



4.06 Establishing or Improving Social Dialogue Mechanisms as Powerful Means of Finding Common Solutions to Problems, Advancing Decent Work and Social Justice

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

Social dialogue, which includes all types of negotiation, consultation or exchange of information between or among representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy, is an important means of improving working conditions, including workers' safety and health, productivity and wages, and social security. Social dialogue, which is based on consensus-building and democratic involvement of the main stakeholders, contributes to more efficient design and implementation of policies that advance equitable livelihoods and sustainable development. An increased focus on agency and on sustainability as core dimensions of food security and nutrition, as called for by the HLPE (2020) can help frame the importance of social dialogue as expression of "collective agency" in food systems.

Effective social dialogue in the agri-food sector can help ensure stable labour relations and boost productivity and quality of work life. It can contribute to collective bargaining, which plays a crucial role in reaching consensus on issues of concern to workers and employers and in raising awareness about their rights and obligations. Conditions that facilitate constructive social dialogue in agriculture and the rural economy include the existence of strong, independent and effective organizations of rural and agricultural workers and employers; willingness and commitment of all parties; and an enabling legal and institutional framework.

The proposed solution is therefore to **promote the establishment of new and improving the functioning of existing social dialogue mechanisms, and enhancing collective bargaining and negotiation, as platforms for giving plantation workers and small-scale producers a voice in social and economic development and ensuring that development is inclusive.**

Social dialogue can take place at various levels, including global, regional, national, sectoral, inter-professional, company and workplace. The establishment of forums that bring together representatives of government, trade unions, employers' associations and may include other key stakeholders and organizations such as cooperatives, small business associations, as well as women's groups, peasants' or indigenous peoples' organizations have proven to be an effective way of jointly designing and implementing common strategies to promote decent work in the agri-food sector and economic development.

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

With many years of experience in this area, the ILO has been supporting social dialogue between government, employers and workers as a unique and effective means for promoting decent work in different sectors of the economy, including the agri-food sector. Over the past years, a number of successful initiatives have emerged that have demonstrated the effectiveness of social dialogue to addressing employment and labour challenges in the agri-food sector. In particular, the ILO has been supporting the establishment and functioning of *multi-stakeholder dialogue forums*, which bring together ILO tripartite constituents – governments, employers' and workers' organizations – and all other important actors (e.g. NGOs, academia, private compliance schemes, etc.) to jointly formulate effective strategies to promote decent working conditions, competitiveness and compliance in specific agri-food sectors on decent work in the agri-food (plantations) sector.

This process starts with a participatory diagnostic exercise on working conditions in that specific sector. Using an innovative methodology, it covers a wide range of issues, from the fundamental principles and



rights at work (i.e. child labour, forced labour, freedom of association and collective bargaining, and non-discrimination in employment) to such topics as recruitment, employment relationships, wages, occupational safety and health, maternity protection, working hours and holidays. Based on the opportunities and challenges presented in the diagnostic report, national tripartite constituents and other key stakeholders develop and adopt a plan of action through social dialogue. The process offers stakeholders a transparent assessment of the actual situation in the specific sector and an opportunity to jointly develop and implement strategies to address challenges. The approach, which helps mobilize governments, companies, plantation owners and workers to improve working conditions and productivity, drives competitiveness and creates a world in which “no one is left behind”, has been successfully implemented in a number of countries and sectors, including Indonesia (palm oil sector) and Malawi (tea sector).

Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs) is another innovative ILO approach to promote employment and decent work at local/rural level through local social dialogue platforms. Through the LEPs, local development policies and related investments are developed to generate jobs, support the MSMEs, promote formalization and ensure income support to vulnerable groups in the rural communities. Particular attention is paid to inactive women and youth, low-skilled, and return migrants. The LEP approach provides integrated solutions to promote decent work in the rural economy, offering real employment policies and active labour market measures, as well as catalysing investments and building capacity of local stakeholders. For example, the approach has recently been implemented in one of Moldova’s regions, led by local partners, under the aegis of territorial tripartite commissions for consultation and collective bargaining, contributed to the creation and formalization of more than 200 jobs, and the launch and expansion of 72 businesses in sectors with job-creation potential (agri-food and rural non-farm). Furthermore, two cooperatives in the field of honey and hard cheese production were developed to enhance productivity and income prospects of small farmers, following the support provided in setting up collective business models. The approach was unanimously praised by national and local stakeholders for its effectiveness in providing locally devised solutions regarding employment and formalization.

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

While there is a widely accepted view that social dialogue is essential for achieving effective, equitable and mutually beneficial outcomes for governments, employers, workers and wider society, and workers in agriculture and related sectors are often excluded from the process and scope of social dialogue at all levels. Given that decent work deficits are particularly severe in the sector and that a large part of its workforce is constituted of groups vulnerable to socio-economic risks, such as women, youth, children, indigenous peoples and migrants, this matter warrants careful and immediate attention. Despite notable progress achieved in promoting social dialogue in different countries and sectors in recent years, in many countries, legal and practical challenges for social dialogue in and on agriculture and related sectors remain numerous and pervasive. In many countries, agricultural and rural workers continue to face difficulties in exercising their right to freely form or join organizations of their choosing due to legislative or implementation gaps. Low literacy and education levels, as well as poverty, informality and poor working and living conditions exacerbate the barriers in access to rights that many agricultural and rural workers may already face. Women and migrant workers often face additional challenges in participating in unions. Limited organization and voice among rural workers and employers prevent them from engaging in social dialogue and influencing legislation, and policy and decision-making process that could contribute to advancing sustainable livelihoods and food systems.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?



Social dialogue forums can provide effective mechanisms for identifying challenges that exist in the sector, and for elaborating solutions necessary for promoting equitable livelihoods and sustainable development.

5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

The inclusion of issues relating to social dialogue in the agri-food sector in the discussions and conclusions of the Food Systems Summit should contribute, *inter alia*, to: increasing awareness among all stakeholders about the effectiveness of social dialogue mechanisms/platforms as a means to discuss problems facing the sector and identify common sustainable solutions; strengthening the commitment of governments to promote social dialogue through the creation of an enabling environment and institutional frameworks; promoting policy coherence, strengthening international partnerships and scaling up the implementation of development cooperation programmes that use social dialogue to address decent work and other deficits facing the sector; and strengthened commitment and willingness of businesses to engage in social dialogue. These developments in turn should lead to: the establishment of new and improved functioning of existing social dialogue mechanisms at various levels (international, national, sectoral, local or enterprise) that enable workers and employers to constructively discuss and identify solutions; increased participation of rural and agricultural organizations of workers and employers as well as other relevant stakeholders in discussions and policy-making processes that affect their work and life; and progress in addressing decent work challenges facing the sector thereby promoting its sustainability and growth. At the workplace/enterprise level, it can contribute to improved productivity; a harmonious working environment beneficial for management and workers; reduction of absenteeism; and fewer conflicts and sustainable solutions to challenges at workplace.

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a ‘game changing solution’ developed by the Summit?

While social dialogue is widely recognized as an effective means for finding sustainable solutions for employment and labour challenges facing countries, regions or specific sectors, its use in the agri-food sector has remained limited. With recent successful examples of applying social dialogue to promote quality jobs and decent work in the sector, if acknowledged as such in the discussions and conclusions of the Food Systems Summit, this solution could have a positive impact on advancing decent work in the sector and reversing the trends of prevailing working poverty, informality, low productivity, and labour rights violations. Multi-stakeholder dialogue forums have proven to be effective in promoting consensus and sustainable solutions on systemic challenges facing specific sectors and, in this context, constitute ambitious yet concrete means of advancing decent work, equitable livelihoods and sustainable transformation of the agri-food sector. The proposed forums, aiming at bringing together all key stakeholders, will be particularly important for giving voice to groups of workers vulnerable to socio-economic risks, including, among others, women, migrant workers, indigenous peoples, youth and contribute to building their agency towards equitable livelihoods.

7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work, or at least achieve the initial outcomes

Numerous ILO initiatives, policy-related work and development cooperation projects focusing on addressing decent work deficits in the agri-food sector through social dialogue, including those described in section 2.

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

There is a widespread political support for the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda, including ILO Conventions, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 8, which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. In this context,



the proposed solution will make an important contribution to achieving SDG8 and in particular targets 8.5 on “full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”; 8.7 on the elimination of forced labour and child labour; and, 8.8 on the protection of labour rights and promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited.

Well-suited for all countries and in particular those with large rural economies and agri-food sectors.