

## **Women in the South African Wine Industry**

The main focus of our study in South Africa was if and how Fairtrade can improve the situation for women working on the farms. We spent most of our time in Western Cape and met with NGOs, trade unions, small women owned enterprises, researchers, etc., all with a clear connection to the wine industry in South Africa. We visited in total five wine farms, three conventional and two FLO-certified farms, where we interviewed both management and workers.

Many issues concerning gender, women's rights, equality, etc. were brought up and presented to us during these meetings and visits. It was clear that it exists an obvious discrimination against women on the farms. Often this was hidden behind the fact that women most of the time were seasonal workers and therefore were not entitled to the same benefits as the permanently employed men. With this explanation the farm owners could easily argue why female employees get less paid or why it is almost exclusively men who get their names signed on the house contracts. Local NGOs, trade unions, etc. are well aware of the dependency problems that this creates and have therefore developed useful workshops and courses to empower women and raise their awareness of their own situation. Fairtrade (FLO) needs to be aware of the existing problems for women and also understand how they differ between regions and industries. To be able to address the actual problems that women, and workers in general, face on the farms FLO should cooperate more with local organisations and trade unions.

The joint bodies at the FLO certified farms possess a relatively big opportunity to make real changes on the farms when it comes to gender equality. The FLO standards are very clear about the need to have a balanced representation of men and women in the Joint Body. The involvement of women in the process of decision making on the farms means that the situation for women at large is exposed and hopefully dealt with. This creates multiplier effects of women empowerment. Finding the seasonal workers (the women) an alternative employment during off-season was a prioritised mission at the FLO-farms we visited. It didn't seem to exist any deeper discussion about why there are only women living in these precarious situations and if there is a way to change that.

It really stroke us early on how small and peripheral the awareness of FLO still is even among people engaged in social work and NGOs. FLO certainly is a very young organisation and it takes time to develop such a complex organisation. There are many aspects of labour issues to deal with and the gender issue is only one of FLO's areas. It is clear that FLO still hasn't had time to address the gender issue properly even though it is of great importance for overall development. There is a big need for more specific and elaborate FLO-standards that aim to achieve women empowerment and awareness raising among women on the farms. As for now it is interesting to ask oneself if a farm really should be FLO-certified even though the female workers don't experience the same rights as male workers.

Fairtrade should be an opportunity for the workers as well as for the employers to get enough resources (human, capital, social) to be able to change and improve their conditions on the basis of the real problems that the people involved face.