



### **4.03 Promote Ratification and Effective Implementation of International Labour Standards**

#### **1. What, in brief, is the solution?**

Achieving sustainable food systems that deliver food security and nutrition for all, while limiting negative environmental impacts and promoting decent work and sustainable livelihoods for workers and producers along the food supply chain, will require a strong focus on social standards, in particular the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards. While agriculture and related sectors remain a significant source of employment and livelihoods in many developing and emerging economies, jobs in the sector are often characterized by significant decent work deficits, including informality, poor working conditions, lack of labour and social protection, and low and irregular incomes. A growing body of research indicates that compliance with international labour standards can facilitate improvements in productivity and economic performance, creating an enabling environment for building agency of the workforce towards more equitable livelihoods. Therefore, addressing decent work deficits and upholding and protecting labour rights in the agri-food sector, through ratification and effective implementation of relevant labour standards, in addition to being an important objective in itself, is key to facilitating agricultural growth and inclusive food systems, with potential significant multiplier effects on other sectors.

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

The rural economy, and the agricultural sector in particular, have been globally challenged by persistent and often structural gaps that obstruct a rights-based approach to development, the promotion of full and productive employment, and the possibility of equitable livelihoods. The ILO has combatted these challenges through its Decent Work Agenda, with a critical focus on standards and rights at work in the rural economy. The focus has been to bolster national policies and laws with international labour standards that have specific relevance to promoting dignity and rights enshrined in fundamental principles and rights at work, fostering development and productive employment, and reducing poverty.

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

While international labour standards are increasingly recognised as central to ensuring a rights-based approach to development and providing an enabling environment for improved productivity and performance, their application in agriculture and related sectors remains weak, contributing to severe decent work deficits and gaps in labour protection for the workforce. In many developing and emerging economies, agri-food workers often endure inadequate working conditions and lack effective protection due to significant gaps in coverage and barriers to ratification and implementation. ILO estimates that 8 out of 10 working poor live in rural areas and the majority of them are engaged in agriculture. Two-thirds of the extreme poor are in agriculture.<sup>1</sup> According to the latest ILO estimates, globally 152 million children, aged between 5 and 17, are subject to child labour, with 70.9% of them in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> Forced labour, too, remains prevalent in many rural areas, especially among migrant agricultural workers and victims of trafficking. In general, many jobs in the sector lack significantly in quality and are among most hazardous, unprotected and poorly remunerated. Some 170,000 agricultural workers are killed in work-related accidents each year, which means that they run twice the risk of dying on the job compared to workers in

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<sup>1</sup> ILO: World Economic and Social Outlook 2016: Transforming jobs to end poverty, (Geneva 2016), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> ILO: Global estimates of child labour: Results and trends, 2012-16, Geneva, 2017.



other sectors. Millions more suffer injuries in workplace accidents involving agricultural machinery or poisoning by pesticides and other agrochemicals.

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

Advancing equitable livelihoods in the agri-food sector will not be possible without addressing decent work deficits and labour protection gaps endured by its workforce. This will require ratification of relevant international labour standards and their effective implementation. This starts with the promotion of the fundamental principles and rights at work (i.e. the elimination of child labour, forced labour, discrimination in employment, and the promotion of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining) as enabling rights and goes beyond into all international labour standards related to specific employment and labour issues, specific categories of workers, or specific sectors and subsectors.<sup>3</sup>

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

The integration of international labour standards in the discussions and conclusions of the Food Systems Summit should contribute, *inter alia*, to: strengthening the commitment of governments to address national challenges which prevent the ratification of relevant ILO Conventions and to improve the enforcement of national laws through better labour administration and labour inspection systems; improving national and cross-border social dialogue; promoting policy coherence, strengthening international partnerships and scaling up the implementation of development cooperation programmes on the promotion of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda in agriculture and related sectors; and improving enterprises' access to ILO resources and guidance on international labour standards and human rights due diligence. These developments in turn should lead to: increased ratification and implementation of international labour standards relevant to decent work in the agri-food sector; improved compliance with labour laws by enterprises; improved access to rights and to legal remedies for workers; and global policy coherence on decent work in the agri-food sector.

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

The Decent Work Agenda with all its dimensions (i.e. rights at work, productive employment, social dialogue and social protection) is increasingly recognized as an effective instrument for fighting poverty and hunger, and offering a basis for a more just and stable framework for global development. And, while there are a number of international labour standards that are of direct relevance to the sector, many of which have been widely ratified, in most countries, their application has remained limited. Given that poverty remains a predominantly rural phenomenon, with the majority of the poor engaged in agriculture, promoting decent work and rights at work in the rural economy will be key to creating agency for the people in the workforce, towards advancing equitable livelihoods. It will have a particularly important effect on groups vulnerable to socio-economic risks and will contribute to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the sector. For instance, women make up a significant share of workforce in the sector. However, their jobs are often time- and labour- intensive, marked by gender-based norms and

<sup>3</sup> In addition to fundamental ILO conventions (i.e. the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Protocol of 2014; the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87); the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98); the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105); the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)), international labour standards that have direct relevance to the agro-food sector and the rural economy include, among others: the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129); the Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11); the Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110); the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131) and the the Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951 (No. 99); the Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141); Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184); the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).



discrimination, informal arrangements and poor levels of remuneration with little or no access to social protection. In this context, integration of international labour standards in the Food Security Summit can catalyse a shift in favour of a robust, normative framework of compliance for stakeholders for systemic change in shaping sustainable food systems. Promotion and ratification of international labour standards will further improve global policy coherence, create a level-playing field for governments and enterprises, improve access to rights and legal remedies for workers, and discourage the ‘race to the bottom’. While ambitious, the proposed solution is actionable and sustainable, and can achieve significant impact at scale, with a critical contribution to advancing equitable livelihoods and sustainable transformation of food systems.

### **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 and advancing workers’ right through the promotion of ratification and implementation of labour standards of particular relevance to the sector and/or its specific sub-sectors.

### **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.

The private sector, which has a major influence on the implementation of SDG 8, is also increasingly recognizing the critical role of labour standards, in particular on productivity and trade, and integrating the labour dimension into human rights due diligence. Labour standards are also progressively being included in internal codes of practice and private certification schemes.

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

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