

Decent Work in Agriculture & the Global Food Chain An International Framework

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Social Injustice and Workers in Agriculture in the Global Food Chain

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We sow it
We reap it
We can't afford to eat it

Social Injustice and Scandal

- It is one of the great social injustices and scandals of the 21st century that hired agricultural workers and (smallholder) farmers in the global food chain who feed the world are often least able to feed, clothe and house themselves and their families, and to send their children to school

It is a global social injustice that urgently needs remedying

Social Injustice

- Hired agricultural workers and smallholder farmers are part of the core world's poor
 - 70% of 1.4 billion extremely poor people, many of whom are chronically undernourished & hungry throughout the year, live in rural areas (CFS 2016)
 - 75% of these rural poor are smallholders (CFS 2016)
 - 2.1 billion persons live in rural areas in absolute poverty below 2\$ a day threshold (WB 2008)
- Smallholder farmers often cannot afford to pay "decent wages" to their workers because of the low incomes they make

Social Injustice

- Family farms, just like AOTM in USA, are under threat in many parts of the world
- More and more farmers - and farmworkers - are part of the corporate-dominated global food chain
- Decreasing numbers of farmers worldwide
- Global problem. So perhaps some of the solutions may be international
- Should smallholder, AOTM -type family agriculture - suitably supported and rewarded - be the backbone of agricultural production worldwide?

The importance of agriculture

- Asia: 700m+, 70% of all agricultural workers; 62% rural household income
- Sub-Saharan Africa: nearly 200m, 20% of total; 63% rural household income
- Latin America – 56% of rural household income
- Europe – 50% rural household income
- North America ?



Workers in agriculture

- Crop/commodity production
- Livestock raising/insect raising
- Aquaculture/fish farming
- Agroforestry
- Primary processing
- Use & maintenance of machinery, equipment, tools, agricultural installations
- Any process, storage operation or transportation in an agricultural undertaking



Farmers & Farmworkers do more than just feed us

- Crops, livestock, aquaculture (fish/prawns/shellfish/plants)
- Commodities: cotton, leather, rubber, oils, starches, biofuels
- Food security – global, local
- Food safety - consumers
- Right to food - help guarantee it
- Environmental protection – land, water and air quality
- Climate change mitigation
- Sustainable agriculture/rural development
- Rural communities & infrastructure

Global Workforce in Agriculture

- 1 billion (ILO) to 1.3 billion (FAO/WB) hired agricultural workers, and self-employed farmers
 - Over 35% of the global workforce – large numbers of women, and migrant workers
- At the heart of the global food chain – from plough to plate, from field to fork



Global Workforce in Agriculture

- 300-400 million are hired, agricultural workers (employees)
 - 85% of (self-employed) farmers are smallholders, - farming 1 to 10 hectares
 - Together they help feed the world!
- Feed 6 billion people + – Everyday!



Global Workforce in Agriculture

- Women comprise 43% of the labour force on average in developing countries
- Up to 50% of the workforce in Eastern and Southeastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa
- Growing numbers of women working in the hired labour force - feminisation of the agricultural workforce



Farmers & Farm Workers

- For both hired agricultural workers and smallholder farmers, basic human rights and labour rights are weak
 - Labour rights & conditions
 - Widespread exploitation of hired workers, including migrant & indigenous labour globally
 - No « Decent work »
 - Forced labour; Trafficking; Child labour are common
 - The « right to food » is weak
 - Sustainable livelihoods lacking - low farm prices, low wages
 - Food insecurity
- There is a need to promote right to food for both farmers and farm workers in the larger framework of human and labour rights, and decent work – linked to food security and poverty elimination

Hired Agricultural Workers

- ◀ Largely invisible to, and ignored by, policy-makers and decision-makers in governments, agricultural & rural development agencies, intergovernmental organisations, science/research institutions, agricultural banks, credit institutions, and even civil society organisations
- ◀ Corporate concentration is increasing in the global food chain - plantation companies, food processors, supermarket chains
- ◀ “Decent work deficits” are getting worse

Hired Agricultural Workers

- 300 to 400 million hired agricultural workers
- Do not own or rent land, or their tools, equipment - so are distinct from farmers
- Work on everything from large plantations and commercial farms to smallholder & AOTM « family-type » farms



Hired Agricultural Workers

- “Work for some kind of “wage” – monetary, “in kind” payment
- Often low wages, below national average or minimum wage
- In an **“employment relationship”** with a plantation company, farmer, labour contractor
- Many “decent work deficits” - “grey areas” around the “employment relationship”
- Hidden, undeclared employment – migrant workers, workers supplied/hired by labour contractors, indigenous workers
- False “self-employment” - companies declaring workers as “self-employed” to avoid paying social security contributions etc
- Outsourcing

Hired Agricultural Workers

- Agricultural worker’s jobs and terms and conditions of employment vary tremendously, creating diverse and sometimes overlapping categories
- Permanent (full-time), temporary, casual, seasonal, daily workers
- Rural occupations are often difficult to categorise
- Lack of accurate data, especially as national employment registration schemes for hired agricultural workers are often weak or absent

Smallholder Farmers

- Smallholder farmers: « family farming », with limited labour hire - main category. 85% of world’s 525 -570 million farms are smallholdings
- Small-scale farmers, pastoralists, forest keepers, fishers who manage areas: less than 1 to 10 hectares .
- Smallholders are characterised by family- focused motives such as favouring the stability of the farm household system, using mainly family labour for production and using part of the produce for family consumption

Smallholder Farmers

- Outgrower farmers - many smallholders are contract farmers for plantation companies, food processors, supermarkets - and part of the global food chain. A chance to build their businesses or a disguised form of slave labour? Problems of market access
- In labour terms, smallholders are hybrids. During the course of the year they are:
 - Part self-employed farmer - on their own farm
 - Part waged worker - off farm to earn extra money
 - Part employer - regularly hiring seasonal/casual waged labour at peak times. Livestock farmers often hire more permanent labour. Rural areas often have active labour markets

Smallholder Farmers

- Smallholders can be really productive
- A large study examining smallholder agriculture covering 286 projects, over 37 million hectares in 57 developing countries, found that when sustainable agriculture was adopted, average crop yields increased by 79 percent.
- The potential of agriculture to contribute to growth and poverty reduction depends on the productivity of small farms.

Smallholders and Family Farmers: Sustainability Pathways. FAO, Rome; World Development Report 2008 (World Bank) supports FAO's opinion