

Decent work in agriculture

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Editorial

They farm, but they are not farmers. They do not own or rent the land they work. Nor do they own the tools and equipment they use. Yet they are at the heart of the world's food production system. They feed the world. Who are they? They are the 450 million women and men worldwide who labour as waged workers in agriculture. Altogether, including farmers and the millions of workers in the informal agricultural economy, this sector represents 1.3 billion people, half of the world's total labour force.

This is not the first time that *Labour Education* has focused on workers in agriculture, nor will it be the last. The fate of these women and men should remain at the top of our agenda. Not only because of their numbers, but also because of the contribution they make to all of our daily lives. Because of their crucial role in sustainable development. Because of the terrible living and working conditions under which they produce our food, while themselves often surviving on the most meagre of rations. And because their right to decent work has yet to materialize.

"They feed the world, but their children go hungry" is the evocative title of the first in a series of articles that describe their situation in various parts of the world. Other contributions to this issue cite the feminization and casualization of work in agriculture, the increased use of (often undocumented) migrant labour, the prevalence of child labour, including its worst forms, the serious health and safety problems and the almost total lack of access to social protection and health care. These deficits have been exacerbated by the impact of HIV/AIDS on such a vulnerable group of workers whose very survival is at risk due to lack of awareness and access to protective measures.

These trends were confirmed by participants in the International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture, which was organized by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities on 15-18 September 2003 in Geneva. They were also highlighted in the excellent background paper prepared for the Symposium by Marni Pigott.¹

The agriculture sector is characterized by deep deficits on all four main points of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda: workers' rights, employment and incomes, social protection and social dialogue.

A key conclusion of the debates that took place at the ACTRAV Symposium is that efforts by the international community to reduce poverty by half by 2015, in line with the objectives set by the United Nations, will not succeed unless decent work in agriculture, including informal agriculture, is made a priority. And decent work in agriculture will progress only if freedom of association takes root in the sector and if fairness and equity are allowed to germinate in global trade.

"It is our firm belief that the absence of rights in the sector lies at the heart of the decent work deficit" in agriculture. This is what Ron Oswald, General Secretary of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel,

Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), told the Symposium. Testimonies from agricultural trade unionists spoke volumes about the abuses of basic rights in the sector. In Colombia, more than 600 members of rural trade unions have been murdered since 1980. Assassinations have been reported in other countries, and they have at least one thing in common – the perpetrators have gone unpunished. As the feminization of the workforce has proceeded, sexual harassment and pregnancy tests before recruitment have become commonplace. Unscrupulous employers exchange blacklists of “troublemakers” (meaning trade union activists). Once evicted from one plantation, these campaigners are kept out of the others.

The first consequence of anti-union repression is poor, often inhuman working conditions. For instance, did you know that night work is not at all uncommon in agriculture, even in industrialized countries where clandestine migrant workers toil for starvation wages? Did you know that agriculture has become one of the most dangerous sectors, achieving the sad record of 170,000 deaths on the land per year – half of all fatal work-related accidents registered worldwide? And that this shocking figure includes 12,000 children?

So the Symposium participants welcomed the entry into force of the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention (No. 184), adopted in 2001 and so far ratified by three countries – Finland, Republic of Moldova and Slovakia. They agreed with ILO Director-General Juan Somavia, who addressed the Symposium, that governments should be encouraged to ratify this important instrument. Other Conventions are equally important for agricultural workers, namely the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) (147 ratifications), the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) (41 ratifications), the Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141) and the two ILO Conventions on migrant workers (Conventions Nos. 97 and 143, ratified by 42 and 18 countries, respectively).

There is no lack of instruments for protecting and improving the situation of workers in agriculture. What is needed, and is needed urgently, is ratification and implementation.

This is all the more crucial at a time when globalization, or at least the “existing model” of globalization, as Mr. Somavia put it, “treats labour as just another commodity” and inflicts even harsher conditions on an already hard-pressed labour force. Decent work calls for a different set of economic policies. Policies that do respond to basic social needs.

Far from reassuring, in this regard, was the Cancún Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in September 2003. The conclusion (or collapse) of the Cancún event actually coincided with the opening of the Geneva Symposium. As Ron Oswald rightly stressed in his address, “what was on the table in Cancún involved the use of billions of dollars and euros spent on agriculture in the rich countries of the North”. This, he continued, “raises an obvious question in relation to the Decent Work Agenda. Against the background of these millions spent on agriculture, why is the Decent Work Agenda blocked even in the wealthier countries – not to speak of the plight of those in agriculture in the poorer South?”

One major explanation for this, as participants suggested, is “the expanding corporate control of the sector”. Findings from the ACTRAV back-

ground document illustrate this graphically. They show that the ten biggest companies in agriculture control about 80 per cent of a world market valued at US\$32 billion. Just two companies distribute more than 80 per cent of the world's cereals. Five firms control three-quarters of the banana trade. Three enterprises preside over four-fifths of the trade in cocoa and three others control the same share of tea trading. The world's five big coffee roasters have a combined turnover of US\$1 billion, and they run half of the planet's coffee production.

But while the companies' profits are rising, the prices paid to the producers are continually falling. As ILO agricultural expert Ann Herbert pointed out, "A peasant farmer gets US\$0.14 per kilo of instant coffee, which sells at US\$26 in the supermarkets". The drop in commodity prices has, of course, hit agricultural wages even harder, as well as the living and working conditions of farm labourers.

Decent work is dependent on achieving the aims of the ILO's core labour standards. If the means to that end are denied, due to trends in international trade, then obviously decent work as a goal will be unattainable. Inequalities in ownership, in control of technology and of capital, and in market access are key problems facing agriculture. These problems are often compounded by unfair trade practices.

It need not be so. And as trade unions commit themselves to mobilize and organize agriculture, despite obvious obstacles and a hostile environment, governments and employers should also rethink their policies. There is a lot of food for thought in the resolution adopted by the International Workers' Symposium (see Appendix). Action is needed. Promoting such action by all concerned is the modest ambition of this issue of *Labour Education*, dedicated to those who feed the world.

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Note

¹ ILO: *Decent work in agriculture*, Background paper, International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, Geneva, September 2003 (<http://mirror/public/english/dialogue/actrav/new/agsymp03/iwsdwa.pdf>).

They feed the world, but their children go hungry

Today, the number of people working in agriculture is put at more than 1.3 billion. They make up half of the world's active population. They feed the world, but what is their fate? Unenviable, according to a whole series of first-hand accounts at the symposium on decent work in agriculture, held recently under the auspices of the International Labour Organization in Geneva.

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If she hasn't finished her work quota, she'll have to carry on the next day, and that's when she'll get her 'day's' wage, because she's paid by the job. If everything goes well, she will earn the equivalent of US\$35 (€32) in a month. The overseers are all men and wage blackmail is part of the arsenal of sexual harassment. In the tea plantations, most of the children living with their mothers don't know their biological fathers. Ironically, the employers are reluctant from the outset to recruit women who have family responsibilities, and pregnancy tests are common practice before hiring."

Accounts like this one from Phillipina Mosha, a trade unionist in the tea plantations of Tanzania, featured strongly in the four-day symposium on decent work in agriculture held in Geneva in September by the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities. Mosha's Zimbabwean colleague, Gertrude Hambira, described the tense situation in her country, where the agricultural workers' unions are right in the firing line. "The so-called agrarian reform promoted by the Government has led to a state of war on the farms, where the new owners have installed a reign of terror. The agricultural

sector used to employ half of the active population, but most of the labourers have been fired and have had to leave the places where they lived. Those who oppose this 'revolution' are regarded as enemies. They are hunted like animals ..."

600 trade unionists murdered

In Colombia, the agricultural workers' unions have lost 600 of their members since 1980. All murdered. Five days before setting off to testify in Geneva, Guillermo Rivero Zapata was informed by the authorities that the protective measures laid on for him had been withdrawn. "They are depriving me of protection to make me stop organizing workers", Rivero told the ILO meeting. But he is more determined than ever to press on with his fight. It is a never-ending struggle. In Colombia, as in many other developing countries, the number of impoverished people in the rural sector has soared in recent years. Between 1994 and 2000, the proportion of the agricultural labour force living in poverty rose from 65 to 80 per cent. In the course of five years, wages went down by 15 per

cent. Elsewhere in Latin America, a delegate reported, there is hard evidence that women are given injections to make them sterile throughout the harvest. To complete this world overview, delegates from Asia and Europe gave equally disturbing accounts.

Women targeted

For instance, according to a report distributed at the symposium, the extent of child labour and discrimination against women (who now make up half of the labour force there) are major concerns in Asia's agricultural sector. The proportion of the active population engaged in the sector ranges from 80 per cent in Bangladesh to 14 per cent in Malaysia. Significantly, everywhere the slice of national income generated by agriculture is smaller than the proportion of the labour force engaged in it. The effects of weak incomes are reinforced by highly unjust distribution systems, explained A. Navamukundam, National Secretary of the Malaysian plantation workers' union. "Distortions" in the agricultural market were meat and drink to the negotiators and journalists in Cancún (Mexico) where, just a few days before the ILO symposium, hopes of a new multilateral agreement for the sector were buried. But the selfsame distortions were cited in Geneva by those speaking for the men and women who toil on the land.

After Cancún

Disappointed by the failure of Cancún, the symposium participants called for a multilateral agreement that pays attention to the fate of small farmers and agricultural workers, particularly in export-dependent countries which see themselves being elbowed out by subsidized agriculture in the North. Guillaume Attigbe (Benin), a Worker member of the ILO Governing Body, has taken up the cudgels on behalf of the ten million African cotton workers whose livelihoods are threatened by

American or European producers who obtain subsidies and can therefore sell substantially cheaper on the international markets.

"The American and European subsidies on agricultural exports to the countries of the South are tantamount to handing out \$2 per day for every cow in the industrialized countries, while the agricultural workers in the South sometimes have to live on less than \$1!" protested Leroy Trotman (Barbados), the Workers' spokesperson at the ILO Governing Body. He called on the ILO to launch an urgent programme on decent work in agriculture and, as Adrian Cojocar, the representative of the World Confederation of Labour also requested, to get a say for the ILO within world trade talks, on the same basis as the WTO, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Nor are the transition countries spared by the inconsistencies of world trade. In Russia, a delegate noted, New Zealand butter is cheaper than the local product and pork from Denmark seems to have pushed home-grown meat off the slab. The result, said the union representative, is "an exchange: the industrialized countries send us cheaper produce, and we send them our migrants". Once Eastern Europe's granary, Ukraine recently lost 5 million jobs during the transition. The unemployment rate has seen a 29-fold increase. Wages in the towns are hovering on the poverty line. In the countryside, they are three times lower.

As ILO Director-General Juan Somavia told the workers' symposium, "those who produce the world's food are often barely able to earn enough to put food on their own family's table. They are the majority of working poor in the world".

If the international community is serious about fighting and eradicating poverty, or even about halving it by 2015, then the rural sector must become a priority. "We should be fighting for jobs, sustainable livelihoods, income-generating activities." This is about promoting "real opportunities, not charitable handouts", Somavia insisted.

But how did things get into this state? Somavia, who heads the only tripartite UN agency, feels that “the present globalization model treats labour as just another commodity. Well, it is not. This model is unjust and it won’t solve the problems”. His views are shared by Ron Oswald, General Secretary of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers’ Associations (IUF). The IUF is the world’s biggest organization of workers in agriculture, a notoriously difficult sector to unionize. “It is a fact that the companies’ growing control over the sector is one of the main factors contributing to the many decent work deficits in agriculture”, Oswald noted. He regards the currently dominant agricultural structures as “a system which favours production models that are not socially, economically or environmentally sustainable”.

Production monopoly

The working paper for the symposium shows just how far the transnational corporations control the global food system as well as food and agriculture policies worldwide. For example, it demonstrates that the ten biggest companies in agriculture control about 80 per cent of a world market valued at \$32 billion. Just two companies distribute more than 80 per cent of the world’s cereals. Five firms control three-quarters of the banana trade. Three enterprises preside over four-fifths of the trade in cocoa and three others control the same share of tea trading. The world’s five big coffee roasters have a combined turnover of \$1 billion, and they run half of the planet’s coffee production.

But while the companies’ profits are rising, the prices paid to the producers are continually falling. ILO agricultural expert Ann Herbert points out the contrasts. “While a kilo of Arabica coffee fetched \$4 for the producers in 1970, today it earns them \$1.42. A peasant farmer gets \$0.14 per kilo of instant coffee, which sells at \$26 in the supermarkets.” The drop in

commodity prices has, of course, hit agricultural wages even harder, as well as the living and working conditions of farm labourers.

Ricardo Yaque started working in Uruguay’s citrus groves in 1996. Soon, he was helping to organize and resurrect the rural workers’ union Sudora. An apt name. *Sudor* is the Spanish word for sweat. The union is based in the port town of Salto on the River Uruguay. Yaque even managed to organize the plantations owned by the Caputto family – a real feat, say his local colleagues. In Geneva, he spoke out for the plantation workers whom he now represents as Sudora’s General Secretary. He has not forgotten the state of things back in the groves, though. The special shirt that you have to wear when picking oranges and that you fill up with 60 to 70 kilos of fruit which you then have to carry, at a run so as not to waste time, to the people at the far side of the field who buy the oranges after weighing them. “We’re paid by the kilo. The work is physically exhausting and most pickers are so worn out that they have to give up at the age of 45 or 50, which is too early to draw a pension.” He also speaks of the anti-union repression that marks the sector.

Union freedom lacking

The lack of trade union freedom causes many problems for workers in this sector, the symposium participants emphasized. In many Latin American countries, says Maria Moya Hinojosa, from the Chilean Peasants’ Federation, most of the subcontractors who recruit workers carefully screen out those who are unionized. Blacklists of “social agitators” are exchanged. A survey organized just before the symposium by the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV) is illuminating: 52 per cent of workers’ organizations in some 35 countries state that their officers or members have been harassed. Job blackmail is commonplace. So are dismissals. Discrimination against union activists is flagrant, and the authorities sometimes

follow suit: 16 per cent of the organizations polled mentioned arrests of trade unionists. Labour leaders have been assassinated in Colombia (the tragic world record-holder for murders of trade unionists), in Bolivia and in Brazil, where a report from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) notes the killing of 1,588 rural workers and 71 peasant trade unionists between 1988 and 2002. In 2002, 16 rural workers were murdered and 73 union activists received threats. In most cases, official investigations of these crimes are at best slow-moving. At worst, they are thrown out of court. In 2002, around 100 Brazilian military police officers, accused of involvement in the massacre of 19 peasants in Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996, were ultimately all acquitted.

Social dialogue – an investment

“What governments and companies must understand is that when freedom of association is denied, nations impoverish themselves further for they lose one of the most precious resources available for their development... that is, the capacity to engage in productive tripartite dialogue to find peaceful solutions to the social and economic challenges they face.” These words from the ILO Director-General went down well with the assembled trade unionists, but also with representatives of international organizations, UN agencies, financial institutions and even employers.

There were few employers at the symposium, which was aimed mainly at trade unionists, but George Jaksch, representing the multinational Chiquita as a guest speaker in the debate on social dialogue, did not take issue with the Director-General's remarks. “We can't envisage a profitable business that does not have a good reputation on human rights”, Jaksch declared. “Good social relations have a direct effect on a company's profitability and sustainability.” Chiquita was not invited at random. The multinational employs more than 20,000 people, mainly in Latin America. Many of them are union members.

Since 1998, Chiquita has been on a “corporate social responsibility” drive. The concept has not yet banished all of the unions' doubts, but it enabled the IUF to open up a breach in the banana sector, as it led the IUF and Chiquita to sign the first-ever global framework agreement in the banana business. In the agreement, Chiquita undertakes to respect eight basic ILO standards on trade union freedom, the right to collective bargaining, non-use of child labour and forced labour, non-discrimination in employment and occupation, and equal remuneration. It also acknowledges its responsibilities for occupational safety and health and, in cooperation with its trade union partners (as well as the IUF, the Latin American banana plantation workers' union coordinating body COLSIBA signed the agreement), it commits itself to promote better working conditions.

And none too soon. Sadly, agriculture holds the world record for deaths due to accidents at work: 170,000 per year. As the symposium working paper points out, increased agricultural productivity, faster work rates and technological developments have a strong impact on agricultural workers' health and safety. Pesticide poisoning has become a serious occupational hazard. The World Health Organization puts the total number of cases at between 2 and 5 million per year, of which 40,000 prove fatal. This was obviously a major topic at the ILO symposium. And there was open astonishment when Swedish trade unionist Sven-Erik Pettersson mentioned the possibility that paraquat, a powerful pesticide, might be taken off the European Union's list of banned products. Pettersson's call for a trade union campaign to maintain the ban was certainly well noted in Geneva. “There is no such thing as a safe pesticide”, insisted Malaysian delegate Navamukundam.

Safety and health in agriculture is a priority topic for the ILO. Adopted in 2002, an international Convention on this issue came into force in September 2003. Convention No. 184 has so far been ratified by three countries. Among other things, it permits workers to refuse a task if

they consider that it could damage their health. During the symposium, and in their adopted conclusions, the union representatives emphasized the basic link between Convention No. 184 and the ILO Convention on the worst forms of child labour (No. 182), adopted two years earlier. As the working paper stresses, the fight against child labour in agriculture should include promotion of Convention No. 184. Article 16 of that standard sets a minimum age of 18 for work which, by its nature and the conditions under which it is performed, constitutes a threat to the safety and health of adolescents. And child labour, most often in its “worst forms”, is endemic in agriculture. In fact, each year 12,000 youngsters die on the land. And, of course, the exploitative situation faced by more and more women does not leave their children unaffected.

Feminization, insecure jobs, migration

Feminization of the workforce and dwindling employment security, with fewer and fewer permanent jobs and increasing use of occasional and temporary labourers, are the hallmarks of today’s agriculture. So is

the exploitation of migrant labour, and all the abuse and discrimination that go with it. This is of concern to agricultural unions in North and South alike. Everywhere, they are trying to rein in hordes of increasingly unscrupulous middlemen who, in some countries, behave very much like mafiosi. Poverty wages, atrocious working conditions and downward pressure on the terms of collective agreements negotiated by the unions are all part of the immigrant workers’ fate. They embody the whole decent work deficit in agriculture.

Everybody’s business

The lot of agricultural workers is the concern of the union organizations which drew up a serious campaign plan in Geneva, but of course it also concerns the employers and governments who should facilitate and promote the emergence of true social dialogue based on trade union freedom. In fact, it is everybody’s business. For instance, lower profit margins, right the way down the chain of those who share out the fruits of the labourers’ toil, would mean that peasants and their families could also have enough to eat.

Priority issues for African agriculture

To tackle poverty worldwide, conditions in agriculture must be improved. But in turn, such improvements depend on progress in developing decent work in that particular sector. African data provide strong evidence of the link between decent work and sustainable development.

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Agriculture is the most important economic sector in Africa, employing a majority of the working population. Its contribution to the total value of production, as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), ranges from around 20 per cent (the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and South Africa) to over 90 per cent (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Niger and Rwanda). Hence, economic development and the welfare of the majority of African people are heavily dependent on the performance of the agricultural sector.

The current state of agriculture in Africa gives cause for serious concern. The most disturbing aspect is the steady decline in food production per capita over the past two decades. Generally, the growth in food production of about 1.3 per cent per year for sub-Saharan Africa has not been sufficient to keep pace with population growth of over 2.5 per cent for the region. As a result, it is estimated that food consumption per person has been falling. Estimates from UN agencies indicate that nearly 30 million Africans (out of a total of 650 million) face the threat of famine. The number at risk in the Horn of Africa is about 15 million, while over 14 million

in southern Africa and hundreds of thousands in the Sahel region of West Africa are already affected.

Of the 18 African countries facing food emergencies in 2001, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that eight were experiencing civil strife and three were suffering the after-effects of conflict, such as internally displaced people and returning refugees. The other seven had been affected by drought, cyclones or food deficits that could not be made up by imports because of a lack of funds. In many affected countries, corruption or mismanagement have been part and parcel of the conflict situation, or have developed from bad governance, turning droughts and food shortages into famine. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also taken its toll, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. A 2002 report by the FAO estimates that in the 25 most affected countries in Africa, 7 million agricultural workers have died from AIDS since 1985, while 16 million more deaths are likely in the next two decades.

To make up for food shortages, several governments have resorted to imports on a large scale, while the production of cash crops for export has either stagnated or declined. Africa's share of world trade in many major export commodities has fallen substantially over the last two decades.

Yet there is immense potential for restructuring the distribution, use and regulation of land and natural resources towards effective poverty reduction and

* This article is a summary of the contribution made by the author to the International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture which took place on 15-18 September 2003 in Geneva. The full text is available on the ILO website at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/new/agsymp03/afriodoc.pdf>

development. To realize this potential, agriculture must be seen to be the key sector supporting Africa's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), under which poverty is to be halved by 2015. And "decent work" will be central to achieving that objective.

Decent work, according to the ILO formula, means work based on fundamental rights, access to jobs and to living wages, social protection and ongoing social dialogue. According to this definition, there is of course a clear link between decent work and sustainable (that is to say economically sound, ecologically balanced and socially fair) development. Does agriculture in Africa meet those criteria?

Workers' rights

Let us first look at the situation of workers' rights. By November 2003, of the 99 countries that had signed up to the eight core Conventions of the ILO, 34 were from Africa. Two years before, there had been just 19. The pace of ratification for Conventions of direct relevance to agricultural workers has been much slower, with only 18 African countries having ratified the Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951 (No. 99) (out of a total of 53 ratifications worldwide), while only one African country (Côte d'Ivoire) is among the 12 that have ratified the Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110). However, labour observers are according less importance to a country's ratification of Conventions than to the actual implementation of the rights enshrined in them. Indeed, many governments are barely compliant with the Conventions they have ratified. According to reports compiled by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), abuses of workers' rights have been on the increase in Africa, especially in the agricultural sector.

For instance, the cut flower industry in Kenya has constantly been accused of human rights abuses. Reports allege that women workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in the form of sexual

harassment, no maternity leave, overcrowded housing and low pay.

Horticulture has become one of Kenya's main foreign exchange earners, second only to tea. In 2001, it exported 95,200 tons of produce worth US\$3 billion. The country is now the world's second-largest exporter of cut flowers.

Despite a rather hostile environment, the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union (KPAWU) has continued efforts to organize workers in the horticulture sector.

In South Africa, up to the democratic elections of 1994 which marked the end of apartheid, farm workers were excluded from labour legislation. Efforts to change and improve the often shocking conditions of farm and rural workers led to the adoption, in September 1995, of a new Labour Relations Act. Although this represented a major leap forward for workers, it still contained some serious restrictions on the rights of farm workers, and employers were able to exploit those loopholes in order to escape their obligations, in particular towards sub-contracted or contracted employees. In 2002, amendments to the Labour Relations Act further improved coverage for all rural workers. Child labour has remained a major problem in agriculture, however. Estimates from 2002 showed that 59 per cent of children who were working for pay, profit or family gain were working in the rural sector.

In Zimbabwe, agriculture accounts for 26 per cent of the total paid labour force. Yet the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) introduced in 2000 by President Mugabe is alleged to have affected at least 150,000 farmworkers' families (nearly half of the total workforce on Zimbabwe's commercial farms) with only 10 per cent of them having been offered resettlement. To date, the plight of the 300,000 farm workers and their 1.5 million dependants is not clear. They have been the hardest hit by Zimbabwe's FTLRP (see article by Marni Pigott and Luc Demaret, p. 1). Since 2000, five farm workers and five farm owners have lost their lives as an indirect result of the FTLRP, and job losses have affected the livelihoods of many.

A major employer, but a bad boss

Agriculture is the largest employer in the formal economy of many countries in Africa. The structure of employment and wages in the sector, and changes to that structure, are therefore important factors for incomes and poverty levels across the continent.

Wages in agriculture are always much lower than in other sectors of African economies. In many countries, agricultural pay is less than half of the wages paid in manufacturing, mining or construction. So most African countries are unlikely to emerge from the quagmire of poverty unless conditions in agriculture are drastically improved.

In Kenya, for instance, the agricultural sector provides 251,000 job opportunities for Kenyans, approximately 15 per cent of the total waged employment. But the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), a respected non-governmental organization, has constantly accused farmers of paying their workers a pittance (scarcely US\$25 a month in some cases).

In Zimbabwe, the actual size of the farm-worker population is a subject of controversy. Surveys carried out by NGOs contrast with official estimates provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO). A reliable survey carried out in 1997 put the total number of agricultural workers at 451,456. And in 1999, statistics revealed that of all employed female workers, 70 per cent were in the agricultural sector. Regardless of gender, only a small percentage of farm workers have incomes above the minimum wage of ZW\$1,932 (2001 figure). In fact, farm workers are amongst the lowest-paid in Zimbabwe and their working conditions have increasingly been affected by globalization and structural adjustment programmes. When prices fall on the global market, farmers pass on the effects to farm workers in the form of reduced wages and of job retrenchments.

In South Africa, the agricultural sector (which includes forestry) employed around 880,000 workers in September 2000. Most workers were permanent (60 per cent) with the remainder comprising

fixed period contract, casual, seasonal or temporary workers. Based on the information available, there appears to have been a significant drop in permanent employment and an even more dramatic drop in other types of employment between 1993 and 2000. The recent attempt by Government to introduce a minimum wage within the agricultural sector should be stressed in the light of the meagre incomes (as little as R350) that some farm workers have been receiving. The proposed minimum wage of about R650 for agricultural workers may, however, still be too little in the light of South Africa's high inflation rate.

Social security – only for the few

An overview of social security in Africa indicates that most national schemes cover employees in the formal sector only. Up to 90 per cent of the active population in most developing countries is thus excluded from social security schemes. In sub-Saharan African countries, the poor coverage of social security (approximately 10 per cent of the population), is mainly due to the dominance of rural, informal and self-employment sectors.

In Kenya's horticulture, the Kenya Flower Council (KFC) has worked with the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers' Union, the Kenya Human Rights Commission, the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU) and others to draw up high standards. The agreed standards include wages above the Government minimum; a six-day working week of 46 hours and overtime rates paid for additional hours; 21 days' paid holiday a year; two months' paid maternity leave and paid sick leave after one month's service; employers will provide reasonable housing for employees, or pay rent in addition to wages. Growers have 12 months after joining the KFC to achieve these standards. Any subsequent failure to comply with this code of practice results in the suspension of membership and of the entitlement to use KFC branding. The KFC is at great pains to ensure that its members meet the agreed criteria.

In Zimbabwe, the Government still regards the health and education of farm workers as the responsibility of their employers. The employers in turn keep the social costs of production to the minimum in order to maximize their profits. Employers therefore regard housing, health care and social amenities as financial burdens. Generally, workers receive no protection from the State against the practices of unscrupulous employers, particularly in the event of their retirement. Numerous traditional problems documented by many reports and literature include infant mortality, malnutrition, illiteracy and low educational standards, occupational morbidity, and poor access to sanitation (ventilation, toilets and piped water) and to health facilities. The overall living conditions of farm workers rank among the lowest of all social groups in Zimbabwe. Their situation has been made even more precarious by the land occupations, massive land transfers and the spread of HIV/AIDS during the last decade.

In South Africa farm workers, who had previously been excluded from the definition of employees under the apartheid legislation, are now fully recognized as such and enjoy full protection of the law and collective bargaining rights. However, despite Government efforts to improve living standards and working conditions for farm workers, implementation continues to be a problem. The reality is that farm workers are still not enjoying the full benefit of post-apartheid regulations. Of all the country's formally employed, agricultural workers earn the lowest wages. The prevalence of child labour is a further cause for concern, as is the gap between female and male workers both in pay and in social security provisions such as unemployment benefits, medical services and pension or provident funds.

Social dialogue emerging

For years, social dialogue in Africa was mere window-dressing, as one-party governments pretended to bargain with and consult organizations that were under

their control. The democratization process launched in most African countries since the early 1990s has, fortunately, transformed the scene.

Most African leaders now appear to be committed to genuine dialogue and to putting resources into addressing the social issues affecting the continent. The recent encouraging trend towards involving civil society, including trade unions – albeit on an ad hoc basis – in the search for solutions to the continent's problems is seen as one such positive development. The decrease in the number of countries plagued by political instability, and the increase in those that are beginning to improve governance, may actually be linked to such progress.

Social dialogue also seems to be making its way on to the regional agenda. The creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as an integral part of the African Union, aimed at enhancing economic development and good governance, may provide a further avenue for positive change.

However, it must be stressed that Africa is far from being at peace with herself. Recent events in various parts of Africa are a vivid reminder of this. The predominance of agricultural workers in Africa means that they will always be among those worst hit by the lack of social dialogue.

As a way forward, there is no doubt that South Africa has set up one of the most comprehensive legislative systems globally to protect and promote decent work in general, including agricultural work, and that social dialogue there can be seen as a potentially encouraging model. However, collective bargaining in agriculture still needs to be seriously strengthened in practical terms.

Conclusions

Policy-makers in Africa, whether in government, business or labour, will have to address the challenges of decent work in agriculture through the following perspectives:

- A balance between the economic survival of farms and the protection of the fabric of rural civil society.
- Strategies for on-farm transformation that take into account the complex relationships between farm workers and employers.
- The development of forms of “social contract” that will allow for the development of paths to competitiveness that protect the adequacy, sustainability and dignity of farmworker livelihoods. A workable social contract will have to include organized labour, organized agriculture and the State.

Independent information on farm workers is still scarce. Most available studies have ignored the economic aspects of wage labour on commercial farms and

have concentrated on social conditions, which have been understated in most cases. The impact of land and agrarian reforms, the effects of the devastating spread of HIV/AIDS, links between sustainable agriculture and decent work, labour arrangements in the context of international trade policies, labour arrangements with new farmers (permanent or casual hiring), and the empirical measurement of labour productivity in agriculture are among the areas that need further investigation.

Finally, agriculture must be the focal sector in supporting the MDGs. In turn, the MDGs must attempt to encapsulate decent work in agriculture as part of the set objectives, with key measurable indicators. There is a need to focus on agricultural workers (and rural people in general) as principal target groups, if the MDGs are to be met.

Agriculture is biggest employer of child labour

Far more children work in the countryside than in the cities. But rural child labour attracts less attention, even though it gives rise to accidents and illnesses that are every bit as serious and as frequent as in the urban areas. Some unions are now throwing their whole weight behind the struggle to eliminate child labour from the agricultural sector. The most promising approach is to combat poverty.

Samuel Grumiau
Journalist

Some 250 million children aged between 5 and 14 are at work – half of them full-time. This ILO estimate is gradually gaining currency. But contrary to a commonly held view, child labour is most widespread not in the cities but in the rural areas. Data from countries with relatively reliable labour statistics or studies clearly show a much higher percentage of children working in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Rural children also start to work at a lower age (from 5, 6 or 7 years old) and may put in more days and longer hours than in the towns. In some developing countries, almost a third of the agricultural labour force is made up of children.

While most child labourers work in the fields and in fishing, the struggle against child labour has, for decades now, tended to concentrate mainly on industry. In a booklet published last year,¹ ACTRAV cites four factors that help to explain the neglect of agricultural child labour:

- Those who study child labour problems and develop programmes to deal with them are usually urban-based and are more likely to focus on city conditions, such as the hazards faced by street children, which are visible and close at hand.
- Rural areas are often remote, both physically and culturally, and this inhibits urban-based researchers and programme developers from spending long periods of time there.

- In many countries, it is urban conditions which receive priority attention from governments, often reflecting willful neglect by powerful interest groups.
- Many international and national policy-makers assume that family-based work in “idyllic” rural surroundings cannot possibly be harmful to children.

So some people think that children working on farms or in fishing are less at risk than those in an urban environment. That is completely wrong – child labourers in agriculture suffer many serious illnesses and accidents. For instance, all too often children harvest crops dripping with pesticides or actually apply the chemical products. One example is Sri Lanka, where deaths due to pesticide exposure exceed those caused by childhood illnesses such as malaria and tetanus. Everywhere in the world, children exposed to pesticides suffer ailments of the skin, the eyes and the respiratory and nervous systems. Moreover, frequent lifting of heavy loads may cause permanent damage to the spine or limbs. Vehicle accidents are also commonplace: children knocked down by fork-lift trucks, or children run over by tractors, harvesters, etc. And like adults, children working in the fields are exposed to snakes and poisonous insects, and may also be injured by the tools they are using.

ACTRAV and Cambodian unions combat child labour

There are many rubber and tobacco plantations in the eastern Cambodian province of Kompong Chan. Workers there earn barely enough to eat. So they tell their children to join them on the plantations, to give a slight boost to their earnings. Backed by Danish and Norwegian funding, ACTRAV has set up a committee against child labour. On it are seven Cambodian trade union federations which are conducting major awareness-raising campaigns on child labour. They are beginning to achieve concrete results in the plantations of Kompong Chan. Mainly under pressure from the unions, most of the firms that own rubber plantations have agreed to build or renovate schools near the workers' homes, while the Cambodian Government pays the teachers. As an incentive to workers to let their children attend classes, these firms give the families ten kilos of rice plus US\$1.20 a month per child at school. The results are sometimes spectacular. For instance, at a firm called "Chup", which employs about 5,000 workers, the union says that 80 per cent of the workers' children used to fail to attend school, but around 70 per cent of them now attend.

In the tobacco plantations, where the workers generally own their land, children are often used to fetch water for the crops. This is a long haul, because there are few water outlets in the region. At British American Tobacco, the only factory that buys tobacco leaves in the province of Kompong Chan, the union has persuaded the company to give the planters interest-free loans for the purchase of water pumps. The loans are gradually repaid by the planters through deductions from the proceeds of their tobacco sales to the firm. This scheme, combined with awareness-raising campaigns by the union, has meant that more than 50 per cent of the tobacco plantation workers' children now attend school – a figure undreamed of before the project was launched. The union intends to continue its campaign and further increase the number of children going to school. "We make the British American Tobacco workers aware of this issue and they are then urged to talk about child labour with their friends and family when they go home", explains Om Theary, who heads the campaign against child labour at the Cambodian Industrial Food Union Federation.

These encouraging results would probably not have been achieved, were it not for ACTRAV's support to the Cambodian unions. "The workers know they should be sending their children to school, but poverty prevents them from doing so", explains Noun Rithy, the national coordinator of the ILO project to assist worker training via the Cambodian unions. "When unions are strong, they have the clout to persuade employers to join the fight against child labour. But to reach that point, we first have to educate workers about what trade unions are, and then explain that unions are there not only to defend workers' rights *per se*, but also to prevent abuses such as child labour, and to raise awareness of issues such as AIDS, etc."

The ACTRAV project, which has been running since the year 2000, confines itself to the regions of Cambodia in which trade unions exist. The Cambodian trade union movement is still far from covering all of the country's economy. The majority of Cambodians are still in the informal sector. And that is where child labour is most prevalent. The union presence in the informal sector is still rather limited, but there are grounds for hoping that the awareness-raising campaigns in the formal sector will gradually impact on Cambodian society as a whole. For example, the Cambodian unions get good media coverage for the events that they organize around the World Day Against Child Labour. They are also pressing the Cambodian Government to ratify Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This should lead to more active Government involvement in the struggle, and the unions stand ready to lend their support.

The smaller the better for some employers

Some employers rely mainly on children for the types of work in which their small size is an advantage. One example of this is in Egypt, where children are regularly employed in harvesting jasmine. Each year, between July and October, hirers recruit children from the villages of the Nile delta to pick flowers in the middle of the night, when the essence is at its purest.

The hirers prefer young children because their small hands are better for picking the delicate flowers one by one. The children work barefoot in the mud and have to rely on their sense of touch, because there is no light. They work nine hours at a go, without eating or taking a break, until the morning sun becomes too hot. If they interrupt their work for whatever reason, they may be caned by the hirer. In the fruit plantations of Brazil, the children's weight is what interests the employers. As children

are lighter, they are less likely to break branches when they climb the trees. Of Brazil's 70,000 fruit pickers, an estimated 15 per cent are children aged below 14. They receive US\$3 for a 14-hour working day.

But developing countries certainly do not have a monopoly on child labour. In the US, for instance, whole families of migrant workers take part in planting and harvesting fruit and vegetables. More than 300,000 children work on American commercial farms, often under dangerous, exhausting conditions, with 12-hour days that may start at 3 or 4 a.m. In the United Kingdom, during 1999-2000, no less than 58 children suffered serious injury due to work-related activities. They accompanied family members to the workplace, where they came into contact with dangerous machines, substances or equipment, or else they were injured while riding on tractors or trailers.

What can unions do?

Often, employers do not actually hire the children. The children accompany their parents to the fields, but work no less hard for that. Piece rates or payment by quota mean that the poorest workers take their children along to boost the family's earnings. "Children work because their parents are poor", emphasizes Ron Oswald, General Secretary of the IUF.² "So they have to contribute to the family's earnings or else perform unpaid tasks. This means that child labour in agriculture cannot be tackled in isolation from one of its main causes – rural poverty. Trade union organizations can work towards the abolition of child labour, but their main priority must be to improve working and living conditions for adults, thus ending the need for children to work." So by fighting for their basic aims (jobs, better pay and working conditions, and the elimination of all kinds of employment discrimination), unions can help to end child labour. They are also very well placed to make as many workers as possible aware of its dangers. The Cambodian unions are doing just that, with ACTRAV's support (see inset), as are IUF partner or member unions in Brazil, Ghana and many other countries.

Over the years, the ILO has developed important instruments to help unions combat child labour in agriculture. The Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), while offering some flexibility by for example permitting the exclusion of certain categories or sectors from its application, does stipulate that its provisions apply to plantations and other commercial agricultural enterprises. Member countries can therefore exempt family-run and small-scale agricultural enterprises from laws on the minimum working age, and many have not hesitated to do so. Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, on the other hand, does not permit the exemption of any economic sector, nor any category of worker. All dangerous work by children in agriculture is therefore to be abolished. The Convention does, however, recognize that such elimination will be sustainable only within a broader policy framework which takes account of the needs of children and their families. More recently, the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184), backed up Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 by stating that the minimum age for working in agriculture may not be below 18.

"Children should be in school, not in work", an ILO slogan insists. To help unions in their fight against child labour, a pack of seven booklets has been jointly prepared by trade unionists working in the field. Topics include campaigning, collective bargaining against child labour, using ILO standards, etc. The booklets are available (in English, French and Spanish) from ILO/ACTRAV in Geneva, and can also be downloaded at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/actrav/genact/child>

Notes

¹ *Bitter Harvest – Child Labour in Agriculture*, published by the project Developing National and International Trade Union Strategies to Combat Child Labour, ILO, ACTRAV, Geneva, 2002.

² The IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations) is a Global Union Federation representing workers throughout the food chain. It has 336 affiliated unions in 120 countries.

Latin America's rural workers – alternatives to exclusion

Agricultural workers' unions have often developed more slowly than their counterparts in industry and in the services. They are now having to rethink themselves and to draw up new strategies, new organizational forms and new networks of allies that will enable them to do a proper job of defending workers' rights.

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When Latin America has hit the headlines over the past few years, it has tended to be due to crises affecting some of the star pupils of neoliberalism. Some of these have been countries, like Argentina. Others have been personalities, such as Peru's Fujimori. Generally, because of the way in which this news is presented, we think that corruption is specific to such and such an individual, or that a drop in employment rates is a cyclical problem which will be fixed once there has been a cost adjustment in line with the demands of the market.

However, all the signs are that we are actually facing a more radical process of transformation which will govern the region's integration into the world market for decades to come. This goes beyond the approval or otherwise of international accords such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and of the final terms of any such approval. To a considerable extent, these transformations take us back to the region's role at the time of its first integration into the world economy, from the fifteenth century onwards, following discovery and coloni-

zation by the European powers: producing raw materials (commodities, in today's terms) which contribute to the quality of life of citizens in the metropolitan countries, to the functioning of industries established in other parts of the world and thus to the provision of industrial products to consumers. In addition to these functions, however, the region now also has tourist potential, and it is a valuable reservoir of biodiversity and thus of wealth that can be exploited in future.

This type of integration into the world market implies a series of changes within the countries of the region:

- On the one hand, the presence of multinationals increases and diversifies within the production sectors orientated towards exporting to markets with greater purchasing power.
- In the sectors that continue to be based on local capital inputs, there is a growing dependency on items produced directly by (or under patent from) the stronger economies.
- The inflow of capital – and no longer of manpower, as happened in previous

centuries with the mass European migrations to “the Americas” – aims at the maximization of profit rather than the achievement of personal or family goals.

- It follows from the above that there is a clear interest in modifying labour relations, as a means of reducing labour costs.
- More and more, workers are excluded from the labour market that this creates. They become dependent on forms of production catering to their own consumption, on a wide range of informal employment, or on precarious jobs that push them out to the slum areas of cities, whether in their own countries or in the better-off economies.

Obviously, these changes affect trade unions, both in the countryside and in the cities. Here, we are concerned with the agricultural workers’ unions which, in terms both of numbers and of union density, have often developed more slowly than their counterparts in industry or even in the services. These agricultural unions are now having to rethink themselves and to draw up new strategies, new organizational forms and new networks of allies that will enable them to do a proper job of defending workers’ rights.

Attacks on workers and their organizations

A country-by-country review of all the attacks suffered by Latin American workers and their organizations would probably make tedious reading. Detailed accounts of slave labour practices – the eradication of which has been singled out by the new Brazilian Government as one of its main aims – and of the various forms of child labour would need whole chapters to themselves. However, these are not the only forms of aggression to which agricultural workers are exposed. Recently, an organization has been formed in Central America by those affected by the use in plantations

of the toxic agrochemical DBCP (known locally as *Nemagón*). DBCP has caused testicular cancer, impotence, miscarriages and birth defects, but the companies have shown little inclination to shoulder their responsibilities.

As mentioned, the techniques of “outsourcing” and subcontracting have been spreading throughout the region. The “co-operatives” of hired hands, such as those in Brazil or Argentina, do not recognize most of the social rights that workers have won through their struggles, and even sometimes retain the workers’ papers, thus submitting them to working conditions similar to slavery.

In Peru, workers organized in the National Agrarian Confederation (Confederación Nacional Agraria, CNA) had to fight hard to regain the union’s assets, while at the same time demanding respect for acquired rights and a reversal of the policy of derecognizing peasants’ organizations, which had been trapped for years on the fringes of the conflict between the Government and the guerrilla organizations. Persecuted at a time when one side and the other were trying to co-opt them, the peasant organizations gained few of the benefits secured by other sections of the population during the economic boom years and were among the hardest hit at times of crisis. In a country where a good part of the agricultural population – 28 per cent of the total – are smallholders engaged in subsistence farming (representing only 5 per cent of GDP) and living below the poverty line, the basic demands concern land tenure, access to credit and recognition of the right to take part in the formulation of public policy.¹

Banana plantation bosses in Ecuador (especially in firms belonging to erstwhile presidential candidate Álvaro Noboa) have developed a systematic policy of anti-unionism and anti-worker repression and have not hesitated to use violence by their private guards as a way of preventing workers from organizing and demanding decent conditions of employment. In the middle of the election campaign that ultimately saw Noboa defeated, groups of armed people entered his banana planta-

tion Los Álamos, shooting and driving out workers who had been demanding a pay rise, a sickbay and better living conditions on the estate. At that time, workers were averaging US\$35 a week. If they put in overtime, they got \$4 extra, irrespective of the number of hours worked and of shift patterns. Asked about these developments, the entrepreneurial candidate for the presidency simply declared: "I love the workers of Los Álamos".² He loved them so much that he protected the police specials who shot them and the foremen who pulled rank to force women workers into sex.

In Brazil during 2002, the export-oriented citrus firms achieved a major increase in profitability due to the devaluation of the currency. But to gain just a small wage increase, workers grouped in the State of São Paulo Rural Waged Employees' Federation (Federação dos Empregados Rurais Assalariados do Estado de São Paulo, FERAESP) had to stage a strike.

Moreover, demands that do actually get written into collective agreements are then often ignored in practice. There are also frequent cases of workers being sprayed with toxic agrochemicals, even while they are eating.³

In Central America, as well as engaging in repressive practices, the companies have encouraged the presence of "solidarista" organizations. These gloss over the contradictions existing within the world of work and promote an idyllic concertation which, in every case, turns out to mean the postponement of benefits due to the workers.

To these examples of anti-worker aggression may be added the slow and patchy dismantlement of the repressive legislation brought in by the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, or, in the absence of such laws, the maintenance of a legal system that makes it easy for violators of workers' basic rights to go unpunished.⁴ Even where the repressive legislation has been repealed, there survives a political culture which distrusts rural workers' organizations and their demands. For instance, in 1985 in Uruguay, the first Minister of Labour under the recently restored

democracy pledged to move forward on recognizing rural workers' rights and launching collective negotiations. That same promise has been made by all of his successors to date, without any sign of substantial change in these fields. More recently, also in Uruguay, the business representatives on a tripartite programme (State, workers and entrepreneurs) rejected a proposal that skills development courses should include modules informing workers of their rights.

Over and above the situations already mentioned, the living conditions of agricultural workers are affected by the lack of consistent policies for national development, and more particularly rural development. The uncritical application of technological packages deriving from the green revolution has not rolled poverty back. Rather, employment has become more precarious, ownership has been concentrated and the poorest of the rural poor have suffered social exclusion.

Building alternatives – new organizing themes and forms

Despite all these difficulties, and so many others with which we will not burden the reader, trade unions do not limit themselves to resistance action, and in certain countries alternatives are being implemented through which the unions take on an active role in the construction of new realities rooted in an ethic of justice. Here, we will single out just a few examples which, in our view, point to the unions' likely courses of action in future years.

First, a very interesting development, in our view, is the successful struggle conducted by UATRE (Unión Argentina de Trabajadores Rurales y Estibadores – Argentinian Union of Rural Workers and Stevedores) for the adoption and implementation of the Rural Workers' Passbook. Since this law came into effect, the employers have a specific place where they can go to regularize their workers' employment situation by registering it with the State and paying the appropriate contri-

butions. Thus, three interests have been successfully reconciled: that of the State in putting the tax system in order, thus ensuring a broader base of taxpayers and opening up the prospect of a possible reduction in overall fiscal pressure; that of the employers who, due to trade union pressure, had already regularized the situation of their workers and who would therefore otherwise face unfair competition from those employers who neglect to pay their social contributions; and those of the trade union, which is keen to guarantee social security to all workers. This ability to articulate the interests of different sections of society, without forgetting the roots of this diversity, is not a new phenomenon within trade unions at the world or regional level. However, it is important to emphasize that, in a context of deep crisis such as that affecting Argentina today, it is once again the workers' organizations that have taken on the task of drawing up proposals aimed at advancing the interests of the majority of the population.

Another construction process that we consider worth highlighting is being undertaken in Brazil by the *Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias da Alimentação, Agroindústrias e Cooperativas de Beneficiamento de Cereais e Indústrias no Meio Rural* (CONTAC – National Confederation of Workers in the Food and Agriculture Industries, Cereal Processing Cooperatives and Rural Industries). Over the past few years, this union has embarked on an organizing drive covering the whole food chain – “from the ground to the plate” – on the basis that workers' interests are the same at every stage of the production process, whether in the plantations, in industry or in services. This process has not only led to a combining of forces and improved bargaining strength on the part of the unions; it has also played a vital role in promoting discussion of civic issues which, at first sight, go beyond “normal” trade union concerns.

In Brazil, CONTAC has been to the fore in calling public attention to the seriousness of introducing transgenic crops into agricultural production. It is also playing a very

dynamic role in solidarity-based economic experiments, and – both by forestalling inappropriate solutions and by proposing alternatives – it has made very important contributions to *Fome Zero* (Zero Hunger), a flagship programme of the Workers' Party which is now in government in Brazil.

At this historic time, when ethical standards are undergoing profound change, the value and the importance of trade unions are being reaffirmed by the more dynamic role that they are taking on in the discussion of social issues – transcending the dichotomy between political rights and consumer rights – and by their becoming a reference point for tackling issues that affect the population as a whole.

A process similar to that at CONTAC is under way within UNAC (*Unión Nacional Agroalimentaria de la Hostelería y el Turismo de Colombia* – National Agriculture, Food, Hotel and Tourism Workers' Union of Colombia). Although UNAC has to conduct its activities within a climate of extreme violence and its affiliated organizations frequently have to contend with aggression or lack of understanding from one side or the other, it has managed in recent years to unify peasants' and industrial workers' organizations, to promote organizing in sectors where it did not exist (for instance, among small-scale fishermen), to take on responsibility for the management of alternative production where businesses have abandoned workers to their fate (such as the banana cooperative set up on the San Pedro estate when the company deserted it without paying the workers what it owed them)⁵ and to galvanize other kinds of organization with which it shares a concern to apply alternative development processes within which social justice and the conservation of natural resources are non-negotiable.

On the other hand, Brazil's CONTAG (*Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura* – National Confederation of Agricultural Workers) has historically been characterized by a concern to group and represent the interests of the sector as a whole, on the grounds that the rural unwaged are agricultural work-

ers, too. The fact that they own a small plot of land (basically used to ensure the survival of their own family, and cultivated by family labour) does not put them at odds with the wage-earners. On the contrary, their interests concerning food self-sufficiency, land tenure, the environmental conditions of production and regulation of the labour market are substantially the same as those of the waged workers who, in most cases, are also grouped within CONTAG. The wealth of experience and theoretical expertise that CONTAG has accumulated on agrarian reform – the central issue in agriculture throughout the continent – is an essential reference point for those working on solutions for any of its countries.

In building the conditions for decent work, attempts are also being made to advance by means of bilateral international agreements, such as that between the IUF/COLSIBA and Chiquita.⁶ These are relatively new instruments, which are still far from reaching their full potential. The main problem is that on top of, or parallel to, such agreements, a culture of social dialogue needs to be built up, and these agreements can now make a big contribution in this respect.

Another issue is that the links between trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and peasants' organizations have not always been easy, and many prejudices and misunderstandings still persist. Presumably, we all contributed to these dissonances. At the time when the trade unions were expanding, we were not always able to understand the types of relation that were forming within production in these sectors; in some countries, this meant that the organizations of peasants and/or of small producers took the organizations of the big agricultural and cattle-raising entrepreneurs as their point of reference. The theories that emerged in the 1980s about the new and old social movements further obscured the debate. The trade unions were accused of every possible evil – some of them undoubtedly real – while the NGOs, which were concentrating on new issues and problems, were assigned a whole pile of virtues, some of which were also no

doubt real. More recently, the importance of the “third sector”⁷ has been stressed. To a large extent, this is an updated version of the earlier dichotomy between new and old social movements. Over and above the intentions of its promoters, the “third sector” discussion does tend to mask the contradictions generated between the various actors in the production process.

The era that has now begun, with all its transformations and contradictory realities, demands a special construction effort from all of us who are involved in organizing the unprivileged sections of our societies. We need to build new organizational structures that facilitate the defence of our interests. As a basic condition for this, we must make an effort to overcome prejudices and misunderstandings, by recuperating the elements that are common to the various platforms and by respecting the different histories that gave rise to each of them and built each identity.

We need, basically, to put more strength into our role as ethical references for our societies, which will otherwise still be bowed down by their baggage of injustice and death. The drive to achieve decent work, to which the ILO is so strongly committed, must necessarily include the rejection of:

- labour conditions maintained through non-recognition of trade unions;
- contempt for workers' living and working conditions;
- wages that are clearly discriminatory and unjust;
- the submission of farming families and small producers to the dictates of a handful of transnationals which supply stock or process and distribute food;
- the denial of consumers' right to healthy food at a price affordable to the population as a whole.

But it also finds concrete expression in the ability to build stronger alliances that make it possible to develop new models of citizenship, anchored in workers' right to define central aspects of the production process, particularly those regarding

their responsibility to the consumers for the quality of what they consume, and to the population as a whole for the environmental impacts of production. We must get back to an ethical pattern rooted in everybody's right, as children of *Pachamama*, Mother Earth or Gaia – whichever name is preferred – to live on this planet, and we must bequeath that right to our children. Today, this is a fundamental challenge to which we must devote our best efforts.

Notes

¹ More information on the national work stoppage in Peruvian agriculture is online in Spanish at http://www.rel-uita.org/sindicatos/paro_nacional_agrario.html

² More information is online in Spanish at http://www.rel-uita.org/sindicatos/noboa/el_amor.html

³ More information is online in Spanish in *4500 cosechadores de naranja en huelga* at http://www.rel-uita.org/sindicatos/acordo_coletivo.html

⁴ Consider for example the very few cases in which the murder of rural trade union leaders, an all too frequent occurrence in the region, has led to prison sentences.

⁵ *La cooperativa: una alternativa al chantaje de las transnacionales y el desempleo* in http://www.rel-uita.org/sindicatos/la_cooperativa.html

⁶ IUF: International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations; COLSIBA: Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Sindicatos Bananeros, the coordinating body for Latin American banana workers' unions; Chiquita: Chiquita Brands International Inc.

⁷ "Within this context (of advances in neoliberal adjustments and the dismantling of the welfare state), there emerges the Theory of the Third Sector. This theory, originally developed by economists in the United States, takes as axiomatic the hegemony of the laws of the market, the State's incapacity to act as the regulator of the Social Pact and the need for effective social action, capable of tackling the growing social problems in those sections of society most penalized by this new model of the accelerated concentration of capital and return." Silvio Caccia Bava, *O Terceiro Setor e os desafios do Estado de São Paulo para o Século XXI* in ONG's: identidade e desafios atuais, Cadernos ABONG N° 27, San Pablo, 2000, p. 40.

Migrants in European agriculture – the new mercenaries?

The seasonal agricultural labourers working in the 15-member European Union come not only from North Africa but also from Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, the countries now joining the enlarged EU. The social partners at the European level have reached several agreements aimed at integrating these migrants and improving their working conditions.

Anne Renaut
Journalist

“It is the reverse of the situation in the nineteenth century.” The waged farm-worker, seen as relatively privileged at the beginning of the industrial era, now seems to be in one of Europe’s worst-off trades. It is marked by “precarious and wretched pay conditions”, and unions “have little hold”. So says a study commissioned by the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT).¹

Agricultural wage-earners often do seasonal, manual, unskilled work, such as fruit and vegetable picking, harvesting, etc.

Each year, agriculture in the European Union (EU) takes on almost 4.5 million seasonal workers, of whom nearly 500,000 come from countries outside the (15-member) EU, estimates the European agricultural employers’ group GEOPA-COPA² (see tables). However, the group also points to the lack of precise, harmonized statistics on this subject. In most EU countries, except the Nordic ones, the number of seasonal agricultural workers exceeds the number of full-timers.

On the EU’s eastern frontiers, in Germany and Austria, these migrant workers come from Central and Eastern Europe (mainly Poland, and to a lesser extent Hungary and Romania), while further south, in Spain or Italy, they are chiefly from North Africa, but also from Central Europe. In Greece, the migrants come from the neigh-

bouring countries (Albania, Romania and Bulgaria). But in France, the migrants account for only 1 per cent of seasonal agricultural workers.

To these “seasonal migrants” must be added the permanently resident foreigners who perform seasonal work during periods of unemployment or holidays, foreign students and, finally, foreigners who have entered illegally and who do not exit again after the work is over. Not to mention the very poorly documented internal migration movements within these countries.

No written contract

“Wage conditions close to the legal minimum, dubious health and safety conditions, hours calculated only approximately and to the disadvantage of the employees” – working conditions for migrants in agriculture are particularly bad, the EFFAT study emphasizes.

Day or piece rates, as well as verbal employment contracts, are still used in some countries, notably the United Kingdom and Spain, according to GEOPA.

Seasonal workers’ employment contracts, often “fixed-term”, may be either between specified dates or simply for the duration of the work. In Spain, 64 per cent of agricultural workers are on fixed-term contracts or other precarious agreements,

Table 1. Non-EU seasonal agricultural workers – Year 2000

Country	Europeans	Non-Europeans	Total
Germany	250 000	–	250 000
Greece	108 000	12 000	120 000
Spain	1 000	28 000	29 000
Austria	28 421	–	28 421
Italy	23 810	1 058	24 868
France	2 700	4 400	7 100
Netherlands	1 000	4 000	5 000
Sweden	2 702	133	2 835
Finland	2 502	–	2 502
Denmark	50	–	50
Belgium	–	–	–
Portugal	?	?	?
Approx. total*	420 000	50 000	470 000

* To this must be added some 15 000 foreign students employed as seasonal workers each year in the UK.

Source: *Les travailleurs saisonniers dans l'agriculture européenne*, Groupe employeurs des organisations professionnelles agricoles de la Communauté européenne (GEOPA-COPA), June 2002.

Table 2. Waged employment in agriculture – Year 2000

Country	Number of employers	Number of permanent workers	Number of seasonal workers
Greece	292 626	10 607	1 352 073
France	141 256	217 939	979 885
Italy	246 758	92 654	817 035
Spain	100 000	130 000	679 000
Germany	50 000	198 000	297 500
Portugal	23 388	61 163	181 443
Netherlands	20 000	88 000	100 000
UK	78 000	112 300	51 308
Finland	15 000	4 900	41 500
Belgium	4 471	9 086	35 591
Austria	10 597	18 132	28 421
Sweden	28 000	28 000	20 000
Denmark	38 000	28 000	2 500
Approx. total	1 050 000	1 000 000	4 580 000

NB This table concerns workers in agricultural enterprises only – i.e. not in landscaping and forestry.

Source: *Les travailleurs saisonniers dans l'agriculture européenne*, Groupe employeurs des organisations professionnelles agricoles de la Communauté européenne (GEOPA-COPA), June 2002.

estimates the union federation Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.). In Belgium and the UK, employment contracts can be by the day. In the UK, the contract is verbal. In Spain, it may or may not be in writing. In Belgium, there are specific regulations concerning “casual seasonal workers”, who may be employed for 45 days a year (95 days in fruit and vegetable production). The em-

ployment contract is for one day only. If it rains the next day, the worker is not taken back on for that day. In Austria, where the seasonal workers are all foreigners, the residence permit serves both as the work permit and as the employment contract.

As regards working hours, these are supposed to be the same for seasonal workers as for permanent employees.

However, the legal working week ranges from 35 hours in France to 40 in Greece, Austria, Germany, Finland and Sweden. In between come Denmark with 37 hours, the Netherlands and Belgium with 38 and the UK with 39. The collectively bargained week in Italy and Spain is 39 hours, as also under several agreements in Portugal, although the legal working week in these countries is 40 hours.

The rules on overtime pay vary greatly from one country to another. In principle, it is higher than the basic rate. But, depending on the country, overtime rates range from 25 per cent to 100 per cent more than basic. In Belgium, overtime is paid at higher rates only from the 50th hour onwards. In Finland and France, the percentage paid over and above basic is further increased from the eighth hour of overtime worked. And several countries calculate overtime on a daily basis (e.g. Portugal and Denmark).

Piece rates

Generally, paid leave cannot be taken by seasonal workers before the end of their employment contract. They therefore receive a compensatory payment which, according to the directive (European law) of 23 November 1993 on working times, should be at least equal to 8.33 per cent of wages in countries where annual leave is set at a minimum of 4 weeks. However, seasonal workers in Belgium do not receive an indemnity for paid leave and in Finland, workers must demonstrate that they have worked for at least 3 months before they are entitled to paid leave. In the Netherlands, seasonal workers aged below 23 do not receive the indemnity. Other indemnities are paid to seasonal workers in Austria, Italy and Denmark.

Turning to pay, piece rates are still used in some places, although the most widespread system is hourly rates, which must be at least equal to the minimum legal or contractual rate. In Spain, wages are calculated by the day. In Portugal, by the month. In the UK, the majority of seasonal workers are on piece rates. In Germany and Fin-

land, piece rates must be so calculated as to be at least 20 per cent higher than what would have been paid for the same volume of work under minimum hourly rates.

The employer sometimes provides benefits in kind, such as board and lodging, but these are often deducted from the cash wage.

Hourly rates for seasonal workers vary greatly, according to the type of work. According to GEOPA, the hourly wage of an unskilled seasonal worker employed in fruit or vegetable picking, in the second half of 2001, ranged from €2.30 in Portugal to €12.67 in Denmark, other rates being €3.50 (Greece), €4.60 (Spain), €5.40 (Germany), €6.65 (UK), €6.67 (France) and €7.21 (Austria).

Informal recruitment

Apart from their precarious working conditions, migrants in agriculture are sometimes the victims of highly informal recruitment practices, whether directly by the employer or via an intermediary person or organization. The forms that this takes may be more or less illegal, even criminal, notably in the UK and southern Italy.

However, clandestine immigration and undeclared work are not the predominant feature of the agricultural labour market. Its main characteristic is "downward pressure exerted by the economic circuit on agricultural labour costs", EFFAT emphasizes. This pressure is particularly great on foreigners who have entered legally on a tourist visa, and whose wages are notoriously lower than those both of the host country's nationals and of foreigners who have a work permit.

Agricultural employers throughout the EU complain of labour shortages, which GEOPA puts down to "a lack of motivation for outdoor work within the national labour force, low physical fitness within increasingly urbanized populations, and the narrow difference between the low wages and unemployment benefits and other types of social assistance, which constitutes an obstacle to a return to work".³

In EFFAT's view, this labour shortage is due mainly to the exodus from the countryside, which has "reduced the number of hands available locally" and has made it necessary to import labour. But this shortage does not lead to the development of temping agencies, because the sector's profit margins make such middlemen prohibitively expensive. This is the reason for the emergence of "labour trafficking schemes, whose operators take their commission not from the enterprise, as in the case of temps, but from the already weak incomes of the wage-earners themselves", criticizes EFFAT, which calls this seasonal work "mercenary" (i.e. in hock to the middlemen, and based on tough, thankless work for a poverty wage).

In general, the middleman is a permanent employee or a self-employed worker who offers gangs of labourers. The most extreme cases involve mafia-style organizations which practice virtual slavery.

In the UK, about 70 per cent of the seasonal workers are supplied by "gangmasters" who bill the farmers for their services and pay the agricultural workers directly. Their profits come for the most part from pay deductions for transport, food and the administrative costs which, according to them, they have to "bear". With growing competition and pressure from the supermarkets, the system has shifted "from a form of local artisanry to a more extensive organization", linked to fraudulent networks for migration from Central and Eastern Europe. This leads to exploitation of the workforce, particularly the foreigners.⁴

In southern Italy, the *caporale* is in charge of recruiting workers locally and transporting them to the workplace, a system known as *caporalismo*. He is the one who bills the farmers and who therefore sets wage rates, blithely ignoring any collective agreements. Thus, in Bari (Puglia), wages are 30 to 50 per cent lower than the legal minimum. Moreover, there are deductions from pay for transport costs, and physical and moral pressure is sometimes exercised.

In view of the pressures brought to bear by the big retailers, the EFFAT study suggests that those who place orders for produce should be made responsible for their subcontractors. This should be achieved by launching cooperation between trade unions and consumers' associations, or by organizing workers in the whole sector (from food and agriculture to big retailing) within the same union.⁵ EFFAT also wants to encourage "decent" forms of labour recruitment, such as the groupings of employers in France.

Campaign

En 2003, EFFAT launched a campaign in favour of the social and trade union "integration" of these seasonal workers, particularly the new migrants from the countries that are candidates for membership of the EU. "This is the only appropriate response by trade unions to any attempts by the employers to exploit migrant workers and abuse social dumping", EFFAT stresses.

The new migrants "return to their countries of origin at the end of the season", explains Arnd Spahn, EFFAT's Secretary for the agricultural sector. "This is creating fresh problems because these people used to settle down in the host country with their families. Today, the employers do not give them the means to integrate. So they cannot pay taxes or send their children to school. The problem is also that these workers come over to earn as much as possible within a limited timespan, say 3, 4 or 6 months. So they don't worry about long hours. They work seven days a week, 16 to 18 hours a day." Hence their higher accident rates – and these workers are not covered by any social security scheme.

As part of its campaign EFFAT intends, during 2003, to survey "best practice" on the integration of migrants in European agriculture and, in 2004, to take European officials round to meet seasonal workers.

Some migrants are undocumented, and EFFAT is also calling for "extra efforts" to eliminate illegal work, because "hidden

behind these illegal workers are employers who are acting illegally and abusing workers' plight solely for the employers' own economic interests".

Framework agreement

The European social partners GEOPA-COPA (employers) and EFFAT (workers) are also planning during 2003 to review progress on their July 1997 framework agreement, which proposes a maximum working time of 1,827 hours a year, or 39 hours per week, and 4 weeks' annual paid leave. This working time can be organized in a very flexible way, thus permitting an increase in the number of paid days off.

Under the agreement, overtime should be compensated by additional pay and/or by time off in lieu, although the signatories commit themselves to use overtime as little as possible "in order to promote employment". The agreement also specifies minimum rest periods.

Skills passport

On training, EFFAT and GEOPA signed on 5 December 2002 another agreement on the creation of a European "skills passport".⁶ Thus, agricultural workers will be able to apply to "national reference centres" for a "booklet of vocational qualifications and skills" showing their diplomas, certificates and job skills. These booklets must be translated into at least two EU languages. "In future, cross-border workers will find it easier to compare their qualifications with those under the systems in the countries where they wish to work", emphasizes Peter K. Holm, the President of EFFAT's agricultural sector. The employers, for their part, see this as a means of "eliminating obstacles to an EU labour market" and "reducing unemployment".

EFFAT also intends to press member states to improve living accommodation for seasonal workers. In Germany's wine sector, "people often sleep in a car in the

middle of the vineyards", reports the German agricultural workers' union IG BAU, which criticizes Europe's "very limited" regulation of this matter.

Safety

As regards health and safety, agriculture is Europe's second most dangerous sector after construction – without counting the work accidents that are not declared or recorded as such. In Poland, a trade union reports that 50 per cent of work accidents happen in agriculture, and that many children are involved.

So the wage-earning workers' unions insist on the need to train seasonal workers in this respect, particularly as regards language, and to step up inspections of smaller farms. EFFAT has also been calling, for many years now, for a separate directive on health and safety in agriculture, which would derive from the framework health and safety directive of 1989.

EFFAT and GEOPA organized a joint seminar on these issues in November 2003. Up to now, GEOPA had been refusing to discuss these matters until ILO Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture was up and running.⁷ This Convention was adopted in June 2001 and came into force in September 2003. Slovakia was the first country to ratify it, in June 2002, followed by the Republic of Moldova and Finland.

In the context of the reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), EFFAT supports the European Commission's proposal to make assistance to farmers conditional upon workplace safety, including the safety of those employed on a temporary basis. EFFAT also proposed that the absence of illegal labour should also be made a condition for aid, as a kind of sanction against undeclared work.

The employers' and workers' representatives have drawn up safety guides⁸ for the use of machinery in forestry and for pesticide use. EFFAT would like to publish further guides, on agricultural machinery and on gardening.

Beyond reach

For the unions, the remaining problem is how to get in touch with these migrants. “The unions have only a marginal impact on the most exploited segments of agricultural wage-earners.”⁹ Moreover, “casual workers are to a large extent beyond the unions’ reach, particularly when they are in *work teams* where relationships are sometimes feudal, or even mafia-style (East Anglia, southern Italy, Spain and, to a lesser extent, the south of France)”.

So EFFAT is counting on its 2003-2004 campaign to reach, or even to unionize, seasonal workers. It also backs the idea of seasonal or mobile union contact points, such as exist in Cyprus and Poland.

Notes

¹ EFFAT: *Le travail au noir dans l’agriculture* (Brussels, 1997) – a study conducted, with the support of the European Commission, in six countries: Germany, UK, Netherlands, Spain, France and Italy. Also published in English as *Undeclared Work in Agriculture*. Quotations here are translated from the French edition.

² GEOPA- COPA: *Les travailleurs saisonniers dans l’agriculture européenne* (Brussels, June 2002).

³ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴ EFFAT, *op. cit.*

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁶ European Agreement on Vocational Training in Agriculture, signed between GEOPA-COPA and EFFAT, Brussels, 5 December 2002.

⁷ The text of this Convention is available on the ILO website at <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm>

⁸ EFFAT and GEOPA-COPA texts published by the European Commission: *Safety Manual for Forestry Work* (Brussels, 1998) and *Instructions for Spray Operators* (Brussels, 1997).

⁹ EFFAT, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Feminization of India's agricultural workforce

As men migrate in search of better-paid work, women in rural India are taking over agricultural work in the villages. They face meagre wages, long hours, hazardous work and sexual harassment. This feminization of agriculture is leading trade unions to change their agenda.

Anuradha Talwar Swapan Ganguly

Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity
West Bengal Agricultural Workers' Union
India

Every February over the last decade, villages in India's Sunderbans area have suddenly emptied. Sunderbans is "mono-cropped". In other words, it now produces just one type of crop, harvested at one time of year. So busloads of men leave for the agriculturally rich Hooghly and Burdwan districts, seeking work on the roads and fields there, in the rice mills and in huge potato cold storages. Suddenly, our union activists find that a huge part of their membership has disappeared. Women now become the central focus in agricultural work.

Is this occurrence peculiar to this region alone? A recently concluded study by our union on the impact of globalization on agricultural workers¹ shows that agricultural unions all over India have identified displacement of labour from agricultural work and increasing outward migration as the most important change on the agricultural scene in the past 10-15 years. They also noted an increase in the number of female agricultural workers in their areas. Unions that had observed such a trend were in areas as widely distributed as the agriculturally developed Haryana and the backward state of Bihar.

Figures from the census also show that, amongst rural women, the percentage of "marginal workers" (defined as working for less than 183 days per year) has in-

creased significantly from 8.1 per cent in 1991 to 14.2 per cent in 2002. During the same period, there was a sharp fall in the percentage of "main workers" (more than 183 days a year), especially male workers, coming from rural areas. The figures thus show a casualization and feminization of the workforce in rural areas, with the number of marginal women workers becoming larger and more significant, while male main workers in rural areas have declined.

These changes also coincide with the period of the 1990s, when India really began to be part of a globalized economy. Should one conclude, therefore, that this feminization of the workforce is a result of the reforms that were initiated in the 1990s? Most unions see the present global restructuring of the economy as an intensification of the commercialization of agriculture, which has its roots in the 1960s. However, while commercialization of agriculture has continued from the 1960s onwards, the huge displacement of men, with women taking their place, is becoming increasingly noticeable now.

The forces leading to feminization

Some of the changes that have ensured the huge displacement of labour from agriculture are given below:

- A shift from subsistence farming to marketable crops – irrespective of regions, changes in crop patterns showed a common trend: all the shifts resulted in a decrease in the labour required.
- Greater use of labour-displacing machinery.
- A change in land use patterns – from agriculture to urban, industrial areas, or brick kilns; and in coastal areas, to export-oriented aquaculture. All the new activities displace labour from agriculture, but create fewer jobs than they destroy.
- The tendency for small and middle farmers to use family labour rather than hired labour.

The estimates given by unions for changes in the last 5-7 years show declines in employment ranging from 20 per cent to as much as 77 per cent.

Employment in agriculture is thus available for fewer days per year. Wage rates have also not increased. It is therefore becoming essential for men to migrate in search of better-paid work, if their families are to survive. Their absence is creating a vacuum, for although employment has shrunk, some labour is still needed. Women are filling this vacuum. Women are forced to accept work in agriculture in their own villages under very bad conditions because they cannot migrate as easily as men.

Along with increases in women's employment as paid wage labour, the feminization of the workforce in agriculture is visible in other ways too. In West Bengal, for instance, we have found that social taboos on women working in fields are breaking down. The use of women's labour on family farms, especially during the peak periods of sowing and harvesting, has become very common. About 15 years ago, agricultural work was considered acceptable for poor tribal women alone. Today, even poor Muslim women, who were traditionally bound by rules of purdah, go out to work for wages in the fields in certain areas.

Farmers, on the other hand, also seem to prefer women as agricultural workers. The farmer is faced with the increasing costs of production required for modern agriculture. He finds that he can squeeze his labour costs by using lower-paid women workers. Union activists informed us that women are preferred to men in North 24 Parganas (West Bengal) by the owners because they are docile, require lower wages and are less lazy than men. Similarly, the use of women within family-based agriculture is preferred because it is cheaper than hiring labour.

Agricultural work has also become an inferior occupation. In Haryana, the study shows that even when men are present in the villages, they refuse to do agricultural work and women take on these tasks. This indicates that agricultural work has become a degraded job that is now available for low-status women workers. Women themselves also seem to feel that work in agriculture is a low-status occupation. In Tamil Nadu, we were told that women preferred to work in tobacco factories rather than agriculture, as they considered it more dignified.

Other changes that have taken place in agriculture also mean that women have to rely increasingly on wage labour for subsistence. Fuel, some food, and grazing grounds used to be available from common property resources in the village. In South Bengal, for example, women used to gather wild vegetables, or catch fish that were commonly available in nearby canals or ponds, all of which were common property. Fuel wood or paddy stalks were also easily available. Now, all these canals and ponds are a very important resource for powerful village groups to control and use to water their second crop or for commercial pisciculture. Similarly, grazing spaces have shrunk, so animal husbandry is no longer such an easy source of earnings for women. Fuel also has to be purchased. The net result is that families are increasingly dependent on purchased food. This affects nutrition levels, as well as making women's wage labour essential. In addition, remittances from men who have

migrated are sometimes irregular, forcing women to enter the labour market in order to survive.

The impact on women's lives

Women agricultural workers, although they represent a big proportion of all women workers, continue to receive lower wages than men. The Ministry of Labour puts the difference at 60 per cent of men's wages, while the *Indian Labour Journal* showed that women received 75 per cent of men's earnings.

This centuries-old system of wage differentials continues even though there are more and more women in the agricultural workforce. Age-old prejudices seem to persist in this matter, even amongst men who are in unions. In Tamil Nadu, we were told that male union members feel that if women get equal wages, they will no longer respect men.

The wage differentials that we came across are given in Table 1.

In certain parts of South Bengal, women work on piece rates for specific jobs like chilli picking. They manage to earn about 7-10 rupees a day, after gruelling labour (approx. 20 US cents or euros). In other cases, women continue to be paid in kind, though for male labour this practice was discontinued many years ago. Thus, women are asked to parboil paddy or to make puffed rice for a family and are paid with a kilogramme or two of broken rice or sometimes even with just two meals a day. The widespread nature of this practice can be seen from the fact that in the Pathar Pratima block (South 24 Parganas,

West Bengal), there is actually a term for women who work in return for two meals a day – "*pet bhata*", which would roughly translate as "a stomachful".

While earnings from agricultural work have not improved for women, modernization of agriculture has in some cases brought new kinds of problems and demands. Our union has recently been approached by a group of women who were employed to clean shrimps and prawns (especially to remove the heads of the shrimps and prawns). Amongst the problems for which they want help – besides being cheated on wages – are long hours of work during the night, continuous abusive language and sexual harassment by the sub-contractor and supervisors, and the lack of toilet and waiting shed facilities in the factory premises. The principal employer, on the other hand, is a distant multinational company whom they have never seen. They are puzzled about how to report their problems to him. In contrast, working at odd hours during the night is totally alien to traditional agricultural work in West Bengal. There, the reports of sexual harassment have been fewer and it has been possible for communities to deal with the employer, who is easily accessible. Similarly, toilets and a waiting shed are demands that would be alien to a woman who works in the fields. They show a changed conception of what the work environment should be like.

The existence of patriarchy at all levels also intertwines with the work-related problems of women. A study on the feminization of agricultural labour in Andhra Pradesh² shows that despite the increasing involvement of women in paid work, women's relative power within the family

Table 1. Male/female wage rates in Indian agriculture (Indian rupees)

Trade union and State	Wage rate for adult men	Wage rate for adult women
BKMU, Haryana	Rs.50-60	Rs.25-30
GMM*, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh	Rs.60	Rs.35-40
PBKMS, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal	Rs.40 (6 hours of work)	Rs.25 (6 hours of work)
AVVU, Andhra Pradesh	Rs.40-50	Rs.25-30

*GMM – Gharkshetra Majdoor Morcha or the Gharkshetra Labourers' Front.

had declined. In addition, despite a near doubling of real wages since 1970, food consumption levels and the general standard of living were lower than expected, with heavy dependence on exploitative loans from merchants and employers. Also, even the benefits of government anti-poverty programmes in Andhra Pradesh have flowed to male agricultural labourers, and they have left agricultural work for petty commodity production and non-agricultural employment. "That female labour was cheaper, more easily disciplined, more economically dependent and ultimately less free than male labour was partly enforced by men themselves", the study found. The men did this by delegating debt repayment and household provisioning to women and by themselves withdrawing from low-paid agricultural work. Women were then forced to work at whatever wages were available and to go in for loans and tied labour arrangements.

The effects of increased commercialization of agriculture are impacting on women labourers in certain more indirect ways. While consumer goods, advertisements, video parlours, television, etc. have invaded villages, increasing seasonal migration has also exposed rural workers to more affluent areas and to cities. One of the noticeable impacts of this is an increased desire for consumer goods. Spiralling demands for dowry are seen as one of the easiest and fastest ways to meet this desire. Dowry is thus spreading to communities where it did not exist before. In tribal families, where a bride price was the practice, the girl's family now has to buy the groom all the goods that make a fat dowry. The bride price is only a token. Mortgaging and selling of land to meet the dowry demands of the bridegroom's family has become an important mechanism by which poor and marginalized farmers lose their land. A study on land rights for women in West Bengal³ recently found that 33.9 per cent of the households surveyed have had to part with land or raise loans at high interest rates in order to pay dowry. In fact, 79 per cent of the families who sold land to pay for dowry were Muslims – a community where tradition and re-

ligion forbid dowry. In addition, the people who were selling or mortgaging their lands for dowry were agricultural labourers, marginal farmers or petty businessmen.

The migration of male labour has also had important outcomes in cases of violence against women. Men against whom arrest warrants are pending in cases of desertion or domestic violence now take advantage of the increased mobility due to migration in order to disappear to a different state, or sometimes across the border where it becomes very difficult to trace them, let alone arrest them.

Organizing strategies

Faced with the increased feminization of the agricultural workforce, what possible organizing strategies could unions of agricultural workers adopt?

The first, most obvious strategy is to ensure that the membership of women increases. While this sounds very simple, it also means that unions need to evaluate their ways of working and their structures to see if they are gender-sensitive. Union structures need to make provisions for women members to meet and organize separately within the union. Male union members need also to be convinced that patriarchal notions about gender-based wage differentials are for the benefit of the employer and are a loss for them. Demands such as those for equal remuneration for men and women, maternity benefits and protection from sexual harassment should become central to the unions' agenda.

Unions must also deal with gender issues at all levels. For example, it is necessary to tackle domestic violence and intra-family discrimination. Women union members who are supported in these matters will then also become active on work issues. In fact, in our experience, the union has to include elements of community organizing if it wants to work with women and their families.

A second important question of strategy that faces unions in India is whether to treat this huge mass of women who are getting

involved in agricultural work as workers or potential entrepreneurs. With declining employment in agriculture, the Government has the option of giving guaranteed work through public works that will lead to a rise in rural purchasing power with a positive push for the entire economy. Or, it can help poor women to become entrepreneurs through microcredit programmes – with no available market for their products. The Government as well as some unions have been emphasizing the latter, without thinking about the inherent limitations of such programmes. In depressed rural markets, and with stiff competition from global producers, is it possible for micro-producers to survive? Is this a feasible poverty alleviation strategy for the entire country? Would it not be much better to demand work guarantees from the State and laws that ensure better working conditions?

Agricultural workers also lack the economic capacity to totally support their own union. Thus, all the unions we visited were subsidized by NGOs, political parties or a formal sector union. If organizing efforts are to reach out to the growing number of women agricultural workers, provisions for financing this work are essential.

Conclusion

Globalization is often glorified as the removal of barriers between nations and groups and the making of one New World.

The truth, however, is that while barriers to the flow of capital across borders have been removed, the fragmentation that exists in the labour market has continued. Uniform labour standards for nations are being resisted across the world, as are uniform labour standards for men and women. Thus, what we see before us today is an intensification of the ways in which differences between labour standards were maintained across countries, ethnic groups and the sexes – to the advantage of the employer.

Notes

¹ The agricultural workers' global union federation, the IUF, and its affiliated agricultural unions in India conducted a study in 2001-2002 on the impact of globalization on agricultural workers in India. The objective of the study was to understand the views of agricultural labourers' unions (ALUs) on the impact of global restructuring; to document the state of unionization amongst agricultural workers; and to understand the present state as well as the potential for developing linkages amongst unions. The study was conducted by members of the Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (West Bengal Agricultural Workers' Union). During this period, the PBKMS interviewed a number of union leaders and union members of ALUs in ten states of India. Much of this article is based on this study.

² Lucia da Corta and Davuluri Venkateshwarlu, "Unfree Relations and the Feminization of Agricultural Labour in Andhra Pradesh, 1970-95" in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1999, Issue 26:2&3.

³ Jayati Gupta, "Women, Land and Law: Dispute Resolution at the Village Level", Sachetna Information Center, Kolkata, July 2000.

Social protection in agriculture

The social protection of agricultural workers and their families is a basic need and right for populations who are often extremely vulnerable to a whole range of social risks. But the great majority of these workers are often excluded from any social security system. Socially and economically, this situation can have serious consequences.

Christian Jacquier

Programme Coordinator

Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty (STEP)

ILO

On the social protection of agricultural workers,¹ the situation varies greatly from one country to another. Generally speaking, however, it may be regarded as bad in most developing countries and often catastrophic in the least advanced ones.

In the vast majority of cases, agriculture will always be in a less favourable position, in every respect, than other sectors of the economy and society. Social protection is no exception to this rule. Rural areas are greatly underprivileged in comparison with the urban areas. The position of women, seasonal farm labourers and migrants is often even more precarious.

This situation is all the more serious because it concerns workers and families who, due to their working and living conditions and their accommodation, are particularly exposed and vulnerable to illness, accidents and sudden misfortune (loss of harvests, livestock, income, capital, etc.). This is reflected in high morbidity and mortality, notably among mothers and infants. Agriculture is the sector with the highest accident figures. That is scarcely surprising, as it combines exposure to a number of specific occupational hazards, notably those linked to chemical substances (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, etc.), with low levels of education (illiteracy is more widespread in the rural areas), prevention and information. Moreover, agriculturalists are also very vulnerable to climatic contingencies (drought, floods,

other natural disasters, etc.) and to erratic variations in the price of agricultural produce. The notable lack of basic infrastructure (irrigation, drainage, sewerage, roads, storage, etc.) and of appropriate services (drinking water, food safety systems, sewerage, information, promotion of agriculture, health precautions, etc.) in many rural areas does much to further increase the vulnerability of the populations concerned. That vulnerability is made even more serious by a strong tendency to exclude independent agricultural workers from compulsory social security systems (social insurance).

Vulnerability and exclusion

In general, agricultural workers rarely have access to appropriate forms of insurance or other types of prepayment. Thus, they do not enjoy the advantages of mutual provident societies and collective risk management. In case of problems, they can count only on traditional solidarity, where it still exists, or else they must directly, individually and immediately bear the financial consequences (payment of services, medicines and other costs, loss of income, etc.).

They are also excluded from the benefits of the redistributive and national solidarity dimensions of social insurance. This exclusion is rarely compensated by effec-

tive social assistance. The non-availability of financial services in the rural areas heightens the difficulties, so many agriculturalists have recourse to usurers who apply very high interest rates. The resulting financial burden is added to the financial consequences of the illnesses and accidents and can mean lasting impoverishment for the families. The more so as there is a major deficit in access to basic social services, particularly health services. In many countries, this is a sign of the low priority given to rural areas in the allocation of public spending.

What is more, rural populations are often very spread out and the density of services in rural areas is low. Thus, the majority of the population is far away from these services (a situation known as "geographical" exclusion). Accentuating this are the difficulty and cost of transport and the lack of communications infrastructure.

A further dimension to the problem is often the poor quality of the services (low priority for preventive and promotional campaigns, absenteeism among health staff assigned to rural areas, inappropriate opening hours, stock shortages of generic medicines, high prices, bad management, corruption, waiting times, lack of dignity in access for women, indigenous populations, etc.). This leads to underconsumption of services and a delay in access to care, thus worsening the consequences and costs of illnesses and accidents.

Chronic poverty

On the economic side, all this means a great deal of lost time and a lowering of productivity and incomes, so that the families concerned remain in situations of chronic or structural poverty.

In other words, the agricultural workers suffer from the absence or inadequate supply of social services and are excluded from the systems of social protection, insurance and assistance, whereas they are among the populations most exposed to hazards and most vulnerable in social terms.

So, to improve this situation, there is an urgent need to encourage the development of social protection systems that are appropriate to the needs of agricultural workers. However, numerous specific constraints have to be taken into account.

The first thing to be noted is the inappropriateness and inadequacy of the prevention policies in rural areas. The absolute priority should therefore be to reduce excessive exposure to hazards, within a framework of real strategies for prevention and promotion. But this demands integrated action on the whole group of factors determining exposure to hazards, notably through effective coordination of all sectoral prevention policies and a major education and information drive among agricultural workers. This, despite the obstacles, is the area of intervention with the best cost-benefit ratio.

On social insurance, the constraint is that, for the most part, agricultural workers are self-employed. So they do not have employers who could help to co-finance their system of social protection. In the absence of aid from the public authorities, they have to finance the systems on their own.

Another constraint is their low capacity to pay contributions. Agricultural workers usually have weak incomes, lower than the national average. Thus, their total spending on health is generally not more than US\$10 per head per year in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In these circumstances, it is understandable that their ability to take part in voluntary insurance schemes and to pay social contributions is limited.

As well as their low income levels, there is the problem of their weak integration into the cash economy. Many are engaged in subsistence farming and therefore sell only a limited part of their production. So they have difficulty in paying monetary contributions, and banking services are beyond their reach.

Moreover, as their income is linked to the sale of agricultural produce, their revenues are usually irregular (one or two harvests a year) and unpredictable, as they

are governed by the size of harvests and by prevailing prices. This is why systems based on payment in kind, to be settled at harvest time, are so successful.

Distrust of systems organized by the authorities is another obstacle. Having often been through bad experiences in the past, agriculturalists tend to have limited confidence in public management and governance.

Unfamiliarity with how insurance works – and the difficulty of convincing people to take out insurance for access to services that do not exist or are of insufficient quality – does not help matters. This is particularly true of primary health care in the countryside.

One possible way around these problems is demonstrated by schemes in Bangladesh, particularly those run by the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC). These provide health insurance based on delivery of primary, local, high-quality healthcare. They could serve as a model in this field.

Political will

In view of all these difficulties, provision of basic social protection for agricultural workers requires a clear political will and considerable, lasting efforts by States in order to develop appropriate local social services and the mechanisms of solidarity and equality required in order to co-finance access to them.

An interesting attempt at this has been made in the Indian state of Kerala, through a system of welfare funds. In particular, the Agricultural Workers' Welfare Fund, established since 1990, offers partial coverage for about a million agricultural workers (pensions, insurance in case of death and educational provision for children).

Similarly, since 1987 Sri Lanka has had a Farmers' Pension and Social Security Benefit Scheme which covers 675,000 families.

In India, a pilot scheme launched by central Government in July 2002 is operating in 50 districts. It currently covers 170,000 agricultural workers who pay in

1 rupee per day, while the Government provides a subsidy of 2 rupees per worker per day, through a social security fund. The same fund provides a 50 per cent subsidy for the life insurance scheme set up by the Self-Employed Women's Association in Gujarat (100,000 members).

In addition, the Indian Government announced in May 2003 that it intended to draw on such experiments in order to launch a community-based universal health insurance system for the poor. The Government would offer a partial subsidy for the contributions payable by families living below the poverty line.

In the Philippines, impoverished un-waged small farmers can join the Phil-Health social insurance scheme at a subsidized rate, co-financed by central Government and local communities.

Under Colombia's Law No. 100, the compulsory health insurance scheme subsidizes the contributions due from the poorest families. In Mexico, the Government is launching a national pilot initiative to subsidize access by the 3 million poorest households to health insurance via the Seguro popular (people's saving scheme). It is hoping to cover 150,000 families by 2003. In Brazil and Mexico (the Progres project), "conditional schooling grant" schemes help support children's education and health.

Up to now, these examples provide only limited cover for the beneficiaries, and are encountering big financing problems. In reality, few States today have committed themselves to support mechanisms for universal coverage of agricultural workers. A lack of financial resources, absence of political consensus, problems of good governance and difficulties in managing decentralized systems are among the obstacles that will first have to be overcome.

Also, the transaction costs involved in establishing and managing decentralized, geographically dispersed systems, within a context of poverty, sometimes prove prohibitive when undertaken by the State. For example, the managerial costs for Kerala's welfare funds often exceed 50 per cent of the contributions paid in.

Moreover, agricultural workers' specific needs in terms of social protection are very diverse, and are strongly dependent on the local context (climate, culture, production type, gender, production system, etc.). And yet, little is available in the way of reliable information or statistics on these needs. Uniform centralized systems are therefore unlikely to take account of this diversity and to be relevant to populations' own priorities.

The low organizing rates among agricultural workers, and the lack of representative organizations, also make it more difficult to identify and take account of these specific priority needs, and to implement such strategies, particularly within the framework of social dialogue.

Local initiatives

Given the inadequacies of central social protection systems, a growing number of community-based local initiatives are springing up in many countries. In West Africa, for instance, a real movement of health insurance funds (several hundred) is now developing, particularly in the rural areas, making it possible to organize a paying demand for health care and to strengthen agricultural workers' bargaining power vis-à-vis the providers. The emergence of regional or national federations of mutual health insurance funds in some countries is helping to reinforce this trend, and may create the conditions for the establishment of contractual policies with governments.

Such community-based health insurance schemes are also appearing in large numbers in Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Philippines, etc.). They are launched by existing organizations of various kinds, such as trade unions, agricultural cooperatives or associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities or health centres.

Interesting examples of this are found in India, within the framework of the sugar cooperative movement in the state of Maharashtra and the milk cooperatives of

the Gujarat. These offer social protection services to more than a million members (health, education for children, harvest insurance and pensions). Another instance is the health insurance developed in Nepal by the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT – 400,000 members) which seeks to organize workers in the informal economy.

There are similar set-ups in Argentina, within the agricultural cooperatives, and in Central America in the framework of the coffee cooperatives. In Nicaragua, the Rural Workers' Association (Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo, ATC) founded the Del Campo mutual health fund.

Such community-based social protection schemes, of a cooperative or mutualist nature, make it possible to stimulate organized participation by agricultural workers, to take more account of their needs and to mobilize and upgrade local resources, including social capital, so as to limit management costs and the costs to the beneficiaries. The World Health Organization's Commission on Macroeconomics and Health regards them as flexible and promising mechanisms for meeting needs at the local level.

Nonetheless, these community-based systems are not a panacea, as their financial and institutional weaknesses mean that they cannot, on their own, provide durable solidarity-based social protection. On the other hand, they have considerable potential for promoting complementary systems, in conjunction with public schemes (social security, social assistance, health-care systems, etc.).

In short, the problem is to achieve equity and efficiency simultaneously, within a context of great diversity. Diversity, that is, of actors (agricultural workers, State, local communities, social partners, service providers, local organizations, cooperatives, mutual health funds, civil society etc.), of mechanisms (subsidized services, social assistance, social insurance, decentralized systems, etc.) and of contexts.

No one actor and no one mechanism appear able to provide an appropriate solution. So there is a need to develop coher-

ent, solidarity-based strategies, rooted in an ad hoc combination of different types of mechanism, coordinated and complementary, and capable of efficiently mobilizing the whole of the available resources and skills – including, naturally, those of agricultural workers and farmers.

ILO efforts

Efforts by the ILO to help improve social protection for agricultural workers are placed within the broader framework of the ILO's Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All, launched in 2002 following the conclusions of the general discussion on social security at the 2001 International Labour Conference.

The ILO global programme on Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty, known as STEP, is a key operational instrument in this campaign. Among its main aims is to improve and propagate knowledge of innovative mechanisms for extending social protection, particularly in rural areas.

Currently present in more than 30 countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and Europe, it combines studies, research and trials in the field with the design of practical tools (both methodological and didactic), training, technical support, institutional reinforcement, social dialogue and the running of partnership networks.

In the countryside, it is seeking to develop innovative mechanisms for the in-

clusion of agricultural workers and farmers within social protection systems. Such mechanisms seek to combine decentralized participative systems (whether community-based or in the form of mutual funds) which promote the organization and empowerment of a paying demand by agricultural workers, while public interventions via various redistributive mechanisms promote the expression of a certain solidarity at the national level.

Conclusions

The social protection of agricultural workers and farmers is a vital dimension, and thus far an all too neglected one, of the promotion of decent work in agriculture. The specific characteristics of this sector mean that a simple generalization of the classic social protection systems is not possible. Innovative, appropriate solutions must therefore be developed and propagated on a large scale. This is a big task, and it will be a long haul, requiring the sustained mobilization of all the actors concerned.

The ILO will be heavily involved in this over the coming years, within the framework of its Global Campaign on Social Security and Coverage for All.

Note

¹ Translator's note: In the English version of this article, the term "agricultural workers" has generally been used to denote both paid agricultural labourers and small-scale or subsistence farmers.

Land distribution – unions push for real reform

Land reform programmes have been carried through in a number of countries – with very mixed results. How can trade unions secure real reform? And how far should they network with other groups to achieve it?

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Land grabs have a long, painful history worldwide. Ownership was concentrated by pushing old-established rural communities off their ancestral turf, often at gunpoint. And today, a new dispossession has been added. Big multinationals and new technologies are driving small farmers out of business and off the land.

This injustice has bred militant “back-to-the-land” movements. Rural people are asserting their right to make a decent living where they were born.

The need for land reform is widely recognized. For trade unions, its aim is clear – to distribute land to those who work it. This will give rural people the chance to feed themselves and to produce healthy, natural food. If agriculture is to be sustainable, policies are needed that favour workers and small farmers. Big agribusiness alone must not rule the roost. Unions see agrarian reform as a way of reducing poverty and hunger, but also as a path to greater economic and political democracy.¹

The market approach: no benefits for rural poor

However, “land reform” is not always what it seems. The model promoted by the World Bank emphasizes the free interplay of market forces. The idea is that

“maladjustments in access to land” can be corrected by the free “buying and selling” of that commodity. This “market-assisted agrarian reform” (MAAR) has been tried in countries such as Colombia, the Philippines, South Africa and Brazil. There is little evidence that it has benefited the rural poor. Rather, it has been accompanied by a tightening of the multinationals’ grip on agriculture. Intensive production models have been imposed, as have greater use of fertilizers and pesticides, stronger corporate control of distribution and the casualization of labour. Temporary employment contracts and “informal” labour are on the increase in world agriculture.

The switch to capital-intensive farming and “just-in-time” crops has put many smaller farmers out of business. This in turn has led to further concentration of land ownership and has increased rural communities’ dependence on big companies. New technologies such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) will boost this trend.

Meanwhile, the pool of landless workers is continuing to grow. In response, people are moving to the already overcrowded cities, or else they are resorting to the environmentally destructive clearance of virgin land.

For agricultural unions and their global union federation, the IUF, all of this

raises two important issues. They need to promote fairer land distribution, but they must also relate to an increasingly unwaged agricultural labour force in many parts of the world. Essentially an international of wage-earners, the IUF found that a growing number of its affiliated agricultural unions were networking with organizations of small farmers and landless peasants. At the same time, the international was receiving affiliation requests from small farmers' organizations.

Land and Freedom: networking for reform

The Land and Freedom project was the IUF's response. From the launch of the project in 1999, land reform was quickly identified as one of its biggest priorities.

In setting guidelines for cooperation with small farmers and landless workers, Land and Freedom drew on ILO Convention No. 141 on Rural Workers' Organisations. Together with Recommendation No. 149, this international standard was adopted in 1975. The two ILO instruments concern organizations of rural workers and their role in economic and social development. They also define who rural workers are, affirm their right to freedom of association, detail the conditions for the development of their organizations, and suggest ways in which their work and living conditions can be improved. Ratification of Convention No. 141 is a focus of Land and Freedom's campaigns.

Who's who?

The definition of "rural workers" is of more than academic interest. It goes right to the heart of trade unions' dilemma when networking with "small farmers" on land reform. Many such farmers are self-employed and vulnerable, and their interests largely coincide with those of agricultural unions. Indeed, not a few of them are already members of unions affiliated to the IUF. Others, however, are employers of ag-

ricultural labour, in which case conflicts of interest may obviously arise. Land and Freedom, like the ILO instruments, defines "rural workers" to include:

- wage earners, who work on a permanent, casual seasonal or migrant basis for large or small farms, or in forestry or fishing, and receive a wage in return for their labour;
- self-employed sharecroppers and tenants, who work land they do not own;
- small owners, who work their own land;
- landless and unemployed people who live in rural areas.

Key issues for unions

Many trade unions were already having to cope with the issue of land reform, the IUF project found. This was true both in transition countries like Azerbaijan, where land reform was implemented more or less overnight, and in southern African countries, especially Zimbabwe, where there was increasing conflict around land reform and union members were very directly involved. Trade unions identified key questions that they needed assistance in dealing with:

- understanding and being able to negotiate on their government's policy, although it might often be driven by the World Bank and the other financial institutions;
- conflict resolution;
- helping members to get title to land;
- servicing members when they become small farmers/land-holders;
- understanding the impact of World Bank policies on (market-assisted) land reform in other countries so they could negotiate on them if their own governments accepted World Bank proposals.

So Land and Freedom began working experimentally on a totally new challenge: identifying tensions between unionized workers and associations of small produc-

ers and/or farmers, with a view to opening up new ways of working together.

A whole series of investigations and campaigns has been carried out. The information gathered by the unions gives a good overview of the present state of land reform worldwide. Just a few examples:

El Salvador and Nicaragua: real land reform, but diluted by neoliberalism

The past decade saw significant land distribution in some Central American countries, such as El Salvador and Nicaragua. This was partly linked to the peace agreements which ended the wars of the 1980s. However, as a result of neoliberal policies which reduced support services and subsidies, many cooperatives have been disbanded and individual farmers have been forced to sell their land. Lack of proper titling on tenure security is a widespread problem in these countries. In Nicaragua, workers in State farms which received 25 per cent of company assets as part of the privatization process of the 1990s suddenly found their property rights under threat because of a lack of economic support triggered by the negative effects of neoliberal policies. Land and Freedom has been supporting part of a multi-faceted initiative launched by the Asociación Nacional de Trabajadores Agropecuarios (ANTA – National Association of Agricultural Workers) in El Salvador. ANTA is an IUF affiliate that organizes both waged workers and small farmers. The association is running a long-term project that calls for the transfer of State-owned land, totalling 9,682 hectares, to 12 ANTA cooperatives. In all, 4,353 peasants would benefit from this transfer. The project involves a broad-based peasant campaign of mobilizations, publicity and land legalization.

India: same story

India was one of the first countries to introduce extensive agrarian reform. The result was a structure that handed control of

most of the land to small farmers. However, the introduction of structural adjustment policies in the 1990s diluted many of these gains. For example, bans on the ownership of land by non-farmers were lifted, and multinational corporations and the Government started forcing farmers to move to plantations that they formally own, but which they must farm under contract farming arrangements.

Brazil: new hope?

Brazil has one of the world's most polarized rural structures and a high degree of land concentration. Market-driven agrarian reform measures have seldom benefited small producers there, because of the costs incurred in purchasing land and the limited access to support services. So the rural workers are promoting land occupations. These have become the most effective way of pushing forward land reform at the national level. They have lent visibility to the struggle for the right to produce and to have decent living conditions.

To date, about 130,000 families have been resettled by means of occupations. Of these, 54,000 were organized by the CONTAG (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers). The CONTAG represents 9 million agricultural workers and family farmers and is affiliated to the IUF. At the same time, Brazil has about 40 social movements fighting for land. Amongst them is the MST (the Landless Movement), which is also playing an effective leading role in land occupations and family resettlements. However, land occupations have repeatedly met with the use of force by local landowners and the military police.

The hope is that the recent election of Luiz Inácio da Silva ("Lula") as Brazil's President will lead to real land reform. Certainly, he has been reaffirming his commitment to accomplish a comprehensive land reform and implement the National Plan of Land Reform, and he has maintained an open dialogue with the trade unions and the social movements. He met CONTAG leaders on 14 May 2003 and landless

workers' leaders on 3 July 2003. He also met leaders of the so-called "Grito de la Terra" movement – which is a land movement promoted by the CONTAG – after its annual demonstration brought together more than 5,000 people.

Brazilian land reform organizations grouped within the National Forum for Agrarian Reform recently published a note reaffirming their hope that the Lula Government will live up to its commitments. They demanded budget resources for land redistribution and the implementation of Government programmes that guarantee the social function of the land, generate employment, combat violence against workers and recognize the rights of the indigenous people and the *quilombolas* (descendants of former slaves).

On the other hand, the elements who oppose the Agrarian Reform keep pressing the Government and society to resist the struggle of the social movements. These anti-reform elements provoke violence in the countryside, using gunmen to carry out arbitrary and violent evictions. The fight for land has led to many deaths among rural workers. Between 1985 and 2002, 1,280 of them were killed in serious violence. But due to widespread impunity in practice, only 122 of the murderers have ever been brought to justice.

South Africa: a slow start

In the 1990s, when South Africa embarked on the transition away from apartheid, 87 per cent of the land was owned by the white minority. Once in government, the African National Congress (ANC) moved away from its long-held policy on land nationalization and adopted a neoliberal position which emphasized the protection of private property in South Africa's Bill of Rights. This was a clear victory for the existing landowners. It also mirrored the worldwide trend towards "market-assisted" land reform, as promoted by the World Bank. The South African programme has three main aims – restitution for those who lost their land rights as a

result of racially discriminatory policies in 1913; tenure reform for people with insecure rights in land, primarily labour tenants and their families living on white-owned farms and rural occupiers who have insecure tenure in relation to communal land; and redistribution for poor and land-hungry rural people. Yet an IUF-commissioned study in 2002 showed that, eight years into the programme, only 1 per cent of the land had been redistributed.² "If tenure reform is to lead to real improvements in the livelihoods of the rural poor", the report concluded, "it must be integrated with local economic development and the provision of services in previously neglected areas. Securing land rights where people currently reside is a good start, but granting real rights to all those in need will also require substantial redistribution of land currently in the hands of the privileged minority. There is a need for the opening up of debates around land reform and for a process of thoroughgoing public consultation leading to concrete measures to safeguard the rights of some of the poorest and most marginalized people in the country."

Philippines: union organizes small producers after land reform

The Philippines farm workers' union NFL and the IUF were closely involved in a campaign at banana multinational Dole. The company sued for damages arising out of the strike, thus threatening the union with bankruptcy. Simultaneously, within the framework of agrarian reform in the Philippines, Dole was forced to divide its land up into plots, and workers became banana producers with a single buyer: Dole. The company's control mechanism is based on a monopoly of loans for agricultural inputs, and a promise to buy the production. The prices for purchase of the bananas from the workers' production cooperatives have been set by Dole – below market rates. "We are worse off now as landowners than we were before as employees", says one of the workers. "We lost all the economic benefits we gained through collective bargaining,

and our crop cannot pay for even a fraction of them.” The NFL, which has members at Dole, has set up FARMCOOP, the Association of Small Producers, to support the work and negotiations of ex-farm workers who have been turned into small producers.

Zimbabwe: land occupations

In recent years, Zimbabwe has gone through a series of highly publicized land occupations. The situation is delicate, especially for the farm workers’ union, because there are tensions between President Mugabe’s policy, which encourages occupation of land by war veterans, and the interests of the workers on these farms and of African migrants with no right to land ownership. These migrants do not have residence permits in Zimbabwe, and have come from neighbouring countries in the hope of settling. The agricultural workers’ union supports the country’s Agrarian Reform Act, but insists that the needs and demands of rural workers must be taken into account.

Central and Eastern Europe: farm privatizations change union role

The distribution of land in Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by a shift from collective State ownership to private ownership. This is leading to the creation of new small, medium-sized and big landowners. The region’s agricultural unions, with their millions of members, now have to face the challenge of responding to the new needs of people who were rural workers and who have now become small and medium-sized producers.

Kenya and Uganda: sugar subcontractors and workers – a conflict of interest?

Land reform in Kenya and Uganda means that the big sugar plantations are being divided up. Consequently, the main sugar refineries are subcontracting to small and

medium-sized producers. The trade unions have taken on the task of organizing the workers who maintain the lines of communication between the refineries and the markets, but the subcontracted producers themselves are also asking the unions to represent them, because they feel they are not being treated fairly by the refineries. The subcontracted producers, in turn, hire workers who are union members. The main debate within the agricultural unions is how to cope with negotiating better conditions both for refinery workers and for the subcontractors.

Real reform needed

So far, therefore, the results of land reform have been very mixed. Trade unions argue strongly that mere distribution of land is not enough. If they are to succeed, the new small landowners need proper access to low-cost credit, logistics, technical assistance and markets. Otherwise, they simply pile up debts. Then, to pay them off, they have to sell their land. In some cases, such as Bolivia and the Philippines, this has effectively reversed the agrarian reform process, leading to a new concentration of land ownership.

Also, the land distributed by reform programmes is often not of the best quality, and it frequently lacks access to irrigation systems.

In fact, the unions point out, land reform is a vital tool for economic development as a whole. It offers a real opportunity to strengthen the social, economic and political fabric of regions where there has been little or no industrialization to absorb the pool of unemployed labour. For this reason, governments must show the political will to carry through real programmes of land reform, backed by the necessary resources.

For the unions, real land reform means the transfer, to the great majority of the rural populations, landworkers and indigenous people, of legal title to fertile land. At the same time, access must be ensured to the full range of services and infrastructures needed. And rural workers and their

families must be fully involved in the drafting and implementation of land reform legislation, so that it meets their real needs.

The people who feed the world deserve no less.

Notes

¹ This is the widely held trade union view in the predominantly agricultural economies of Africa, Asia

and Latin America. In the older-established industrial economies, such as Europe, agricultural workers' unions tend to be wary of any process that could split farms into smaller units. They see smaller farms as a possible threat to employment contracts, collective bargaining and agricultural trade unionism.

² Sue Tilley, *An Examination of Market-Assisted Agrarian Reform in South Africa*, Discussion Paper 2, IUF – Land and Freedom Project, June 2002. Full report and executive summary online at: http://www.iuf.org.uk/cgi-bin/dbman/db.cgi?db=default&uid=default&ID=387&view_records=1&ww=1&en=1

Decent work and international commodity agreements

Three-quarters of the people living in extreme poverty worldwide are in rural areas. And most of those are dependent, directly or indirectly, on the commodity sector for their livelihoods. Can international commodity agreements help them out of poverty? The answer is yes. But they will have to include both fair prices and core labour standards.

Carmel Whelton

Consultant

ILO

The 1960s ushered in a new era in world affairs. Colonialist regimes were downsized. New countries, emboldened by idealistic constitutions, joined an expanding United Nations. A spirit of freedom, hope and possibility permeated the air. Commodity agreements were testimony to the belief of the times that sheer international will could overcome the North-South divide and bring prosperity to all.

Cocoa, sugar and coffee farmers, tin, rubber and tropical timber producers, and their governments hoped that these agreements would lead to better livelihoods. They hoped that the agreements would stabilize supply and reduce the price fluctuations that characterized these markets and devastated farmers' livelihoods.

The agreements did not meet expectations. The tin agreement imploded in London under massive litigation in the 1980s. The rubber agreement lasted longer than most, but dissolved in 2001 when the Malaysian Government withdrew its support. Other agreements were quietly set aside or divested of their price stabilization or buffer stock properties.

Today's commodity farmers need more help than ever. The forces of globalization, trade rules, structural adjustment, financial market speculation and a few muscular multinationals have worked together to wreak havoc in the lives of commodity farmers around the world.

Can international commodity agreements help agricultural workers achieve decent work?

The rural poor

Three-quarters of those living in extreme poverty worldwide are in rural areas. And most of those are dependent, directly or indirectly, on the commodity sector for their livelihoods. Low commodity prices are hurling farmers down a vertiginous spiral towards absolute poverty. Real coffee prices paid to farmers are at their lowest in one hundred years.¹ In some areas of the world, coffee producers cannot meet their variable costs.

Why do farmers keep producing if they cannot meet production costs? Because price and income elasticities for commodities tend to be low. This means that farmers cannot quickly adjust production if prices move up and down. It also means that higher income does not translate into consumers purchasing more commodities.

An UNCTAD press report estimated that the percentage of people living on less than US\$1 a day in non-oil commodity exporting LDCs rose from about 63 per cent in 1981-1983 to 69 per cent in 1997-1999.² The same UNCTAD report said that in 1999 the average real GDP per capita (adjusted

for purchasing power) in the same countries was lower than it had been in 1970. At the end of 2001, real non-fuel commodity prices had plunged to one half of their annual average for the period 1979-81.

How did the situation ever get this bad? Forty years ago, countries acknowledged the vicissitudes confronting trade in commodities and worked to devise mechanisms and solutions to manage them. The economic institutions and forces that underlie our economies today have made things worse and not better for commodity farmers. Redress or even a short respite is not in sight.

The WTO Agreement on Agriculture of 1995 reinforced the unfair agricultural spending patterns of Northern countries while forcing Southern countries to open their markets. Southern commodity farmers faced double discrimination: their products faced peak or escalating tariffs in industrialized countries while locally battling cheap subsidized imports from the North. Northern tariffs generally escalated for any value-added processing. Commodities also faced non-tariff barriers like quotas, rules of origin and high quality control standards that LDCs could ill afford to meet. The situation verges on the absurd. Millions of smallholder farmers with a total annual income of \$400 a year are expected to "compete" against American and European farmers who respectively receive \$21,000 and \$16,000 a year in government subsidies.³

Preferential treatment attenuated only somewhat the magnitude of the problem. In the 25-year existence of the Lomé Convention, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries saw their share of European Union imports fall from 7 per cent to 3 per cent. Likewise, the US Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, signed into law in May 2000, had exceptions for staple commodities like sugar and coffee.

At the same time, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund pressed developing States to liberalize and pursue export-led growth. This increased the world supply of commodities, which led to a further fall in prices. For many LDCs,

the result was greater dependence on low-priced farm products. Farmers switched to produce for export markets, leaving their families hungry when world prices were not sufficient to buy local food. IMF-led structural adjustment programmes called for the dismantling of commodity marketing boards and the cutting of other types of government assistance like access to credit, extension advice and fertilizers. While many developing countries needed to revamp outdated and often corrupt farming assistance and marketing apparatus, the swift blanket removal of all assistance and the dismantling of the boards left farmers with no cover in hard times. And for commodity farmers, it was all hard times.

Countries that produced commodities faced declining terms of trade, meaning that as they earned less money selling cocoa or coffee, the price of imports like fertilizer or computers grew. Oxfam calculates that deteriorating terms of trade have cost Africa more than seven times what it receives in aid.⁴ The cost of development moved slowly but inexorably beyond the reach of most of the least developed countries. Foreign debts swelled as the ability to repay slid. Only four of the 27 LDC non-oil commodity exporters did not have unsustainable external debt as measured by the World Bank HPIC programme. As needs increased, foreign aid declined precipitously throughout the 1990s, so that aid resources barely compensated for lost export revenues. And aid to agricultural projects dropped even more as industrialized countries targeted aid to social issues. UNCTAD called it the "debt tail" wagging the "aid dog".

The liberalization of financial markets has exacerbated price fluctuations. Farmers in LDCs have little ability to protect themselves from volatile and unpredictable commodity prices. Risk management techniques do not always work, because of weaknesses in the national legal, regulatory and institutional framework of least developed countries. Lack of clear title (e.g. registration, transferability of title documents), problems in banking law and

weaknesses in enforcement make it difficult for farmers and especially women farmers, to seek redress.

Rural underdevelopment has plagued commodity producers but most farmers have few compelling alternatives. Weak infrastructure and insecure or non-existent social safety nets increase both farmers' workload and their sense of vulnerability. High transport costs and poor storage facilities reduce farmgate prices, translating into lower household income. Farmers have scant access to credit, fertilizers, irrigation and important extension services that could lead to better farming techniques and enhanced know-how. Land reform will bring stability to precarious livelihoods, especially for women who often cannot own, inherit or transfer title in land. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that two-thirds of the rural population in Latin America are either landless or lacking sufficient land for their basic needs.

While commodity prices have plummeted and swaths of agricultural workers are consigned to soul-shattering poverty, multinationals are reaping record profits. Over the last twenty years, through a mélange of mergers and acquisitions, only a handful of multinationals control the market for most staple commodities. One result has been the growing disparity between producer and consumer prices for commodities. For five non-oil commodities (banana, beef, coffee, rice sugar and wheat) there has been an almost continuous increase in the price spread which has seen the disparity between producer and consumer prices almost double in the last two decades.⁵ Southern farmers are powerless against the "buyer-driven supply chains" of a few multinationals.

International commodity agreements

International commodity agreements pre-date the Second World War, but most – like cocoa, jute, olive oil, natural rubber, sugar and tropical timber – were negotiated by UN conferences under the auspices of

UNCTAD. Others, like coffee and grains, were negotiated by their respective councils. The agreements were mostly designed to stabilize prices, including through a system of quotas and buffer stocks. But they could rarely maintain commodity prices over the long term. By the mid-1980s, most agreements were discontinued or lost their price stabilization mechanisms.

The current agreements on coffee, sugar and grains focus on international cooperation, providing a forum for international consultations, promoting expansion of international trade, and performing a market transparency function by acting as a centre for the collection, exchange and publication of information, and encouraging consumption. The agreements on jute and jute products and on tropical timber are more focussed on cooperation, consultation, research and development, trade expansion, market promotion, cost reduction, improvement of market information and sustainable development.

There are no categorical references to international labour standards in the agreements, but a few mention improving labour conditions. The Sugar Agreement has a fair labour clause, while the agreements on coffee and cocoa include a commitment "to improve the standard of living and working conditions of populations engaged in the coffee (cocoa) sector".

Common Fund for Commodities

After commodity agreements had slid into disfavour or were being substantially revamped in the late 1980s, the Common Fund for Commodities was emerging from a very long negotiation and ratification process that had begun in the mid-1970s. It was meant to be the central financing piece in the commodity puzzle. While its current role is smaller than originally envisaged, it remains a lingering symbol of more comprehensive global efforts to tackle commodity questions. Using mostly market methods, it funds commodity development projects aimed at improving the structural conditions of the market

and enhancing long-term competitiveness. It also helps with market development including physical market development, enhancement of market infrastructure, facilitation of private sector initiatives and commodity price risk management. Projects focus mostly on the poorest farmers, with assistance also given to small and medium-sized enterprises. The Fund hopes that its commodity focus, as opposed to country focus, means that results in one country can be replicated worldwide.

All Common Fund project proposals must be submitted through an international commodity body (ICB) such as the International Cocoa Organization or the FAO subgroup on tropical fruit. By May 2002, the Fund approved projects with an overall cost of \$317.5 million, of which the Fund financed \$152.3 million. Remaining funds were leveraged from recipient countries or private sector donors.

Commodity workers and decent work

Decent work means productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. It encompasses respect for basic rights like freedom of association, access to employment, safe and healthy working conditions, and social security. Decent work is still a dream for many agricultural workers around the world.

Agricultural workers in the commodity sector toil under some of the most difficult working conditions imaginable – long backbreaking hours, low pay, unsavoury employment conditions, and few rights at work. They are often excluded in both theory and practice from the minimum standards of labour legislation. Unemployment is high, jobs are unstable or temporary and there are often no health insurance, social insurance or pension rights. Health and safety measures are often ignored as the ILO estimates that 170,000 agricultural workers are killed every year. Seasonal workers and labourers are among the poorest and most vulnerable of them all.

More than two-thirds of the world's poorest women work in agriculture in ad-

dition to shouldering their family responsibilities. The FAO cites wars, urban migration and rising mortality due to AIDS as contributing to the “feminization of agriculture”.⁶ Women are often paid less than men for the same work – often as much as 30 per cent less. Women tea workers in Sri Lanka can earn as little as \$12.90 net a month.⁷ Women also face difficulties accessing land, credit, extension services, technology and training to enhance their productive capacity. Indigenous populations, too, face difficulties on multiple fronts: industrial farms encroach on their ancestral lands, undermining their livelihoods, and discrimination pervades their paid work on the industrial farms.

Child workers plant, water, fertilize and pick farm goods around the world. In Kenya, Oxfam charges that 30 per cent of coffee pickers are under fifteen⁸ and the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh employs nearly 250,000 girls as pickers in cotton fields.⁹

Agricultural workers are often forbidden by legislation from exercising their freedom of association in order to fight for higher pay, better working conditions and enhanced health and safety measures. In Sri Lanka, workers are denied the right to strike because producing commodities for export is considered “an essential service”, in spite of repeated statements from the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association that agricultural activities are not an essential service. In 2001, the Canadian Supreme Court struck down Ontario labour legislation excluding agricultural workers, but farm workers in the province still lack rights of association.

The degradation of forced labour still sullies farmers' fields in a devastating way. Cocoa plantation owners in the Ivory Coast pay 50,000 CFA (\$70) per child, usually “recruited” from neighbouring Mali or Burkina Faso.¹⁰ In the 2002 report on the application of ILO Conventions, the ILO Committee of Experts implored the Government of Burundi to respect the “voluntary nature of agricultural work”. In the same year, the Committee noted the “high number of (Brazilian agricultural) work-

ers who, with their families, are subjected to degrading conditions of work and debt servitude...”.

Decent work and international commodity agreements

The current crisis requires an urgent and comprehensive international commodities policy. Within such a policy, commodity agreements could serve as beacons to attract and promote decent work in the commodity sector.

The first step will be to reduce chronic oversupply and tackle the decline in world commodity prices to ensure that farmers receive a fair price. The UNDP recommends voluntary supply management schemes to achieve a better balance between supply and demand.¹¹ The International Coffee Organization is considering a coffee quality improvement programme to eliminate coffee below a certain quality. Oxfam suggests destroying 5 million bags of the lowest-grade coffee to help increase coffee prices by 20 per cent.¹²

The second step will be to incorporate core labour standards into all commodity agreements. Core labour standards are defined in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. They include freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively, freedom from discrimination, and the end of forced labour and the worst forms of child labour.

By affirming a respect for core labour standards, commodity agreements will set a social floor that protects workers' most basic rights. Even the worst ravages of globalization will not penetrate that social floor.

As the third step, international commodity organizations could work closely with local and international workers' organizations to advance the aims of the commodity organizations and promote the implementation of the core ILO Conventions. The Common Fund could actively solicit and implement joint project proposals from ICBs and workers' organizations. Joint human-centred rural development

projects could improve workers' productivity through better research and development, environmentally sound farming techniques and extension services. The goal would be to increase farmers' productivity per acre, keeping supply constant and liberating space for alternative produce. Other joint rural development projects could include post-harvesting assistance, such as safer communal storage and shared transport.

Unions and ICBs could also enhance farmers' livelihoods by assisting with product diversification, financing or marketing. Vertical or horizontal diversification could help “decommoditize” commodities, by enhancing quality or strengthening local brands. The Common Fund could fund workers' organizations to help farmers take a more proactive role in marketing their products – sharing relevant market information and teaching efficient marketing and financing methods. Together, workers could access price risk management tools like “put options”, which provide a payout when prices fall below a certain level. Likewise, collateralized finance would allow farmers to use a crop in the ground as collateral for a bank loan.

The Cocoa Agreement (2001) calls for the formation of a private sector consultative board to help develop a sustainable cocoa economy, identify threats and challenges to supply, and demand and exchange information. Workers' organizations may wish to participate. A workers' voice could alert the organizations to unsung practicalities and trends and concerns on the ground. Unions could also be a useful conduit for information, awareness-raising, education and training among workers.

Multinationals can also be pressed to respect core labour standards and promote decent work. The US banana giant Chiquita “reaffirm[ed]s its commitment to respect the core ILO Conventions” in the IUF/COLSIBA and Chiquita Agreement on freedom of association, minimum labour standards and employment in Latin American banana operations.¹³ Equally

important, Chiquita will require its suppliers, contract growers and joint venture partners to provide reasonable evidence that they respect national legislation and the minimum labour standards outlined in the Agreement. A joint review committee will oversee the Agreement and gauge progress. The Agreement proves that multinationals can manage their supply chains responsibly, so as to ensure adherence to core labour standards from the farm gate to final delivery at the supermarket. The next step is to persuade multinationals that it is in their long-term corporate interest to pay farmers a fair price.

Conclusion

Sixty years ago, John Maynard Keynes proposed an international institution for regulating world commodity markets. It was not to be. But that meeting in Bretton Woods did give birth to the World Bank, the IMF and the international trade body that became the GATT. Some of the solutions suggested by Keynes, such as well-functioning commodity agreements operating under an integrated council, merit further consideration today.

By themselves, international commodity agreements cannot hope to confront the magnitude of today's global commodity problem. They can, however, reiterate their commitment to agricultural workers by reinforcing core labour standards and

working to improve workers' livelihoods. Decent work in agriculture is a long way off. But international commodity agreements and the Common Fund for Commodities can play an important role in making it a reality.

Notes

¹ Oxfam International, *Mugged: Poverty in your coffee cup*, 2002, p. 9.

² UNCTAD, *Global anti-poverty efforts must address link between commodity dependence and extreme poverty*, 6 June 2002.

³ Oxfam International, *Rigged Rules and Double Standards – trade, globalization and the fight against poverty*, 2002.

⁴ Oxfam, *ibid.*

⁵ *The Role of Commodities in LDCs*, Note by the Common Fund for Commodities, Joint UNCTAD/CFC Workshop on Enhancing Productive Capacities and Diversification of Commodities and South-South Cooperation, Geneva, 22-23 March 2001.

⁶ FAO, *The Role of Agriculture in the Development of LDCs and their Integration into the World Economy*, May 2001.

⁷ Oxfam, *ibid.*

⁸ Oxfam, *supra*, note 1.

⁹ Oxfam, *supra*, note 2.

¹⁰ ILO, *Combatting Trafficking in Children for Exploitation of their Labour in West and Central Africa*, 2001

¹¹ UNDP, *Making Global Trade Work for People*, 2003.

¹² Oxfam, *supra*, note 1.

¹³ IUF/COLSIBA and Chiquita Agreement on Freedom of Association, Minimum Labour Standards and Employment in Latin American Banana Operations, Article 1.

AIDS and agriculture:

A threat to rural workers and food production

AIDS was seen for many years as a largely urban phenomenon, but today's figures show that rural parts of many countries are experiencing a more rapid spread of the pandemic. AIDS is becoming a greater threat in rural areas than in cities of the developing world.

Susan Leather

Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work
ILO

The family has been talking over their problems since the sun went down. The young ones move in and out of the hut, anxious but not able to sit still. The father lies on a string bed, coughing, unable to speak for long. Their oldest son moved to the city and helped by sending money home, but the payments stopped some weeks back. They're worried about him, and about how they will manage.

John says they must stop cultivating the far field – it takes too much time. Young Thomas offers to take the goats there to graze, but Rose bursts out, “How can you do that, and weed the maize, and go to school? If you stop school, how will you make progress when you're an adult?” Then, more quietly, “Anyway, I think we have to sell the goats. We don't have Peter's money, and the medicine is so expensive”. Mary suggests, “If we take in one of your brother's children, he can help work the middle field, and grandmother will have one less mouth to feed”. “But we'll have one more. I don't know. We need help with caring for father, and with the farm, but if we take one of your cousins we may not have enough food. Whatever happens, Mary, you and I must keep tending the vegetables, and look after the chickens well. Without them we'll be eating only mealie porridge and that isn't good, especially for the young ones.”

But Rose was afraid that even this wouldn't be possible for long. She had

started to feel sick and weak herself. She wouldn't tell them until she had to, but she knew that soon it would be up to Mary to look after all of them.

Half the world's population lives in rural areas, and over half the world's workers make a living through farming. In the countries where HIV infections are most numerous, the numbers in agriculture are higher. Although fewer farmers today rely solely on subsistence agriculture, and get extra income from cash cropping, labouring or rural industries, farming in Africa and Asia in particular remains a labour-intensive and often household-based activity. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women do much of the world's farming, and produce and prepare most of our food. In Africa, eight out of ten farmers are women.

What does this mean in the face of AIDS? The epidemic mainly affects those between 15 and 45 years of age, the most productive workforce and the mainstay of families and communities. As a result, the more labour-intensive the economic activity, the more it is at risk in high-prevalence countries. And the more an activity depends on women's labour, the more it is at risk – over half of all new HIV infections are among women, and 60 per cent of those infected in Africa are women.

AIDS was seen for many years as a largely urban phenomenon, and the rural areas appeared to be somehow protected

The weight of agriculture

In low-income countries, 72 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, and 69 per cent of the labour force is in agriculture.

In middle-income countries, 53 per cent of the population lives in rural areas and 31 per cent of the labour force is in agriculture.

from the epidemic. But this vision was never realistic, in view of the complex pattern of dependency between rural and urban areas, rural poverty including lack of access to information and health services, and the greater hold of tradition and customary law. Today, the figures bear this out, as the rural parts of many countries are seeing a more rapid increase in new cases. A key factor is the amount of movement and interchange between the countryside and the larger towns and cities.

Commercial farms and estates showed rising infection rates before most other parts of the rural economy. Living conditions on estates vary enormously, as do infection rates and work needs to be done on the particular risk factors for these workers. Some estates employ many migrant workers. Others are part of the local community. Where accommodation is provided, it is often overcrowded and unsanitary. Many women work on plantations, sometimes as part of family groups and sometimes in their own right, though the composition of the workforce varies among countries and companies.

A study by the FAO of two districts in Kenya showed that the country's commercial agriculture sector is particularly susceptible to HIV/AIDS: high levels of infection were found on many commercial farms; on one sugar estate a quarter of the workforce was infected with HIV. The industry is facing a social and economic crisis as a result of escalating direct and indirect costs. One of the most serious consequences for workers is that the companies' response to date has concentrated on reducing these costs rather than planning strategies to control the spread of infection.

A comfortable myth is the idea that rural economies can "cope" with AIDS, that flexible farming systems and the extended family and community solidarity would absorb the epidemic's impact and adapt. Many examples exist of families coping, some successfully and some not. Kinship ties, lineage systems, land ownership and even average rainfall are all factors which help determine to what extent the economy of a rural household or community may be hit by HIV/AIDS. A middle-aged household, with several grown-up children still at home, copes better than a young one with small children. Wealthier households can hire labour while poorer ones have to sell assets, reduce their farming hours or switch to less labour-intensive – but possibly also less productive or lucrative – crops. Tasks which yield more benefits in the long term tend to be neglected in favour of more immediate returns. A particular issue, which will have repercussions for generations to come, is that children are taken out of school to help with the jobs that need doing, or because school costs too much, or because they lose their parents. Some plantations in Zimbabwe have hired children in the place of their dead parents to help them survive.

Coping is difficult in Africa, in particular, because the epidemic has hit at the same time as a number of other crises: structural adjustment, the rising cost of agricultural inputs, and environmental and climatic problems. There is increasing evidence that the pandemic is intensifying existing

Women more vulnerable

AIDS affects women disproportionately because

- they already carry out the majority of agricultural tasks
- they are usually responsible for the family and household
- they bear a large share of the burden of care for the sick
- they are more vulnerable to infection for biological reasons and as a result of gender inequality.

Shocking figures

AIDS undermines the labour force and human capital, productivity and food security, and national development

- AIDS has killed at least 7 million agricultural workers since 1985 in the 25 hardest-hit countries in Africa. It could kill 16 million more before 2020.
- Up to 25 per cent of the agricultural labour force could be lost in countries of sub-Saharan Africa by 2020.
- AIDS reduces productivity as people become ill and die and others spend time caring for the sick, mourning and attending funerals. The result is severe labour shortages for both farm and domestic work.
- Fostering AIDS orphans or hosting and caring for sick relatives reduces the amount of food available for each household member.
- The sale of productive resources – including cattle, tools and land – to care for the sick and pay for funerals diverts funds away from long-term development.
- People are dying before they can pass on knowledge and expertise to the next generation. A study in Kenya showed that only 7 per cent of agricultural households headed by orphans had adequate knowledge of agricultural production.
- In Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture, 58 per cent of all staff deaths are caused by AIDS, and in Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation at least 16 per cent of the staff are living with the disease. One study found that up to 50 per cent of agricultural extension staff time was lost through HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

labour bottlenecks in agriculture; increasing malnutrition; and adding to the burdens on rural women, especially those who head farm households. Reduced food production has already been noted as a result of the labour losses caused by HIV/AIDS. Studies in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania and Zimbabwe show adverse effects on levels of production that can be directly attributed to the epidemic.

Combating AIDS

The FAO is one of the agencies taking a lead in raising awareness on the dangers of AIDS for agriculture and the rural workforce. A number of measures have been put in place to help integrate AIDS prevention programmes in ongoing agricultural extension work. One example is the strategy set out in 'AIDS and agriculture' by the UN Development Programme's South East Asia HIV and Development Project, with FAO and other partners. The World Bank Toolkit on AIDS and development assistance also includes a strategy for rural development.

The ILO's approach has been to establish a set of guidelines that are applicable to all

workplaces – formal and informal, private and public, rural and urban – and to mobilize its tripartite constituents and help them take action against the disease. AIDS-related issues are mainstreamed throughout the Office, its programmes and field offices.

The ILO's global Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work (ILO/AIDS) was set up in November 2000. In response to widespread requests from constituents for guidelines it produced a code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work in May 2001. The code establishes key principles for developing policies at enterprise, community and national levels, and suggests concrete responses to HIV/AIDS at the workplace. It is a consensus document – agreed by a tripartite meeting of experts, is adaptable to a range of situations, and provides the basis for social dialogue on a difficult and sensitive issue. It is based on respect for fundamental rights at work and covers the key areas of:

- prevention through education, gender-awareness programmes, and practical support for behaviour change;
- protection of workers' rights, including employment protection, gender

ILO projects

The ILO Office in Lusaka is giving technical support for AIDS policy and programme development to the Zambia Business Coalition on AIDS (ZBCA) and the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers (NUPAW), and is developing training programmes with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Security, the Ministry of Labour and the Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS.

A pilot project on HIV prevention in the informal economy financed by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) seeks to assess the vulnerability and risks that informal workers face regarding HIV infection and the impact of AIDS on productivity. It has components for rural and for urban workers. The main focus is to provide information and education on HIV/AIDS, and to adapt the code of practice to the needs of informal workers. The countries are Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

equality, entitlement to benefits, and non-discrimination;

- care and support, including confidential voluntary counselling and testing, as well as treatment in settings where local health systems are inadequate.

The code provides the framework for workplace action on AIDS and for the ILO's own technical cooperation for the prevention and mitigation of AIDS. It has been translated into over 20 languages and launched in over 30 countries, where projects are taking place at the initiative of the ILO. A comprehensive manual has been produced to encourage and facilitate the use of the code. Entitled *Implementing the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work*, it is an education and reference document as well as a tool for training and guide for action.

AIDS and hunger

The famines of recent years have been due to rather more than the weather. Bad governance, the democracy gap, continual armed conflicts, trade imbalances and particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic are behind the serious food crises experienced by a number of African countries.

Marie-Paule Dromeel
Journalist

Forty-two million people worldwide are HIV-positive, the majority of them in Africa. Forty million people in Africa face the threat of famine. Seven million agricultural workers have died of AIDS. The world maps of hunger and of HIV/AIDS are so similar that the epidemiological data from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) overlap with the facts from the World Food Programme (WFP). Southern Africa is the region worst affected by famine, and it also has the highest HIV infection rates: 16 per cent in Malawi, 21 per cent in Zambia, 31 per cent in Lesotho and 33 per cent in Swaziland and Zimbabwe.¹

This has nothing to do with the images of parched, cracked earth so often associated with famine. The countries of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa are indeed facing food insecurity yet again, but this time, most of the humanitarian aid is concentrated on countries which really should not be in difficulties, because they have fertile land aplenty. Certainly, drought has hit southern Africa hard over the past two years, but that also happened in 1992 – without causing a famine. Climatic problems may have triggered the food crisis, but the decisive factor this time around has been the spread of HIV/AIDS, to an extent that would have been inconceivable just a few years ago.

Downward spiral

In fact, the links between HIV/AIDS and food insecurity have been known for quite

some time. First, the virus weakens these countries' essentially rural, agricultural economies. Then growing poverty and food insecurity make rural people more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. At the family level, the downward spiral begins with the infection of the first adult, often the father. While she is looking after him, his wife can no longer work in the fields. Medical expenses place a heavy burden on the family budget. When the husband dies, funeral expenses may force the wife to sell off part of the family assets. Tradition forbids field work for several days while in mourning. The following year, unable to hire temporary labour, the family plants a smaller surface. The children no longer go to school and they have to hoe and reap. Output declines. With their food stocks reduced and no money to buy meat or fish, the family suffers malnutrition and ill-health.

When the mother or the children fall ill in turn, the spiral goes on and gets worse.

The next stages were described by UNAIDS Director Peter Piot, when signing a cooperation agreement with the WFP at the beginning of 2003: "People are obliged to adopt survival strategies that may put their lives in danger. Some of them emigrate, often to shanty towns that lack health and education services; women and children may be forced to prostitute themselves in exchange for food, work or other essentials..."²

Denounced by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in a speech to the G8 in March 2003, the "deadly trio" – food insecurity, HIV/AIDS and the inability to provide

and manage basic services – has a measurable impact. In Swaziland, where life expectancy has dropped below 40, a recent study revealed that 38 per cent of households confronted with an AIDS-related death experienced lower harvests and withdrew their children from school because they could no longer afford the costs. Average maize production per family per year has fallen from 35 to 16 sacks. Homesteads where nobody has yet died of AIDS have an average of 13 head of cattle, as against nine head on holdings where AIDS has already killed someone. According to another study, a rural area of Zimbabwe where 50 per cent of deaths are attributable to AIDS has seen its output of maize plummet by 61 per cent and of vegetables by 49 per cent.

Rather than being a “crisis” linked to climatic occurrences, food insecurity has thus become a sort of permanent disaster in Africa. With 7.2 million people needing urgent assistance in December 2002, according to the world alert system set up by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the situation in Zimbabwe, the region’s former “granary”, is a clear case in point. The disastrous agrarian reform launched by President Mugabe three years ago is brutally dismantling an agricultural system which, although based on an unjust distribution of land, did at least work. On the social side, the Commercial Farmers’ Union, grouping 3,400 big farmers who are among those who have good land and are targeted by the reforms, had developed one of the country’s most efficient programmes against HIV/AIDS. Ten thousand volunteers were mobilized for prevention campaigns aimed at the 2 million people living on these big farms. The effectiveness of this programme had improved relations between the employers and the agricultural workers. However, the land occupations, the violence and the exodus of more than half a million people have seriously compromised the future of these activities, which had to some extent compensated for the State’s inability to protect the population. Today in Zimbabwe, even State-based humani-

tarian aid is no longer functioning or is corrupt. Thus, the WFP, alerted by revelations in the press, had to suspend some of its operations because the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), was diverting aid to its own supporters.

Harvests are usually expected in the region during April, so food aid was reviewed downwards at the beginning of April 2003. But on the seventh of that month James Morris, the WFP’s Executive Director and the UN Secretary-General’s special envoy for the humanitarian needs in southern Africa, warned the Security Council: “It would be foolish to say this crisis is over. Crop prospects are better, but more droughts are forecast and we are confronted with the real possibility of a permanent, low-grade food crisis created by AIDS”.

A few weeks later, a report by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) coldly set out some possible responses to this risk of permanent shortages. The points included continuing food aid operations, focusing on the decline in the quantity and quality of work in zones with high rates of HIV/AIDS, and adapting work “so that it conforms to the abilities of adults in poor health and of elderly people”.³ In a way, the pessimism of this document, which also noted “the prediction of the exponential growth of the disease over the next 10-12 years”, echoed a note from the European Commission last December concerning the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa. As seen from Brussels, the main problems are “governments’ economic failures, linked to inadequate policies concerning the sectors of food security, rural development and land acquisition, the exhaustion of traditional mechanisms of adaptation, chronic malnutrition and very weak private investment”, together with “the weakness of the regional institutions, notably the SADC, who have been insufficiently involved in anticipating and preventing the crisis”.

Inadequate economic reforms

Not a word in the EU's note about the tonnes of surplus that it dumps on the markets of the South. Nor about the US\$400 billions' worth of subsidies that the Western countries granted their farmers in 2001. The economic reforms promoted by the international financial institutions have sometimes turned out to be completely inadequate, thus contributing to the weakening of the poor countries. Through their structural adjustment programmes, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank inspired agrarian reforms which, far from improving food security, sometimes thrust the people of these countries into even more precarious circumstances. This happened all the faster because these economies are primarily agrarian. In particular, liberalization of the agricultural sector meant the reduction or abolition of various forms of assistance to peasant farmers, such as subsidies for the purchase of inputs. In Malawi, cuts in a very effective programme for the free distribution of seed and fertilizers contributed to the collapse of food production. Marked by misunderstandings, dirigisme and suspicions, the difficult relations between the IMF technocrats and the authorities in these countries sometimes have very serious consequences. Malawi is a good example of this. For more than a year now, the authorities and the IMF have been holding each other responsible for the famine linked to the Government's sale of its cereal reserves a few months before the bad harvests. The IMF advocated selling off a large part of these stocks, and the Government decided to offload them completely at a moment when prices were very low. Moreover, this operation was marked by embezzlements. The WFP, for its part, announced in April 2003 that food aid to more than 3 million people would continue, so that peasants, now prey to hunger and income losses, would not be tempted to harvest unripe crops. The WFP also predicts that, with 60 per cent of Malawi's population living below the poverty threshold and an HIV/AIDS

rate of 16 per cent, the majority of the poorest and most vulnerable households will be unable to buy food even if it is available. Life expectancy in Malawi has dropped from 46 to 36 years.

It is an often-overlooked fact that more rural people than city-dwellers are infected with HIV/AIDS. The epidemic is spreading through the countryside at an alarming rate, via the communications axes and due to migratory habits. An agricultural market, where peasants and customers meet, is a "high-risk zone". So are the plantations, where large numbers of unmarried agricultural workers or migrants often live in conditions similar to those for the miners of southern Africa. In the past, big infrastructural projects attracted thousands of workers and boosted the sex trade, thus helping to spread the epidemic. This explains why, for example, the giant construction site for the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline is being very closely watched by the World Bank, which is financing it.

Heavy price

Rural people, and women in particular, are paying a heavy price. In many rural communities, a large number of the men have left to try their luck in the cities. Some of them come back with HIV and may infect those around them. Also, once they fall ill, migrants tend to want to end their days in their village. For biological and cultural reasons, women and girls are more vulnerable to HIV than are men and boys, but when females are infected, they generally survive longer. Which explains why there are so many "AIDS widows". However, in some rural communities, the husband's death will also entail rituals that may increase the risk of spreading the virus. One example is levirate, the moral obligation on a widow to marry the youngest brother of her deceased husband. This practice still exists in various regions of Africa. In other societies, widows may lose all their rights to land and property upon their husband's death. And even when this is not a funeral custom, they are sometimes rejected by

their in-laws. All over the world, women's associations are trying to put across the point that agrarian reforms should be launched to eradicate all the discrimination of which they are victims. The greatest injustice is that, while a large proportion of agricultural work is done by women, they hold only a tiny part of the property rights. Little by little, this issue of illegality is coming to the surface, precisely because it has become obvious that HIV/AIDS was further weakening women's position within the community.

At the local level, raising this awareness is a major challenge, in view of the restricted access to information and education. This brings us to the other great victims of the pandemic – the children. In the rural areas, schools are often far away and their curricula do not match the children's needs. Mobilization campaigns in the education sector, such as the one initiated by Education International (EI) in cooperation with UNICEF and the World Bank, are proving decisive. For some years now, EI has undertaken to disseminate as much information as possible on HIV/AIDS, via its regional, national and local trade union structures. This material is aimed at teachers (in some Zambian schools, as many as 40 per cent of the teaching staff are HIV-positive) and pupils. In Haiti, for example, one of the countries targeted by EI, affiliated teaching union the Coordination nationale des éducateurs d'Haïti is one of

the best-structured organizations not only within the local trade union movement but in civil society as a whole. Today, the training modules are getting through to even the most underprivileged regions, in schools where the subject of HIV/AIDS had never been mentioned before. Another promising project supported by several international organizations provides free school meals. This may help to greatly reduce the number of poor children who drop out of school, such as the many boys and girls obliged to take over the farming tasks of a family member who is sick or has died due to AIDS. Many others have been withdrawn from school because there is no other choice when the deadly trio strikes – AIDS, poverty and food shortages. To quote James Morris, one of the strongest supporters of this project which is still looking for funding, "The first thing that families affected by AIDS want is not money or medicines, but food."⁴

Notes

¹ Apart from Botswana (infection rate 38 per cent) and South Africa (20 per cent), whose mineral wealth is protecting them from food insecurity. The percentages are for infection rates in adults (UNAIDS estimates, end of 2002).

² Translated from the French.

³ SADC and European Commission quotes are translated from the French.

⁴ Translated from the French.

Hispaniola, two hundred years on

Haiti's President Aristide is seeking funds for a splendid celebration in 2004, the bicentennial of the first black revolution. Meanwhile, in the Haitian countryside, more than 4 million descendants of slaves – smallholders, sharecroppers and agricultural workers – are facing almost insurmountable obstacles: archaic farming practices, the repression of human and trade union rights and the absence of the State. The choice before them? The shanty towns or the Dominican Republic.

Jacky Delorme
Journalist

Toblero, a few minutes away from the beach resort of Boca Chica and its “all-inclusive” tourism. Ramon Ramirez’s red cap, marked “BALAGUER”,¹ contrasts nicely with the green backdrop of the sugar fields. Ramon lives in a *bateye*, a wretched encampment inhabited by the *braceros*, Haitian cane-cutters, together with their families. According to some sources, between 500,000 and 1 million Haitians like Ramon live in the Dominican Republic. They work mainly in agriculture, but also in other sectors like construction and the free trade zones. Most of them are undocumented and are regarded as illegal immigrants. Ramon is an exception. His Dominican identity card states that he was born there in 1941. And he remembers that his parents came from Jacmel in Haiti. His memory fails him when he is asked why he has a Spanish-sounding name, but his parents probably decided to make his life a little less difficult than theirs by Hispanizing his name.

Long history of exploitation

Exploitation of Haitian labour in the Dominican Republic began with the development of the sugar industry during the First World War, when the collapse of sugar beet production in Europe made it possible for the Dominican Republic to become

a major sugar producer. The United States, which occupied the country from 1916 to 1924, organized the recruitment of Haitian workers. When the Americans pulled out, this immigration, legal or not, continued. There were some bloody episodes, such as in 1937 when the troops of General Rafael Trujillo, who had seized power seven years before, massacred 20,000 Haitian migrants at the frontier within the space of a few days. This did not prevent the Haitian dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier from reaching agreement with him, in the 1950s, on formal structures for seasonal hiring. Despots do not hold the odd massacre against each other when there are fat profits to be made on the backs of the *braceros*. Trujillo’s former right-hand man, Joaquim Balaguer, and several other leaders were to take the same line: exploitation, massive expulsions and anti-Haitian propaganda.²

In his *bateye* at Toblero, Ramon Ramirez does not really follow all the subtleties of politics, but the people who gave him the cap said he had to support the “reds”.³ So yes, next year he will no doubt vote for the party of the former conservative caudillo. For the rest of his community, politics remains an even darker mystery. They have never voted in their lives, they do not have any papers, and they are irregular, even if some of them were born in the Dominican Republic, like Ramon. But although the country’s Constitution grants nationality

to those born on its territory, this principle is never respected in practice – unless their parents are legal migrants, which is very rarely the case.

So their main concern is to get from one day to the next. “We don’t earn enough to eat properly, take care of ourselves or buy clothes”, explains Joseph, a *bracero*. His job is to load the cane on to the trucks. He receives 50 pesos per skip filled. That comes to about 600 to 700 pesos every two weeks. But sometimes the truck does not turn up. Those days, he earns nothing. What is more, the *zafra*, the sugar cane harvest, lasts for only six months. The rest of the year, Joseph makes a little bit of money tending the fields.

Joseph lives with Sabine. They have a ten-year-old daughter, but both of them also have bigger children back in Haiti. Joseph no longer gets any news of his children there. Sabine tries to keep in touch with her three sons. In December 2002, she set off to see them. An opportunity arose to cross the frontier. The people smuggler asked her for 1,000 pesos and she had to pay the transport costs too. Once she returned, she tried in vain to claim the wages that her employers owed her as a domestic servant.

At the encampment, an atmosphere of desolation reigns, unbroken even by the cries of the children playing in an old car wreck. They do have a school, built last year thanks to a grant from the Dominican State, but the teacher has stayed away for several weeks now. He was not paid his salary. In the *bateye* of Toblero, nobody would dream of protesting. “Nobody helps us”, says Sabine resignedly. “We don’t have papers. In Toblero, it’s not like in Santo Domingo. Here, the police usually let the Haitians alone. But we know that they could evict us at any minute.”

Dajabon, a frontier town (Dominican Republic). On Mondays and Fridays, Dajabon turns into a real beehive. The frontier is opened. Thousands of Haitians come in to sell *pèpè* (used clothes) and contraband goods that have ended up in Haiti. In return, they buy Dominican agricultural produce which they can no longer

find in sufficient quantities in their own country. The Dominican Republic continues to rely on its agriculture, thanks in particular to the exploitation of migrant labour. But in Haiti, the agricultural sector – although it continues to involve more than half of the active population – now represents just 22 per cent of GDP. It is heart-rending to see hundreds of Haitian men and women heading back and forth, their faces dripping with sweat, across the frontier post that straddles the Rio Massacre, some with bundles of old rags on their heads, the others struggling with overloaded barrows full of agricultural produce. The presence of soldiers, *cobradores* (watchmen) and customs officers gives an appearance of legality, but according to the few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have decided to operate on the border, this market is a no-go area for due process. “The Haitian buyers and sellers who frequent these markets are forced to pay a whole range of taxes that are often levied by officials or the military, without any legal basis. In Dajabon market, for instance, a seller may be obliged to pay customs duties several times over on the same goods. Each year, this market is auctioned off to an operator who then collects the rentals for space from the stallholders. To do this, he hires groups of people who impose whatever charges they wish. If anyone refuses to pay, then merchandise, often worth more than the sum demanded, is simply seized.”⁴

Repression

While Dajabon market is a great source of disputes and human rights violations, they also happen every day right along the frontier. The repatriation of Haitians, or the refusal of re-entry after they have spent a few days in Haiti, is well-documented by the NGOs that are active at the border. Down the years, they have noticed that waves of such incidents often coincide with particular events: a political crisis and threatened coup in Haiti, an electoral campaign and consequent ratcheting up of xenophobia

in the Dominican Republic, renewal of the *bracero* workforce before the *zafra*, so as to have younger, more docile labour, etc. These NGOs note that, despite a protocol signed between the two countries in 1999, convoys unload their human cargoes after the border has closed, at undesignated crossings. Night is also the preferred time for most clandestine crossings in the opposite direction. For the migrants, real risks are involved due to the existence of all kinds of trafficking (arms, drugs, etc.) and a reinforced and sometimes trigger-happy Dominican military presence. Murders are frequent, police enquiries and court cases much less so.

"Recently", explains Xavier, an activist in the NGO *Solidaridad fronteriza*, "a Haitian woman was murdered just outside Dajabon on account of a papaw fruit. A Dominican farmer was certain that he had caught a papaw thief, and he wanted to take his revenge by making him several whole papaws, husk and all. The man's mother intervened, and the farmer took out his gun and shot her in the back. When the local radio reported what had happened, several listeners expressed their indignation on air. Not because of the murder. No, they were outraged that anyone would dare to arrest an honest Dominican peasant."

At Ouanaminthe, on the Haitian side, the contrast is striking. Dust and an all-embracing misery – the socio-economic indicators that people consult to get an idea of the state of development of a country are suddenly transformed into tangible reality. The Dominican Republic and Haiti are both classed as "developing countries", but the former has the strongest economic growth in the Americas while the latter is the poorest nation in the hemisphere. On the edge of the little town, in Nan Cacao and Pitobert, two places on the Maribahoux plain, Haitian policemen are standing guard while heavy equipment digs up the ground. Several days ago, construction work began there for a free trade zone, sparking anger among the inhabitants

"This is supposed to be an agricultural area", explains Gaston Etienne, an agron-

omist from Ouanaminthe and a member of the Pitobert Defence Committee. "In fact, it's one of the country's last remaining zones with high agricultural potential. With a little upgrading, it could make the whole north-east region self-sufficient in rice, beans and maize. The water-table is six feet below. We have constantly demanded State aid for the peasants, and a good irrigation system with technical support, so as to increase national production."

Not only did the aid never arrive, but for the last two years, the Haitian authorities have not replied to requests from various human rights and environmental NGOs for information and concertation on this matter. It was in 2001 that trade unionists from the two countries alerted the local population to the intention of a Dominican industrial group, active in the textile sector, to move into Maribahoux. Its aim was to gain new scope for exports to the United States, as the limits of the Dominican Republic's quotas had been reached. The free trade zone project materialized in April 2002, when President Aristide came to lay the foundation stone. He was accompanied by his opposite number, the Dominican Republic's President Rafael Hipolito Mejia, and he declared that the project was "the first child of the Haitian-Dominican union". Indeed, the free zone is just one stage of an enormous programme of cross-border integration, baptized the "Hispaniola Fund", which would be mainly financed out of the convertible part of the two countries' bilateral debt to the United States. This "anti-poverty" plan provides for the construction of free trade zones, roads, irrigation basins and dams, and for reforestation activities, in a frontier corridor common to both countries.

But on 18 March 2003, on the fertile plain of Maribahoux, 54 powerless peasants witnessed the destruction of their houses and crops. "Nobody was given any warning", Gaston Etienne insists. "In most cases, these are smallholdings of no more than a *carreau* – that's 1.29 hectares. Those who have a deed of title may be able to

claim compensation, but the others?" The peasants sought an injunction. But a few days later, the judge issued the following declaration: "By virtue of an order of the Government commissioner attached to the court of first instance of Fort-Liberté, obliging me to refrain from setting foot in this place until further notice, this request cannot be granted for the time being".

The unions mobilize

Leogane, up in the mountains, two hours' drive from Port-au-Prince. About 30 delegates of the smallholders' organization *Rassemblement des petits planteurs* (RASPA) are meeting in a community centre made of blocks without mortar, bits of wood, plastic and some sheet-iron. Depending on the time and the day, it is used for reading and writing lessons, for preaching or for union meetings, like the one today to mark the visit of Fritz Charles and Carlo Napoléon, respectively the General Secretary and the Treasurer of the Haitian Trade Union Coordination (*Coordination syndicale haïtienne*). They have come to hear the peasants' grievances and to try to mobilize them for future campaigns to press their demands.

Although it was supposed to spare those most in need, the freezing of a large proportion of international aid, decreed after the mangled elections in the year 2000, is hitting Leogane hard. The peasants are making ruinous purchases of seed and fertilizers, because they know in advance that they risk heavy losses. The drought destroys the harvests and when the rains do come, erosion carries the crops away. Since the embargo, the reforestation programme has stopped. In the mountains, the peasants have gone back to felling the little bit of tree cover that had so far been spared. Children who used to go to school no longer do so. They suffer from malnutrition and illnesses linked to untreated water. The exodus is starting again. Towards the shanty towns or the Dominican Republic.

The meeting with the trade unionists fortifies the peasants, and they say they

are ready to mobilize for a march on Port-au-Prince, despite fears of reprisals. Certainly, the *chefs de section*, the Duvalierist local potentates whose word was law even in the remotest country areas, have disappeared. But the insecurity linked to the political crisis remains. Leading local officials are all from the Fanmi Lavalas, President Aristide's party. Exactions against members of peasants' organizations, committed with the consent or even the participation of these officials, have multiplied since 2000. On the radio, people heard that on 21 March 2003, near Hinche on the Central Plateau, a march by the Papaw Peasants' Movement was brutally halted by armed partisans of President Aristide. Police forces present at the scene did not intervene. But the most dramatic case is the Guacimal dossier – from the name of a company which runs orange and lemon plantations and exports essential oils from bitter oranges, marketed for use in liqueurs such as Cointreau or Grand Marnier.

On 27 May 2002, in Saint-Raphaël, a protest by the trade union *Syndicat des ouvriers de Guacimal Saint-Raphaël* (SOGS), supported by a group of trade unionists from *Batay Ouvriye* (Workers' Struggle) was put down by men armed with machetes and guns, led by town councillors. They killed two peasants, injured several others and burned down some houses. When the police decided to intervene, they arrested 11 people, including two journalists and seven trade unionists from *Batay Ouvriye*, and imprisoned them in Port-au-Prince. Despite a report by the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR), highly critical of the local councillors, and despite a high-profile international campaign, the authorities only freed the detainees very gradually, one by one. The last two detained trade unionists were released on 2 December 2002.

In Saint-Raphaël, the agricultural workers wanted to reaffirm their right to use citrus fields, between seasons, to grow their own food, in line with an agreement reached when the land was bought in 1958 by the Novella family, which runs Guaci-

mal. In 2000, the workers founded a trade union, with the assistance of *Batay Ouvriye*. Despite the hostility shown by Guacimal, and its reluctance to negotiate with the SOGS, some wage demands were met. Then, in May 2002, the workers' wish to end the sharecropping system, arbitrarily organized by the guards and supervisors to their own advantage, led to the dramatic clash.

The repression of peasants' organizations, and the abandonment of the countryside by the elites who possess political and economic power, are a constant of Haitian history right up to the present day.⁵ Many writers therefore immerse themselves in the "specificity of Haiti" in order to make the link between the past and the present. For example, the author André Corten, like others before him, thinks that the centuries-old resistance of the peasants against the big traders and coffee exporters has brought the peasantry to a suicidal state. He points to the practice of *marronnage*, "which refers to the situation of slaves who escaped from the plantations to the colony's inaccessible wooded knolls". After independence, this became a general survival reflex.⁶ This dominant cultural trait within Haitian society would in particular explain the very high proportion of rural dwellers (about 65 per cent of the population, as against an average of 25 per cent for the other Latin American countries), but also the people's distrust of the State, which historically has been very repressive and has been completely absent from the provision of public services.

Considering the countryside as one of the sites of bloody conflicts during Haiti's long democratic transition, the sociologist Laënnec Hurbon notes that "the demands of the rural sector have been the least listened to". He also explains that "the many charges levied on agricultural production, by the big landowners, the urban traders, the usurers and the State, without giving anything in return (roads, schools, hospital care or agricultural credit), make the peasantry the most underprivileged section of national society".⁷

Nothing has really changed in the Haitian countryside since the nineteenth century. In many cases, sharecropping – which consists of leasing out land (often lower-quality) in return for 30 to 50 per cent of the harvest – continues to dictate the balance of power. Aware that it is difficult to know just how much somebody has harvested, landowners often turn to their own advantage the negotiations on the share due. Whether sharecroppers, smallholders or agricultural workers (categories that in any case often overlap), Haitian peasants generally suffer the same evils. Apart from what the experts discreetly call "structural problems", the peasants have to deal with economic fluctuations which, in reality, are often related to the fundamental handicaps of the rural areas. Nobody can do anything about a lack of rain, but the same cannot be said of landslides, scorched crops and land that has become infertile due to desperate exploitation of the soil, which in turn is linked to inaction by the State. The same goes for the ravages of insects, which do not seem to worry anyone except the peasants themselves; for the lack of outlets for agricultural produce facing competition from imports or contraband; or for the fall in the coffee price, which reveals the weaknesses of the authorities who organize a sector that is, after all, vital to tens of thousands of families. If nothing has really changed in the basic problems of the countryside, it may nonetheless be noted that the peasants have, thanks to their organizations, developed an ever keener awareness of the constraints posed by globalization, but also of the structural changes that a modern State, even without any great means, could achieve.

Notes

¹ Named after President Joaquín Balaguer, who ruled the Dominican Republic with an iron fist from 1966 to 1996, after succeeding General Rafael Trujillo. Joaquín Balaguer died in July 2002.

² In a document from an American NGO, there is the following description of life in the *bateyes*: Once they arrive in the sugar farms run by the Dominican

State, the workers are subject to strict rules. They are not allowed to leave the *bateyes* – the sugar-cane plantation communities where they live – and they are under constant armed surveillance. Often, the Haitians are not paid in money, but in vouchers that can be exchanged only in the company's stores, which deduct 20 per cent of the face value. When the Haitians are paid in money, they generally receive less than the minimum wage required for field workers. Moreover, payment is based on the weight of cane cut, as indicated by scales that have been rigged to the workers' disadvantage. (Translated from the French.)

³ Curiously enough, in the Dominican Republic, red is the conservatives' colour.

⁴ Evaluation of the human rights situation on the Haitian-Dominican border in 2002 by the *Groupe d'appui aux réfugiés et aux apatrides* (GARR).

⁵ Without going too far back, mention should be made of the massacre, by cold steel, of 200 peasants in Jean-Rabel, in the north of the country, in 1987.

⁶ Corten, A.: *Misère, religion et politique en Haïti*, (Paris, Karthala, collection Hommes et Sociétés, 2001).

⁷ Hurbon, L.: *Pour une sociologie d'Haïti au XX^e siècle, la démocratie introuvable*, (Paris, Karthala, 2001).

Sweet words and harsh facts in Trinidad's sugar industry

Few question the need for restructuring Trinidad's sugar industry. But the Government there seems intent on going it alone, without badly-needed dialogue with stakeholders, including workers and their trade unions. Experience elsewhere in the Caribbean shows that the search for consensus is the key to successful reforms.

Jorge Chullén

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On 17 February 2003, all the employees of Caroni (1975) Ltd. received the offer of an “enhanced” Voluntary Separation of Employment Programme (VSEP). Thus, the current Government in Trinidad launched the restructuring of Caroni, the State-owned sugar company and sole cane processor in the Caribbean island. Even if it was necessary, the restructuring process lacked a well-constructed programme and, more importantly, failed to gain the support of the main stakeholders in the industry.

Although small by international standards, the sugar industry in Trinidad has features shared by most of the traditional cane-based industries around the world: an agriculture sector dominated by one crop – at the regional, but sometimes national, level; social and political structures tightly linked to the labour force in the industry; and a labour force comprising mostly non-skilled agricultural workers. The nature of the challenges when restructuring a company (and an industry) makes the Trinidadian case a classic example of restructuring of any cane-based sugar industry.

Caroni (1975) Ltd. was established in the early 1970s, after the State acquired the assets of Tate & Lyle, then a major sugar multinational. Caroni is a miller-planter enterprise, with two sugar factories and a refinery. In 2002, Caroni produced about 91,000 tonnes of sugar. Controlling close

to 77,000 acres of land, Caroni is also reckoned as the country's largest landholder, and it is involved in the production of rice, citrus fruits and rum, among other things. Caroni employs about 9,200 people. The All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Union (ATSGWTU) represents some 8,100 “daily-paid” workers, while four different staff associations organize the remaining 1,100 “monthly-paid” employees. There are close to 6,000 independent cane farmers in the island.

Unlike the oil industry, sugar carries no major weight in the national economy, but its influence at the regional level is considerable. Communities in the cane-growing areas of Central Trinidad depend on sugar for their living, while the company provides them with some social services, like health care and recreation, and road infrastructure.

No dialogue on separation package

In the early part of 2003, a highly emotional discussion about the restructuring of Caroni took place almost daily in the national media. Even though this discussion was necessary for the country, it was no substitute for the availability of information on the process and the business plans for the new Caroni, which should have flowed from the Government.

What the Government did instead was to offer an “enhanced” Voluntary Separation of Employment Programme (VSEP), which it had not negotiated with the union. The Government, in fact, launched the restructuring by alienating the union, and the workers it represents, from the process, even though they are key stakeholders in the industry. The Government did claim that it had indeed gone through a “consultative process” with the union, the staff associations and farmer organizations; only to hear from the union they had been “informed” about the process but were never participants in it. (A perusal of the reports from some of the meetings shows that they were more like information meetings, where participants raised some concerns but the latter were not a basis for collaborative work.)

The VSEP covers three areas: first, severance is calculated according to the collective agreements, which in the case of the daily-paid workers had expired in December 2001, with negotiations for renewal in progress. (One item deferred in the negotiations was the formula for calculating severance payments.) Second, pension benefits would be payable according to the rules of the pension plans, but workers received no statement on pension payable (see below). Third, support programmes, such as access to land for agricultural purposes and counselling and retraining programmes, were also announced. The “enhancement” of the VSEP is a lump sum based on a percentage of the severance payment, which varies according to age groups. The Government gave employees a 45-day period (ending on 3 April) to decide on the enhanced VSEP. Severance payments to daily-paid workers would be effective on 10 July, and on 2 August for the monthly-paid or staff.

The enhanced VSEP offer failed to gain prompt and massive support among the daily-paid workers because of the relatively low severance – inclusive of bonus – and the confusing context in which the VSEP was offered. The agriculture minister told the media, for instance, that if the workers did not accept the programme,

they would be dismissed. A Government document states that in the event of a “favourable” response by employees, the company would seek to rehire employees on the basis of need and contract, with new terms and conditions of service. The trade minister volunteered a figure: the new Caroni would rehire 75 per cent of the employees taking the VSEP. The hiring “on contract” means that jobs would be precarious and employees may be unable to exercise their right of association.

Additionally, the VSEP offer had some technical flaws, in particular regarding pension benefits. In early February, before the VSEP was offered, a firm of actuaries and consultants hired to review benefits under the company pension plans told the company they had “serious concerns” about the accuracy of the data on the workers, and that it would be misleading to provide employees with statements on pension payable. (A second firm was hired to audit the company data.)

Union members, mostly daily-paid agricultural workers, were already concerned about losing their jobs, about a relatively poor severance payment and about their lack of skills and the scarcity of new jobs. Now, they have to make a decision on quitting their jobs without adequate information.

The Government's restructuring proposal

The restructuring of Caroni is an old topic of discussion in Trinidad, as many studies and reports have been produced over the years. Nonetheless, it is surprising that the Government gave no information on the time frame for the restructuring or the business plans for the new Caroni. In general terms, the Government's proposal includes closing one factory by the end of the 2003 crop (July) and reducing production to 75,000-80,000 tonnes of sugar in the Usine Ste Madeleine plant. Caroni will no longer cultivate cane and, starting in 2004, farmers would supply all cane required, while arrangements will be in place to en-

sure that cane growing attracts the best lands, the best cane varieties are employed, and machinery is efficiently used.

The new Caroni will focus on the manufacturing and refining of sugar, but Caroni's assets are much more than a factory and a refinery. The approximately 77,000 acres of Caroni lands would be transferred to the State and managed by a new agency (the Estate Management and Business Development Company), which the Executive created in June 2002. In addition, private sector investors will participate in such production sectors as citrus fruits, rice, sugar refining, beef and dairy products, as well as in work areas such as tractor and field engineering, human resource management, transport services and others.

This outline lacked technical and economic information and public discussion – key elements in a politically charged sector like sugar. Members of Parliament on the Government bench said, for instance, that there were no plans on how to achieve such goals; others that plans will be available when Caroni's lands are vested in the State.

Probably this was the second main area where the restructuring failed to gain support from among the industry's stakeholders. Manufacturing sugar is a centuries-old activity, and there is no secret formula for overnight success. As Caroni's senior staff told this writer, the proposed production target requires, among other conditions, a certain length of crop, enough good-quality cane supplied by the farmers, no technical breakdowns and no time-losses of any kind. Fresh investments in the factory are crucial because, even if the volume of cane required to produce the amount of sugar targeted were available, the factory has technical limits on processing such volume. With no upgrading – nor any announcement of future upgrading – of the old Usine Ste Madeleine, the staff legitimately doubted that the proposed target of 75,000-80,000 tonnes, raw value, would be achieved. These are industry-specific features, which require preparatory work, even before any financial or economic considerations.

Politics and sugar

Although the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Ltd. is an important – and difficult – process for Trinidad, it faces a major obstacle in the lack of dialogue among the social partners (i.e. Government, company and employees). This could cause the failure of any reasonable restructuring exercise.

In 1991-93, the industry had experienced the work of the so-called Tripartite Committee, which proposed a series of steps to put Caroni "back on track." The strength of such experience was that all sugar groups had unanimously agreed on the way forward, besides the technical or economic merits of the proposal itself. Something went wrong, however, as the Government ("Caroni's shareholder") failed to provide timely and sufficient resources to fund such a proposal. Politics and politicians have influenced – in various degrees – the sugar industries of the Caribbean. Trinidad is no exception: the sugar industry and workers have always played a crucial role in the country's history and they have been and are the basis for political movements. Whether political influence/interference in the industry is an adequate explanation of the failure of concerted efforts at restructuring is a question best left for Trinidadian sugar groups to answer.

In the 2003 situation, no group in the sugar industry is opposing the restructuring of Caroni. The groups appeared unable to create conditions for a real dialogue, however, which is a misfortune for the country, because Caroni has the human capital and technical expertise to lead a well-planned restructuring, which takes into consideration social and economic objectives, and can attempt to minimize the social dislocation that any restructuring implies. Such dialogue is necessary to guarantee a sensible restructuring, in particular when considering the new realities of the restructured international sugar industry.

Sugar goes global

The restructuring of Caroni (1975) Ltd. is in part a response to local factors, but it is also true that international developments influence the Trinidadian industry and will be quite relevant for a new Caroni and the new sugar industry in Trinidad. Government officials cited “adverse long-term developments” on the international sugar scene as one of main reasons for the proposed restructuring. They said that the State could no longer continue financing Caroni’s operations, nor would it be able to protect the company from the competition of lower-cost producers.

Today, the sugar industry is increasingly globalized. For example, inexpensive Brazilian sugar is available in most parts of the world. At the same time, the proliferation of free trade arrangements – notwithstanding the failure of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to introduce freer trade in agriculture – makes protectionist policies, even if desirable, less possible. Sugar markets are changing. For instance, the international trends just mentioned, in combination with some European developments (e.g. reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and the process of enlargement), have created pressure for reform of the EU sugar regime, which is tightly related to the preferential markets enjoyed by sugar producers of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, Trinidad included.

These developments are part of the restructuring of the international sugar industry, a complex process in itself. The restructuring combines decades-old processes with newer developments, geographical shifts and technological advances, and new industrial relations with economic liberalization programmes. For instance, central-southern Brazil (thanks to a striking synergy of producing sugar and fuel alcohol – ethanol – from cane) and some Asian countries have a key influence on the fundamentals of the sugar industry – production, consumption and international trade. Technological advances favour the consolidation of production and the concentration of ownership: sugar companies are now

bigger and more powerful; newer factories have larger processing capacities; and versatile machinery and computer-based processes are becoming available, even for medium-sized industries. The industry has been experiencing these developments for a long time now, but in the early 1990s, the massive introduction of market reforms and economic liberalization programmes meant that efficiency was identified with profit-making. Increasingly, sugar industries around the world found themselves measured against lower-cost producers and pressed to perform as profit-makers. This was true even of State-owned enterprises like Caroni (1975) Ltd., whose primary goal has never been profits.

Social dialogue and social partners

A new Caroni and a new sugar industry in Trinidad will be operating in this globalized context where more, not less, competition is expected to be the norm. It is necessary that the industry’s stakeholders agree on the way forward, and that informed consensus should be the basis for proposing business objectives, as in 1991-93.

Other cases in the English-speaking Caribbean shed light on the nature of this social exercise. The sugar industry in Guyana, for instance, took a dramatic turn for the better in the early 1990s, when political interference in the industry practically ceased and the stakeholders were able to build a common vision of its future. The Guyanese industry has become strong enough to withstand (and change) a recommendation made by the World Bank in 2001 that half of the industry should be closed. The industry is in expansion mode now, but not all problems have been solved. At the time of writing, a wage arbitration case is in progress for the sugar sector, because the parties were unable to reach an agreement in 2002.

In 2002, in the context of wage negotiations in Barbados, the stakeholders and the Government agreed on a restructuring programme for the industry. One mill closed in mid-2002, another will close

before 2005, and after that the industry will be operating only one mill. Relevant to this exercise was the fact that the Barbados Workers Union (BWU) negotiated the new terms and conditions of service for the workers, and the company submitted the proposed letters of employment, redundancy and severance to the union before issuing them to the workers. The process, as described by the BWU, was "consultative and cooperative".

The restructuring of Caroni (1975) Ltd. and the sugar industry in Trinidad has difficult political and economic, even racial, challenges to face and solve; all of which make dialogue more necessary. One responsible party is the Government (the Executive), to which falls the task of opening, conducting and sustaining a real and informed dialogue with the union, the workers and the rest of the country. However, this is not happening, and the process might become even more entangled: the Executive has replaced the company's board and management with an Inter-ministerial Committee in charge of the restructuring. The Government (the Execu-

tive) and the company have become one single entity. This move centralized a great amount of power but, at the same time, it deprived the specialized management of the opportunity to contribute to the process (even if only by helping to de-politicize issues). Moreover, in the recent history of the Trinidadian sugar industry, political goals had been all too easily portrayed as Caroni's goals.

Because of the way in which the restructuring was launched, an industrial relations matter (severance of workers) and the sugar workers' union (which represents the overwhelming majority of Caroni employees) became the key issue and player in a process that has the potential to dramatically change Trinidadian society. To restructure Caroni is to reform an entire economic sector which depends on the company and to free significant economic assets under its control. This process requires a democratic and open dialogue. The foremost responsibility of a union is to represent and defend the rights of the workers; in some circumstances, a union also speaks for the population in general.

Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture

Conclusions

1. The International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture held in Geneva from 15 to 18 September 2003, has adopted the following general conclusions and identified preliminary steps which are critical for developing strategies to redress the range of deficits in decent work in agriculture. The Symposium has:
 - a) The adverse impact of the global trade environment on commodity prices, employment and incomes;
 - b) Declining international and domestic investment in agriculture;
 - c) The restructuring of national agricultural sectors under Structural Adjustment Programmes; and
 - d) The increasing casualization and impoverishment of the agricultural work force which disproportionately affect women;
2. Recognized that in too many cases globalization has led to the degradation of economic, social and political conditions in the agricultural sector in most countries in most regions. These factors include the following:
3. Noted the preponderance of poverty in rural areas and the fact that waged agricultural workers, smallholders and subsistence farmers are found disproportionately among the millions of men and women experiencing severe poverty and livelihood and food insecurity;
4. Stressed that to be sustainable, agriculture must be economically viable, ecologically sound and socially just;
5. Highlighted the critical importance of targeting agricultural growth and rural development in order to reduce poverty, achieve food security and extend access to health care, education, clean water and sanitation;
6. Deplored the serious violations of freedom of association and the erosion of labour rights due to increasing constraints on the organization and representation of agricultural workers, and recognized the linkages between deteriorating economic conditions in the agricultural sector and increasing political repression in many contexts;
7. Deplored also the violation of other ILO core labour standards, notably the widespread use of child labour, and forced and bonded labour;
8. Identified numerous decent work deficits in agriculture both in the developing and industrialized countries. Among these are the extreme vulnerability of women and men migrant agricultural workers, in particular those who are victims of trafficking; unacceptable levels of child labour in agricultural work; unacceptably high levels of fatalities, injuries and

ill health experienced by agricultural workers, including child labourers; lack of comprehensive social security protection, whether in terms of access to health care; compensation for injury or disability; maternity protection or pension rights;

9. Noted the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on the agricultural workforce especially in Africa and that it intensifies all points of the deficit in decent work;

10. Observed that decent work deficits reinforce each other and perpetuate unsustainable development in the agricultural sector;

11. Noted the growth in codes of labour practice and other voluntary initiatives aimed at ensuring corporate social responsibility and application of ILO standards along the agricultural supply chain;

12. Reaffirmed the democratic values of equity, representation and voice.

The ILO is therefore called upon:

13. To support the development and promotion of an Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture in all relevant forums; in particular, the ILO must:

a) Promote the application of core Conventions especially Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 in agriculture;

b) Strengthen its advocacy role and presence at the international level, in the interests of the millions of men and women, waged agricultural workers, migrant workers, wage-dependent small farmers and self-employed farmers who are without voice in these global forums;

c) Strengthen collaboration with the FAO on issues of mutual concern, i.e.: (1) the cause and effect of global price declines in commodities and their impact on rural employment and small-scale producer livelihoods; (2) sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) and the involvement of trade unions and workers' organizations in implementation of the SARD initiative; (3) food security; (4) capacity building and training of trade union and cooperative leaders in participatory agricultural policy formulation; and (5) awareness raising on health and safety issues with a special focus on HIV/AIDS prevention among rural youth;

d) Integrate the findings of this Workers' Symposium and the issues highlighted in the background report into all relevant aspects of its programme of work in the next biennium and, specifically, to promote the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2002 (No. 184), to provide technical assistance to countries with the declared intention of ratifying and implementing Convention No. 184; promote the ratification of other key Conventions, such as the Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95), the Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery in Agriculture Convention, 1951 (No. 99), the Plantations Convention, 1958 (No.110), the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) and the Rural Worker's Organizations Convention, 1975 (No. 141);

e) Ensure the integration of all four pillars of decent work in agriculture in ILO work at the global, regional and national levels in key

policy areas, notably in the development of rural employment strategies, as an inherent part of the Global Employment Agenda, and draw the parallels between the Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture, rural poverty alleviation, PRSP and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals;

f) Make special efforts to promote integration of the Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture in social dialogue processes in forums at all levels, such as collaboration with the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety,¹ collaboration with UNAIDS and other relevant partners in HIV/AIDS and other public health issues;

g) Promote the implementation in the agricultural sector of the ILO code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, developing specific guidelines as necessary and appropriate;

h) Provide assistance for social dialogue with the aim of achieving decent work in agriculture;

i) Strengthen the capacity of trade unions and workers' organizations to function in an increasingly hostile environment through support for strategy development, policy guidance, focused research, policy information and sex disaggregated data;

j) Promote implementation of the tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in agricultural and commodity-based MNEs as well as MNEs in the food retail sector and in countries with significant agricultural economies to ensure decent work up and down the supply chain;

k) Promote the reform of national labour legislation to ensure that existing laws and regulations apply in an effective manner to all agricultural workers – not just employees with a recognized contract of employment. The conclusions of the General Discussion on the Scope of the Employment Relationship (International Labour Conference, 91st Session, 2003) are particularly relevant and should guide the work of the ILO in this regard;

l) Strengthen its campaign for the ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions concerning migrant workers (Conventions Nos. 97 and 143) as well as the UN Convention on the rights of all migrant workers and their families;

m) Seek extra-budgetary technical cooperation resources for projects on rural development and sustainable agriculture;

n) Develop the provision of specially targeted services for trade unions and workers' organizations to use as a recruitment strategy and as a means to address the immediate economic and social needs of the agricultural workforce. Such strategies should be developed in consultation with the workers themselves and must be demand driven in order to be successful;

o) Build capacity of trade unions and workers' organizations to understand and work on codes of labour practice and develop agreed benchmarks of competence for social auditors of such codes.

¹ Comprised of the ILO, FAO, UNEP, UNIDO, UNITAR, WHO, OECD, together with trade unions, representatives from industry and science and NGOs.

The Role of the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities

14. The Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), in conjunction with other relevant ILO departments, is called upon to:

a) Seek additional regular budget resources to strengthen activities in the agricultural sector and establish a focal point dedicated to the agricultural and rural sector;

b) Ensure that the ILO Workers' Group Gender Equality Policy is applied;

c) Design and implement follow-up activities, including women's activities, through targeted research, seminars and projects, at the regional and national level in order to assist in strengthening the capacity of trade unions and workers' organizations to organize and represent agricultural workers to ensure their active participation in the implementation of a decent work agenda for agriculture. Where possible an approach based on South-South cooperation should be fostered;

d) Seek donor support for projects designed to assist agricultural trade unions and worker's organizations to establish structures and activities that focus on organizing agricultural workers and incorporating their needs into the priorities and policies of unions at the national level. Emphasis should also be placed on developing the technical capacity of agricultural unions and workers' organizations at national level to participate in social dialogue and national, regional and international policy discussions concerning all aspects of the decent work agenda in agriculture;

e) Establish guidelines and mechanisms to assist trade unions and workers' organizations in bringing forward and following up on complaints concerning non-compliance with ILO standards with the supervisory mechanisms of the ILO;

f) Continue to promote, in conjunction with all levels of the trade union movement, ratification and implementation of ILO Conventions on rural workers' organizations, safety and health in agriculture and labour inspection in agriculture. ACTRAV should design and implement workers' education materials on a range of ILO standards which are particularly relevant to agricultural workers. Use determination of the national hazardous child labour lists under Convention No. 182, involving trade unions, to help promote ratification and implementation of Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture;

g) Undertake research and implement activities that will assist the trade union movement at national, regional and international levels to engage in the development and implementation of corporate social responsibility initiatives; in particular framework agreements negotiated between MNEs and international trade union bodies, and similar agreements negotiated at the regional and sub-regional level, which are designed to extend appropriate labour standards and protections to agricultural workers;

h) Work with ILO/AIDS to support the implementation of the ILO code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work for the protection of the rights, health and livelihoods of agricultural workers, including the development of training activities and materials based on the education and training manual on HIV/AIDS;

15. ACTRAV should establish and develop cooperation with other ILO technical programmes in order to:

- a) Assist with the full and rapid implementation of these conclusions;
- b) Pursue the effective implementation of resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference of relevance to agricultural workers including the resolution concerning social security adopted in 2001, the resolution concerning decent work and the informal economy adopted in 2002 and the resolution concerning the employment relationship adopted in 2003;
- c) Support agricultural trade unions and workers' organizations in fulfilling their unique potential to address specific problems facing workers in the agricultural sector, such as the elimination of child labour in agriculture, especially the worst forms, and redressing the devastating social and economic impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Role of Trade Unions and Workers' Organizations

16. All categories of agricultural workers need organization and representation and there is a need to develop comprehensive and effective strategies to reach these excluded groups of women and men in most countries and regions. In particular, trade unions and workers' organizations should examine their organizing strategies to take account of changing work patterns. Agricultural unions and organizations need to:

- a) Review, and where necessary, revise their own internal regulations and statutes in order to remove any limitations on their ability to organize and represent the agricultural workforce;
- b) Establish and/or strengthen special structures within their existing centres with responsibility for mobilizing and organizing agricultural workers, with special reference to both documented and undocumented migrant workers;
- c) Promote the principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability and democracy within their own structures and foster a true sense of accountability to those they represent;
- d) Explore potential links and strategic alliances;
- e) Consider developing a community-based approach to organizing in unison with other 'workplace-based' methods. Such dual strategies might be more effective in reaching agricultural workers, particularly when access to the undertaking is denied;
- f) Identify and challenge institutional and legal restrictions on freedom of association. Such action might include united national level campaigns and international campaigns in collaboration with subregional, regional and international trade union organizations as well as other appropriate international and intergovernmental organizations;
- g) Seek support from subregional, regional and international trade union organizations and ACTRAV in reporting rights violations and obstacles to freedom of association to the ILO for consideration by the ILO supervisory mechanisms;

h) Develop initiatives to target the working poor including those in the informal economy.

17. With the increased participation of women in the agricultural workforce combined with the many additional vulnerabilities and abuses they face, it is crucial that trade unions and workers' organizations make greater efforts to become gender-aware. Trade unions and workers' organizations should:

a) Promote gender equality in the workplace and in their structures. This should include establishing or expanding specialist units devoted to gender issues and gender mainstreaming including leadership training for women and their full participation in all activities. Gender audits of structures and programmes should be undertaken;

b) Ensure greater gender equality in leadership and establish and strengthen women's structures and develop alternative strategies and structures where necessary;

c) Develop capacity around a range of employment related non-wage issues of relevance to existing and potential members – such as reproductive rights, childcare and other family responsibilities, sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS. Trade unions and workers' organizations must develop a gender-aware approach to campaigning around such issues.

18. Concerning efforts to extend social protection and safety and health protection to agricultural workers, trade unions and workers' organizations need to:

a) Emphasize the importance of prevention and the need for widespread ratification and implementation of ILO Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture, recognizing that worker OSH protection and protection of the environment are closely linked;

b) Develop, or continue with the development of, well-focused and organized campaigns for the ratification and implementation of Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture. This includes raising awareness and soliciting support within trade unions, workers' organizations, rural communities and with key decision-makers in government concerning the benefits of ratification and implementation of Convention No. 184;

c) Seek improved worker-ILO cooperation on training and capacity building on Convention No. 184 and occupational safety and health (OSH) in agriculture with emphasis on strengthening and ensuring effective safety and health representation on OSH issues in the workplace.

19. Recognizing that agricultural trade unions and workers' organizations have severely limited resources and that the conclusions of this Symposium require effort on the part of all concerned, there is an urgent need to strengthen capacity in terms of both human and financial resources. Trade unions and workers' organizations should consider and seek support to:

a) Carry out education programmes aimed at raising awareness of trade unionism, workers' rights, and the benefits of collective action amongst agricultural workers. Such campaigns should also seek to develop real leadership potential amongst agricultural workers;

b) Develop special projects as a complement to education campaigns designed to accommodate relatively low levels of literacy amongst the agricultural workforce. This might include the use of visual materials, theatre and radio campaigns, or popular events such as concerts or sporting events organized and promoted by their organizations;

c) Carry out targeted campaigns against specific decent work deficits in the context of agriculture such as child labour, migrant, forced and bonded labour. Such campaigns should fully explore the causal factors behind such problems and the linkages between various elements of decent work. Many existing ILO Conventions and Recommendations can be used to provide a normative background to campaigns. Agricultural workers are, for example, uniquely placed to highlight the linkages between the need to eliminate the worst forms of child labour (ILO Convention No. 182) and the need to promote occupational safety and health amongst the adult workforce.

The Role of Governments

20. Governments should ensure the full realization and universal application of the fundamental right of freedom of association. In doing so, governments should facilitate the organization of workers in the agricultural sector and revise and reform legislation which currently serves to exclude many agricultural workers from the right to organize whether expressly or effectively. Trade unions and workers' organizations should be able to freely exercise all rights associated with the right to organize and bargain collectively in particular the right to strike. Significant numbers of the agricultural workforce are excluded from the scope of the employment relationship at national law which denies their access to a range of employment-related rights and makes them especially vulnerable to decent work deficits.

21. Governments must ensure appropriate legislative and institutional frameworks to guarantee labour rights and working conditions in agriculture.

a) Legislation must apply to all categories of agricultural workers, including migrant workers;

b) Legislation must not act as a deterrent to healthy trade union functions in organization, collective bargaining and settlement of grievances;

c) Governments should develop a national policy framework in consultation with the social partners in order to address various issues relating to the scope of the employment relationship. These policies might include but not be limited to elements such as the provision of clear guidance concerning employment relationships and the distinction between dependent workers and the self-employed; the provision of effective protection for workers; combating disguised employment; providing access to appropriate resolution mechanisms; strategies to improve the application and enforcement of existing legislation and the reform of national law where appropriate.

22. Governments need to ensure that the desire for foreign investment and export crops does not lead to restrictions on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.

23. Governments should also promote equitable trade that does not encourage trade-distorting subsidies that could lead to increasing poverty.

24. Governments need to adopt a wider vision with regards to rural development strategies in order to achieve people-friendly social outcomes. Governments should be proactive in their efforts to ensure universal literacy and numeracy, reduced maternal mortality, improved child health, greater mobility and enhanced opportunities for training and employment in rural areas. In order to achieve this, governments need to re-examine their budgetary allocation processes to eliminate urban bias.

25. Governments are called upon to integrate issues and priorities of the Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture in key policy areas. In particular:

a) Where countries are involved in poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) processes the role of trade unions and workers' organizations representing agricultural workers must be supported to ensure voice in the consultation and participation in the monitoring process;

b) National policy and institutional frameworks and mechanisms covering gender equality issues must ensure the inclusion of large numbers of women involved in the agricultural sector;

c) To ratify and implement Convention No. 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture and to support and finance initiatives, such as roving safety and health representative schemes, which can lead to improvements on the ground.

26. As social dialogue is one of the principal means for formulating and implementing the Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture, governments should ensure conditions for the development of effective social dialogue and create more opportunities for the inclusion of representatives of agricultural and rural workers in the shaping of policies which are of concern to the sector.

a) Free and independent trade unions and workers' organizations must be recognized as respected counterparts;

b) Collective bargaining must be encouraged, facilitated and practiced as the principal means for negotiating work-related issues of concern to women and men. Collective bargaining cannot be replaced by any other means;

c) Codes of labour practice should be used to strengthen and improve collective bargaining and should not be used as a substitute;

d) The role of workers' organizations in national development should be recognized in accordance with Convention No. 141.

27. The failure of the 5th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization has highlighted the critical importance of agriculture in the global trade system. Lack of transparency in process and of equity in the proposals tabled for discussions have contributed to the failure of the talks. Any new agreement must be equitable and take into consideration the needs of poor farmers and agricultural workers particularly in the least developed

countries. Participants supported the positions taken by the international trade union movement at the Cancún Ministerial Conference and called on the WTO and its member states to:

- a) Eliminate all forms of agricultural export subsidies;
- b) Reduce trade-distorting domestic support and channel resources to support sustainable agriculture;
- c) Remove obstacles to market access for agricultural goods of developing countries;
- d) Strengthen special and differentiated treatment for developing countries;
- e) Ensure greater coherence in global policy and the incorporation of the sustainable development agenda in the work of the WTO.

The Role of Employers and their Organizations

28. Employers and their organizations should be informed by relevant ILO departments of the proceedings and conclusions of the ILO/ACTRAV Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture (15-18 September 2003). Employers should acknowledge the deficits in decent work in agriculture identified by the Symposium and work with trade unions, workers' organizations, governments and the ILO to establish time-bound plans to eliminate the deficits.
