

SECTOR Note

Decent Work in Agriculture

Decent work for all is the principal goal of the ILO. Decent work reflects the aspiration of men and women everywhere to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Decent work encompasses respect for basic rights, access to employment, safe and healthy working conditions, and social security. Decent work comes about through social dialogue.

Unfortunately, decent work deficits are pervasive in the agricultural sector. They are expressed in the widespread denial of rights at work, in poor quality employment and high levels of unemployment, in unsafe working conditions and lack of income security, and finally in the inadequate representation of agricultural workers in the social dialogue which could improve their working lives.



We see decent work deficits in the fact that all conditions of work are worse in agriculture than in other sectors. Incomes are lower (in fact, poverty levels are twice those of urban workers) and incomes are even more unevenly distributed than in the rest of the economy. Overall, agriculture accounts for two-thirds of the world's poverty. Women in rural areas suffer even greater poverty than men and are less able to exercise their basic rights, despite their high levels of labour force participation. Indeed, women account for about 40 per cent of the total agricultural workforce, but they are often paid even less than their male counterparts. Roughly 70 per cent of child labourers work in agriculture and in some countries bonded labour abounds.

The world community has set ten ambitious [Millennium Development Goals](#), the aims of which are to reduce poverty and hunger, to increase access to safe drinking water, to health care and to education and to implement national strategies for sustainable development. All of these goals are of direct interest to those who live and work in rural areas. Indeed, ensuring rural workers' access to secure employment and decent working and living conditions are critical steps in reducing poverty and achieving sustainable livelihoods.