



International
Labour
Office

Promoting Social Dialogue in the Rural Economy

**DECENT WORK IN THE RURAL ECONOMY
POLICY GUIDANCE NOTES**

Social dialogue and tripartism are key governance tools to promote economic development and social justice worldwide. The rural working population is however often excluded from the process and scope of social dialogue at all levels. This is a matter for policy concern, as decent work deficits are particularly severe in rural areas. Social dialogue – which is based on consensus-building and democratic involvement of the main stakeholders – contributes to more efficient design and implementation of policies to ensure the sustainable development of the rural economy. The International Labour Organization (ILO) supports social dialogue structures and processes, as they have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues in the rural economy, to advance social peace and stability, and to boost economic progress. Tripartite social partners are key actors – through their participation in social dialogue institutions and collective bargaining – in elaborating sustainable approaches to rural development.



1. Rationale and justification

Social dialogue and tripartism are key governance tools for the ILO to promote economic development and social justice worldwide. As its core value and specific feature, tripartite social dialogue is transversally mainstreamed throughout all ILO activities.

The ILO's member States share the view that that social dialogue is "essential for achieving effective, equitable and mutually beneficial outcomes for governments, employers, workers and wider society,"¹ for example in moving towards poverty reduction and sustainable rural development.

However, the rural working population is often excluded from the process and scope of social dialogue at all levels. This is a matter of policy concern, as decent work deficits are particularly severe in rural areas. Moreover, a large part of this workforce is constituted of vulnerable groups of workers, such as women, youth, children, indigenous peoples and migrants.

At the 2013 International Labour Conference, the ILO tripartite constituency reaffirmed the importance of promoting social dialogue in all sectors, including the rural economy.² However, despite notable progress in recent years, legal and practical challenges for social dialogue in and on the rural sector remain numerous and pervasive.

Strong tripartite social partners are key actors for informing social dialogue forums on problems that exist in the rural economy, and for elaborating solutions necessary for sustainable development. In addition to their driving role in social dialogue, governments should re-think horizontal

linkages among state agencies in charge of rural issues in order to take account of rural concerns in all public policies. Development issues are not limited to rural employment policy and poverty reduction strategies, but also concern land reforms, access to financial services, educational and vocational programmes.

The weakness of collective voice of rural workers and employers has deep-rooted causes. Trade unions and employers' organizations tend to be fragmented and register very low levels of membership in rural areas. The realization of their freedom of association and their right to engage in collective bargaining is often restricted by laws, and presents specific features in rural areas. Such difficulties in law and practice, which are aggravated by poverty and informality, can in particular be explained by the remoteness of rural communities and the variety of categories of the workforce, which is mostly comprised of self-employed, seasonal, casual and migrant workers.

To successfully address these challenges, the ILO, with 95 years of experience in this area, suggests that effective social dialogue between government, employers and workers is a unique and useful policy means for promoting decent employment in the rural economy.

¹ ILO: *Conclusions on promoting rural employment for poverty reduction*, para. 32 (v), in Resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 97th Session, Geneva, 2008.

² ILO: *Social dialogue: Recurrent discussion under the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, Report VI, ILC, 102nd Session, Geneva, 2013.

2. Scope and definitions

The main goal of social dialogue is to promote consensus-building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders in the world of work. Successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues in the rural economy, encourage good governance, advance social peace and stability, and boost economic progress.³

National tripartite social dialogue institutions have been set up in some 80 per cent of 185 ILO member States. The ILO encourages the establishment of such mechanisms that enable tripartite partners to tackle economic and social problems at the central level. Although the efficiency of their functioning varies from one country to another, they can ensure a certain degree of coordination and solidarity that cannot be achieved at lower levels of decision-making.

BOX 1: What is Social Dialogue?⁴

Social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.

The mechanisms of social dialogue vary from country to country and from region to region. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue, or it may consist of bipartite relations, namely collective bargaining, between labour and management, with or without indirect government involvement. A number of prerequisites must be in place for successful social dialogue to be effective. These include:

- respect for the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- strong, independent and representative organizations of workers and employers with the technical capacity and access to relevant information to participate in social dialogue;
- political will and commitment to engage in social dialogue on the part of all parties; and
- appropriate institutional support.

Governments have the main responsibility for promoting social dialogue as an inherent part of modern and fair governance. The leading role of governments resides in providing an enabling environment for social dialogue. This involves, among other things:

- creating a supportive legal environment for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining of all workers and employers (including rural workers);
- promoting the establishment of tripartite bodies for social dialogue (e.g. national commissions of tripartite social dialogue, economic and social councils and other similar institutions), with specific sub-committees dedicated to the rural economy;
- establishing greater communication between the Ministry of Labour and other state agencies in charge of rural issues, such as the Ministry of Agriculture; and

³ ILO: *National Tripartite Social Dialogue: An ILO Guide for Improved Governance*, Social Dialogue and Tripartism Unit, Governance and Tripartism Department, Geneva, 2013.

⁴ Adapted from the web-page of the Governance and Tripartism Department, ILO, available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/lang-en/index.htm>.

- supporting stronger engagement of national trade unions (including those involved in the rural economy) with multinational enterprises (MNEs), in particular by promoting the ILO Tripartite Declaration of principles concerning multinational enterprises and social policy (MNE Declaration), and encouraging initiatives of corporate social responsibility and conclusion of international framework agreements.

The social partners – employers' and workers' organizations – can play a key role in improving working conditions in the agricultural sector and the rural economy in general through their engagement in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Trade unions are a main vector for combatting decent work deficits in the rural economy. However, in many countries, trade unions face challenges that can prevent them from effectively representing rural workers. Specific difficulties arise for workers in rural areas, as their work is often performed in small and dispersed units. Another challenge is the increase of casual or precarious employment, including outsourcing and subcontracting through global supply chains. The question remains how to strengthen the relationship between trade unions representing waged workers and representative groups such as small farmers' organizations. Building alliances between the two may be a means for ensuring participation of these groups in national decision-making procedures and ensuring sustainable rural development. However, small farmers are also employers, and in some circumstances their interests may conflict with workers' interests.

Employers' organizations can contribute to rural development through forming networks with farmers' unions, cooperative organizations and other rural member organizations. In countries where agricultural production is a major sector of the economy, national employers' organizations often have affiliated crop associations.

Cooperatives are businesses that are owned and democratically controlled by their members. Given the particular importance of cooperatives in providing jobs in the agricultural and rural economy, social dialogue forums should adopt an inclusive approach to take into account their views and promote their contributions for more decent employment opportunities for rural workers.

National labour laws do not always cover rural workers and, for this reason, some working conditions (e.g. wages, working time, paid leave) may be regulated by collective agreements. The collective bargaining process is the best guarantee to ensure a mutual commitment between employers and workers of their respective rights and responsibilities.

BOX 2: The importance of collective agreements in Africa's agricultural sector⁵

An analysis of 23 collective bargaining agreements in agriculture in Africa revealed their importance in guaranteeing basic rights at the workplace as well as establishing procedures to ensure stable labour relations. All collective agreements included provisions on wages, overtime and severance pay, and occupational safety and health. Most agreements included sections on housing allowances, leave and medical care. Approximately three-quarters of the agreements contained

clauses regarding the employment status of the worker (permanent, seasonal or casual), which demonstrates the importance of this question for workers' well-being. Some agreements set out a probationary period, timeframe or process through which workers could move from less stable to more regular employment, for example, from seasonal to permanent status.

⁵ ILO: *Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction*, Report IV, ILC, 97th Session, Geneva, 2008.

3. The ILO's approach

The ILO has a unique tripartite structure, which is reflected in its policies and action. These include a comprehensive set of interventions, such as advisory services to national policy-makers, awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building of tripartite social partners and collaboration with other international organizations.

The ILO recognizes the importance of building social dialogue institutions at the national level to ensure that the voices of social partners are heard during the formulation of national

policies. To promote decent work in rural areas, problems in legislation and in practice should be addressed through tripartite and bipartite social dialogue.

The ILO's technical assistance projects aim at promoting social dialogue at the national, regional and sectoral levels. An inclusive approach for rural communities is to be systematically used to build on synergies with other groups that have more experience of social dialogue.

BOX 3: Tripartite collective agreements in the agricultural sector in Eastern Europe and Central Asia⁶

Most countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have a long tradition of concluding national-level tripartite collective agreements in the agricultural sector. In Belarus, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova and the Russian Federation, these three-year comprehensive agreements are concluded by the Ministry of Agriculture and sectoral federations of trade unions and employers' organizations. The national tripartite social dialogue commissions in these countries have innovated by encouraging several initiatives concerning the sustainable development of the rural economy. Their strategy consists of

pursuing broader goals such as agrarian reform, interventions and support services targeted at the self-employed, group enterprise promotion, transfer of improved technology and social activities. The Moldovan National Commission for Consultation and Collective Bargaining initiated the ratification of the ILO Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184). For the past few years, a contest for "Best collective agreement in the agricultural sector" has been promoted by national authorities and organized in various regions of the Russian Federation.

In addition to its unique tripartite structure, international labour standards are the second comparative advantage of the ILO. The ILO's Conventions and Recommendations provide binding and non-binding guidelines for basic principles and rights at work, which are relevant to promoting decent work through social dialogue in the rural economy.⁷ Three ILO instruments are of particular relevance to promoting social

dialogue in the rural economy: the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), which has been recognized as one of the governance instruments; the Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11); and the Rural Workers' Organizations Convention, 1975 (No. 141).

⁶ Information gathered from several websites: www.vkp.ru, www.vocea.md, www.profapk.by, www.profagro.ru, and www.consultant.ru (in Russian).

⁷ ILO: *Empowering Rural Workers, Employers and Communities through International Labour Standards*, International Labour Standards Department (NORMES), Geneva, 2012.

Table 1: ILO's Conventions for promoting social dialogue in the rural economy

ILO Conventions	Number of ratifications
Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)	153
Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)	164
Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144)	139
Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11)	123
Rural Workers' Organizations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)	40

Source: NORMLEX, July 2015.

To date, 122 out of 185 ILO member States have ratified Convention No. 11. Eight States,⁸ amounting to approximately 41 per cent of the world's population, have ratified Convention No. 11, but not Convention No. 87. For a large number of rural workers in those countries, Convention No. 11 has an impact on ensuring a minimum level of organizational rights for them.⁹

The ILO's capacity-building activities aim at enabling tripartite social partners to engage effectively in social dialogue. The ILO International Training Centre in Turin offers training courses on social dialogue and tripartism, negotiation techniques, prevention and resolution of labour disputes.

The ILO collaborates with other international institutions. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has a crucial complementary role in promoting decent work in the rural economy. Comparative advantages of both organizations are mutually beneficial with regard to agricultural employment, employment in agro-processing and rural marketing enterprises and industries.¹⁰ Initiatives focusing on social dialogue may include, among other things:

- strengthening democratic organizations and networks of producers and workers, particularly in the informal rural economy;
- promoting participation of the rural poor in local decision-making and governance mechanisms;
- empowering rural women and youth groups to be involved in these processes from the initial steps.

⁸ Brazil, China, India, Iraq, Kenya, Morocco, New Zealand and Singapore.

⁹ ILO: *Giving a voice to rural workers: General Survey concerning the right of association and rural workers' organizations instruments*, Report III (Part 1B), ILC, 104th Session, Geneva, 2015.

¹⁰ FAO: *Guidance on how to address decent rural employment in FAO country activities*, Rome, 2013.

4. The ILO's experience to date

Bringing together key actors for the promotion of rural development for poverty reduction has always been at the forefront of the ILO's agenda.¹¹ National policies should focus on tripartism and social dialogue in the rural economy as a policy priority to ensure better governance.

The ILO has played a positive role in developing and supporting numerous technical assistance projects and capacity-building initiatives to promote social dialogue in various sectors of the rural economy.¹² The ILO's local economic development approach, used since the late-1990s in over 36 countries, fosters the establishment of forums that include local government, local branches of trade unions, employers' associations and other organizations of working people such as cooperatives, small business associations and women's groups

to jointly design and implement a common development strategy for local areas.

For instance, in Senegal, social dialogue is a strong component of an ILO project (PROMER II), which supports micro- and small enterprise creation through an integrated decent work approach in eight rural regions of Senegal. The project helps organizations develop their capacity to provide services to assist in creating micro- and small enterprises (and thus gain affiliates) and to enter into dialogue with local authorities; promotes trade union presence, particularly on labour rights and working conditions; and has created tripartite consultation frameworks in 15 value chains.

BOX 4: Gender Equality in Social Dialogue in Rural Areas

Mainstreaming gender equality in all forms of social dialogue in the rural economy is an important issue for the ILO. The recognition of gender-based challenges is a starting point to encourage the competent governmental authorities to promote programmes highlighting the role that women can and should play in the rural community, and to integrate them into general programmes of education and training offered to women and men. The ILO has prepared several tools to address the issue of women's representation among social partners, and to promote gender equality in the

process and content of collective bargaining. Recent initiatives include a gender-specific training manual for trade unions to specifically build the capacity of women rural workers.¹³ The manual informs rural women about their rights to freedom of association, thus empowering them to organize and participate in processes of collective bargaining alongside men. It is important to understand women's concerns and give them prominence in order for collective bargaining to be truly effective and equitable.

¹¹ ILO: *Unleashing rural development through productive employment and decent work: Building on 40 years of ILO work in rural areas*, Governing Body, 310th Session, Geneva, Mar. 2011, GB.310/ESP/1.

¹² See several examples in ILO: *Social dialogue: Recurrent discussion under the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization*, Report VI, ILC, 102nd Session, Geneva, 2013.

¹³ R. Gopalakrishnan and A. Sukthankar: *Freedom of association for women rural workers: A manual*, Geneva, ILO, 2012.

5. Practical guidance and resources

Tripartism and social dialogue are key governance paradigms proposed by the ILO for guiding national policies to promote decent work and social justice in the rural economy. The following measures and initiatives may be developed at national, regional and international levels:

- *Supporting national tripartite bodies for social dialogue:* Such support should be provided at all levels, namely through improving legal and institutional frameworks. It may also be channelled through the creation of a specific sub-committee dedicated to sustainable development in the rural economy.
- *Making social dialogue more inclusive:* Tripartite social dialogue institutions should be more inclusive, to cover workers and employers in the rural economy, who are frequently among the most vulnerable and unorganized categories.
- *Improving representation and outreach of social partners:* Building capacities of trade unions and employers' organizations at different levels may help them to be more effective in organizing their diverse potential constituencies. Such outreach and their stronger voice are indispensable to expanding the scope of social dialogue and collective negotiation in rural areas.
- *Strengthening the labour administration and labour inspection services:* Appropriate labour law enforcement mechanisms help to generate a virtuous circle of compliance to promote the rule of law in rural areas, and therefore guarantee the protection of rights of workers and employers.
- *Encouraging bilateral and multilateral social dialogue for cross-border agreements with multinational enterprises:* Social dialogue in global supply chains is resulting increasingly in cross-border collective agreements, concluded in particular with multinational companies operating in developing countries. The ILO Tripartite Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy is a useful reference to guide social partners in these processes.
- *Developing the collection of statistics and measurements on the participation of rural workers and employers in social dialogue institutions and processes:* Closing knowledge gaps means gathering sex-disaggregated data on the representation of rural workers and employers in tripartite social dialogue institutions, as well as on trade union density and collective bargaining coverage in the rural economy.

BOX 5: Key policy guidelines for promoting social dialogue in – and for – the rural economy

- Strengthening tripartite social dialogue at national and local levels;
- Improving the legal and institutional framework for social dialogue, freedom of association and collective bargaining in conformity with ILO standards;
- Supporting freedom of association and collective bargaining for a stronger engagement of trade unions and employers' organizations in the rural economy;
- Empowering social partners to increase their outreach in rural areas and their representation in all forms of social dialogue;
- Including rural development issues in the agenda of social dialogue institutions and key national policy frameworks, such as poverty reduction and employment policies;
- Strengthening the labour market institutions and the rule of law in rural areas;
- Improving the system of labour administration and labour inspection in rural areas;
- Promoting effective policy coordination and coherence at the national, local and international levels.

Promoting Social Dialogue in the Rural Economy

Tripartite social partners have their own responsibilities and complementary roles in promoting social dialogue in the rural economy.

Governments are responsible for creating an enabling environment for social dialogue and ensuring democratic governance. This may include:

- creating a supportive legal environment for guaranteeing the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining of all workers and employers;
- building greater communication between the Ministry of Labour and other governmental agencies dealing with the agricultural sector;

Instruments

Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11).

Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87).

Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98).

Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141).

Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144).

- encouraging multinational companies to engage in genuine dialogue with the national trade unions when sourcing from a specific country.

Trade unions and employers' organizations at national level need to become more inclusive of rural workers and employers and their local representative bodies, and recognize them as genuine partners in development. Overcoming varying interests and building lasting alliances to ensure participation and equal representation of these groups in national decision-making procedures is vital to ensure sustainable rural development.

Several training courses for promoting social dialogue are proposed by the ILO International Training Centre in Turin.¹⁴

Publications

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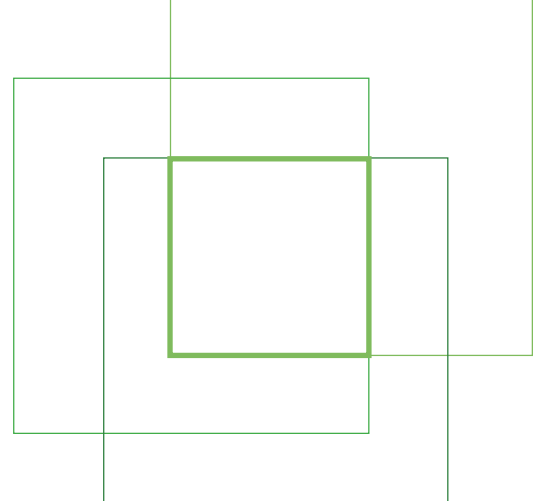
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ILO. 2015. *Giving a voice to rural workers, General Survey concerning the right of association and rural workers' organizations instruments*, Report III (Part 1B), ILC, 104th session (Geneva).

¹⁴ For more information please visit <http://www.itcilo.org/en/the-centre/areas-of-expertise/social-dialogue-and-tripartism>.



Overview of Policy Guidance Notes on the Promotion of Decent Work in the Rural Economy



Supporting inclusive agricultural growth for improved livelihoods and food security

- Decent Work for Food Security and Resilient Rural Livelihoods
- Decent and Productive Work in Agriculture

Promoting economic diversification and triggering productive transformation for rural employment

- Economic Diversification of the Rural Economy
- Promoting Decent Work for Rural Workers at the Base of the Supply Chain
- The Role of Multinational Enterprises in the Promotion of Decent Work in Rural Areas
- Transitioning to Formality in the Rural Informal Economy
- Sustainable Tourism – A Catalyst for Inclusive Socio-economic Development and Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas

Promoting access to services, protection and employment-intensive investment

- Providing Access to Quality Services in the Rural Economy to Promote Growth and Social Development
- Extending Social Protection to the Rural Economy
- Developing the Rural Economy through Financial Inclusion: The Role of Access to Finance
- Employment-Intensive Investment in Rural Infrastructure for Economic Development, Social and Environmental Protection and Inclusive Growth

Ensuring sustainability and harnessing the benefits of natural resources

- A Just Transition towards a Resilient and Sustainable Rural Economy
- Decent Work in Forestry
- Harnessing the Potential of Extractive Industries
- Water for Improved Rural Livelihoods

Increasing the voice of rural people through organization and the promotion of rights, standards and social dialogue

- Rights at Work in the Rural Economy
- Promoting Social Dialogue in the Rural Economy
- Building Local Development in Rural Areas through Cooperatives and other Social and Solidarity Economy Enterprises and Organizations
- Decent Work for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in the Rural Economy
- Empowering Women in the Rural Economy
- Decent Work for Rural Youth
- Promoting Fair and Effective Labour Migration Policies in Agriculture and Rural Areas

Improving the knowledge base on decent work in the rural economy

- Enhancing the Knowledge Base to Support the Promotion of Decent Work in Rural Areas

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