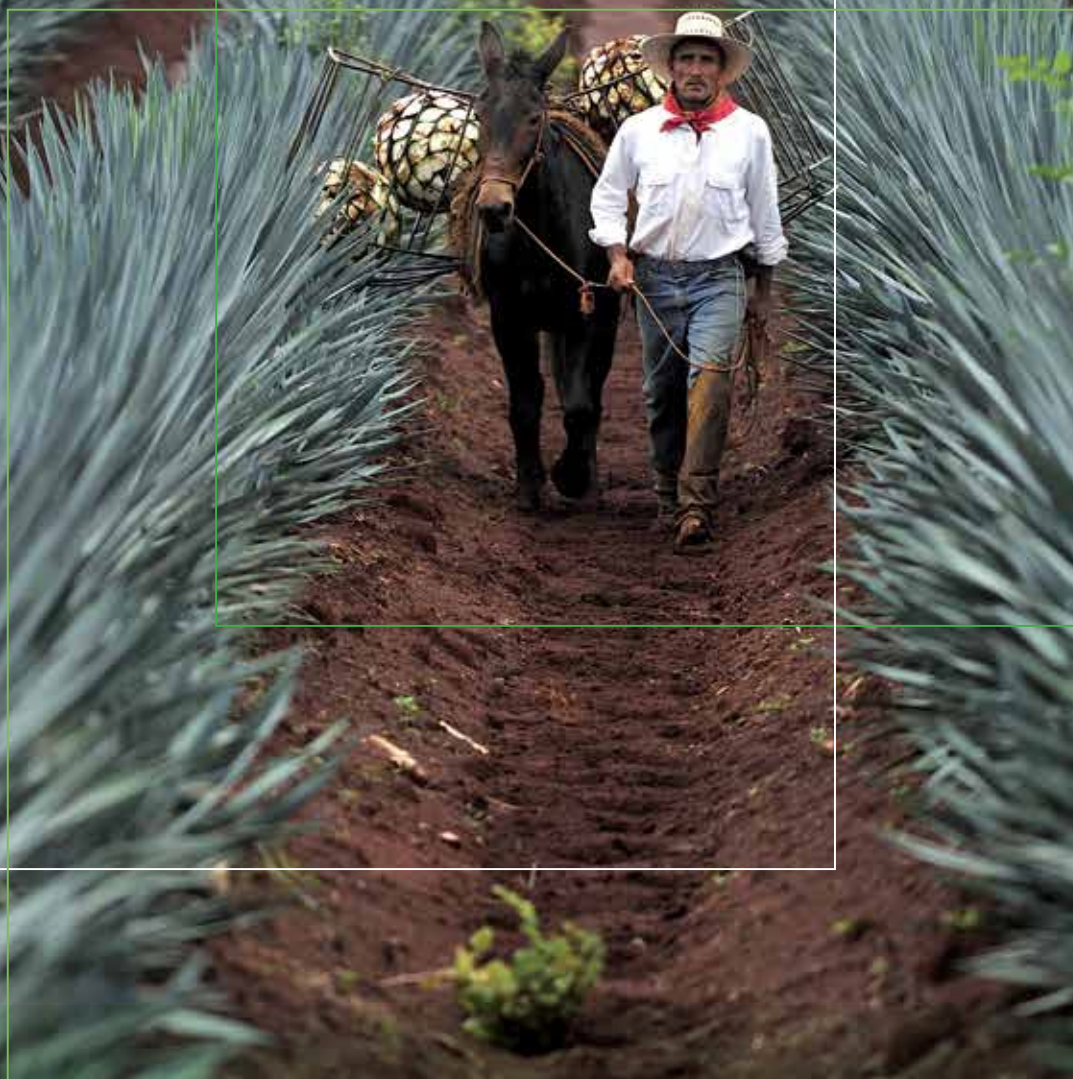




International
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Office



Decent and Productive Work in Agriculture

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

Agriculture is an important source of employment and income, particularly in developing countries. Yet agricultural workers often face decent work deficits, working for low wages and incomes under poor and sometimes hazardous conditions, and lacking the means to effectively address their situation. Achieving decent work and improving productivity in agriculture are key to reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth in rural areas. Improving the quantity and quality of jobs, promoting rights at work, extending social protection, and strengthening rural workers' organizations are crucial for achieving decent work and improving agricultural productivity. To achieve these goals, the approach of the International Labour Organization (ILO) takes account of the complex and overlapping challenges facing the sector.



1. Rationale and justification

Over a billion people,¹ nearly a third of the world's workforce, are employed in the agricultural sector.² Though the share of the agricultural sector in total employment has fallen from 45 per cent to 34 per cent over the past two decades,³ in many developing countries the percentage is much higher, particularly in East and Southeast Asia, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴ Over 60 per cent of India's working population is employed in the agricultural sector. In Mali, agriculture provides income for more than three quarters of the workforce.⁵ Given the importance of agriculture as a source of employment in many developing countries, achieving decent work in agriculture is key to reducing poverty, stimulating economic growth, and improving food security in rural areas.

Agriculture provides a livelihood to millions of workers throughout the world, yet many, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized, experience decent work deficits. Many jobs in agriculture do not ensure decent levels of income and sustainable livelihoods; agricultural workers are among the groups with the highest incidence of poverty in many countries. Many are employed under poor health, safety and environmental conditions; every year, many thousands of agricultural workers are killed as a result of workplace accidents,⁶ and a large number die of pesticide poisoning. Yet worker health status, for example, is an important determinant of labour productivity, and as such, a healthy agricultural workforce is crucial to expanding agricultural

output on a sustainable basis.⁷ Agricultural workers are often the most socially vulnerable, and lack access to social security and protection. Approximately 60 per cent of all child labour is employed in agriculture, a large proportion of which is in the worst forms of child labour.⁸ The agricultural sector has the lowest level of organization into trade unions, farmers' organizations and employers' organizations; it is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the world's waged agricultural workers are organized and represented in trade unions or rural workers' organizations.⁹

Where agricultural growth is led by growth in labour productivity, poverty reduction can be significant. With the exception of rapidly transforming economies, labour productivity in agriculture has been found to grow faster than in non-agricultural sectors.¹⁰ The agricultural sector there has important growth potential, particularly when the growth is related to targeted investments and favourable policies for the achievement of decent work for those employed in the sector.

This policy guidance note profiles approaches for addressing the substantial decent work deficits in agriculture, with special attention to the most vulnerable. It focuses on much-needed action in the areas of skills development and the realization of core rights and protections for agricultural workers.

¹ ILO: *Key indicators of the labour market*, Geneva, 2014.

² ILO: *Global Employment Trends 2014: Risk of a jobless recovery?*, Geneva, 2014.

³ ILO: *Global Employment Trends 2012: Preventing a deeper jobs crisis*, Geneva, 2012.

⁴ ILO: *Key indicators of the labour market*, Geneva, 2014.

⁵ ILO: *Working towards sustainable development: opportunities for decent work and social inclusion in a green economy*, Geneva, 2012.v

⁶ ILO: *Strengthening rural labour inspection for high quality and productive jobs*, Rural Policy Briefs, Geneva, 2011.

⁷ ILO: "Why Agriculture Still Matters" in *World Employment Report 2004-05*, Geneva, 2005, p. 153.

⁸ ILO: *Accelerating action against child labour*, Report of the Director-General, ILC, 99th Session, Geneva, 2010.

⁹ ILO: *Decent work in agriculture*, International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture, 15-18 September, Geneva, 2003.

¹⁰ ILO: *World Employment Report 2004-5: Employment, productivity and poverty reduction*, Geneva, 2005; and World Bank: *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for development*, Washington, DC, 2007.

2. Scope and definitions

The agricultural workforce includes waged agricultural workers, self-employed farmers and self-employed workers. Waged agricultural workers are the women and men who work in the production and primary processing of agricultural products on small and medium-sized farms as well as plantations. They do not own or rent the land on which they work and work for some kind of remuneration, which can include “in-kind” payments.¹¹ Although waged agricultural workers are seen as a group distinct from small farmers, there is often overlap with self-employed small farmers, who often depend on seasonal or casual wage work on other farms or plantations to supplement their low incomes.¹² ILO actions for working women and men in agriculture are many and diverse.

Constituents’ roles and responsibilities

Governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations all have a role to play in promoting decent work in the agricultural sector. Governments are key to ensuring a national regulatory framework that supports integrated and comprehensive policies to address decent work deficits in agriculture. Governments have primary responsibility for extending coverage of social protection to rural areas and agricultural workers in particular. Policies promoting decent work in agriculture must be embedded within national strategies, and require strong social dialogue institutions with the participation of employers’ and workers’ organizations. Agricultural workers’ and farmers’ organizations play an important role in improving the bargaining power of agricultural workers with employers.¹³ Employers’ organizations are important partners in developing effective laws and policies to promote decent work in agriculture.

Target groups

Waged agricultural workers are frequently confronted with very poor wages, unstable and temporary employment,

and hazardous, unhealthy work conditions. There are an estimated 450 million waged agricultural workers in the world out of a total number of 1.3 billion people engaged in agricultural work. They have limited opportunities to improve their skills and frequently are denied fundamental rights, such as freedom of association and collective bargaining.¹⁴

Women play a critical role in agriculture, particularly in producing food for home consumption. In some countries, women account for more than half the total agricultural labour force, and the majority are in irregular and casual forms of employment. They constitute a significant proportion of contributing family workers. They are also less likely to engage in wage employment than men,¹⁵ and, when they do, they are more likely to hold part-time, seasonal and/or low-paying jobs in the informal economy.¹⁶ Indications are that these forms of employment are growing and so is the proportion of women in them. Despite their role in agriculture, women face major obstacles in accessing and controlling the means by which to improve their productivity and earnings. They are restricted in ownership or access to land, resource entitlements, inputs and financing, technology and markets. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 per cent.¹⁷

More than half (98 million) of the world’s *child labourers* (aged 5 to 17) work in the agricultural sector.¹⁸ In all sectors, the majority (67.5%) of child labourers are unpaid family members. In agriculture this percentage is higher, and is combined with very early entry into work, sometimes between 5 and 7 years of age. Children working in agriculture are regularly exposed to hazardous conditions and long working hours. About 59 per cent of all children in hazardous work aged 5–17 are in agriculture, fishing, aquaculture and forestry.¹⁹

¹¹ ILO/IUF: *Promoting the role of agricultural workers and trade unions in sustainable agriculture and rural development*, World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002.

¹² B. Mueller and M. Chan: *Wage labor, agriculture-based economies, and pathways out of poverty*, LEO Report # 15, Washington, DC, USAID, 2015.

¹³ ILO: *Learning from Catalysts of Rural Transformation*, Geneva, 2014.

¹⁴ P. Hurst: *Agricultural workers and their contribution to sustainable agriculture and rural development*, Rome, FAO-ILO-IUF, 2005.

¹⁵ Ibid.: Women waged agricultural workers account generally for 20 to 30 percent of the waged workforce, rising to 40 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹⁶ FAO/IFAD/ILO: *Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty Status, trends and gaps*, Rome, 2010.

¹⁷ FAO: *State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*, Rome, 2011.

¹⁸ ILO: *Accelerating action against child labour*, Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Geneva, 2010.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Child labour contributes to youth (aged 15 to 24) being a disproportionately large share of the world's working poor; youth account for 23.5 per cent of the working poor in the countries with available data, compared with only 18.6 per cent of non-poor workers. Most of them are in the agricultural sector.²⁰

Subsistence and smallholder farmers (mostly in the informal economy) sustain local knowledge, expertise, skills and practices; help to secure food supplies in remote areas; and can help to sustain the local environment. According to FAO, roughly half a billion farms are less than two hectares.²¹ In Africa, smallholder or family farms account for up to 80 per

cent of all farms; however, in terms of marketed products, their share is much smaller.

Migrants, who are increasingly part of the agricultural workforce in many countries, are often victims of discrimination and face strong disadvantages. Migrant workers in agriculture are particularly vulnerable to forced labour. Many are unable to leave a job because of the real or perceived absence of employment alternatives, despite low wages or poor working conditions, and migrant labourers are particularly vulnerable to threats to report them to the police or immigration authorities.²²

3. The ILO's approach

The ILO supports constituents at global, national, sectoral and local levels in their actions to include decent work principles and practices in policies, strategies and programmes for agricultural and rural development. The ILO's work in the rural economy aims to promote decent work for sustainable livelihoods and food security, with an emphasis on extending social protection and rights at work and giving a voice to and improving the organization, working conditions, productivity and incomes of waged workers, including those on plantations, as well as of smallholders, small businesses and cooperatives.

Promoting jobs

To upgrade capacities and expand job opportunities, the ILO promotes sectoral development interventions which customize well-established decent work tools to address the specific opportunities and challenges facing agricultural producers and workers. These target support at individual, institutional and enabling environment levels.

To improve agriculture's effectiveness for development, upgrading the skill levels of rural people is of paramount importance. Low educational attainment levels coupled with scant opportunities to acquire job-specific skills and on-the-job training and experience, constrain job opportunities for many rural youth and adults seeking productive work in agriculture. Skills-focused programmes, including Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE), target agricultural communities and bundle rural extension systems into broader knowledge and skills development packages, which interact with technical services, the private sector, and specific supply chains to support high-potential but small-scale agricultural production. Community-based and entrepreneur training initiatives open up means of linking training to local social networks, and have demonstrated how the limited opportunities for skills development in poor rural areas can be expanded and then linked to employment by identifying local potential economic opportunities and skills constraints, designing and delivering (or extending access to existing) community-based training, and providing post-training services.

²⁰ ILO: *Key indicators of the labour market*, Geneva, 2011.

²¹ FAO: *The State of Food and Agriculture: Innovation in family farming*, Rome, 2014.

²² P. Martin and J. Edward Taylor: *Ripe for change: Evolving farm labor markets in the United States, Mexico and Central America*, Washington, DC, Migration Policy Institute, 2013.

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The ILO's value-chain development initiatives link small, medium and large growers – primarily through their producer associations or through contracts – to markets and buyers, while establishing or strengthening channels for product- and market-specific technical support. These mechanisms can provide small agro-enterprises (including farmers) with reduced transaction costs, improved access to market information, and increased bargaining power. However, such coordination mechanisms require strong institutional capacities and active promotion of participation, including through effective use of bargaining power.

Guaranteeing rights at work

The ILO works with member States to ratify and implement International Labour Standards. The Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), for example, sets international standards to secure the enforcement of the national legal provisions relating to conditions of work and the protection of workers, such as hours, wages, weekly rest and holidays, safety, health and welfare, the employment of women, children and young persons. The Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184) aims to prevent occupational accidents and diseases by controlling hazards in the agricultural working environment. It includes provisions on preventive and protective measures, machine safety and ergonomics, handling and transport of materials, sound management of chemicals, and coverage in case of occupational injuries and diseases.

Extending social and labour protection

For remote areas and regions with large pockets of poverty, addressing rural needs means redirecting public and private programmes to specifically target socially excluded and disadvantaged communities. The ILO's programming in local economic development facilitates local planning, so that real improvements can be delivered through integrated approaches in the form of social protection, education, jobs, enterprise development and other enabling capacities to strengthen rural institutions and infrastructure. Core to this is raising the standards of service delivery in deprived

areas, and ensuring that vulnerable groups are reached so that they can benefit fully from these services. Agriculture is one of the most dangerous sectors of the economy and is associated with a high incidence of occupational diseases and injuries related to the safety and health conditions of the work, and to exposure to agrochemicals. Pressure to work faster and to harvest more raises the risks of accidents. Many agricultural workers are specifically excluded from national labour protection laws, such as those specifying minimum wages, maximum hours of work, paid sick leave and social security.

Promoting social dialogue

The ILO supports agricultural workers' unions, which are found in most developing countries with large agricultural sectors. The 2015 session of the International Labour Conference highlighted the critical role of a range of rural organizations in addressing the core rights of agricultural workers, and called for strengthening of their capacities.²³ Collective bargaining is an important means to improve wages, working conditions, and safety and health, and agricultural workers' unions can be very effective in promoting, monitoring and enforcing decent work rights and protections for their members. Trade unions can also be effective in raising awareness among members of their rights and obligations toward workers, including family members on their farms. The ILO works with trade unions and cooperatives to incorporate initiatives to reduce workplace hazards and the incidence of child and forced labour, as well as discrimination. The ILO's cooperatives programme targets improving the performance of producer organizations, including their services aimed at upgrading farmers' technical capacities and broader know-how in business and financial management, marketing and advocacy. It is proving a cost-effective channel for reaching rural small-scale agro-entrepreneurs. The number of producer organizations in remote rural communities is expanding as new agricultural products, such as bio-production, increase demand for scaled market solutions. In many countries, producer associations are a major source of access to rural services, including skills training and finance.

²³ 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, 2015.

4. The ILO's experience to date

ILO policy has been concerned with the situation of agricultural workers since it was founded. The ILO has accumulated decades of experience providing policy advice and technical cooperation interventions for agriculture workers and small-scale producers, as well as their local communities. More specifically:

- Through its country offices, the ILO pursues operational links to national development plans, strategies and investments, policies and enabling environment for integrating decent work into agriculture and rural development.
- The ILO maintains collaborations with UN and other international organizations to promote rural and agricultural development through decent work (FAO, World Bank, IFAD and IFPRI), and actively supports joint initiatives focused on agricultural productivity and decent work.
- Through technical programming, the ILO guides local skills development initiatives to be cost-effective, reliable and of high quality, and to include cooperative development, business development services, among many other initiatives. TREE projects supporting agricultural skills development have been successfully implemented in Pakistan, the Philippines (Mindanao), Zimbabwe and elsewhere.
- Over the past decade, the ILO has promoted employment-intensive rural infrastructure development, much of which has included support for rural road construction and maintenance, mechanization, irrigation, advances in productivity and access to markets for small-scale farmers and agricultural workers. Major projects have focused in Eastern and Southern Africa, South and Southeast Asia.
- The ILO's value chain interventions help to improve input markets and channels serving smallholders and contracted growers; and to improve efficiency and safety for post-harvest handling and storage through upgraded capacities, equipment, technologies and infrastructure. On-going value chain development initiatives in Indonesia, Timor Leste and Zambia are registering favourable results in these areas.
- The ILO works through social partners to improve the voice and bargaining power of agricultural small-scale growers and workers by strengthening their representative organizations and promotion of effective negotiations.
- The ILO has supported major campaigns in over 88 countries to end child labour, many of which have directly addressed the plight of child labourers in agriculture. The ILO is a founding member of the multi-agency International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture.²⁴
- The ILO organizes tripartite meetings to facilitate social dialogue among constituents. The Tripartite Meeting on Improving the Conditions of Employment and Work of Agricultural Wage Workers in the Context of Economic Restructuring was held in September 1996. The Tripartite Meeting on Moving to Sustainable Agricultural Development through the Modernization of Agriculture and Employment in a Globalized Economy was held in September 2000;²⁵ and, Meetings of Experts on Safety and Health in Agriculture were convened in 2009 and 2010 to develop a code of practice on safety and health in agriculture. In September 2016, a Meeting of Experts will discuss Policy guidelines on the promotion of sustainable rural livelihoods targeting the agro-food sectors.

²⁴ ILO: *Child labour in agriculture*, <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>

²⁵ ILO: *Decent Work in agriculture*, International Workers' Symposium on Decent Work in Agriculture, ILO, 15-18 September 2003, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/publication/wcms_161567.pdf.

5. Practical guidance and resources

Instruments

Addressing decent work deficits confronting agricultural workers requires addressing complex and overlapping rights at work and protection challenges. An important feature of ILO policy towards agricultural workers concerns the extension of elements of social protection, and a series of instruments specific to agriculture have been adopted since the early 1920s. These include:

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

Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery (Agriculture) Convention, 1951 (No. 99)

Holidays with Pay (Agriculture) Convention, 1952 (No. 101)

Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110) and its accompanying Recommendation, 1958 (No. 110)

Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) and its accompanying Recommendation, 1969 (No. 133)

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

Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and its accompanying Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164)

Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161) and its accompanying Recommendation, 1985 (No. 171)

Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184) and its accompanying Recommendation, 2001 (No. 192)

Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and its accompanying Recommendation, 2006 (No. 197)

Tools

The ILO has developed a substantial set of tools and guides target agriculture or are readily applied to agriculture. These include:

ILO. 2006. *Tackling hazardous child labour in agriculture: Guidance on policy and practice*, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (Turin).

A toolkit produced to help policy-makers ensure that agriculture is a priority sector for the elimination of child labour. The guidebooks included in this package provide policy-makers and stakeholder organizations with information and ideas needed to plan, formulate and implement policies and programmes to tackle hazardous child labour in agriculture.

ILO. 2009. *Rural skills training: A generic manual on training for rural economic empowerment (TREE)*, Skills and Employability Department (Geneva).

Community-Based Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) promotes income generation and local development, emphasizing the role of skills and knowledge for creating new economic and employment opportunities for the poor, underemployed, unemployed, and the otherwise disadvantaged, towards sustained economic activities. Many of these target agricultural production and services, working to build capacities and value-chain networks.

ILO. 2013. *Labour Issues in Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture: Information and Resource Guide*, Sectoral Activities Department (Geneva).

The Information Guide on Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture provides background information on urban and peri-urban agriculture, noting key decent work challenges for stakeholders, and presenting ILO resources for achieving decent work in urban and peri-urban agriculture.

ILO. 2014. *Global Manual for WIND: Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development. Practical approaches for improving safety, health and working conditions in agriculture* (Geneva).

The Global Manual for WIND is designed to assist small-scale farmers and their families in improving safety and health at work and in their everyday life. There is also a Global Action Guide available which supports the effective application of the Global Manual by presenting practical tips for the successful organization of training and implementation of good practices in different countries and regions. Building on the ILO's experience, WIND applies a participatory and action-oriented training approach, designed for rapid and sustainable improvements in farmers' safety, health and working conditions. To ensure relevance, as well as sustainability, WIND is very much reliant on, and responsive to, farmers' own initiatives, knowledge and resources.

ILO; International Ergonomics Association. 2012. *Ergonomic checkpoints in agriculture: Practical and easy-to-implement solutions for improving safety, health and working conditions in agriculture* (Geneva).

This manual, compiled jointly by a group of international experts assembled by the International Ergonomics Association (IEA) and the ILO, presents practical solutions for improvements in agricultural work and rural life from an ergonomics point of view. The checkpoints it lists are intended to be used as a means to improve existing working and living conditions, for better safety, health and efficiency in agricultural and rural settings.

Mayoux, L.; Mackie, G. 2007. *Making the strongest links: A practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development* (Addis Ababa, ILO).

This guide provides ground-breaking methods for incorporating gender concerns into the different stages of value-chain analysis, strengthening the links essential for gender equality and promoting sustainable pro-poor growth and development strategies. It has been effectively applied to women in agriculture to strengthen value-chain links and target priority business services.

Relevant ILO codes of practice include:

ILO. 1965. *Safety and health in agriculture*, ILO codes of practice (Geneva).

—. 1976. *Safe construction and operation of tractors*, ILO codes of practice (Geneva).

—. 2001. *An ILO code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work* (Geneva).

—. 2011. *Safety and health in agriculture: An ILO Code of practice* (Geneva).

Publications

FAO/IFAD/ILO. 2010. *Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty Status, trends and gaps* (Rome, FAO/IFAD/ILO).

Hurst, P. 2005. *Agricultural workers and their contribution to sustainable agriculture and rural development* (Rome, FAO/ILO/IUF).

ILO. 2005. *World Employment Report 2004-5: Employment, productivity and poverty reduction* (Geneva).

—. 2008. *Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development*, Report V, ILC, 97th Session (Geneva).

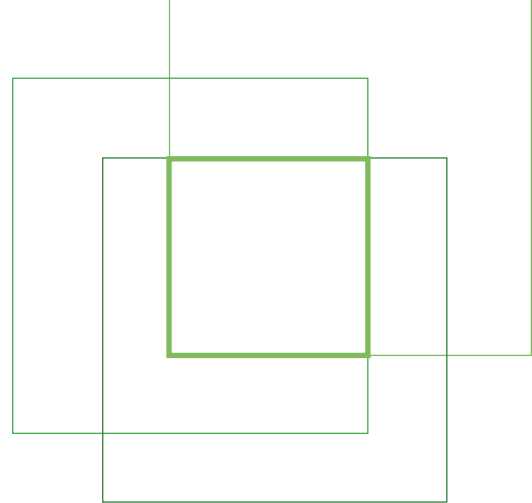
—. 2010. *Accelerating action against child labour – Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2010* (Geneva).

—. 2012. *Good practices in labour inspection: The rural sector with special attention to agriculture*, Labour Administration and Inspection Programme (Geneva).

—. 2014. *Key indicators of the labour market* (Geneva).



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

- Greening Rural Economies and Green Jobs
- Decent Work in Forestry
- Harnessing the Potential of Extractive Industries

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

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