



*Mayan women in Yaxcaba, Yuc., Mexico*

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*Observations and reflections of an ICDD Summer Course - Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY) Merida, Yucatan – July 4-8, 2016*

# DECENT WORK DEFICITS IN AGRICULTURE

CONCEPTS, MEASURES, AND SOLUTIONS

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

DWD	Decent Work Deficits
EAP	Economically Active Population
ENOE	National Occupation and Employment Survey
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GMO	Genetically Modified Organisms
ICDD	International Centre for Development and Decent Work
ILO	International Labour Organization
MW	Minimum Wage
UADY	Autonomous University of Yucatan
UNAM	Autonomous University of Mexico

## **Decent work deficits in agriculture: Concepts, measures, and solutions**

### **Abstract**

The International Centre for Decent Work and Development (ICDD), in collaboration with the Autonomous University of Yucatan (UADY), carried out a summer course in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico from July 4 – 8, 2016, which addressed concepts, measures and solutions to decent work in agriculture, globally and in the region. Presentations and site visits were carried out during the course, in order to compliment the course both theoretically and empirically. Course participants included multi-disciplinary PhD scholars from around the world, government officials and entrepreneurs, who offered their views regarding the issues at hand. The result was a lively course, with a multi-dimensional approach to decent work, and an array of questions and solutions that are addressed in this course output. The present document summarizes the course and offers some reflections from the students, regarding the theoretical/conceptual aspects of the course, as well as observations from field visits carried out.

**Keywords:** Agroecology, Decent Work, Decent Work Deficits, Globalisation, Labour Relations, Mayan Traditions, Rural Areas

### **1. Introduction**

The International Centre for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) is a global multidisciplinary network of eight partner universities in four continents with its head office located at the University of Kassel, Germany. It cooperates closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). The ICDD contributes to the global fight against hunger and poverty through research and education on Sustainable Development to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all. A special focus lies thereby on the world's 805 million people living in rural areas who face food insecurity (ICDD, 2016).

In July 2016, the ICDD held a summer course in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, titled: "Decent Work Deficits in Agriculture: Concepts, Measures and Solutions," as part of ICDD's academic activities and its PhD scholar curriculum. The event brought together academics from across the globe – China, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa – with expertise on labour relations, in order to assess and understand the decent work deficit (DWD) in agriculture.

The premise of the course was that the DWD is much pronounced in agriculture: workers and smallholders frequently lack sufficient income, social security, protection against occupational risks and a collective voice vis-à-vis employers, middlemen, and the state. While this is generally addressed, little research has been done to actually measure the DWD in agriculture. Its objective was to familiarize agricultural researchers with the decent work concept, to develop methods for identifying DWD, and to focus on a multidimensional approach to the idea of decent work.

Yucatan is well known for early development of mathematics and architecture, its agrobiodiversity and long-term agricultural history with a combination of rich Mayan culture that

is still alive today. It was also recognized that Mexico is no longer as dependent on oil as a result of declining prices and that agriculture is currently a new frontier. Therefore, Yucatan was ideal for hosting the 2016 ICDD summer school. The core topics of the course were:

- Decent work deficits: problems and constraints;
- Origin and meaning of the concept of decent work;
- Measurement of decent work;
- Decent work in Mexico and its regions;

Our engagement at the school was guided by the following working questions:

- What are decent work deficits?
- Where do we find decent work deficits in agriculture?
- What are the reasons for indecent work conditions in agriculture?
- What kind of solutions do we know/are needed to avoid indecent working conditions?

The summer course presentations covered the following topics:

- *Decent Work in México and Value Chains* – Dr. Clemente Ruiz Durán (National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM))
- *Origin and Meanings of Concept of Decent Work* – Dr. Beatriz Torres Góngora (UADY)
- *Gender Relations and Access to Productive Agricultural Resources* – Dr. Akua Britwum (University of Cape Coast)
- *The Determinants of Labour Relations* – Dr. Christoph Scherrer (University of Kassel)
- *Rural-Urban Gradients and Options for Development and Decent Work* – Dr. Andreas Buerkert (University of Kassel)
- *Mayan Ethics about the Management of Natural Resources* – Dr. Alejandra García (UADY)
- *Agrobiodiversity and Decent Work in Yucatan* – Dr. Juan Jimenez (UADY)
- *Decent Work in Agriculture* – Dr. Javier Becerril (UADY)
- *Poverty and Social Inequality to the Decent Work Deficit in Yucatan* – Dr. Luis Ramirez (UADY)
- *Employment Programs and Policies that Promotes Labour* – Enrique Castillo Ruz (Labour and Social Forecast, State of Yucatan)
- *Farmers School Providing Support to Avoid Decent Work Deficit* – a strategy to work for education based on an agroecological perspective – Dr. Wilbert Trejo (UADY)

The summer school's theoretical and conceptual course followed up with site visits, listed below, in order to compliment with on-field empirical data. Sites visited included:

- "*Huertos Magaña*" - plant nursery, plantation and processing plant of Mamey fruit, in rural Yucatan
- "*Juguera Aki'*" - largest cooperative in the region, Maya-owned and operated, citrus juice processing plant
- "*Uyits Ka'an – Agroecological school of Man'*" – non-profit organization, which teaches ecological methods of agriculture as an alternative to conventional agriculture

The closing of the course involved watching a documentary<sup>1</sup> about indecent work conditions on banana plantations in Nicaragua, which triggered lively discussions, addressing and covering issues from the previous sessions among participants.

This document serves as a summary of the course and provides insight on the reflections and considerations that were manifested by course participants. Finally, based on the coursework, the document provides recommendations in order to address DWD in agricultural settings.

## **2. Origin and meaning of the concept of Decent Work**

One of the main elements of the summer course was to review the concept of decent work and, more specifically, decent work in agriculture. In this sense, the concept of decent work emerges more as an aspiration, an ideal in the neoliberal economy. Decent work as defined by the ILO rests on the following pillars: access to employment, labour rights, security in the workplace, association rights, no discrimination based on race or gender and social dialogue. These pillars were identified to provide a guideline for the development of parameters for evaluation of decent work.

## **3. Decent Work Deficits (DWD): problems and constraints**

### **3.1 Background**

Demographic transitions, structural change, technological progress, and global volatility are changing the world of work. Yet, traditional farming still remains dominant in many countries. For agrarian countries, most people still work in agriculture and live in rural areas. Traditional land property rights of those people including small holders are often imposed by national and international estates. Higher agricultural productivity also allows the development of off-farming employment. On the global scale, it marks a trend where the proportion of agricultural employment is rapidly decreasing. For example, from 2010 to 2012 globally, the average ratio of agricultural employment was 30.5%, a 7.4% of decrease compared to the previous decade (World Bank, 2013). Reduction of employment in agricultural activities has been attributed to the perception of work in agriculture as drudgery with low standards in an increasingly globalized (market-driven) and competitive production environment. Broader global political economy forces are also pushing people out of agriculture as it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain decent livelihoods (McMichael, 2014).

Agriculture has transitioned in the rural-urban interface, going from subsistence agriculture to value chains, creating new job opportunities due to technological innovations. For example, in many parts of India, changes in resource availability to agriculture increasingly led to a shift away from the monsoon-dependent production of traditional staple crops cultivated under low intensity conditions to the cultivation of more resource efficient, but at the same time more technology-dependent, drip-irrigated vegetables or fruits. The same is true for investments in dairy systems whose products are traded along complex value chains. In Yucatan, the production of mamey (*Pouteria sapota*)<sup>2</sup> pulp has also led the implementation of new technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Bananas!\* is a 2009 Swedish documentary directed by Fredrik Gertten about a conflict between the Dole Food Company and banana plantation workers in Nicaragua over alleged cases of sterility caused by the pesticide DBCP.

<sup>2</sup> An orange-red coloured fruit, the pulp from which is extracted and exported mainly to the United States market to be used in fruit juices.

There are some positive examples and solutions for how this market-oriented trend can offer opportunities for particular economic sectors in a country. For example, the multi-stakeholder-based certification schemes of the dye-industry in Pakistan have generated a more horizontal distribution of the industry's wealth (Bürkert, 2016). On the other hand, attention has also been drawn to the challenge of decent work deficits that can accompany global integration of economies, especially in agriculture.

### 3.2 Labour relations

The analysis of forces involved in labour relations is critical to address DWD issues. The determinants of labour relations between employees and employers are analysed through the concept of the three "E's" that represent: Entry, Extraction, and Exit of labour markets.

- Entry: How and what is needed to get involved in the work force?
- Extraction: How the production in terms of organizational setups and sustainable stakeholder relations is being extracted.
- Exit: The forces that lead to the dissolvent.

The determinants of labour relations are thus identified as the forces that influence entry, extraction, and exit. Forces that influence entry include the means of engagement such as head-hunting in organisations and forced labour (slavery). "Extraction" forces are classified as either outward force or structural force and they determine the nature of the work process. These can also be viewed as either internal force or external force. Structural force includes machine control as in assembly lines which limit incentives and self-motivation.

Forces that influence exit include the nature of labour, for example, day labour, access to severance pay and on-the-job rights and privileges, such as paid leave. The conceptual model of the three "E's" was theoretically applied to wage/share croppers and smallholder producers to identify the determinants of labour relations with the following output:

#### A: Wage/share croppers

- i. Entry forces: the unequal distribution of capital, land or resources; expectations of higher return/distribution of gains; and cooperation/division of labour among stakeholders;
- ii. Extraction forces: mutual agreements; productivity; profitability; social security; insurance of means of production or resources; access to finance; landlords' power of knowledge over productive process, and the power of the monitoring system over the field;
- iii. Exit forces: the loss of capital; economic crisis; injustice/discontent over distribution/agreements; independence; interlinkage transactions, and indebted situations;

#### B: Small holder producers

- i. Entry forces: the direct local markets; national commercial markets; and exports; subsidization
- ii. Extraction forces: mainly focused in terms of value chain and power relationships, contract farming; farmer based marketing organizations; bargaining power of famers; and processing monopolies;

- iii. Exit forces: debt; market power; public policies, like subsidization; multiple livelihoods.

### **3.3 Decent Work Deficits in Agriculture: theory and reality**

Though the ILO has defined the concept of decent work clearly, there are difficulties that are associated with applying the concept across the board. These include:

- a) the heterogeneity of forms of work,
- b) sectoral differences,
- c) different or unique economic and social contexts and
- d) varying production contexts.

Other related issues that arise in agricultural labour include the degree of commodification of labour, the role of markets and the role of cultural constructs of gendered agricultural task allocation as well as marital residence. Applying the concept of decent work to a particular setting therefore needs to take into account particular social, cultural, historical and geographical factors that shape the examined activity.

The definition of work among smallholder Mayan farmers provides a clear example of their concept of work for whom the concept of a reward in form of earned income does not exist. Work is paid with the *milpa* harvest which also serves to feed their families. Moreover, the concept of vacation does not apply to their cultural or social context. Likewise, children as young as 8 to 10 years of age are usually involved in production activities in the *milpa*. Though this may be considered elsewhere as child labour, the Maya consider it as a form of upbringing in their firm belief that work makes one human.

There is a thin line that distinguishes a working relationship and local cultural practices. Therefore, the task also lies in identifying these relationships to improve the conditions in which they take place. There is no doubt that modernity has brought about globalization which has increasingly resulted in cultural change in cities and in rural areas.

## **4. Measuring Decent Work: a case study of Mexico**

The summer school course essentially provided a case study in the state of Yucatan, Mexico that focused on challenges in achieving decent work status in agriculture.

Presentations that examined DWD in agriculture in Mexico provided by Mexican researchers and two days of field visits were used to explore and provide answers to two key questions; first, where do we find DWD and, secondly, why does this DWD exist?

However, in order to have a clear picture of the labour situation in Yucatan, it is necessary to understand the Mayan cultural constructs of work. For this reason, the summer school course provided a description of the Mayan ethics in relation to agriculture and natural resource management.

### **4.1 Mayan Ethics about the Management of Natural Resources**

To understand part of the current cultural context of the Yucatan and its impact on work, we explored some history of the Mayans by going back to the beginnings of humans, their

development as well as their once high level of social integrity and sustainable livelihood strategies. Dr. Alejandra Garcia gave the school participants an overview of Mayan ethics in relation to the management of natural resources. This should be understood within their broader epistemology. In this history, the necessity of work is to be able to produce offerings to the gods, and so work is what enables one to be human. To be able to make these offerings requires cultivating and caring for the earth and reproducing communities.

Furthermore, in Mayan epistemology, objects have no existence – everything is a subject. This means that everything has the possibility of consciousness, action and communication, not necessarily in human form, but even in metaphysical forms. Dr. Garcia argued that this epistemology still guides many Mayans today in their reproduction and form of farming, of the work they do, and how they organise their social lives. Finally, Dr. Garcia also emphasized the importance of learning about the past in order to prepare and understand the future in Mayan culture. The implication of this is to be guided by ethical action towards all people and things and also to take into account how we approach work in different cultural and social settings, and, therefore, decent work.

#### **4.2 Decent Work in Mexico**

In Mexico, the concept of decent work is included in the Federal Labour Law (Presidencia de la República, 1970):

Article 2 - Labour standards tend to achieve a balance between the factors of production and social justice and promote decent work in all labour relations. For example in 1970 decent work was defined in Mexico as follows:

“Decent work is understood as that in which human dignity is fully respected; there is no discrimination on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disability, social status, health conditions, religion, immigration status, opinion, sexual orientation or marital status; and that in which access to social security and a remunerative wage is perceived; that has ongoing training for increased productivity with shared benefits is received, and has optimal conditions of safety and health to prevent occupational hazards.” (Presidencia de la República, 1970)

In order to put the concept of decent work in Mexico into perspective, it is helpful to understand what experts have proposed to use as indicators. In this sense, Dr. Clemente Ruiz Durán provides some insights into these indicators and the current situation in Mexico. The following indicators have not been officially adopted, since the selection of indicators is currently being discussed; nonetheless, they provide a comprehensive perspective of the situation in Mexico. According to Ruiz Durán (2016), professor of economics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM in Spanish), and is part of a working group with ILO Mexico, the indicators on the status of Decent Work in Mexico are measured according to four strategic axes derived from the definition of decent work, disaggregating them at state level. These four axes are as follows:

- Access to employment/ nature of employment;
- Security at work/ Occupation safety and health, social security;
- Labour rights / national labour code;
- Social dialogue/ collective bargaining;

### 4.3 Access to employment/ nature of employment

The indicators that were used to assess the composition of the labour between formal and informal labour markets were grouped based on income level, time work and those seeking work openly (Ruiz Durán, 2016) as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Access to employment indicators

Indicators	Description
Low income indicator	% of workers that do not get income, or their earnings are below 3x the minimum wage (MW)
Rate of Wage Salary	% of subordinated workers or earners of wage income
Rate of growth of formal employment	Rate of growth of formal employment
Formal labour as a ratio of Economically Active Population (EAP)	% of workers in formal employment as ratio to EAP
Underemployment rate	Those who work less than 35 hours and looking to increase their working hours to increase their income

Source: Ruiz Durán (2016).

The indicators show employment in Mexico increased overall between from 2013 - 2015 (Table 2). However, although data shows that the rate of growth of formal employment has doubled in two years, all other indicators show only insignificant increase.

Table 2. Change of access to employment in percent (%) in Mexico between 2013 and 2015

Year	Underemployment Rate	Rate of wage workers	Low Income Indicator	Rate of growth of formal employment	Formal employment as of EAP
2013	8.2	62.8	65.7	3.1	39.1
2015	8.3	63.5	71.3	6.4	41.6

Source: Ruiz Durán (2016).

### 4.4 Security at work/ Occupation safety and health, social security

The indicators in Table 3 group variables that show conditions in the workplace, using variables such as the number of insured at work, accidents and illnesses (Ruiz Durán, 2016). Table 3 puts in perspective the lag of employees with social security between 2013-2014 in Mexico.

Table 3: Change of security at work in percent (%) in Mexico between 2013 and 2014

<b>Years</b>	<b>Work accidents per 100 workers insured under risk premium</b>	<b>Occupational diseases per 10,000 workers insured under risk premium</b>	<b>Employed population with social security on total subordinate workers</b>
<b>2013</b>	1.2	1.6	53.1
<b>2014</b>	1.0	1.5	53.8

Source: Ruiz Durán (2016).

#### **4.5 Labour rights / national labour code**

Indicators in this category comprised compliance with federal labour law in terms of gender equality, elimination of child labour and formalization of work (Table 4). The results of this indicators show that empirically the situation for labour rights in Mexico is deteriorating (Table 5).

Table 4. Labour rights indicators

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Description</b>
Rate of child labour	Less than 12 to 15 years who work according to the National Occupation and Employment Survey - ENOE in Spanish
Subordinated and paid workers with a written contract	Number of subordinated and paid workers with a written contract
Rate of critical employment conditions	Persons working less than 35 hours a week, which adds 35 to 40 and earn up to 1 minimum wage and people who work more than 48 hours and earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages

Source: Ruiz Durán (2016).

#### **4.6 Social dialogue/ collective bargaining**

Collective bargaining was chosen as a proxy of indicators for social dialogue such as union membership as a ratio of total employed population. The rate of union membership in Mexico decreased from 2013 to 2015 indicating in general a decrease in social dialogue (Table 5).

Table 5. Change in labour rights and social dialogue in Mexico between 2013 and 2015

<b>Year</b>	<b>Child labour 12 – 15 years</b>	<b>Population with a written contract</b>	<b>Rate of precarious occupation</b>	<b>Rate of union membership</b>
<b>2013</b>	6.7	52.5	11.8	9.3
<b>2015</b>	6.8	53.5	12.1	8.9

Source: Ruiz Durán (2016)

According to Table 5, almost half of the population lacks a written contract, a significant fraction, which increases the vulnerability of the workforce.

Finally, it is worth noting that DWD can be found in both rural and urban settings, e.g., agriculture work, as well as construction. Nonetheless, the scope of this course is limited to DWD in agriculture.

#### 4.7 Decent work deficits in agriculture – Yucatan, Mexico

Traditional agriculture is the most common in Mexico. Nationally, a huge fraction (53%) of the combined number of unpaid agricultural workers, as well as those fully dedicated to subsistence farming, produce for auto-consumption and subsistence. In Yucatan this number rises to 60% (Table 6). Farm work constitutes one of the most vulnerable sectors with major DWD. The workers are excluded from the social protection and other benefits because they are not salaried (Torres Góngora, 2016). The overall work condition of agricultural workforce in Mexico is very poor and Yucatan's is more vulnerable (Table 6).

Table 6. National and Yucatan agricultural workforce population (%), according to work condition, 2015

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>National</b>	<b>Yucatán</b>
<b>Subordinate and paid workers</b>	42.6	34.7
<b>Employers</b>	4.8	4.4
<b>Subsistence farmers</b>	38.0	51.3
<b>Unpaid workers</b>	14.7	9.6

Source: Torres Góngora (2016).

#### 4.8 Socioeconomic indicators and implications for decent work

Using two different methodologies, the direct and multidimensional approach, Dr. Luis Ramirez showed a 10% increase in total poverty in Mexico during the last 2 decades with 25% of the population suffering food insecurity. In this sense, the decline in productivity of the primary sector, where 68% of agricultural land is on cattle keeping and 23.3% on maize production, are major contributors to gross domestic product (GDP).

In the last 18 years the number of business units has been stagnant as well as the number of government institutions, an indicator for bureaucracy. Though there has been a decline in agricultural employment, the informal sector has shown an increase in size, including in the number of people employed in the sector.

In summary, the implications for decent work have been an increase in minimum wage salaries, decreased child labour, increased job opportunities as a result of growth in the size of the informal sector and increased employment. However, on the negative, there has been a decrease in access to health care, job security and union membership, resulting in a lack of bargaining power (Table 5).

## 5. Summary Findings

These findings represent an interpretation of the data and observations during the site visits carried out during the summer course. Therefore, having engaged conceptually with DWD in the Yucatan, DWD in agriculture were found to exist.

### 5.1 Where do DWD exist in agricultural work?

#### a) Access to employment

In many parts of the world employment in agriculture is declining. Much debate ensued during the summer course over whether this is because of the nature of agriculture itself – that the hard nature of agricultural work pushes people to seek less strenuous occupations – or whether it is due to the nature of power relations and political economies that are causing agriculture to become more and more marginalized.

Furthermore, informalisation of work in agriculture seems to be growing, especially seasonal work. Wages for workers in the agricultural sector also tend to be low; however, in Mexico it tends to be unevenly distributed.

It is important to emphasize the differences in access to decent employment and informal employment in Mexico and other developing countries. Agriculture is focused essentially as a subsistence activity (proportion of agricultural labour producing for consumption), i.e. farmers do not produce for the market, but rather for self-consumption. Consequently, subsistence agricultural activities take the form of self-employment, lacking in most of the elements that characterize decent work, i.e., perception of a sufficient salary, vacation, social security, among others.

Agricultural workers in formal employment, such as those who are employed in agricultural firms, enjoy greater benefits than their counterparts in informal work. Such benefits may include a stable base salary, social security, holiday period, provision of protective equipment and healthcare. However, unionization of workers, which may enhance communication between workers and employers regarding conditions of employment, is uncommon.

#### b) Security in the workplace

Worker's security at the workplace also tends to be uneven in Mexico. Most seasonal workers lack insurance and social security. In the case of contract workers, however, security in the workplace is better covered where appropriate equipment and machinery to carry out safer work are provided, as well as with insurance and social security benefits.

#### c) Labour rights

Labour rights tend to be a very challenging and contentious issue in achieving decent work in agriculture. In Mexico, for example, there is a relatively high rate of child labour in agriculture. However, there was also a debate among the group about whether child labour should also sometimes be seen in context, such as part of cultural norms and how work is sometimes understood by particular cultures historically, like by the Mayans. Sometimes work is seen not as labour *per se*, but as part of socialization and human development. However, this should also be analysed on the basis of what sort of work conditions such child labour is taking place: Is it in an employer-employee relationship? Is someone else profiting from such child labour? Is the child employed/hired during vacations or does the period of the child's work stretch into school

days? For example in Mexico where 6.8% of the work force population is comprised of child labour.

Another point at which labour rights tend to be undermined in agriculture is that a high number of agricultural workers do not have permanent contracts, but work on a seasonal and informal basis. This reduces the consistency of their work and income.

**Excuse: Child labour from a Mayan ethics perspective**

As previously discussed, from a Mayan ethics perspective, child labour forms part of an important process of socialization, necessary to safeguard local traditional environmental knowledge, through experiences related with their agricultural modes of production.

One of the most important resources of rural communities is the workforce of their inactive members i.e., children and, in moments of crisis, the need to complement their incomes, by becoming active members. Nonetheless, while some form of child labour is important for the transfer of cultural knowledge of distinct production, as is the case in traditional culture in Yucatan, the labour exploitation of those who are part of the labour force – which 2.5 million Mexican children suffer – a third of those active in agriculture activities-cannot be denied (Torres, 2016).

d) Union membership

A fourth important measure of decent work is the levels of social dialogue in the agriculture sector, which most often requires facilitation through representative organisations like trade unions. However, in Mexico, as with most parts of the world, unionisation of agricultural workers is low, which undermines the ability of workers to collectively build their voice and power to engage in dialogue to advance their interests.

e) Gender

We often find that decent work deficits are gendered. This relates to the fact that it is women that often experience lower rates of pay, poor labour conditions, and high levels of insecurity. This is due to unequal power relations between men and women in access to productive resources, such as land, labour and capital.

The issue of gender in agriculture is important. In Yucatecan and Mexican rural areas, fieldwork in the *milpa* is carried out by men, while women perform other activities vital to the household economy, such as growing home gardens, raising children, backyard animal handling, housework like cooking and cleaning, making crafts and hammocks or in activities related to beekeeping. For example, in the case of Yucatan, these activities represent what is deemed as culturally acceptable, mediating resource access among gender (pers. communication Britwum, 2016).

During the excursions, it was observed that firms involved in agriculture, hired women to perform activities like seed selection and sorting while men carried out more physical work like weeding and cleaning, collection and transport of the commodity. Therefore, there is a strong evidence of a cultural task-related differentiation between genders. In this sense, DWD analysis should be adapted to account for cultural customs.

## 5.2 Cultural factors and DWD

As previously noted, according to Mayan ethics, everything is a subject. This connotes to treat everything with respect and reverence. Even rocks have something to say. For example, the jungle is filled with deities, whose permission is necessary, in order to slash and burn for *milpa*. In terms of decent work, this reverence of nature leads to more respect of the ecological cycle of nature.

For instance, some of the following cultural aspects were considered relevant to decent work, during the in-course discussion sessions:

- Among rural communities in Yucatan, a sense of social security comes from land and family, rather than retirement pension. This traditional form of security relies on family ties and main agricultural production, i.e., usufruct of the land.
- Women are delegated to work considered less physical and not assigned leadership roles.
- Children have no place in market-oriented agro-industry; nonetheless, their participation in traditional subsistence farming has educational purposes.
- Empowerment and a sense of identity seems to be more important than production, for example, the social organization observed at the Jugueria Akil, where local community leaders – over 30 of them – are the stakeholders of the cooperative. It's important to mention that this juicing plant has been functioning since the early 1980s under this model.

Moreover, in Mayan communities, work is part of life itself, therefore, it is necessary to establish reciprocity with nature and coexist with it. Through work, the inhabitants of these communities transmit their knowledge to their descendants (Torres Góngora, 2016).

In this sense, some of the local elements that may be perceived as a source of deficits in decent work are:

- Models of agriculture and seasonality of the production, e.g. Conventional model vs. agroecology model. The former allows for temporary work, rather than for a stable work situation. However, if a more integrated model of agriculture was practiced where multiple crops are grown and rotated throughout the year, it may be more likely that labour requirements would also be more stable.
- Global value chain and global market competition challenges a fairer model, i.e., Juguera Akil. In this sense, investment in equipment and technology to maximize production becomes a priority, rather than allowing for a horizontal, cooperative model.
- Indicators that reflect global certifications, i.e., Fair-trade, Kosher, traceability, etc. should be prioritized among cooperatives, instead of the maximization of production.
- Organizing agricultural labourers is a challenging task due to geographic locations, particularly among Mayan communities, which are geographically dispersed in small and isolated communities throughout the Yucatan peninsula.
- Enforcement of labour codes in the geographic region is a challenge, due to a lack of presence of the federal government.

Technical capacities are a challenge, given the limited resources for investment among some of the places visited. This was particularly visible during the visit of Juguera Akil, where a more horizontal structure, and profit distribution, leaves less income for technological investments. This generates extra burden on the human capital, in order to keep up with production requirements.

### **5.3 Reasons for Decent Work deficits in agriculture**

The factors that explain the existence of DWD in agriculture are wide-ranging. However, some of the following are reasons identified in discussions and surveys during the summer course:

#### a) Seasonality of work

A key reason for the existence of seasonal and informal rather than permanent work in agriculture is that due to production cycles high levels of labour are required during some seasons of the year, such as during harvesting, and much less in other times of the year. This makes it difficult to create permanent work conditions.

#### b) Mode of agricultural production

It was pointed out at the farmer school *U'Yits Ka'an*, that the seasonality of production, and hence of labour requirements, is also linked to the mode of agriculture. In the industrial mode where only one or two crops are grown, cultivating and harvesting takes place at specific, short periods in the year. However, if a more integrated model of agriculture was practiced where multiple crops are grown and rotated throughout the year, it may be more likely that labour requirements would also be more stable.

#### c) Global integration

Integrating into global value chains also poses challenges for the attainment of decent work. The global market place often imposes pressures on the conditions of work, quality standards and traceability with certification such as the global Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) most of which require a huge capital outlay. Failure to meet such conditions often comes with very punitive measures. The ability of enterprises like cooperatives that wish to give their members fairer prices for their produce is curtailed by their inability to find the necessary capital to support their activities.

#### d) Challenges for labour organising

Organising workers in the agricultural sector is notoriously difficult. One reason is because a high proportion of workers are not permanent workers, but only work seasonally. A second reason is that the geographical distance between workplaces in rural settings makes organising workers in agriculture more challenging.

#### e) Gender inequalities

Unequal experiences of work can be determined by gender, as often women do not have the same access to productive resources like land, are placed in subordinate work roles in the workplace, and often are paid less than men. This is due to unequal power relations between women and men, and, in a broader scope, in society.

#### f) Weak state enforcement

Very often the state is weak in monitoring and enforcing labour codes on farms and agricultural enterprises.

#### g) Low levels of technology adoption

Low security at work can be linked to low adoption and use of technology, such as safety technology, as well as labour-saving technology that could replace extremely strenuous and menial tasks that otherwise increase the arduousness of work and increase the human work hours required. However, at the same time, technology adoption can be the source of unemployment in agriculture as it replaces human labour, and it can increase the flexibility and informalisation of labour.

## **5.4 Strategies providing support to avoid DWD**

### **5.4.1 *U Yits Ka'an* – School of Agroecology in Maní**

As previously noted, the major part of the agriculture in Yucatán is undertaken in a traditional way – agroecology – which is linked to the environment and subject to the natural cycles of the weather, seasons, an ancestral practice familiar and usually away from market economy (Torres Góngora, 2016). Thus, the case of *U Yits Ka'an* was visited in order to become familiar with a concept that contrasts conventional agriculture by actively addressing and promoting alternative ways of farming.

During the site visit to *U Yits Ka'an*, the school of agroecology in Maní, Yucatan; the school Director, a Catholic Priest, introduced the group to the concept of *Buen Vivir* (Good Living). The mission of *U Yits Ka'an* is to promote an alternative mode of agriculture, which is more just, healthier and decolonizing. Therefore, the school criticizes the conventional development model as an anti-model, and focuses on a more harmonious relation with nature through the preservation of local traditional knowledge, rather than maximization of production, the teaching of decolonizing theory, such as *Buen Vivir*, and through political activism, as discussed hereafter.

*U Yits Ka'an* takes the form of farmer schools offering technical support to farmers to avoid DWD. The schools apply an educational strategy based on an agroecological perspective. Majority of farmers involved in the schools have very low literacy levels. An Adaptation-Innovation system is applied where the main goal of farmer education is capacity building in the field of agroecology. The programme participants included alumni of UADY, Mexican farmer schools, civil society organisations and University academic staff.

The main objective of the programme is conservation of indigenous genetic resources. A multidimensional approach is adopted with reference to animal and crop systems. An example of a conservation project is the Mexican hairless pig which was almost extinct by 1997. It represents an important genetic resource that is adapted to the environment. It is an important source of meat and thrives in traditional production systems. The Mexican hairless pig has inherent ability to deposit fat and has high nitrogen retention. This project has resulted in improved household incomes while integrated biogas systems using pig slurry generates energy for 37% of the farms.

#### a) Decolonizing theory and traditional modes of production

The visit to *U Yits Ka'an* underscored the importance to revert to biocultural memory for answers to future challenges in agriculture, for example, planting native seeds species, applying native knowledge in farming, and reflecting cultural elements through traditional ceremonies and food preparation. Decolonizing theory emerged as a critique to conventional western modes of production, which emphasize primarily in maximization, while sustainability takes a backseat.

#### b) Empowerment through political action

*U Yits Ka'an* also participates in promoting traditional practices through political action. For example, it is openly opposed to the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO), since these threaten the traditional apiculture in the region, by contaminating the honey with traces of GMO making the honey less desirable in the international market.

c) *Buen Vivir* (Good Living)

The school also promotes a spiritual relationship with nature, taking their inspiration from the *Buen Vivir* philosophy, which emerged from the traditional way of life of the *Quechua* and *Aimara* peoples, in the Andes region of South America. *U Yits Ka'an* believes that the Mayan people share a similar philosophy, which is based on the harmonious and balanced relationship between society and nature.

#### **5.4.2 State intervention in the labour market**

The labour secretary in the State of Yucatan Mr. Martin Enrique provided an outlook on the state departments' intervention to promote employment. The objectives of this programme were to link opportunities to potential employees, to support self-employment and to support capacity building.

To achieve these objectives, several means have been put in place including:

- Job cards,
- Employment portals,
- Telephone service to arrange for job interviews,
- Website for seeking employment,
- Workshops by the National Employment Service held with high school students,
- Scholarship programmes,
- On-the-job training programme and
- Social programme that deals with social security, health, accident and illness prevention

The results of these programmes have been impressive and include:

- Modernisation of work through unions in arbitration
- Improved working conditions
- Improved wages
- Reduction in youth unemployment
- Reduction in overall unemployment rate
- Increased efficiency of management of employment

## **6. Recommendations / Solutions**

The following are a few recommendations to take into account when attempting to measure decent work deficits in agriculture in particular contexts:

1. Acknowledging cultural differences should be in the forefront when evaluating decent working conditions e.g. cultural constructs of gender around labour;
2. DWD should be placed in the context of a production system which is often dynamic and therefore, a multidimensional approach should be adopted;
3. A clear definition of indicators to be used in evaluation is necessary to overcome challenges of irrelevance to the production environment;

4. A broad sectoral background should be sought so as to have results that are representative;
5. As a result of the diverse attributes of decent work particularly in agriculture, it is critical to carefully select a conceptual framework that provides a clear analysis of labour concepts.

## 7. References

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