



CASE STUDY

Biosev – Sugarcane production and processing, Brazil

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Company Background

Biosev S.A. is the world's second largest producer of sugarcane, with crushing capacity of 36.4 million tons, 348,000 hectares of directly managed land, and additional cane-processing capacity from 190,000 hectares managed by third parties. The company's product lines include sugar, ethanol, electricity, and animal feed, which are sold to the food, beverages, cosmetics, pharmaceutical, and fuel distribution sectors. In 2016, Biosev had net revenues of approximately \$1.5 billion (Biosev, 2016). The company was founded in 2000 by the Louis Dreyfus Commodities Group, its controlling shareholder, and listed on the Brazilian stock exchange in 2013. The company has been an IFC client since 2015.

The Brazilian sugarcane industry has experienced turbulent times over the past 15 years. It expanded strongly during the early 2000s, as a result of new investments and technological innovation focusing on ethanol production as a 'clean' alternative to fossil fuels. This was followed by several years of crisis and excess capacity from 2008 onwards. In response to an increase in gasoline subsidies by the Brazilian government, coupled with the impact of the global financial crisis, more than 80 out of 300 sugar mills were closed. More recently, the Brazilian sugarcane industry has returned to profitability (Almeida, 2016; Wernau, 2015). Having weathered this difficult period, Biosev's management is optimistic about the future of the company and is now focused on its strategic goal of becoming the world's leading sugarcane producer. Most of Biosev's senior management has joined the company during the last two years.

Biosev is a conglomerate of 11 different mills, organized into five clusters, and it employs 16,800 workers, including 1200 women. Biosev has grown mainly through acquisitions; integrating and modernizing its corporate culture is an important strategic goal. Many of the mills and plantations acquired were previously family-owned. The company is pursuing a strong training and employee-engagement program with an overarching focus on quality and safety.

This case study focuses on two of Biosev's sites: Leme in the São Paulo region, Biosev's first acquisition in 2000, and Rio Brilhante in Mato Grosso do Sul, a greenfield site built in 2006. While the two sites are making progress toward integrating women into management and operations, both represent different points along the spectrum of modernizing operations. Leme relies largely on the training and advancement of workers already employed by the company. Rio Brilhante is building a new, mostly externally recruited, workforce.



Photo © Biosev

WOMEN WORKERS AT BIOSEV

As of 2016, women represent 7% of Biosev’s permanent workforce. This figure is consistent with the Brazilian sugarcane industry overall, which is heavily male-dominated. Across the sector, women account for 10% of all workers (2014 figures from UNICA 2016). Almost all employees are employed on permanent year-round contracts and women represent only 1% of Biosev’s 800 temporary workers.

The largest number of workers in the sugarcane industry work in soil preparation, planting, and harvesting, but this work is also least likely to employ women. Some 70% of Biosev’s workforce and 35% of its female employees work in agriculture, but overall women constitute only 3.3% of Biosev’s agricultural workforce. This work involves driving tractors, harvesters, and trucks, as well as planting and pest control.

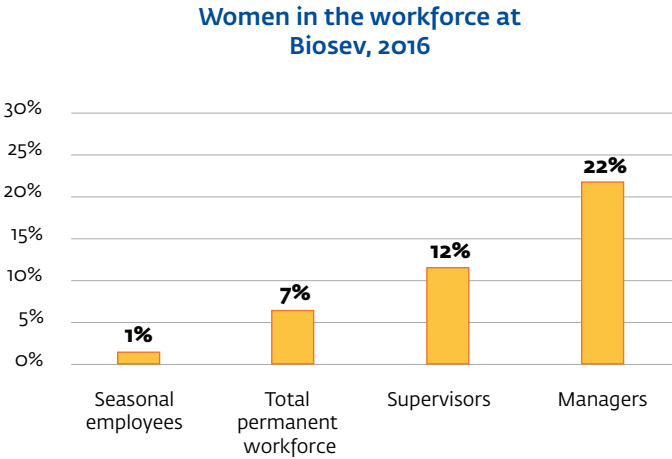
Harvesting and planting of sugarcane used to be done manually but, during the past decade, these operations have become almost completely mechanized, in line with broader industry trends.

While mechanization has greatly reduced the need for manual harvesting in Biosev – only 600 of its workers are still engaged in manual harvesting. This is primarily in the Northeast Region, characterized by a hilly topography which is unsuitable for mechanized harvesting. The work is still hard, often requiring work outdoors in high temperatures and in isolated locations far from modern amenities. Field workers can easily be 50 miles or more from the nearest town or the main mill, working with small teams of co-workers.

A fifth of Biosev’s workers, and 19% of its women workers, are industrial workers engaged in the processing of sugarcane into sugar, ethanol, and biomass. This work employs a high share of engineers, mechanics, and technicians, including laboratory technicians responsible for quality control. Laboratory workers are mainly female. It is much less common for women to work in other positions. Women make up a higher share of production workers than of agricultural workers, but overall represent just 6% of Biosev’s industrial workforce.

Some 10% of Biosev’s workforce, and just under half of women workers, are in administrative positions. One in three administrative workers in Biosev is female.

While women are only a minority of Biosev’s employees (7%), women are proportionately almost twice as likely as their share of total employment to be in supervisory positions (12%) and more than three times as likely to be in management positions (22%). This is a result of Biosev’s active pursuit of meritocratic recruitment and promotion policies.



HOW BIOSEV PROVIDES A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN WORKERS

As a publicly listed company, Biosev is an employer of choice in many ways, offering the prospect of secure employment and good terms and conditions. Female (and male) workers report that they appreciate Biosev's investment in safety, as well as its reliability as an employer: wages are paid promptly, there is no expectation of unpaid overtime (or of overtime at short notice), and shift schedules are adhered to. Workers report that these practices are not as common among other employers in this industry.

Women and men particularly appreciate the company's family healthcare plan, which provides benefits beyond industry standards. The family coverage is particularly helpful to single mothers. In line with Brazilian law and collective agreements, the company has clinics on each site which are staffed around the clock by paramedical staff. A doctor is available during the daytime shift and is on call at all times for emergencies, as well as twice a month during the night time shift to address routine medical check-ups. For non-work-related complaints, the healthcare facility helps workers with referrals to local medical practitioners. The company has invested to improve working conditions in the field, providing air-conditioned buses for the often long drives to the field, offering air-conditioned hubs, and providing mobile, covered lunch facilities to provide shade for workers in the field.

Overall, the company is perceived as committed to its employees, supporting them through training and development, and following fair and performance-based principles when deciding career advancement.

A MODERN AND TRANSPARENT HR MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Biosev has implemented a modern and transparent HR management system; policies and procedures are codified in writing and readily available to workers. As part of the formalization of its HR policies, the company has conducted a comprehensive salary and grading review, and it now has a coherent and uniform compensation system across all grades. This includes clearly stated criteria for performance-based pay.

Biosev is currently rolling out a new performance management system, based on key performance indicators, which will apply to all levels of staff. The new approach is informed by the 'Biosev Spirit', a set of corporate values that guide all of the company's activities and establish expectations for individual behavior, respect, team-based work, and capacity building and learning. While both women and men benefit from these explicit criteria for professional development and promotion, arguably this is particularly important for women. They are less likely to have access to existing (male-dominated) networks to gain access to jobs and promotions, and more likely to be held back by bias about their capabilities (Williams & Dempsey, 2014). The Biosev Spirit highlights respect for differences as a fundamental value of team work, providing the basis for actively integrating gender and diversity management into expectations for teamwork and performance.

Both female and male employees report that they feel that the culture at Biosev is fair and performance-based and that those who were identified for advancement deserved their promotions. While some women reported knowing some men who informally indicated that they would never hire women, such attitudes were reported to be the exception rather than the rule. Both women and men reported that individual qualification and performance – instead of criteria such as gender – were the overwhelming factors influencing decisions related to recruitment and advancement.



Photo © Biosev

A CULTURE OF RESPECT: PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT

Women, and men, confirmed that the company provides a safe and respectful place of work. Beyond basic safety, women, and men, appreciated a very collegial working environment, including for women who may be in a minority of one in their teams.

Biosev's code of conduct states that: "All collaborators must act with dignity and respect toward the individual values of their co-workers and avoid any situation which might be described as moral or sexual harassment." This code of conduct is discussed at the induction training of all new workers, strongly emphasizing a culture of respect within the company. Any worker can report any incident of harassment (Brazilian law protects workers from sexual harassment, but also more generally from 'moral harassment' from supervisors) on the company's national toll-free phone, 'Talk to Biosev.' The Talk to Biosev line is operated by an independent third party and also allows people in the community to raise potential concerns, about pollution for example. The toll-free phone number is communicated to all workers and all interviewed for this study were aware of it. All reported incidents are investigated by a team at the corporate office.

The Director of Human Resources reported that since the 'Talk to Biosev' line was established, there had been no confirmed case of sexual harassment. A small number of complaints had been received but, upon investigation, concerned inappropriate behavior that was not necessarily sexual harassment. As an indication that the procedure is taken seriously by the company, one supervisor was fired when complaints about workplace harassment of workers reporting to him were substantiated during investigation.

"During the first phase of working for Biosev, I was able to absolutely dedicate myself to the company. Now, in the second phase, as a mother, I can show that it is possible to be both a good mother and a good supervisor."

Manager of quality control, and a single mother, Leme plant

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Women are present at all levels of leadership in Biosev, from team leader and first line supervisor to the C-Suite. The directors of Human Resources, Corporate and Legal Services, and Sales and Marketing are women, for example, and two of the 11 plants are managed by women.

At senior levels, Biosev has typically recruited women externally, as part of its recent focus on developing a new management team following the listing of the company. As Luiz Enrique Cerqueira Valverde, Corporate Manager for Investor Relations, explains: "If you want women in management, you have to hire them from outside, because the talent base is still too low inside the company."

Some women leaders have risen through the ranks. The supervisor responsible for quality control in Leme, for example, has been with Biosev for 13 years and began working as a laboratory analyst. At least in recent years, advancing through the management hierarchy in the plants has typically involved moving to other plants to gain experience and exposure. While this can be hard, particularly with young children, the company's supportive attitude and encouragement has made it easier for young parents, including women, to pursue this path.

Women in senior positions serve as role models for other employees and the broader community – not just as women in leadership positions, but also as women who have young children. The Corporate Director of Sales and Marketing, Dorothea Soule, received a major promotion while pregnant and intends to return to work promptly at the end of her maternity leave. This example is seen as inspiring by workers and managers within the company.



Photo © Biosev

Women leaders report being respected by their teams. One female supervisor, brought in to supervise an all-male administrative team, reported that some team members were less enthusiastic about having a female manager. However, the company, with its clear commitment to her, encouraged these men to simply leave the company and work elsewhere.

"We are working to promote the women who already work in Biosev – to show that you can be both gorgeous and drive a tractor!"

Maria Paula Curto, Corporate Director of Human Resources

WOMEN IN NON-TRADITIONAL POSITIONS

The shift from manual to mechanized agricultural operations has resulted in job losses in the industry. It has also opened up new opportunities for women to work as tractor, truck, and harvester drivers. As Dalmo Carlos, Agricultural Manager at Leme, explained: "There have always been women working in sugarcane, but it has only been in the last five years that there have been women tractor drivers." In Leme, many workers have family members who also work for Biosev and this may have increased the acceptability of promoting women into new operator opportunities.

In Leme, new operational positions are filled by promoting existing workers to the extent possible. Drivers must obtain progressively higher levels of training and licensing as the move from operating trucks and tractors to heavy equipment, such as harvesters. The highest level of driver's license is required to drive large trucks. It requires at least two years' driving experience with an already experienced driver, making it more difficult for the company to promote from within.

"When the first women were employed in these jobs, men stopped and stared, it seemed so strange to them. Now it is more common."

Leandro Kaster, General Manager, Leme

Women, and men, working in manual harvest can apply for training to become a tractor driver, following brief introductory training sessions. In Leme, one woman now drives a harvester; she was the first woman to be selected to be a tractor driver. She invested in gaining the required license, and advanced to the senior harvesting position. She reported her pride in being the first woman to drive a tractor, but also her happiness at now no longer being the only woman doing so.

Still, only 2% of agricultural workers in Leme are women. Progress toward increasing women's share of these jobs has been relatively slow, in part because there are few women who have the required licenses in the local labor market. During the last two years, less than 1% of newly hired workers in agriculture in Leme were women. Dalmo Carlos, Agricultural Manager at Leme, reports that he previously worked in other regions, including some closer to mines which have also opened up opportunities for women in non-traditional jobs, and that there it had been easier to hire qualified women drivers.

Unlike the Leme plant, Rio Brilhante was established on a greenfield site and, as a result, most of its workforce joined the company relatively recently. Women represent over 7% of agricultural operators and, in 2015/16, close to 9% of newly hired agricultural workers. One woman tractor driver reported learning of job vacancies for drivers at Biosev, while listening to her clients chatting in her previous job as a sales assistant in a bakery. She reported that she initially lacked the confidence to apply, but when her husband dared her to do so, she overcame her nervousness and succeeded. Both her pride in herself and her salary have increased substantially since she started her new career. A male co-worker reported that once jobs at Biosev opened up, it became much harder to find women willing to work as nannies and babysitters.



Photo © Biosev

Rio Brilhante's agricultural workforce also includes women trailer truck drivers, including one woman who gained her license through working with her father and brothers, who are also truck drivers. Being petite, just 5'3" in height, her presence is a constant reminder that women are just as able as men to drive a large machine.

Women are also working in most aspects of the production process, as mechanics, technicians, and engineers, although it is rare for teams to have more than one woman and several teams are all male. The exception is laboratory technicians, the majority of whom are women. Women are working on each of the three shifts. On the whole, women reported being accepted by their colleagues. However, some also reported feeling under constant scrutiny and having to be at the peak of performance all the time, because of a perception that any mistakes they may make will be noted more than those of a male colleague, as women are still a minority in these roles.

A FOCUS ON TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The company is committed to training and developing its staff. All operational staff are trained in the company's health and safety program, Prisma, which sets out clear procedures, encourages staff to report any problems, and suggest improvements and solutions. All operational teams begin their shifts with a short safety briefing, encouraging both a team and safety culture, a practice that was positively noted by several women, and men, workers.

The company also invests in the further education and vocational certification of its staff. It cooperates with SENAI, Brazil's national vocational training and education association, to develop targeted training programs for its staff. Where such training is directly needed for the work, it is provided during working hours. Additionally, Biosev provides grants to high-performing employees to advance their education in their own time. Several women, and men, reported attending college after work; typically, this involves enrolling in private educational institutions, at considerable expense.

In Rio Brilhante, a small town with few opportunities for vocational training and education, Biosev is cooperating with SENAI to bring mobile training centers to the town. While SENAI directly trains Biosev's workers, these training facilities also make it more feasible for the local population to gain qualifications necessary to find work in Biosev or other local employers. The initiative was developed in collaboration with the local mayor, who approached the company about options for increasing local economic development.

As part of its investment in a quality workforce, Biosev also supports several 'new apprentices.' Apprentices are high-school students, 16-17 years of age, who are incentivized to take technical vocational courses while at school. They receive a stipend for working 20 hours per week, paid at half the minimum wage. While there is no guarantee that Biosev will employ the apprentice after his or her graduation and, likewise, no obligation on behalf of the apprentice to work for Biosev, this is an important initiative to develop the pipeline of skilled workers. Although selections for the apprenticeship scheme are competitive and there are no gender quotas or rules that specifically favor girls, 18 of 25 apprentices are young women in Rio Brilhante. The children of employees are encouraged to apply. In Leme, a single mother who drives a harvester reported that her daughter is the recipient of one of the apprenticeship grants. She is pursuing technical qualifications with the hope of following her mother's trail-blazing path into non-traditional employment.

SUPPORT FOR WORKING PARENTS AND OTHER CARE RESPONSIBILITIES

Many workers in Biosev, women and men, have children. Pregnant workers are entitled to be moved to light duty, and this is adhered to by the company. The company offers general uniforms for women, and those who are pregnant improvise by wearing their own clothes in combination with the company-provided uniforms. There

are plans to provide specifically designed uniforms for pregnant women. Biosev offers the statutory 120 calendar days of paid maternity leave to women, and five calendar days paid paternity leave to men. The company does not offer lactation rooms. Under Brazilian law, women returning from maternity leave are entitled to two 30-minute breaks for breastfeeding until the child reaches six months (Sorj, 2015). It is common for women who return from maternity leave to combine the lactation periods to extend their full-time maternity leave.

Under Brazilian law, part-time work is highly restricted and there are only very limited options for workplace flexibility. Under the sugarcane industry collective agreement, agricultural and production workers work shifts on a '5/1 system': five days at work, followed by one day off. This rotating rest-day system can complicate family life. Work is conducted around the clock, in three shifts of seven hours. While women are found on all shifts, they are more likely than men to work the day shift (starting at 7 a.m.). Administrative workers and workers in management work on a 5/2 system. The company offers some flexibility, letting workers swap shifts during personal emergencies, but such practices cannot be introduced more widely because collective agreements set 36-hour rest periods between shifts and require 30 days' advance notification of proposed shift changes. The shift system allows some parents to split childcare responsibilities between them by working consecutive shifts, so that one parent is always available to take children to school or the doctor when needed. Yet while flexibility is limited, strict adherence to announced shift times and the corresponding departure of the company-provided buses that take workers to and from work, means that working parents can at least plan their time. Shift patterns (i.e. morning, evening, or night shifts) are set annually.

For women in management and professional roles, long working hours, coupled with lengthy commuting times, can be a source of work-family conflicts. A woman professional at the company's corporate headquarters announced that she was ready to quit, because long São Paulo commuting times added to a long working day meant that she rarely saw her two-year-old daughter. The company agreed to pilot a new arrangement where she will be able to work from home two days a week and temporarily reduce her working time. This is the first time the company is embarking on such an arrangement; part-time work and home-based work are very rare in Brazil's formal sector (Lobel, 2009).

The company does not offer workplace childcare at any of its plants. However, in recognition of the crucial role of childcare, both for its workers and the development of the next generation in Rio Brilhante, the company has provided resources to build two childcare centers. In total, the community has seven early childhood centers. The centers are run and operated by the municipality and provide full-time early care and education for children ages four months through three years. Once children turn four, they automatically transfer to public, pre-kindergarten classes. While Biosev workers do not have preferential access to places in the centers, children of many of its employees attend them. One of the childcare centers is in the process of being expanded and will be able to care for 150 children.

Under the collective agreement, workers are entitled to paid sick leave and to use the leave to care for their sick children, or other family members, as long as they have a doctor's certificate. Taking such leave was reported as fully supported by Biosev management and employees. For workers in the fields, who frequently work 50–100 km from the nearest town, being so far from their children can be of concern. When one child had an accident and needed to be hospitalized, the company sent a car to pick up the mother and take her to her child.

"In the field, when women use the equipment, they leave it clean. When they see something wrong – even something little – they insist on having it fixed. The men don't care as much."

Male maintenance worker, Leme plant



Photo © Biosev

HOW BIOSEV BENEFITS FROM WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

SUPPORTING A SAFETY CULTURE

Women play an important role in Biosev's goal to reach best-in-class standards in safety. Biosev's challenge is to move from a culture focused on short-term output and profit maximization to long-term sustainability. As part of this goal, Biosev is committed to achieving zero accident rates, for which detailed safety protocols have been developed and are rigorously implemented.

Supervisors report that women are more likely to directly adhere to such rules and procedures, as they are typically new to the tasks, while men are more likely to display a lax attitude, as they may have not been held to strict standards in their previous employment in the sector or believe that they can improvise based on previous knowledge and experience with technical work. Male co-workers, likewise, report that having women on teams leads to more respectful and less 'rowdy' behavior, and thus potentially better compliance with the spirit of safety protocols.

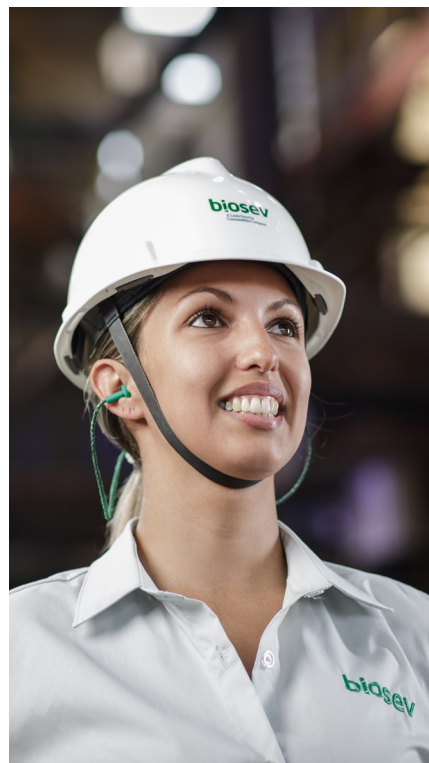
Supervisors and male co-workers observe that women machine drivers and operators tend to be more careful with their equipment, leave it cleaner, and more promptly note and insist on maintenance if they notice something wrong. Male workers report that receiving a perfectly clean machine at the beginning of their shift encourages them, too, to take better care of machines. As a result, the company saves on maintenance costs and has shorter periods of machine downtime.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING THE BEST STAFF

Offering good working conditions, and being seen to be a desirable employer of both women and men, is essential if Biosev wants to build and keep its well-trained and motivated workforce. Training a worker (who already has the appropriate driver's license) to be a tractor driver

"The women here have one thing extra compared to the men, they really want to work here. They are more motivated than the men."

Leandro Kaster, General Manager, Leme plante



Photos © Biosev

at Biosev takes, on average, about three months. High levels of retention ensure that the company will benefit from its investment in training.

“Retaining good workers is a big issue for us, at all levels of staff,” explains Tatiana Moura, HR Manager for the Rio Brilhante plant. “While Biosev is the biggest employer in the area, we are not the only large employer, and the salaries we offer are similar to those offered by our competitors.”

Biosev’s investment in the training and development of its workers makes retention even more of a business prerogative. Because of the current Brazilian labor market, labor turnover is comparatively low (less than 2% in the most current year at the Rio Brilhante plant, for example), but Biosev managers do not expect this low rate to last. Offering opportunities to women, and ensuring that women are treated equally and are able to advance professionally like men, is likely to increase women’s loyalty to the company. Having more women at all levels of the company reportedly also has a positive impact on the workplace culture, making the company a more desirable place to work.

“Promotion is the biggest communication tool to show that everyone can advance based on performance.”

Rodrigo Jonko, Manager of Production, Rio Brilhante

PROJECTING AN IMAGE AS A MODERN SUSTAINABLE COMPANY

The recruitment and promotion of women plays an important role in Biosev’s goal of modernizing the company’s culture. While the recent Brazilian recession has improved hiring conditions for skilled professional staff, Biosev’s CEO, Rui Chammas, is aware that the company has to work to secure this human capital in the longer term; the challenge is “to change enough to make it attractive for them to stay once the labor market heats up again.” These challenges do not only apply to well-educated women and men in professional and managerial roles. Biosev is increasingly hiring only workers who have at least completed high school and, ideally, pursue further vocational qualifications. Women in this target group have many options and may not see the sugarcane industry as their first choice.

Having women in positions of leadership where there were previously only men in itself sends a signal that the company is changing: “The women are new: they can have the role of change agents,” suggests Dalmo Carlos, Agricultural Manager at Leme. Apart from this demonstration effect, women supervisors and managers are also reported to have a different management style: they are more explicit and communicative, a quality that the company is seeking to promote as it moves away from the previous, top-down management style in place in many of the farms taken over by the company.

Investing in the support that makes Biosev a desirable company to work for, such as early childcare and education, and facilitating access to vocational education and training, is helping Biosev remain an employer of choice, at the same time as it is investing in the quality of its potential future workforce.

In addition, as a global listed company, Biosev’s employment practices are under considerable scrutiny with investors, including its historically low employment levels of women. Commodity sustainability standards like Bonsucro, which requires producers (mills) to demonstrate compliance with non-discrimination requirements, are increasingly the norm to access high-value markets.

By recruiting, supporting, and promoting women, Biosev can demonstrate to all its stakeholders – current employees, potential future employees, the local community, and the broader financial and compliance community – that it is a modern company and serious about performance.

CHALLENGES

While women have made impressive advances in Biosev, particularly in the area of management, they remain a small minority of Biosev's overall workforce. Biosev faces a number of challenges in further advancing the position of women in the company. There are a limited number of vacancies and staff turnover is very low, given the current weak Brazilian labor market. This reduces opportunities for quick increases in women's numbers in Biosev, whether through internal promotions or external recruitment. Yet, even when there are vacancies, there is a limited supply of women workers with the qualifications needed to apply for operational positions. This is a particular issue for the drivers of heavy trucks and harvesting machines. While the company provides industry-specific training, it expects workers to already have the required licenses to operate a harvester or large truck. Yet women are much less likely to have these qualifications than men, and even basic driving licenses can require a considerable investment for a woman on a low salary.

More broadly, Biosev's efforts to recruit women are hampered by the image of the sugarcane industry as one that is dirty, heavy, and old-fashioned. While Biosev is rapidly modernizing facilities, the perceptions of the industry are changing more slowly. Added to this potential image problem are gendered assumptions about appropriate work for women. Even though Biosev is reported to have an excellent record on preventing sexual harassment, the sugarcane industry does not have a reputation for providing a safe working environment for

"The company could reach out more to change the thinking of men. People outside think that there are problems with sexual harassment, they do not want their wives or daughters to work here; but when you enter the company, there really are no such problems."

Male agricultural worker, Rio Brilhante plant



Photo © Biosev

women. In addition, especially in the Northeast Region, – though the problem is not unique to it – husbands and other relatives are often more reluctant for women to work in isolated areas with other men. At the same time, social norms regarding parenting responsibilities limit the labor supply of mothers with young children. Biosev's women tractor and harvester drivers are, in themselves, good ambassadors for the company's commitment to women. However, the company would also gain from a proactive communication strategy to further convey its commitment to women.

One of the barriers to women's work in production is the occasional need to lift heavy objects. Under Brazilian labor law, companies are forbidden from assigning work to women that regularly involves lifting of objects weighing more than 20kg (or more than 25kg on an occasional basis). Yet, the presence of at least some women in all types of production jobs suggests that such weight restrictions are more a perceived than a real barrier.

As Rodrigo Jonko, Manager of Production, Rio Brilhante, explains: "The men all think: the difference between women and men [and the reason for women's under-representation] is physical strength. But muscles are less and less important. In a couple of years, tools will have replaced the need for physical strength. Moving away from relying on physical strength is a general health prerogative, but it will also make clear that women are able to do all jobs, just as men [can]." Any task that is too physically strenuous for women is likely to also have adverse health effects for men, particularly for those men who have worked in such positions for many years.

Work for women, and men, with caregiving responsibilities can be challenging. Round-the-clock shift work, not having a regular rest-day as part of the 5/1 shift arrangement for operational workers as per the collective agreement, and working in remote locations, can all make parenting difficult. While some workers reported the benefits of some informal flexibility, options for more formal flexible working time arrangements, such as allowing workers to swap shifts in emergencies, are limited by legislation and collective arrangements. Once workers reach the supervisory and managerial level, requirements to be at work typically grow. Options to temporarily reduce working hours, shift to part-time work, or work from home are very limited under Brazilian law, potentially pushing some women out of paid employment when their children are young. More broadly, although Brazilian society is changing, there still is an expectation that women will be the main caregivers of young children (Lobel, 2009). Within Biosev, several male workers reported taking their children to and from care, or even being the one to take time off when their children were sick, but overall still primarily care responsibilities rest on the shoulders of women.

CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, the Brazil sugarcane industry has experienced significant changes that have opened up new opportunities for women. In particular, the large-scale mechanization of the harvesting process means that women are increasingly likely to enter non-traditional occupations, such as tractor and harvester drivers. Biosev's emphasis on modernizing company culture and practices – including the introduction of a transparent HR framework and merit-based approaches to training and development – provides an environment in which existing women workers feel supported, respected, and have access to opportunities that they need to progress in the industry. The company's visible commitment to equal opportunities for women, and its outreach to the next generation of young women in its apprenticeship and vocational training programs, is laying the foundation for the continued integration of its workforce.

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