

Last October, a female worker died of a breathing disorder, one of her co-workers alleged. Another complained of lesions on her body, which she said were from handling chemicals.

James Mwaniki spends his working day pushing cartloads of freshly cut flowers from the fields to the grading bay. The 1.5-kilometer route takes him through the area where the flowers are sprayed with pesticides, but he has no face mask or protective clothing.

"I hate it, I wish I could quit," said Mwaniki, 23, who has worked in the farms for three years. "There is no hope or future here," he lamented, revealing that he would like to marry but cannot afford to on his US\$56-a-month salary.

Rahab Wanjiru, 37, claimed that even pregnant women get exposed to hazardous chemicals in some companies. "One of my colleagues miscarried because of long exposure to these chemicals."

"Where the companies provide housing, you are forced to share a room with another family. No privacy," said Benta Akinyi, one of about 700 workers who rent rooms in Karagita, the biggest village serving flower farms workers.

Women have to leave their children at the makeshift day care centers where old women nurse them at US\$2 per day.

"When I go to the farm I normally leave my six-year-old daughter with some old woman. One time she neglected her and she was abused. The case is still in court," said Akinyi.

Naivasha town mayor, Musa Gitau, explained that "crime has also increased as the farms have grown. Naivasha now has more rape cases and sexual assaults than any other town in the country."

Some of the women have to endure sexual exploitation for favors like promotions, although this is declining due to fear of HIV/AIDS.

Few companies are like Magana Flowers Kenya, that pride in a comprehensive welfare package to workers. These include medical care and morale boosting incentives among other benefits.

A Booming Market

Jane Ngige, KFC head, says the sector today employs between 50,000-70,000 people.

