

## Role of RBC in Promoting Responsible Production and Consumption

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In Taveta Sub-County, banana farming is one of the main sources of livelihood. For years, farmers worked hard but often faced challenges related to unfair trade, unsafe working conditions, and environmental degradation. Workers handled chemicals without protection, children were sometimes seen working in farms, and buyers would take advantage of farmers by buying bananas in bulk without weighing, and sometimes delaying or refusing to pay. There were no clear standards guiding human rights, labor practices, or environmental care, and many people did not understand their rights or responsibilities in production and trade.

Through the DANIDA Market Development Partnerships (DMDP) Programme implemented by MESPT, the concept of Responsible Business Conduct, commonly known as “RBC”, was introduced into the banana value chain. The DMDP programme aimed to equip all banana value chain actors with knowledge of RBC and ensure compliance to its principles. The RBC approach focuses on four main pillars:

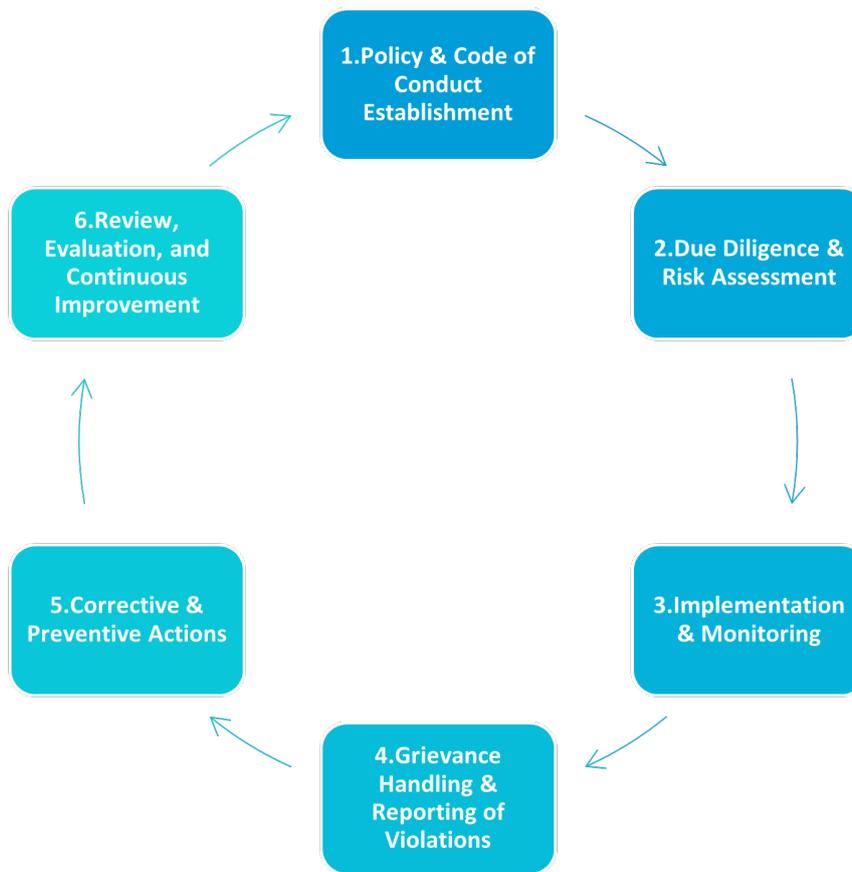
*Human Rights* where provisions include: Businesses must respect and uphold fundamental human rights of all workers and communities affected by their operations; Ensure no child labor, forced labor, or human trafficking in any part of the value chain; Promote gender equality and inclusion of underrepresented groups; Respect community rights to land, culture, and livelihoods; Implement fair grievance mechanisms accessible to all stakeholders.

*Ethical Labor Practices* where provisions include: Upholding workers’ rights to fair wages, safe working conditions, and freedom of association (unionization); Prohibit discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, or disability; Ensure decent working hours and provide benefits as per national labour laws; Encourage worker training, capacity building, and participation in decision-making.

*Environment sustainability* where provisions include: Minimize environmental pollution and manage waste responsibly; Promote climate-smart practices (e.g., afforestation, solarized irrigation, reduced pesticide use); Conserve biodiversity and address human–wildlife conflicts ethically; Ensure sustainable use of natural resources (soil, water, forests); Comply with national environmental laws and global environmental standards

*Anti-Corruption* where provisions include: Zero tolerance for bribery, extortion, favoritism, or misuse of power; Transparent procurement and pricing mechanisms; Promote fair trade by eliminating exploitation by brokers or middlemen; Maintain accurate financial records and disclose all payments transparently; Train staff and farmers on ethical trading and integrity principles.

All the 4 principles are aimed at ensuring that business and farming decisions promote positive ethics and protects people, nature, and integrity. The implementation involves of RBC review process follows a 6-stage process as seen in the diagram below:



*Emmanuel Mwiti, MESPT Project Officer Taveta Sub-County*

*“The integration of RBC was essential because the banana sector involves many actors, from nursery operators and farmers to traders and commercial partners. By integrating RBC, farmers are now better equipped to make production and business decisions that safeguard dignity, protect natural resources, and promote fair working conditions. Embedding RBC ensures that the banana value chain’s growth does not come at the expense of people’s rights, environmental health, or ethical standards.”*

Among the farmers trained through this initiative was Peninah Mshabaha, a banana farmer from Taveta. After receiving training from MESPT, she became an RBC Champion, responsible for promoting ethical practices among fellow farmers. She remembers the situation before the training very well. After the training, Peninah and her group planted trees to protect their farms and began practicing safe pesticide use and proper waste disposal.

*Before I was a champion, we didn't know much about how our actions affected others. People used to spray pesticides and leave the cans anywhere, and there were no trees on the farms, so the wind would blow and damage our banana plants. Now our environment is cleaner and safer for everyone."*



*Peninah Mshabaha, RBC Champion Taveta Sub county*

Emmanuel Mwiti, Programme Officer MESPT also added that, "Through Agroforestry Campaign efforts, it led to planting of over 242,000 agroforestry trees by smallholder banana farmers in their farms. The adoption of composting practices also increased significantly as a result of greening training among smallholder banana farmers."

One of the biggest changes Peninah saw was in the fight against child labor. "Before MESPT trained us, child labor was very high," she explains. "Parents used to go to the farm with their children to help so they could get food for the family. After the training, parents were encouraged, and even farm owners understood that children should not work on farms. After this training, child labor ended."

RBC training also addressed serious issues of corruption and exploitation in the banana trade. Before the intervention, buyers would buy bananas in bunches, often underpaying farmers or paying late. "Sometimes they would sell the bananas first and even refuse to pay the farmers," Peninah says. "But after the RBC training, MESPT linked us to reliable buyers like ORANA who pay within twenty-four hours after harvesting." The new system brought transparency, fairness, and trust between farmers and buyers.

The training further covered fair treatment of workers, particularly around gender and labor rights. Peninah recalls that before the training, some farm owners exploited women workers who were poor and desperate, while men struggling with alcohol would sometimes be paid with alcohol instead of money. "After the training, this ended," she says. "Now people understand that every worker deserves respect and fair pay."

At the enterprise level, MoonBerg Organic Demo Farm is one of the agribusinesses that integrated RBC practices through the DMDP Programme. Stella Kigombe, who works at MoonBerg, describes the transformation. The training also encouraged the formation of a workers' committee that now represents staff issues to management and enabled collective bargaining with stronger voices. She believes that without the partnership between MESPT and MoonBerg, they would not have achieved such change.



*Stella Kigombe, Worker at MoonBerg*

*“Before the training, our workers didn’t have protective gear, but after MESPT trained us through the DMDP Programme, we provided gumboots, gloves, and spray equipment for the team thus improving performance. That made the workplace safer. Before, workers didn’t know their rights, but after the training, they learned about the eight-hour working day and that if they work beyond that, they should be paid overtime. We also established toilets and provided clean food for workers as a result of the RBC training. Through this partnership, we were able to train our workers, and everyone is happy about it.”*

According to Emmanuel Mwiti, *“By the end of the DMDP programme, a total of 2,036 farmers (Male:987; Female:1,049; out of which Youth of under 35years of age were:568), had been trained on RBC principles surpassing the overall five-year target of 2,000 farmers. This has created a strong culture of accountability and awareness across the banana value chain. We are leaving behind RBC champions who will continue to run with the agenda beyond the project,”* he says. *“It ensures that the banana industry in Taveta remains sustainable, inclusive, and transparent.”*

The results of this intervention are visible in both farms and enterprises. Farmers are now more environmentally conscious, waste management has improved, and the issue of child labor has reduced significantly. Workers are aware of their rights, and buyers and farmers transact more transparently. Through RBC, value chain actors are learning that ethical conduct and sustainability are not just moral obligations but also make their businesses stronger in a world that is becoming a global village.

Peninah Mshabaha sums it up with pride. *“RBC has been very important to me,”* she says. *“It changed how we work, how we treat others, and how we protect our environment. I’m very happy after seeing things change because of the training.”* The experience in Taveta shows that when people are empowered with knowledge and accountability, responsible production and consumption become a shared goal that benefits everyone, from farmers and workers to businesses and consumers alike.