



**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE**

**BUREAU INTERNATIONAL DU TRAVAIL**

**OFICINA INTERNACIONAL DEL TRABAJO**

---

***International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture  
Geneva, 15-18 September 2003***

***Colloque international des travailleurs sur le travail décent dans  
l'agriculture  
Genève, 15-18 septembre 2003***

***Coloquio Internacional de Trabajadores sobre el Trabajo Decente  
en la Agricultura  
Ginebra, 15-18 de septiembre de 2003***

---

**CONCLUSIONS**

**CONCLUSIONS**

**CONCLUSIONES**

---

## Agenda for Decent Work in Agriculture

### Conclusions

1. The International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture held in Geneva from 15-18 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:
  - 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.
3. Noted the preponderance of poverty in rural areas and the fact that waged agricultural workers, small holders and subsistence farmers are found disproportionately among the millions of men and women experiencing severe poverty, 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 Decent Work Agenda in Agriculture, rural poverty alleviation, PRSP and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Comprised of ILO, FAO, UNEP, UNNIDO, UNITAR, WHO, OECD, together with trade unions, representatives from industry and science and NGOs.

- 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 91<sup>st</sup> 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.

### **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 on 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 the 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 C.182, involving trade unions, to help promote ratification and implementation of C.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 MNE 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 sub-regional, regional and international trade union organizations as well as other appropriate international and intergovernmental organizations.
- g) Seek support from sub-regional, 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 wide spread ratification and implementation of ILO C.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 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 health and safety 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 numeric, 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 PRSP processes the role of trade unions and worker's 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Cancun 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.

### **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.

---