, et, al., (2012), consent is very critical in research and often raises unresolved questions (ibid). Hence, in this study respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study to seek his or her informed consent. Utmost care was taken when conducting the interviews so as not to be so intrusive on their privacy. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of responses they

gave. In addition, all information collected were treated confidential and were used only for academic purposes.

## **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

There were two limitations that need to be acknowledged regarding this study. The first limitation concerns the very nature of this research project requires dealing with very sensitive issues mainly flower farms working conditions and adherence to legal frameworks and codes of conduct. There was an apparent danger of level of transparency from key stakeholders i.e. owners and managers of flower farms and EHPEA association leaders. The second limitation was with the extent to which the findings can be used to make broad generalizations because variations exist between different farms flower farm beyond the specific study area given the sample size and the number of flower farms in the country.

## **Data analysis**

The primary task that I have done after fieldwork was transcription of all the primary data: individual interview and focus group discussions that were in the form of notes and questionnaire. A summary of the individual interview and transcripts of focus group discussions were organized with translation from local language to English. In addition, the results of the translation were categorized according to respective thematic areas. Field notes recorded from observation, informal discussion and description of events were also converted into writes-ups. An excel data base was set up to analyze the quantitative data.

I am aware that there is no single and best way for analyzing primary data. Even though, much analysis was already going starting from the first day on the field, I have read and re-read the data and wrote down my reflection and comments commonly referred as ‘memos’ in order to get an understanding of the data, I have also highlighted the terminologies or phrases used by respondents as this process also involves going back and forth between analysis and interpretation. Following that, I have categorized the data based on the themes reoccurred assigned abbreviated codes. I also gave different colors to the respective responses within the category. The outcome of this preliminary analysis process was a reduction of the sheer volume of data into summary along selected categories. It helped me to put all the data from each question together as well as identify consistencies and differences from individual response. However, this process has been also labor intensive and time consuming. Finally, the information related to each theme was summarized as well as differences and similarities of responses within the same category were described. Identification of general patterns in the

data and connections within and between the identified categories was also part of this process. The quantitative data was entered using excel database and used to calculate basic analysis such as frequencies, means, modes and medians.

## **Presentation of Results and Discussion**

The following chapter presents results of findings with further discussions in reference to related studies with the topic under investigation. Accordingly, section one presents overview of the flower industry with discussion on the process of emergence and development of the flower sector in the country. Section two discusses the study findings in relation to economic and social impact of flower industry in Ethiopia with a focus on economic impact, and labor and employment conditions. Section three presents labor rights, standards and unionization and further elaborates on flower workers level of awareness in relation to national labor law proclamation, their contract terms and EHPEA Code of Practice. Finally occupational health and safety issue are discussed.

## Chapter V: Study Findings and Discussion

### Overview of Flower Industry in Ethiopia

This section presents an overview of the flower industry in Ethiopia since its inception in the mid-1990s. The discussion elaborates on the process of emergence and development of the flower sector as well as flower growers opportunities and challenges. The data for this section was mainly drawn from interviews with EHPEA manager and Farm managers from Ethio-highland and AQ Roses. Related studies are also conferred to interpret the result.

Ethiopian is among the countries where cut flower production, especially the production of roses, has emerged as one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange earner in recent years (Taylor, 2010, Gebreeyesus & Iizuka, 2010). The country used to depend solely on a few traditional export crops mainly coffee and oilseeds. It started to enter the flower market in late 1990s with two private farms that used to produce summer flowers (Mano & Suzuki, 2011, EHPEA, 2011). In 1999 a foreign company named Golden Roses started rose flower production on a bigger scale using modern greenhouse technology than its predecessors. After mid 2000s the number of both domestic and foreign firms started to increase sharply. As a result the country emerged as one of the leading exporters of cut flower in Africa next to Kenya with increased future growth (EFE, 2013). Such rapid growth was motivated by agro-climatic conditions suited for flower production, strong government initiatives to attract FDI and labor supply with relatively low wage rate (Taylor, 2010; Mano & Suzuki, 2011).

According to the discussion with manager of EHPEA the number of flower farms has increased from two domestic growers in mid-1990s to one hundred twenty domestic and foreign firms producing flowers, potted plants , fruits, vegetables and herbs by the end of 2012 (Field Note, August 2013). The association bulletin shows the country has currently leased 12,552 hectares of land for the production of flowers, vegetables and fruits. So far 1, 700 hectares of land have been utilized for the production of roses that accounts for the largest proportion in the horticulture sector (ibid).

All the flower producers that currently operate are commercial farms with production of flowers in modern steel structure greenhouse technology. Most of the farms are located around the outskirts of the capital Addis Ababa and in the Rift Valley area. This is mainly because of the high altitude (2000 meters above sea level) and short distance to Bole international airport (50 km radius) (Mano & Suzuki, 2011). Roses are the most widely

produced variety of flowers with eighty percent of the farms engaged in production of roses. This is because Ethiopian highlands provide excellent growing conditions for roses. The remaining 20% of the farms produce potted plants, fruits, vegetables and herb (Mano & Suzuki, 2011, Gebreeyesus & Iizuka, 2010).

There appears to be a balanced trend in terms of ownership and management of the farms with almost 50 % owned by foreigners and the rest by domestic investors including joint ventures between Ethiopians and expatriates. The foreign investors are mainly from the Netherlands, Israel, India, and Saudi Arabia (EHPEA, 2011). Around 95 % of flower export is destined to EU countries; mainly to the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK. The rest of the export goes to Norway, Russia, Japan, and the Middle East. The Netherlands has played a pivotal role in Ethiopian horticulture development both as investors and end market. More than 87 % of the flower freight is managed by Ethiopian Airlines, the rest by Lufthansa and Emirates (EFE, 2013).

The Ethiopian horticulture producers and exporters association was established in 2002 as a non-profit organization representing growers. The aim of the association is promoting the development of Ethiopia's horticulture sector. It has been instrumental in lobbying for government assistance for the horticulture sector in terms of infrastructure, loan and logistics services (EHPEA, 2011). The association bulletin shows that it provides various services such as training, advocacy and consultancy to its members. In 2007 the association has also been successful in establishing a code of conduct for sustainable horticulture production. The code of conduct focuses of core aspects of the industry i.e. sustainable agricultural practice, environmental protection and flower workers safety and acceptable employment practice (EHPEA, 2007).

According to figures from Ethiopian Flower Export website, export of flowers has continued to grow rapidly and it is generating a significant amount of foreign exchange (170 million USD in the nine month in 2013 Ethiopian budget year) (EFE, 2013). It has created employment opportunities for more than 85,000 people. The industry in particular created employment opportunities for more women to enter formal labor market. Women make up to 75 % of the labor force across the flower farms in the country (ibid).



Discussion with manager of the association and farm managers from AQ Roses and Ethio-highlands showed there are opportunities and incentives that contributed to the successful emergence of the country in to the global flower market. The major opportunities include a strong government initiative to provide a favorable flower investment climate that include provision of a five year corporate tax exemption for inputs, duty free import of capital goods, access to air freights, access to land and provision of loan from government banks. The sector also enjoys availability of a relatively cheap labor even when compared to other African countries such as Kenya. A human resources manager from AQ Roses from the Rift Valley area mentioned that, in Kenya it is difficult to find labor less than two dollars a day while in Ethiopia it is a dollar or just over a dollar. A relatively cheap labor force coupled with the county's comparative advantage of diverse agro-climate and high altitude has also made it a favorable flower production site. Studies from Ethiopia reported similar comparative advantages that attracted the flower farms in particular abundance of cheap unskilled labor force and strong government support to the flower sector (Ute, 2013, Taylor, 2010, Mano & Suzuki, 2011).

According to the information from production managers at AQ Roses in the Rift Valley area and Ethio-highlands in Sebeta area, the major challenges of the industry include shortage of inputs and green house equipment's because almost all the fertilizer and pesticide are imported from abroad. There is also high establishment cost involved in establishing integrated pest management (IPM) system and many flower growers are reluctant to adopt IPM even though there are risks involved in pesticide. Similarly Getu (2009) and Belwal and Chala ( 2008) reported that all flower farms use imported agrochemicals with high importing cost (25% of production cost). There is also growing concern about the misuse and overuse of pesticides that is posing threat to human health (Hanssen, et al., 2014). The manger mentioned flower workers level of awareness as a challenge when it comes to proper implementation of health and safety practices. IPM program which is supported by EHPEA was launched in 2007 in five trial farms in an effort towards sustainable flower production ( Belwal & Chala, 2008)

In relation to the challenges the association manager also explained that disputes over land tenure between foreign investors and local communities have been a major concern in some areas. In this regard a conference proceeding noted that large scale leasing of land to foreign investor remains a point of contention between government and local communities as it compromised their property rights (Rahmato & Assefa, 2006). Government land

commercialization might increase poverty as the land available for local food production has been reduced and limited local people access to communal pasture land (Ibid). Finally, labor turnover was highlighted as another challenge of flower farms especially among young women who make the majority of the labor force leave to Middle East countries to work as house maids.

## **Economic and Social Impact**

This section presents the findings of the study in relation to economic and social impact of flower industry in Ethiopia drawing on results from interviews with flower workers and discussion with trade union representatives and representatives of farm management in the Rift Valley and Sebeta area. The presentation mainly focuses on three major issues: demographic characteristics of flower workers, labor and employment conditions in farms studied, and economic impact of the sector. In doing so it tries to address the first research question of this study: What are the economic benefits and values of flower industry for flower workers employed in the sector? It also tries to present the experiences of men and women who are working in the flower farms. The results from primary data are substantiated with findings of other researchers on the topic.

Employees in flower farms can be categorized to four major groups based on the respective sections they have worked: green house, packaging, crop protection, transport and maintenance. According to the interview with the production managers in AQ Roses and Ethio-highlands each Greenhouse measured an average of one and half hectares of land and managed by five greenhouse workers with up to five plant beds each. Interviews with the flower workers confirmed that the daily work in this section involved activities such as weeding, pruning, cleaning and harvesting. In the packaging houses sequences of processes were undertaken starting from sorting the bulk of flowers arriving from the field up until packing buckets of flowers ready to be stored to refrigerator room. Crop protection (i.e. spraying of agrochemicals), irrigation (mixing of agrochemicals and monitoring the pipes), transport and maintenance were smaller sections that were entirely occupied by men.

## **Demographic Characteristics**

According to the information from farm management both in Ethio-highlands and AQ Roses, green house and pack house represented the highest proportion of employees (75 %) that mainly constituted women. The trend of women working in green houses and packaging sections explains why there is large proportion of female workers in flower farms in general

as compared to their men counterparts. Similar figures were reported by Ute (2013) and Taylor (2010) in Ethiopia and studies from Kenya and Tanzania (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Rissgard 2009). It also appears that jobs in both farms were segregated according to the traditional gender roles in which men tend to specialize in skilled jobs while women mostly performing relatively low or unskilled jobs. Even though the flower industry has given women employment opportunity, they remained at the bottom rung of the industry's workforce. According to studies, this situation is associated with the low social status of women as compared to men in Ethiopia especially in rural areas (Ute, 2013, NCTPE, 2003). Women have limited access to education and training that could eventually qualify them to engage in skilled jobs (NCTPE, 2003). According to the interviews with managers in both farms this happens to be the normal trend even though there had not been specific gender preference made while recruiting employees. In contrast, Ute (2013) reported there is a perception among employers considering women more compliant, nimble-fingered and careful thus better qualified for routines involved in flower production.

At the management level there was one female farm manager in Ethio-highlands whereas all other sectorial and managerial positions were occupied by men in both farms. The farm manager in both study areas also indicated that recruiting women for managerial positions was a challenge as the number of qualified women was limited and those educated tend to prefer working in bigger cities such as Addis Ababa. Such phenomenon could be justifiable in a country where 28.6 percent of women finished undergraduate studies and 13.6 percent did their postgraduate studies in 2013 (MOE, 2013).

The age composition of workers in both farms falls between 20 and 45. The results of the interview confers that a sizeable proportion (70%) of the workers were under their twenties when they started to work in the farms and two of respondents started at the age of 17. This implies that the labor force in both farms were young with mean age of 25.5. Similarly Nigatu (2010) and Weldegebreil (2010) reported young labor force that fall between 18 and 35 of age in the flower farms they studied. In this regard Taylor, (2010) asserted that flower farms in Ethiopia opened up a labor opportunity for unemployed and under employed rural youth.

**Table 1 Flower Workers Socio-Economic Characteristics**

<b>Flower workers characteristics</b>	<b>Ziway and Sebeta No=20 (6 Men and 14 Women)</b>
Flower workers mean age	25.45
Average household size	4.65
Education level	
Illiterate	6
Adult education	4
primary school	3
secondary school and above	7

Source: Field Work data July-September 2013

Results of interviews and focus group discussions indicated that it used to be possible to get employed while being under the age of 18 because the farms had not requested ID cards to check the age of workers. But flower farms has recently changed rules and started to strictly check age of workers during recruitment. According to the respondents it has become difficult to get employed if a person is under the age of 18. Interview with the production manager in Ethio-highlands confirmed that European buyers do not buy flowers that hire child workers. As a result the farm enforced strict rules on age of workers. This situation evidently shows that even though the country has signed minimum age convention (No.138) there had been gap when it comes to adherence. In contrast the introduction of private social standards contributed in improving labor condition in this case minimum age of employment. Studies from Kenya and Tanzania found that private social standards had significant impact in improving labor conditions (Riisgaard, 2009, Leipold & Morgante, 2013).

The production manager from Ethio-highlands said that it was common for high school students between the ages of 15 and 17 to do seasonal work during summer time to avoid interference with their schooling. Accordingly the students were commonly assigned to do “light work” such as cleaning. The result from both farms indicated compliance of flower farms to the national labor proclamation and Ethiopian horticulture code of conduct that do not allow children under the age of 14 to work.

The educational levels of workers in both farms found to be relatively low and significant variation was found between men and women. Only 25% of the respondents attained secondary school and none of the respondents had post-secondary level of education. Among interviewed women 25 % had never attended school and categorized as illiterate. These figures imply that the labor force in both farms with low levels of education mainly drop out from elementary and high school. Women flower workers in particular were either illiterate or educated up to primary level. This is a reflection of the existing gender gap in education between men and women in Ethiopia (MOE, 2013). Girls' access to education is also limited because of factors such as early marriage, traditional sexual division of labor with girls preferred to do reproductive activities and confined girls to household activities. In contrast boys get priority to attend formal schooling because they are perceived as future breadwinners (NCTPE, 2003). In addition unfavorable societal attitudes towards girls' education that inform parent's decision to send children to school and incidences of abduction restrict their physical movements in cases of long distances of schools from home. As a result girls' enrolment in education at all levels is lower than boys with 49.9 male's literacy rate while that of female is 26.6 percent (MOE, 2013).

Close to half (45%) of the respondents were married and just over half (53%) were single. The rest (2%) were divorced. Among those who were married a sizable proportion indicated that they got married after they joined the farms and had their spouses working at the same farm or another farm. Similarly human resource manager of AQ Roses mentioned that there is a general trend of workers to get married after they joined the farm mainly because of economic reason as their wages were not adequate to meet the basic needs. It was also found that those who were single lived either with their parents or with their siblings who also worked in flower farms in orders to share their living expenses. The result showed that about 80 % of workers resided with other household members including siblings, parents, and relatives. This relates to the low wages of flower workers that is insufficient for basic necessities which is discussed in next sub sections.

### **Economic Impact**

Wages for a starting level worker were paid monthly with an average daily rate of 15 Ethiopian birr (ETB (0.77 USD)) in Sebeta area and ETB 23 (1.2USD) in the Rift Valley area. The lowest wages was ETB 12 birr and was paid to casual laborers who worked for short period of time. Other studies on wage of flower workers reported similar or lower wages of ETB 9 per day with most farms paying between ETB 9 and 12 (Taylor, 2010, Ute, 2013).

According to the farm managers the wage variation observed between Rift Valley and Sebeta area was related with difference in living costs and availability of job opportunities in the respective areas. There is no national minimum wage in Ethiopia and minimum wage exists only for the public sector worker which is around ETB 420 (\$24) per month (Decent Work Check, 2013). This resulted in very flexible wage rate open to be determined by the market (Ute, 2013).

According to the results of the interviews, the average monthly income for workers in pack house and green house was ETB 766 (40 USD) including overtime pay. There was also 60 ETB bonus tied to workers level of absenteeism. According to (Nigatu 2010, Weldeghebrael, 2010) a similar or even lower monthly wage was paid to flower workers in Ethiopia that did not amount to a living wage. Belwal & Chala ( 2008) reported that flower growers identified Ethiopia as an alternative market with its supply of cheap labor and tax incentives especially following the political instability in Kenya. Sher PLC, a leading company from Netherlands, moved from Kenya to avoid rising production cost and become the largest investor in Ethiopia’s flower industry. This phenomenon is also a result of competition between countries that keeps labor standards and wages at lower rate and attract foreign investors. Studies from Ethiopia and other countries showed that low labor costs and deregulations in labor market were among important factors in the relocation of flower farms (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Ute, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007).

**Table 2 Flower Workers Income and Savings**

<b>Flower workers characteristics</b>	<b>Ziway and Sebeta No=20</b>
Flower workers income (average)	1038.8
Flower wage (average)	851.3
Other sources (average)	375
Savings (average)	177.5
Male	141.7
Female	192.8
Flower income dependency (average)	
Male	67.6
Female	76.2

Source: Field Work data July-September 2013

There were no wage disparities between men and women flower workers for equal work. Only women supervisors, who were few in numbers, earned better than those women worked in the green house and packaging section. Those who worked in spraying section get paid relatively higher (60 USD) per month and these were exclusively men. Otherwise, the majority of women performed jobs that required limited skill and get lower wages. There are fewer jobs that required skills and many workers remain in low standard jobs with low wage and limited benefits. The wage difference between men and women was justified by the fact that men either engaged in skilled jobs such as maintenance or worked with direct contact with pesticides which was considered more dangerous (Nigatu, 2010). Ute (2013) reported similar trend of employment segregation according to traditional gender division of labor that also contributed to the wage gaps between women and men. Analysis of job segregation across flower farms in Kenya and Ethiopia showed that such trend is rooted in domestic gender relations and cultural perception that shaped women and men working conditions (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Ute, 2013). Thus it is limiting women access to employment rights and benefits (ibid).

The average monthly household income among workers was ETB 1,038 (54 USD) with the lowest ETB 650 (34 USD) per month and the highest ETB 1,575 (83 USD) per month. Flower workers explained that they used their salary mainly for consumption such as food, house rent, educational expenses, and support to families back in the village. Food and rent were the biggest costs incurred and equaled around 85% of monthly wages. Those who lived with their parents contributed to covering household expenses. Nearly 70 % of the respondents also remitted for their parents and family members who lived in rural areas on a regular basis.

Respondents claimed that with their wages, they found it difficult to cater for their basic necessities of housing, food, healthcare, transport, and clothing. There were cases of falling short of money for emergencies such as medical expenses and resorting to free treatments for example holy water for their children and themselves. The respondents' mentioned over and over again that depending on wages from the flower farm is rarely enough for the whole month. A man who works in the spraying section explained that

*“It is difficult to depend on my wage from flower farm to support my family for the whole month because there are so many expenses while living in town when I compare it to my expenses in village. Here (in town) you have to pay for rent and food nothing comes from my own back yard. I do daily labor work in construction in my spare time. Still what I am doing now is just for survival”.*

Almost all the respondents confirmed that their income is not enough to meet the basic household needs such as food and medical expenses and unable to securely make it through every month as they continue working long hours for low pay. Despite the fact that EHPEA codes of conduct stipulate that wages in flower farms should be sufficient to meet basic needs of the workers, salaries in the horticulture sector remain low. According to the information from Decent Work Check website, the country has not signed the ILO conventions on minimum wage, regular pay, wage protection (Conventions 95 (1949)) and overtime compensation (Convention 01 (1919)) and there is no minimum wage legislation in Ethiopia (Decent Work Check, 2013). The absence of legislation and wage standards partly affects the enforcement of EHPEA code of conduct. Evidence from other developing countries also showed that the wages in flower farms did not amount to a living wage for the majority of workers and their families (Tanya & Olga 2007, Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Hale & Opondo, 2005).

Hence, the need for extra income was common among flower workers because their monthly wage did not meet their household needs according to results of focus group discussions (FGD 1 and 2). Results of interview also showed that flower workers adopted various strategies to supplement monthly wages such as small scale farming (breeding sheep and chicken) that did not require large space. Informal business such as petty trade, selling food and local liquor as well as working in construction sector were also the common strategies used as additional sources of income and supplement monthly wages. Seventy percent of the respondents were reliant on such additional income to supplement the wage from flower farms and it was particularly common among women flower workers. Cutting on expenses and number of meals per day, working for the whole month without a break for extra income or taking credit on food items from local kiosk were also reported by the respondents as the common mechanisms to make ends meet.

During interviews respondents explained that their wage did not keep pace with the inflation on basic commodities, especially food items in the past few years<sup>7</sup>. This leaves a savings rate between ETB 100 (5 USD) and ETB 300 (15 USD) per month among those workers reported being a member of voluntary rotating fund called equip. Some of the respondents mentioned that they put aside such savings from additional income from informal business. The savings that are made also go to household investment mainly household furniture's and electronics. Savings were also used during emergencies.

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<sup>7</sup> Average inflation rate on consumer prices for year 2013 was 23.4%. CSA, 2013



Women who were divorced were responsible for providing for themselves and their children. For these women, the wages they earn fail to meet basic living costs such as three meals a day or buying a soap to wash their cloths. A single woman who worked in green house in Ethio-highlands said that *“I struggle to cover medical expenses whenever my 12 year daughter is admitted to clinic. I look for loans to get her treated or go to holy water if I fail to get the loan”*. Similarly other respondents also mentioned that they cover such shortfalls and unforeseen expenses mainly through loans.

In terms of assets the majority of the respondents (85%) were renters rather than homeowners. Only two respondents owned land in their original place of residence and four had livestock registered as an asset out of the total twenty respondents. Information from both respondents and farm management confirmed workers in both farms were not provided with either housing or housing allowance. This illustrates flexible labor standards in Ethiopia when compared to neighboring countries such as Kenya where flower worker were provided with either housing or housing allowances (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Ute, 2013). Such widespread poverty among flower workers also raises a concern about the extent to which labor intensive industries in this case flower industry potentially provides a way out of poverty in developing countries which was one of the premises of liberalized trade.

### **Labor and Employment Conditions**

The Oromia regional government, where the majority of the flower farms are located, has entered agreement with flower growers to hire unskilled labor from the domestic areas (Weldeghebrael, 2010). However, the majority of the respondents (70%) relocated their place of residence and were migrants coming from various regions around the country. The result indicated that there has been an exceptional level of labor mobility to the newly established flower farms in the Rift Valley area. When asked about initial information about employment opportunities in flower farms, all of the respondents said they got information either from friends or relatives. A significant proportion (90 %) had chosen to work in the specific farms depending on the same sources of information in relation to salary, benefit packages, labor practices and provisions. In this regard Mano and Suzuki (2011) reported domestic and personal networks as playing important role in disseminating information about employment opportunities across flower farms in Ethiopia.

The results of the interview and FGD indicated that young people who form the majority of work force in flower farms found it difficult to make a living in their original place of

residence. This was mainly because they cannot be sure if they would get sufficient land from their parents as it was becoming difficult to gain access to land in Rift Valley and Sebeta area, both small holder areas. According to studies there is a general youth unemployment or underemployment in rural subsistence farming areas because of decreasing chances of getting access to land from their parents (Rahmato & Assefa, 2006). As a result young people are becoming landless and migrating to towns in search of other alternative employment opportunities (ibid).

According to workers interviewed their level of education which was mainly primary school education was also among the reasons for their decisions to relocate and work in flower farms. Lack of sufficient land to do farming in rural areas and their level of education are main reasons to relocate and work in flower farms. Results of focus group discussion also showed that flower farms were also attractive source of employment because they provided a stable income in contrast to the uncertainties involved in subsistence farming and the informal sector (FGD 1 and 2).

Women in particular mentioned that they have been able to capitalize on employment opportunities in flower farms because they used to get employed as domestic servants as the first job in urban centers. One of the respondents who worked as a maid when she first arrived to town said that *‘I preferred to work in flower farm because first it gave me autonomy and freedom when compared to working as a house maid. Second I am illiterate and it is easy to get employed in this farm than the textile factory that is found across the road because the flower farm did not require any level of education or training’*. There is a gender disparity in education as traditionally parents in rural areas choose sending boys to school than girls because they attach less value of female education in their future life (Chuta & Crivello, 2013). Girls are also more likely to drop out of school because of factors such as early marriage and abduction (ibid). Women respondents’ mentioned their level of education remains as a major challenge to upgrade their current job and join other skilled employment sectors such as textile factory after they migrated to the urban centers.

The regular working hours were eight hours on both farms with six consecutive workdays within a week. There was one hour lunch break and one day off within a week. Working hours were further stretched to twelve hours during peak production seasons and before holidays like Mother’s Day and Valentine’s Day. This goes against the labor proclamation that states “workers shall have the right to appropriately defined working hours, breaks, leisure, and periodic leave with pay, paid public holidays” (Article 18(3)). Other studies also

showed flower workers were subject to long working hours with low pay justified with seasonality of the industry (Tanya & Olga, 2007, Weldeghebrael, 2010, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). Respondents also indicated that working overtime was not a choice but compulsory especially for those who work in pack house. The overtime pay ranged between ETB 2.0 (0.10 USD) to ETB 4.5 (0.23USD) per hour. This shows that overtime work is paid at almost the same rate as regular work which is against ILO technical standards that demands overtime work out of normal working hours to be paid at a different rate. However Ethiopia has not signed the ILO conventions wage protection (Conventions 95 (1949) and overtime compensation (Convention 01 (1919) which opens a gap in enforcement (Decent Work Check, 2013). The EHPEA code of conduct requirement of overtime compensation at a different rate than normal hours might fill in this gap and potentially improve labor conditions.

Results of focus group discussion showed that there are series of tasks involved in the flower farms such as tending beds, grading, harvesting, packing, and so on. The tasks were labor intensive and required standing many long hours without a break (FGD 1 & 2). A greenhouse flower worker from Sebeta further explained that *'I am in charge of five plant beds and my monthly bonus was determined based on the evaluation of tidiness of the plant beds'*. Similarly pack house workers were required to meet a daily quota of packing 125 boxes of flower. Women respondents who predominantly worked in both sections claimed that such work standards were tiresome and keep them under pressure demanding excessive level of effort. According to the respondents it was only pregnant women who get some level of treatment such as short breaks because they were considered less fit to work in the heat wave of the greenhouses and to stand many long hours in pack house. The majority of greenhouse and pack house flower workers interviewed also verified that it was difficult to get transferred to other sections on the basis of their work conditions. Hanssen, et.al., (2014) and Nigatu, (2010) also reported that workers in the flower farms were subject to extended working hours and such working condition is associated with health problems among flower workers that will be discussed under occupational health and safety section.

According to the respondents working in the green houses becomes very difficult especially during hot season in the Rift Valley area. The temperatures sometimes touch 40 degrees Celsius. Similarly those who worked in the spraying section also mentioned that coping with the heat wave and suffocation while using mouth and nose mask made their conditions of work difficult. In addition, it was quiet stressful to finish spraying their assigned plots within six hours as it demanded excessive levels of effort. The production manager from Ethio-

highlands justified that the very nature of cut flowers which are highly perishable demands an effective and uninterrupted chain of work arrangements.

According to the result of the interviews long working hours put pressure on workers in both farms, but they were especially difficult for women who constitute the majority of flower workers. Long working hours during peak production seasons has further stretched women's already long working day as they were responsible for reproductive roles when they get back home. Some women workers also mentioned safety concerns during peak harvesting seasons when they get back from work at late hours. Ute (2013) and Tanya & olga ( 2007) argued that women's involvement in labor intensive jobs without change in men's share of domestic and family responsibilities around the house further adds the burden on women. It was asserted that even though flower farms opened up employment opportunities for unskilled and illiterate women the low standard labor conditions coupled with the gender division of labor in the domestic sphere are contributing to the continuation of women's subordinate position rather than empowering them (Ute, 2013, Tanya & olga, 2007).

Women respondents with young children indicated that they had to leave their children with neighbors or they leave their children permanently back in villages with their relatives. Interview results also showed that women with young children mainly rely on such supportive social structures to care for their children since there was no day care facilities in the suburbs where workers live. This shows a gap that need to be filled through adoption of gender sensitive employment policy and code of conduct that recognizes the reproductive roles and social status of women. Studies from Kenya and Ecuador indicated women's access to employment in flower farms might have adverse impact on their unpaid child care responsibilities if it is not extended to include social services such as day care that could enable the combining of paid productive employment with reproductive labor (Dolan, et, al., 2003, Tanya & Olga , 2007).

### **Employment Benefits and Provisions**

Both companies provided workers with a permanent employment contract on completion of 45 days of probation. Workers confirmed that introduction of written contracts detailing terms and conditions was one of the major improvements that had been made over the last two years. As a result, the contract terms for the majority of workers in both farms shifted to permanent status. This is the significant impact after the introduction of EHPEA code of conduct that is putting upward pressure flexible labor arrangements and eventually contributing to raise

flower workers labor condition (EHPEA, 2011). Respondents confirmed that this provided them with sense of job security and addressed their major concern of securing work throughout the year.

On the average respondents who participated in this study worked for 4.5 years. Even though the results of the interview indicated relative job assurance and stability in both flower farms the management highlighted concern of turnover. After the farms invested on training employees, young women leave to Middle East countries to work as house maids which caused a major loss for their company.

Respondents indicated that having fixed term contract did not always lead to job security. There are cases of layoff and termination of contracts without compliance to the terms and conditions especially in cases of conflict with the supervisors and management. In this regard even though Ethiopia has ratified Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158), the national labor proclamation has gaps because it opens up room for unfair and arbitrary dismissal. It states that contract terms could be terminated without notice on the basis of quarrel at place of work and employees manifestation of loss of capacity (Nigatu, 2010, Ute, 2013). When it comes to compensation during layoffs or in cases of work related injury, respondents complained that there exists a lengthy legal process and compensation was provided only for those who have worked five years or more. Respondents mentioned that there were also cases of intimidation to prevent them from complaining further or seeking compensation. Focus group results also indicated that company disciplinary and grievance procedures were not followed that resulted in feeling of job insecurity to persist among workers who worked for less than five years (FGD 1 and 2).

According to the information from farm management both in AQ Roses and Ethio-highlands, workers on permanent contracts were provided with legally mandated employment benefits and provisions such as pension, paid annual leave, and two months of paid maternity leave. The maximum annual leave given was 21 days and the minimum was 14 days according to the number of years one has worked. In this regard the flower farms confer to Ethiopian labor proclamation No.377/2003 that states workers right to periodic leaves with pay (Ethiopian labor proclamation No.377/2003).

Both farms provided permanent workers with access to health care. Ethio-highlands provided health care at government owned clinics mainly for on job injuries and emergency cases. In AQ Roses there was a clinic located in the farm compound that provided healthcare for workers. In cases of serious illness workers were referred to Sher Hospital which is owned by

Sher Ethiopia group companies and get treatment free of charge. Employees were required to cover drug expenses and sick leave days were granted without pay. In both farms the medical care also did not include other family members. The results illustrate that even though flower farms created access to health facilities; it was not adequate enough to ensure proper health care for workers and their families. Experiences from Kenya and Tanzania fair trade certified flower farms showed that they were required to provide workers and their families to have access to proper treatment, medicine and health education (Riisgaard, 2009, Leipold & Morgante, 2013)

There were variations between the two farms when it comes to fringe benefits such as breakfast and transport. The farm in Sebeta provided workers with free breakfast (tea and bread). There was also transport service for those who commute. According to the information from AQ Roses human resource manager there were no provisions of breakfast and employees were provided with transport allowances.

According to interview with managers from both farms the above mentioned employment benefits and provisions were introduced over the last two years in an effort to comply with international standards. Accordingly both farms introduced provisions such as annual leave, medical coverage, allowances and peak season bonuses in effort to improve working conditions. The finding illustrates that the introduction of private standards lead to some level of progress in raising labor standards in the studied flower farms

The Human resource manager at AQ Roses mentioned there are also initiatives in an effort to set up a socially responsible flower farm which go beyond the basic standard requirements and would eventually enable to establish the company at higher level in international market. Towards this end the company has been spending a “fair amount” of budget on broader social responsibility schemes that served both employees and the surrounding community. This include contribution to operating cost of Sher hospital, which is established and run by the country’s largest flower farm company Sher Ethiopia<sup>8</sup>. The hospital provided free access to hospital facilities to all employees in Ziway Area. The company also contributes to Sher primary school which created access to primary education for employees children. The company also supported NGOs involved in community development issues such as supporting street children by providing uniforms and educational materials.

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<sup>8</sup> Sher Ethiopia, a Duch company, is a leading investor in Ethiopia on Flower Sector. It has leased land in Rift Valley area and developed initial infrastructure. It subsequently leased smaller plots to domestic and foreign investors.

According to the discussion with the production manager, the Farm in Sebeta is one of the selected farms participating in a pilot project jointly launched by DFID's Food Retail Industry Challenge Fund (FRICH) and its commercial partners, Marks and Spencer and Finlays Horticulture Holdings Ltd. Improving labor standards in the flower industry is one of the objectives of the project with a target to UK markets. Discussions with labor union representatives and the production manager in Sebeta revealed that even if it was at an early stage some progress has been made in rising labor standards after the introduction of the project mainly establishment of workplace committees and awareness raising programs on labor standards.

In general, the results indicated that not much was achieved when it comes to enforcing employment benefits and provisions stated in the country's labor law. This relates to the flexibility of the labor proclamation as well as lack of capacity at district level to monitor and enforce such benefits and provisions. The introduction of private social standards and EHPEA code of conduct has filled in some of the gaps and contributed to improving labor conditions, especially permanent contract arrangements that lead to improved job security. There are also signs of improvement in terms of employment benefits and provisions in the two farms studied in terms of health care services. However, challenges remain in social service provision such as housing, transport, health provision for workers' families and day care facilities. In this regard, Rissgard (2009) argues that existing private social standards still fail to go beyond outcome entitlements and cover issues of rights that could potentially empower workers and their trade unions and eventually claim rights.

### **Career Development opportunities**

As it has been discussed in the previous section, the majority of workers in flower farms are women and with low level education because the nature of their work does not require higher levels of training or education. In both flower farms, employees were provided with on-job training at the start because the majority of the workers did not have prior experience or training. Such training was given for one week up to a month when they started the work. The production manager in Sebeta explained that most of the skills are learned from on-the-job training and experience rather than formal training. During focus group discussions, workers confirmed that their work positions mostly remained the same throughout their stay in the farm and there was almost no opportunity to go up the ladder of employment to supervisory levels, and thus increase their wages (FGD 1 and 2). They claimed that this trend was especially common for those with low levels of education even after they gained years of experience. In this regard, studies argue that even though flower farms created employment

opportunities for unskilled workers, the majority of them kept trapped in low position jobs because their disproportionate share in labor intensive increases their probability of remaining in same positions. In addition their low level of education hinders them from further opportunities for training and education (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Ute, 2013, Tanya & Olga, 2007 ).

Respondents with some level of education also complained that opportunities for advancement from their entry-level positions were limited. According to the workers informal labor relationship such as the relationship that the workers establish with supervisors dominate and worth for promotion rather than education or experience. According to flower workers there also exists nepotism and favoritism which made it difficult to earn promotions (FGD 1 & 2). Among the 20 respondents interviewed, only one respondent got the chance to get promoted to quality supervisor position after working for three years in pack house. She said that “ *I am happy with the new position. I now get better salary because I just check what the others did*”. Nonetheless the human resource manager from AQ Roses explained that promotions mainly depend on experience and education. Since the majority of women worked in green house and pack house they rarely get promoted as there were few positions in the next job ladder. The manager also confirmed that while the majority of sectorial and top management positions were occupied by men as there were no qualified women to fill up such positions given the inherent gender inequality in education.

In summary, results of interviews and observation indicated that economic vulnerability rooted in landlessness; high youth unemployment and few available alternatives in rural areas were the push factors for young people to seek employment in flower farms. The characteristics of the labor force in both farms were young with relatively low levels of education. In both farms there was high proportion of women (75%) who mainly worked in labor intensive sections of the flower farms. In this regard flower farms created new opportunities for women who are less advantaged to enter formal waged employment. Women from rural areas are less educated and find it difficult to get into formal employment (Chuta & Crivello, 2013).

The majority of workers were provided with permanent contracts with legally mandated employment benefits such as pension, paid annual leave, paid maternity leave as well as fringe benefits. The requirements from international market standards played a significant role in the implementation of such benefits packages in the context of flexible labor market



arrangements. Nonetheless difference was observed among the two flower farms studied with regard to employment benefits and provisions.

The study found that respondents regarded the industry as beneficial as it provided stable income and job security when compared to informal business and subsistence farming. However, flower workers highlighted their concerns of poor working conditions and low wage level. First their wage was not sufficient to provide the necessities essential to an acceptable standard of living for the workers and their families. Second there is lack of consistency in implementation of disciplinary and grievance procedures. Finally workers claimed that work positions remained the same regardless of the number of years worked because of common trend of nepotism and favoritism which makes it difficult to earn promotions and thus increase their wages.

## **Labor Rights, Standards and Unionization**

### **Awareness of labor rights and standards**

This section presents findings about flower workers level of awareness in relation to national labor law proclamation, their contract terms and EHPEA code of conduct. It also presents results in relation to freedom of association and level unionization among flower workers in the Rift Valley and Sebeta area. Finally compliance of flower farms to national labor law visa vise efforts of the government in enforcing law is assessed.

The Ethiopian government has ratified ILO core labor conventions and domesticated them in its national labor legislation (Nigatu, 2010). Respondents were asked about their knowledge of the national labor proclamation, and only two respondents have undergone training about national labor law from their high school training on civic education. Some respondents also got orientation on basic company code of conduct when they have joined the farms. Otherwise a large proportion of flower workers are women without any previous formal employment experience and unaware of the very existence of national labor law. They did not have prior opportunity to get training about the labor law or company code of practice. They mentioned that they have learned about their basic rights and duties from colleagues and supervisors informally. Yet their basic knowledge related to the warning and firing procedures by observing when others get fined. This resonates with findings from other countries that codes of practice are most often unknown, unavailable or not translated at production sites (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Rissgaard, 2009).

I have observed that summary of code of practice displayed on the notice board at the entrances of the flower farms buildings. An interview with the human resource manager of AQ Roses also confirmed that effort has been made in disseminating information about national labor proclamation No.377/2003 and EHPEA code of conduct. In addition, labor union representatives in both farms mentioned that they have organized different awareness raising sessions in relation to the national labor law, inviting experts from district labor and social affairs office. In spite of such effort there found to be a gap of knowledge among flower workers. It appears that there might be a mismatch between the awareness raising mechanisms used and workers level of understanding which might be related to flower workers level of education.

According to the results of interviews, all of the respondents have signed contract terms with their respective employers. However there was difference among flower workers with regard to knowledge about the details of their contract terms. The respondents explained that they were briefly informed about the contract terms when they signed it. Some of the respondents did not know and has never read their contract terms. This might be related to the low level of education among flower workers. Even those who were literate mentioned that it was difficult to understand the language and legal terms used in the contract. This implies that the flower workers are unaware of their rights and duties established therein, and might not demand it. In addition the effort of flower farms and labor union to rising awareness was not effective.

Respondents frequently mentioned that what matters most in cases of problems was the kind of relationship one has with supervisors rather than knowledge about the contract terms. Others claimed that it was not even relevant to have the contract terms in the first place because there is a lengthy legal procedure and judicial delays in cases of problems. Research suggests that there is insufficient capacity and resources as well as reluctance at district level labor affairs offices, government agencies charged with monitoring compliance with labor, to monitor compliance and enforce the basic labor rights established in national labor proclamation (Nigatu, 2010, Ute, 2013, Weldeghebrael, 2010). This also shows that the country is only sensitive in meeting the demands of flower growers and adopts flexible approach to enforce the existing legal and policy frameworks. It is suggested that government must go beyond attracting FDI to enforce labor laws that protect workers as well as apply stronger sanction on companies that fail to comply (Ibid).

## Labor Union Membership

Freedom of association is one of the fundamental principles of ILO convention. Accordingly, labor proclamation No.377/2003 states that all workers have the constitutional right to join trade unions, and collective bargaining including non-permanent workers(Articles 42(1) (a) and (3)) without interference by the public authorities (Ethiopian labor proclamation No.377/2003)<sup>9</sup>. In both farms workers were allowed to organize themselves in to labor unions. This is different evidence and pattern when compared to other study findings from Ethiopia and Kenya that reported Trade union membership is often discouraged and undermined across flower farms (Weldeghebrael, 2010, Leipold & Morgante, 2013). There was different trend when it comes to level of unionization among flower workers in Sebeta and in the Rift Valley area. Generally trade union membership in Sebeta area was low, with just 12.5% of total flower farm workers who joined the trade union. In the Rift Valley area the trend shows a higher proportion with automatic membership of flower workers up on joining the flower farms. In this regard Pahle (2011) asserted that such arrangements regarded as ‘closed shops’ are against the ILO’s freedom of association standard that include *the right not to associate*.

According to trade union representatives in Sebeta area, even though workers were allowed to organize themselves labor unions, they were not interested in becoming members. Reckoning their past experience of unionization, respondents’ counter claimed that labor union leadership had been weak and not trustworthy. There had been two earlier unions that were not successful with many internal problems such as embezzlement of funds and leadership failure. Respondents also complained that the power of trade unions to influence wages and working conditions tends to be weak. In addition some of the respondents mentioned that they choose to be not members because they cannot afford to pay contributions for a union which has not been proactive in safeguarding members’ interest. Thus, the general lack of trust and interest in labor unionization among flower workers in Sebeta area was related to past experiences of labor unions that failed to defend worker’s rights. In this regard Tanya & Olga (2007), and Riisgaard (2009) asserted with the advent of trade liberalization, the power of labor has been weakened and promotion of labor rights and addressing labor issues through traditional trade unions has become difficult.

The production manager in Sebeta confers that the management has noted the aforementioned concern of workers given the previous experience with two earlier unions which were not successful. Collective bargaining agreement has also been in the process of development for

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<sup>9</sup> Articles: 39, 40, 109, and 110 further clarify regulations in relation to severance pay and compensation, disablement payment and dependents benefits (ibid).

long time. The manager alleged that it was not signed because of the lack of commitment from committee leadership. In order to address this problem the company offered space, time and funds for trade union. The production manager mentioned such efforts are being made because it is also one of the requirements to qualify for silver level certification of EHPEA accreditation. In addition the farm facilitated the formation of a work place committee in order to address issues of grievance at a lower level. The work place committee is part of the initiative of DFID's trade development project funded by Global Brands. This initiative is also part of the requirement for international market certification in order to fulfill buyer's requirements and access UK markets. The result suggests that the flower farm is recognizing the union and allowing minimum organizational rights without workers being engaged with the employer in collective bargaining agreement. In this regard Rikken (2010) and Leipold & Morgante (2013) assert that private social standards have played a role in rising labor conditions in flower farms even though limited to go beyond this and cover issues of right that could potentially empower workers and their trade unions.

In contrast, flower workers in Rift Valley area joined trade union and demonstrated better trust and confidence in its liaising role between workers and the management during focus group discussion (FGD2). There is collective bargaining agreement signed between the union and AQ Roses management which is being implemented. The Human resource manager of AQ Roses also explained that there has been a smooth relationship with the trade union. The common issues that had been coming up in relation to labor relations were issues of discipline. In spite of such developments there were concerns raised that requires prompt consideration vis-a-vis requirements of full-fledged labor union. The results of interview showed that there were no regular union meetings rather members contact representatives of the labor union in case of problems. Some of the respondents even do not know their representative. And some were not certain if they were members and they presumed their membership from their pay slip deductions for union fee. This resonates with the aforementioned discussion about 'closed shop' whereby union membership is automatic upon being employed without their consent and or recognition. It appears that unionization among flower workers in the Rift Valley area was functioning with the purpose of fulfilling international marketing requirements rather than empowering its members to claim their rights.

In relation to company disciplinary and grievance procedure respondents claimed procedures were rarely implemented particularly in cases of workplace conflict and employment termination. Those who were aware of the national labor law and company code of conduct

believed that the farms did not comply fully with items on the code of practice and collective bargaining agreement. Lay-off was common in cases of conflict with supervisors without following proper administration procedures because supervisors use their authority to influence decisions. Supervisors tend to have sole power in treating in whatever way they want. Such kind of unfair dismissal was reported as common among those who are illiterate as these groups of workers were rarely aware of their labor rights (FGD 2). In this regard Ute (2013) argued that the labor proclamation has gaps in relation to termination of employment as it opens up room for unfair and arbitrary dismissal. The proclamation states that contract terms could be terminated without notice on the basis of quarrel at place of work and employees manifestation of loss of capacity (Ute, 2013).

The same group of respondents claimed that workers also get fired when they claim their rights (FGD 2). Trade union representative did not have real power to intervene because they were afraid of losing their jobs if they confront the management (ibid). Respondents complained that *what is written on the law was rarely implemented and it was rare to see promises get fulfilled because of unbalanced power relationship between the union and management* (FGD2). There was also shared belief among respondents that in cases of conflict the level of relationship one establishes with the supervisor matters more than knowledge of the rules or being a member of a trade union.

The farm management and trade union representatives did not agree with the aforementioned claims of the respondents. The farm managers explained that in an effort of decentralization and easing accessibility there are smaller committees responsible for dealing with specific issues. The work place committee has representatives in each green house and pack house. The workers first contact these representatives in case of problems and put their issues up to the supervisors and then to the next management level if the issues were not resolved. The gender committee was mainly responsible for following up issues of sexual harassment and dealing with other gender related issues. In addition employees were provided with awareness about the company's harassment policy.

In summary, although the country has signed ILO core labor conventions and enacted a series of national labor proclamations that recognized labor entitlements, informality and non-standard forms of labor relations appear to be the rule that dominate in both flower farms. The result showed there was a gap of awareness on the demand side (workers) as well as compliance to national labor proclamation and company code of conduct from the supply side (management) that require intervention from regulatory bodies. In addition the responsible

government body was reluctant to enforce labor standard with limited financial and human resource capacity. In relation to unionization, trade unions ability to influence the enforcement and proper implementation of these laws appeared to be weak. The action of trade union and the functionality of the various committees remain issues of concern being initiated for the purpose of market label accreditation. In general the trade unions in both farms had a frail role in promoting and defending their members' rights and interests.

## Occupational Health and Safety

### Knowledge and Practice towards the use of Agrochemicals

The peculiarities of greenhouse working environment mainly use of agrochemicals that poses threat to both human health and environment, requires specific occupational health and safety guidelines ( Marcela, et al., 2012, Dolan, et al., 2003). Occupational health and safety in flower farms reoccurs in academic writings and UN agencies reports such as the ILO because they are labeled among those at a high risk of occupational health problems due to their high level exposure to agrochemicals (ibid). Ethiopia has committed itself to respect and protect worker's right for a healthy and safe working environment by ratifying the Convention on occupational health and safety (No.155) (Nigatu, 2010, Getu, 2009). This section presents knowledge and practice towards the use of agro chemicals in flower farms in Rift Valley and Sebeta area drawing on results from interviews and discussions with flower workers, farm management and representative of EHPEA health and safety department. In addition it looks at adherence to Ethiopian labor proclamation on occupational health and safety and MOLSA directives.

Flower workers who work in various sections get in to direct contact with agrochemicals during pesticide mixing, application, and re-entry stage after pesticide spraying. As a prevention strategy flower workers levels of exposure to chemicals need to be monitored with regular medical checkup (Hanssen, et, al., 2014, Magauzi, et al., 2011). Nonetheless from the interview with farm management it was verified that flower workers did not undergo pre-employment medical checkups. Respondents also confirmed that there was no regular medical checkup unless and otherwise one gets sick and referred to hospital in cases of severe problems. Thus in both farms there was no mechanism put in place to ensure that flower workers were fit for the job and to further establish a baseline data about their health conditions.

When asked about their training on health and safety practices, workers reported that they have got orientation about emergency procedures at the start of their job. In relation to occupational health and safety the labor law states that workers shall be properly instructed and notified of the hazards pertaining to their respective occupations (Ute, 2013, Nigatu, 2010). In Sebeta area copy of safety guidelines were posted at the entrance of greenhouses. Nonetheless, the majority of the respondents did not understand the health and safety instructions. A respondent who works in green house said that *'no one gets fines and it is*

*simply a warning at the worst if I do not use protective gears*'. Thus, this showed that there was gap both in terms of awareness and reluctance in application of the guidelines as most of the workers could not read and write eventually fail to understand and implement. Similarly, the production manager in Sebeta area highlighted that workers level of literacy as a major challenge when it comes to enforcing health and safety procedures. Similarly studies on health and safety from Ethiopia and other countries showed flower farm workers low level of awareness on safe pesticide handling practices and compliance to safety procedures (Marcela, et al., 2012, Magauzi, et al., 2011, Hanssen, et, al., 2014). This pattern was attributed to lack of training on health and safety as well as absence of regular follow up and monitoring system (Ibid).

The human resource manager of AQ Roses in the Rift Valley claimed that even though Ethiopia has committed itself to respect and protect worker's right for a healthy and safe environment there was no clearly stated requirement on the national labor law with regard to health and safety of workers. The company mainly uses international marketing requirements as a reference to health and safety practices. In spite of this claim review of secondary sources showed that the proclamation gives detailed directives about the power and duties of MOLSA (ministry of labor and social affairs) in order to determine standards and measures for the safety and health of workers as well as follow up their implementation (Ute,2013, Nigatu, 2010. Getu, 2009). Accordingly, the occupational health and safety directive requires the ministry to disseminate information to workers about the hazards pertaining to their respective occupations. Companies are also required to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs). The studies noted that even though there is legal and policy framework in place, the enforcement remained a challenge because the ministry is poorly resourced both in terms of financial and human resource (Ibid). This implies occupational health and safety surveillance and inspection were not a prime concern and priority of the government when compared to the effort made to attract foreign investment.

According to production managers in both farms pesticide application occurs every day between 2 pm and 8 pm. After the pesticide application re-entry was not allowed for around four hours. Respondents from Sebeta who worked in greenhouse explained that they respected the re-entry intervals and if they smell odor of chemicals they were allowed to stay outside until the odor goes away (FGD 1). Nonetheless from the interviews and observation the in Rift Valley area it was verified that those workers in packaging section continued to perform their activities while the spraying was going on in the greenhouse which was only separated



by a sliding door. Pack house workers reported that they get the chemical odor during spraying. Hanssen, et. al., (2014) noted similar trend of occupation health and safety practices given the level of flower workers daily exposure to agro chemicals that might cause adverse health effects among flower workers reported.

### **Availability and Use of health and safety facilities and equipment**

Regarding the availability of facilities I have observed dining hall, clean drinking water supply separate from non-drinking supply and separate toilets for men and women in both farms during the farm visits. There were also cabinets to keep personal belongings and food. The availability of facilities both in the Rift Valley and Sebeta area were found better than those reported in Holeta area (Weldeghebrael, 2010). During focus group discussions participants reported that the washing facilities or bath rooms were allowed to be used by the spraying men. In addition none of the farms had resting area and changing facilities, workers rather use tree sheds to rest during lunch breaks (FGD 1 and 2). I have observed that the personal cabinets in Rift Valley were inside the pack house which was attached to the green house. Respondents claimed that such arrangements might expose the food to chemicals because there has been odor leakage during spraying (FGD 2).

Regarding personal protective equipment (PPE) the common type of PPE provided to pack house and green house workers were hand gloves and uniform (guan) in both farms. For those who did spraying the farms provided waterproof pants and jacket, gumboot, hand gloves, face mask and goggle. Respondents complained that the farms initially provided uniforms for employees who were believed to be exposed to high level of risk such as those who did spraying. And later based on the negotiation done the company has started to provide uniforms for workers who also work in other sections. Still the company did not provide required uniforms for employees who were believed to be at a lesser risk of exposure. Provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) was among the common concern noted by empirical studies on health and safety practice in flowers farms (Marcela, et al., 2012, Magauzi, et al., 2011.). The Ethiopian penal code also outlaws work specified as hazardous by ILO conventions. And that companies are required to provide personal protective equipment (PPEs) where it is required (Nigatu, 2010). Nonetheless, the provision of personal protective equipment in the farms studies was associated with the specific sections of work with priorities to high risk tasks such as spraying. Those who worked in green house and packaging predominantly women were less likely to be provided with the required PPEs which compromises their health and safety right.

Interview results with human resource manager of AQ Roses and production manager from Ethio-highlands confirmed that different sections were provided with various types of PPE's based on the requirements. *'The sections that were considered as high risk to agrochemical exposures were provided with adequate equipment with closer supervision to ensure proper use of equipment'*. Evidently, men were involved in sections where mixing, and spraying take place and where there are believed to be direct contact with pesticides. Whereas women worked mainly in the greenhouse and pack house and these sections were less prioritized when it comes to both provision of PPE and supervision of its use. Hence, men were more likely to be provided with PPE than women even though the later also get agrochemical exposures during re-entry and handling of flowers.

Respondents from spraying section still complained that they were not provided with adequate and appropriate equipment and sometimes they were obliged to use worn out uniforms. A man who worked in irrigation section with the responsibility of mixing chemicals said *'the uniforms were provided only once a year and were not compatible with the work that I did. For example gumboots were not provided per head rather we were asked to share three gumboots for twenty one workers in his section. I prefer to use my own flip-flops which have a risk of exposing me to chemicals rather than sharing gumboots. It was better than sharing gumboots with a risk of contagious fungus'*.

Studies from Ethiopia noted that there has also been limited training and follow up on the use of PPE and compliance to flower farms safety procedures (Hanssen, et, al., 2014, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002). Similarly problems persist on the use of PPE when handling flowers and chemicals in both farms studied. During a focus groups discussion participants explained that hand gloves were rarely used in pack house and greenhouse because they find it uncomfortable and believed that it decreases work performance. Some respondents reported that the gloves did not provide the intended protection from the thorny flowers as they were made of ordinary threads. Some of the respondents in the pack house reported that they did not use the hand gloves because it was difficult to know how much the flowers were pressed while wearing gloves. Thus, they preferred to work without it in order to better care for the flowers and to avoid complaints from supervisors (FGD 1 and 2).

The interview result showed similar results that even though respondents generally knew all possible routes of entry of agrochemicals into their blood system and would be at risk of agrochemical exposures if they did not use PPE. PPE were used rarely among pack house and green house workers because they were causing discomforts. Those who did spraying and

mixing of the chemicals also reported of not using the goggles and facemask during hot seasons because it suffocates and hinders smooth flow of air. Likewise, the manager in both farms mentioned during interview that the major challenges on health and safety is related to misuse or failure of proper use of the PPEs among worker and failure to comply with the guideline. Other studies also established that flower workers low level of awareness and attitude on health and safety was challenge which also explains the level of training, surveillance and inspection undertaken (Hanssen, et, al., 2014, Nigatu, 2010, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002).

### **Experience on Health and Safety**

Farm workers and in particular flower workers are labeled among those at a very high risk of occupational health risks due to exposure to agrochemicals (Dolan, et al., 2003, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002). During interviews respondents identified various work related health problems that range from temporary acute effects to chronic diseases. The most frequent problems mentioned include headache, fever, unconsciousness, weakness, dizziness, vomiting, skin irritation, kidney problems, high blood pressure, typhus, and typhoid, back and shoulder pain, water borne diseases, dehydration and eye irritation.

From the interviews it was verified that respondents assumed the health problems were associated with their work condition mainly exposure to agrochemicals, standing in a static position for long many hours and lack of knowledge. A man who worked in the spraying section said that *I was anxious about the strong odor of chemicals especially when I started the job and when I do spraying I still fear that I might be risking my health*. Workers reported that standing long many hours exposed them to diseases such as kidney problem. Very cold food from the locker inside the pack house was also attributed to the common incidences of typhus and typhoid. Adverse health effects among flower workers related to the working condition as well as health and safety practices were also reported other studies (Hanssen, et, al., 2014, Mekonene & Agonafir, 2002). Prevalence of respiratory and skin symptoms, kidney infections, swollen legs were identified with increased prevalence among females flower workers who stand many long hours (Ibid).

Results of focus groups discussion showed that even though flower workers believed that most of common diseases were work related, health practitioners reported them as non-work related. The workers claimed that such kind of approach has been used with the intention to avoid costs that would be incurred by the company for further treatments. Respondents

generally reported visiting health facilities when they get ill but fail to get appropriate treatment (FGD 1 & 2). Those in the Rift Valley area get treatment at the farms clinic and hospital whereas those in Sebeta area get treatment at the government clinics. The workers were expected to cover their drug expenses. Some of the respondents did nothing or treated themselves with free local medications such as holy water because they could not afford to buy the medicines. The findings illustrate that even though flower workers have access to health facilities; it was not adequate enough to ensure proper health care. In addition, flower workers low level awareness and gaps surveillance and inspection systems were reported to be contributing to incidences of health problems (Nigatu, 2010).

From the results of interviews it was verified that details of health records and reports of flower workers were not provided to them instead the company management usually contacts doctors to get the information. During focus group discussion participated mentioned that there were cases whereby spraying man get transferred to store keeping because of his health conditions but details of his illnesses was not given to him (FGD 1). This situation goes against both against human right and labor right of workers that requires further assessment and pertinent solution.

According to the discussion with EHPEA health and safety department representative, the association has developed a code of practice that served as a guideline in implementing sustainable flower production practice including health and safety of flower workers. The association also provided training for eighty member farms in order to facilitate the proper implementation of the code of practice. Accordingly there was an audit system put in place in an effort to address safety and health concerns of flower workers that would also eventually enable member farms qualify for international accreditation. However given the low coverage of the code of conduct and current progress, it is less likely to address the aforementioned health and safety problems in flower farms. This confers with results from other studies with regard to the limitations of self-regulatory systems in terms of coverage and implementation at production sites (Leipold & Morgante, 2013, Rissgaard, 2009).

Even though, the issue of environmental impact is beyond the focus of this study a brief discussion was made with EHPEA representative and farm management in the Rift Valley area. The section leader of the association indicated that they are promoting organic pest control method in order to address the detrimental impact of the sector on environment. Towards this end the association has been encouraging the adoptions of self-regulatory code of conduct that leads to market certification. Accordingly some of the member farms put in

place waste management and chemical collection procedures (Sher Ethiopia) as well as IPM system (Ethio-highlands).

In summery there was no mechanism that is put in place to either ensure that flower workers were fit for the job when they enter the job or establish a baseline data about their health conditions. The results also showed that flower workers had low level of awareness on safe pesticide handling practices and low level of adherence to health and safety procedures. This pattern was attributed to inadequate training as well as weak government follow up and monitoring system. In terms of the availability of health and safety facilities, both farms provided such facilities but were not adequate enough to cater for the welfare of the workers. Provision of PPE was also inadequate and the use of PPE was also not common which has implications on common health problems. In this regard adverse health effects among flower workers related to the working condition as well as health and safety practices were reported by other studies (Hanssen, et.al. 2014, Nigatu, 2010).

The studies also noted that even though there is legal and policy framework in place, the enforcement is lacking because responsible government body was poorly resourced both in terms of financial and human resources (Nigatu, 2010). Evidently given the financial limitations of the country, health and safety surveillance and inspection does not come as a prime concern either to MOLSA or Ethiopian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in allocation of budget. The country's budget limitations partly explain such reluctance. Nonetheless, the occupational health and safety challenges need to be seen in the context of liberalized trade regime whereby Ethiopia has been sensitive in meeting the demands of flower growers given its contribution to foreign exchange earnings and job creation thus it adopts flexible approach in regulating occupational health and safety practices in this sector. To conclude the government's reluctance to enforce existing legal and policy frameworks has both capacity and policy limitations.

With regard to environmental audit and water management around Lake Ziway, one of the Rift Valley fresh water lakes and source of water for the surrounding small-holder farming community, water management strategy was not put in place (Tadele, 2012). I have verified this information during my field and from discussions with the farm managements. In this particular area 400 hectares of land was used by flower farms at the shore of the lake and using water for irrigation from the lake. During the field work it was learned that the flower farms were discharging fertilizer and pesticide residues directly in to the lake. Information was not found with regard to the level of dumping of agrochemicals in to this particular lake.

Nonetheless it was noted that extent to which the flower farms are threatening the sustainable use of Lake Ziway in particular water quality and aquatic life requires further assessment and monitoring by regulatory bodies (Tadele, 2012).

## CHAPTER VI: Conclusion

The flower industry provided employment opportunities for unemployed and under-employed rural youths. It has increased women's participation in labor market that constituted seventy five percent of flower farms workforces. Jobs were segregated according to the traditional gender roles with men specializing in skilled jobs while women mostly performing relatively unskilled ones. Even though flower industry has provided women employment opportunity they remained at the bottom rung of the industry's workforce.

Despite the low wages and virtually little savings from the earnings, flower farms are still attractive source of employment because they provided stable income in the context of economic vulnerability which is attributed to landlessness, high youth unemployment and few available livelihood alternatives in rural areas. The low level of wages and the struggle of flower workers to get ends met raise a concern about the extent to which labor intensive industries could potentially provide a way out of poverty in developing countries.

Women tend to capitalize on new employment opportunities created by flower farms given their low social and economic status. Nonetheless, their involvement in flower farms came without change in men's share of domestic and family responsibilities around the house. There was also lack of social services such as day-care that challenged them to combine paid productive employment with reproductive responsibilities. This shows a gap that need to be filled through adoption of gender sensitive employment policy and code of conduct that recognizes the reproductive roles and social status of women. Even though women engagement in paid employment improved their financial position because of the limited change both in their share of domestic responsibilities and social services provisions it further added on their burden contributing to the continuation of women's subordinate position rather than empowering them.

In regard to health and occupational safety practices trade unions action and engagement in collective bargaining with flower farms remain as issues of serious concern. The trade unions in both farms have a frail role in promoting and defending their members' rights and interests. Unhealthy and unsafe occupational health and safety practices including limited training and follow up on the use of PPE and compliance to flower farms safety procedures further compromised flower workers' rights to healthy and safe working environment. In this regard the country adopted flexible approach in regulating occupational health and safety practices in flower sector in spite of the high risk of occupational health problems because of exposures to

agrochemicals. Generally the labor, safety and health situation reflects the lack of adherence to core and technical ILO labor standards and efficacy in enforcement of national labor proclamation. This further confers with labor challenges under flexible labor market arrangements in developing countries in a bid to attract FDI which might lead to a 'the race to the bottom' in labor conditions.

Private social standards and self-regulatory systems emerged as alternative labor regulation systems that could potentially raise labor standards in the context of weakened labor union and state intervention under liberalized economy. Accordingly these labor regulation systems contributed in improving labor conditions in developing countries. Nonetheless they have limited scope and their potential focus on outcome entitlement makes them a weak tool to bring about structural change which may empower workers and the trade unions. To conclude, the economic, political and moral issues surrounding the debate on countries adherence to core labor standards and the respective measures to be taken against them appear to be failing and the leaves the issue very contentious. Thus, identifying a feasible implementation mechanism remained open to further international discussions and negotiations given the ranges of interests of various nations, businesses and interest groups involved.





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# Appendix I: Semi-structured interview guide

## 1. Background Information

Informant code \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_ Education Level: \_\_\_\_ Family situation: \_\_\_\_\_ (Single, Married, Divorced)

	Family size	Age	Education
M			
F			
Total			

1.1. Where do you come from? \_\_\_\_\_ (Km)

1.2. How were you recruited to the job (follow ups : any requirements to get employed in the company )

1.2.1. Which section of the farm do you work? \_\_\_\_\_

1.2.2. Why did you choose to work in this section?

1.2.3. Previous training and job experience Yes \_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

If yes type of training and years worked \_\_\_\_\_

1.3. how long have you worked in this company \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Experiences

2.1. What were your motivations for working in flower farm (follow ups: why did you choose to work in this particular farm, what are other alternatives of work if you could have not been employed in this farm).

2.2. How do you consider conditions and quality of employment ( follow ups: work shifts/schedule, employment benefits<sup>10</sup>, day to day variation of tasks, job security stability, compensation in cases of job loss , career development opportunity)

2.2.1. average hours per week\_\_\_\_\_

2.2.2. day offs\_\_\_\_ overtime (hrs) \_\_\_\_

2.2.3. Type of employment benefits? \_\_\_\_\_

2.3. Quality of employment: do you think that you work condition is good enough? If yes how and if not why and what could be better?

2.4. How did you work affected your household time use?

2.5. How do you manage your time between work and household responsibilities?

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direct benefits ( health care , insurance , retirement and pension, sick leave, maternity leave) and fringe benefits (transport, food , day care facilities)



### 3. Livelihood issues:

#### 3.1. House hold Asset (dwelling, land ,livestock etc)

Type/size	Value

#### 3.2. Household income

Household Income	Amount (in birr)	House hold income use	Amount (in birr )
Income from flower farm		Consumption ( food (F), health care (HC), social expenses (SE))	
Income from other sources (petty trade, local brewery, waged labor, other )		Investment (saving/remittance )	
Total		Total	

3.3. Is your income good enough to cover living expenses, if not what other mechanisms do you use to cover your expenses?

3.4. How does your income affected your decision making power in your household?

### 4. Awareness of rights and duties

4.1. Have you heard about the Ethiopian labor codes? If yes how did you know labor rights and duties?

4.2. Do you exercise you labor and welfare right? If yes in what ways

4.3. Can you explain your terms of employment and the process that you went through when you signed contract terms (if contract signed)? Do you have a copy of it now

4.4. Experience with regard to decision making (is there anything you could do in order to influence aspects of job that are not up to your satisfaction?)

4.5. Any experience with regard to the causes of workers getting fired from job?

4.6. Organization in to trade union (follow ups: are you a member , it is allowed to organize in to trade unions, do you think it is important to be a member, the role of the trade union in safeguarding members interest, if not why? And any experience in this regard )

### 5. Health and safety:

5.1. Have you undergone any orientation/training on safety rules and guidelines before starting you work?

5.2. Are you aware of the occupational health and safety procedures in the farm? If yes how did you know about it and please explain some of the rules that you know?

5.3. What are the available health and safety facilities in the farm and which ones do you use personally? (facilities for personal hygiene such as bathroom/wash basins for men and women, supply of drinking water, protective clothing, medical examination, clinic for emergency and first aid )

5.4. Have you had any health problems in relation to the work that you do? If yes can you explain how you get treated?





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