

## Report on International Conference in Merida: Occupational Health and Safety in Agriculture



Occupational health and safety is a core element of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Despite hazardous disposition of agricultural work, unfortunately, the occupational health and safety (OHS) issues in agricultural sector are frequently ignored. The International Center for



Welcoming banner at Universidad Autónoma de Yucatan main campus, Merida, Yucatan, 6-10 November 2017)

Development and Decent Work (ICDD) together with the centers for International Health (CIH) and the Food Security Center (FSC) addressed this challenge in a conference in Merida from 6-10 November 2017. The conference was held at the Autonomous University of Yucatán (UADY), one of the ICDD partner universities. Prof. Dr. Javier Becerril, Dr. Claudia Davila from UADY, and their dynamic team hosted this conference. Over 80 participants (23 different nationals) from universities, research institutions, and NGOs countries joined the conference.

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The mentioned centers are three exceed (Excellence for Exchange and Development) centers funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the program *exceed* offered by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). All centers involved, having different aspirations, covered different aspects of the occupational safety and health in agriculture. The problems of OHS in agricultural sector and concomitant physical, biological and psychological hazards were deliberated. The participants at length discussed on the policies and solutions to decrease the work-related hazards and to foster safe and healthy work environment in agricultural areas.

The conference was organized under 4 parts, which thematically overlapped with each other. First part comprised of intensives lectures and case studies on various topics related to OHS.



**Left: Lunch during field work with participants (Yaxunah, Yucatan, 9 November 2017). Top right corner: PhD workshop. Bottom right corner: The directors and/or executive managers (left to right: FSC – Dr. Schönleber, ICDD – Prof. Dr. Scherrer, CIH – Prof. Dr. Radon, FSC – Dr. Nicole Schönleber) of the three centers.**

Second part included field work on community projects in a Mayan village (Yaxunah). Third part consisted of the workshops, training programs on occupational health, food security, teaching methods and open slots for exchanges for the further projects. The fourth part was a

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self-organized PhD workshop under the motto “Sustainable Development Goals and Place of Labor” that assembled ICDD scholars and gave space to present and discuss their research progress and preliminary data.

Various agricultural product provisions have been extensively studied throughout the program, unveiling, various interwoven tasks – ranging from the way of using pesticide, harvesting, marketing, certification–carried out by different actors such as agricultural workers, supermarkets, and certification firms. The case studies covered arrays of crops varying from melon to palm oil, and regions from Brazil to India. What made this conference more fruitful is that participants of the conference focused on different scales of OHS: Some focused on individual level, some on workplace, while some contributors confined their attention to the macro level questions such as labor standards and OHS measures. Thus, the presentations were complementary to each other.



**Conference participants at the Faculty of Architecture (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatan, Merida, Yucatan, 6-10 November 2017)**

The contributions documented the dire situation of the farmers and lack of OHS measures in agricultural areas. Given the relevancy and urgency of the lack of OHS in agriculture, common

grounds and projects concerned with OHS were discussed. It was underlined that OHS, labor rights and food security appear to be inseparable from each other at the level of empowering working conditions, including gender perspectives. As documented several times during the conference, the poverty, lack of rural development, underproductivity, migration and OHS are closely related with each other, and in some cases, they are part of the same vicious cycle that produce each other. Moreover, it was stressed that OHS can be better grasped with an interdisciplinary perspective that can address its different aspects.



**Individual suggestions of future research foci (coloured tags) and clustering of common ideas by heads/staff of the three centers (left to right: CIH – Prof. Dr. Radon, ICDD – Prof. Dr. Scherrer, FSC – Dr. Schönleber) at the Faculty of Architecture (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatan, Merida, 6-10 November 2017)**

Considering various research interests, the participants identified different research clusters and looked for a cooperation in the final day of the conference. Three research clusters on labor relations, third-party certification, and migration came out as a further research scope after an extensive discussion and intellectual exchange. The researchers, interested in one of these

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clusters, worked together and came up with concrete proposals.



**Left: Group picture. Right: Group work of newly assembled research cluster “Third party-certification, OHS, policy implications, and value chain” at the Faculty of Architecture (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatan, Merida, 6-10 November 2017)**

They are summarized as bellow.

- 1) A multidimensional impact assessment of programs that target integration on migrant populations: Taking a case analysis approach, the impact assessment proposal will focus on the improvement of decent work conditions, occupational health and food security of migrant population in different parts of the globe.
- 2) Economic upgrading of small scale enterprise and its implications on gender relations: Case studies from Ghana, Germany, India, Brazil and Mexico. It will focus on decent work application in the informal sectors of the economy. Next steps: 1) Call for papers will be disseminated in December 2017 2) Inception meeting will be held in Natal in Brazil (March 2018).
- 3) Third party-certification, OHS, policy implications, and value chain: This project involves a detailed analysis of third-party certifications considering its social, economic and environmental impacts. The project delves into certification systems and their effects on employment condition. In particular, it focuses on the OHS and more specifically the use of the pesticide in the certified agricultural areas. Concerning the latter, the researchers decided to write a proposal for a EU project.



**Group work of newly assembled research cluster “A multidimensional impact assessment of programs that target integration on migrant populations” at the Faculty of Architecture (Universidad Autónoma de Yucatan, Merida, 6-10 November 2017)**

Cooperation is very central to enhance the *exceed* network and going beyond disciplinary boundaries is very crucial to explore OHS-related issues that were grasped in this conference. Besides, it provided an important platform to understand OHS and foster safety and health working environment in agricultural sector. This conference, bringing international researchers having different background together, took a step further to enhance *exceed* network activities and to stimulate impacting research outcomes based on global development agendas.

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