

SUSTAINABILITY BRIEF

Update from the field

September 2014

Back to Basics: Understanding Labour Rights and Issues



Tackling the labour issues in the palm industry is not yesterday's news. Building capacity on understanding real issues on the ground is part of the battle itself. With that in mind, TFT and Wilmar engaged the International Organization for Migration (IOM) from 22nd-23rd September 2014 to conduct an Ethical Recruitment and Fair Labour Training course for 20 staff.

The two-day training was split into classroom sessions and field visits. The classroom session covered the following topics: Labour Migration; Labour and Human Rights; Wilmar's No Exploitation policy; Role of Recruitment Agents; Forced Labour and Human Trafficking; Child Labour, and Access to Remedy. Case studies were discussed and the reality of the migrant workers' plight was brought to light. Wilmar's team was obviously no stranger to these issues as they shared their experiences dealing with such matters and their fair share of knowledge of the laws and regulations governing the states of Sabah and Sarawak.

The second day started early with field visit to the supply base for one of Wilmar's palm oil mills. IOM, Wilmar and TFT were split in 2 different teams, one team visited a third-party supplier and the other team visited Wilmar's own estate. We talked to the workers and supervisors, visited their housing quarters and met with workers' committee representatives.

In Wilmar's estate, we discovered some workers didn't understand piece-rate calculations; others had arrived illegally and Wilmar was assisting them to obtain necessary documentation, and workers were assigned to committees not elected. Wilmar held workers' passports for safekeeping with free access upon request, which is not always the case in other companies.

At the third-party supplier's premises, there were workers with no contracts or payslips; there was limited access to education for the children and no access to workers' unions.

These were discussed in the closing meeting and options for improvement were identified for Wilmar both to implement itself, and to support its suppliers to.

Bringing the issue to centre-stage and coming up with a win-win situation for both parties is the ultimate goal eventually. The training was a great platform to kick-start a momentum for change - undoubtedly a mammoth task to fulfil across the entire palm oil industry, but the journey should be made possible with the involvement of all stakeholders.

