

RURAL DEVELOPMENT through DECENT WORK

FOR GROWTH, PRODUCTIVE JOBS, INCOME, FOOD SECURITY, GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES, RIGHTS, VOICE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CRISIS RESILIENCE



International Labour Office

Themes

Rural Policy Briefs

Promoting Rural Development through Occupational Safety and Health

Most people in rural areas face particularly poor and hazardous working conditions coupled with a lack of social protection. Integrated approaches that include promoting rural workers' health and safety are fundamental to ensure decent and productive lives and boost rural development.

Why action is needed

- Workers in rural areas face the greatest challenge regarding occupational safety and health as most of them work in small and micro-enterprises, in agriculture and in informal activities.
- Hazardous working conditions and other adverse factors, such as remote locations, precarious housing, low quality nutrition and poor general health, high prevalence of epidemic and endemic diseases, lack of access to drinking



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Facts and Figures

- About 2.3 million people die every year from work-related accidents and diseases; some 317 million suffer serious non-fatal injuries and another 160 million fall ill from work-related causes. Most of them live in rural areas of developing countries.¹
- Agriculture, which employs about 60 percent of workers in less developed countries, is one of the most hazardous sectors. Out of the yearly 321,000 fatal workplace accidents worldwide, about half occur in agriculture.²
- Workers in agriculture run twice the risk of dying on-the-job compared with workers in other sectors. Fatal accidents in agriculture remained high over the last decade while having decreased in other sectors.³
- Most of the 115 million children working in hazardous occupations are found in rural areas, particularly in agriculture, which accounts for about 59 percent (or 70 million) of all children aged 5-17 in hazardous activities.⁴
- High exposure to risks combined with low levels of social protection affect informal economy workers the most. Many of them operate in rural areas of developing countries where informality accounts for 35 to 90 per cent of total employment. It represents almost 80 percent of non-agricultural employment in Africa, 65 percent in Asia and 51 percent in Latin America.⁵ If agricultural employment was included, the proportion of informality would be even higher.

water and sanitary facilities, as well as difficult terrain, poorly designed tools, and exposure to extreme weather conditions is aggravated by the absence of, or low standard of health and medical services available in rural settings.

- The interaction between poor living and working conditions in rural areas promotes a vicious cycle of low productivity, low wages, malnutrition, ill-health and low working capacity, which creates a characteristic morbidity-mortality pattern among rural workers and negatively impacts rural economic development.
- A large number of workplace accidents within rural activities occur mainly among the most vulnerable groups, such as migrants and seasonal workers, the elderly, women, and children.
- Social and cultural gender-based criteria for the division of work expose rural women to particularly dangerous, stressful, and low paid work, with dangerous repercussions on their reproductive health.
- Migrant workers are also exposed to high risk and exploitative jobs with precarious and difficult working conditions that are often dirty, dangerous and even demeaning.
- Rural communities often lack the education and information to respond appropriately to the health hazards and risks they face.
- Widespread under-reporting of the occupational health and safety hazards faced by agricultural and non-agricultural rural workers results in the lack of proper response and appropriate preventive measures.
- In most cases, rural workers are not covered by national occupational safety and health legislation, employment injury benefits or insurance schemes. Where national regulations do exist, their enforcement is weak due to insufficient labour inspection, lack of understanding and training among employers and workers on hazards and prevention their prevention, and low levels of organization among rural workers, particularly in agriculture.



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Policy options

- An integrated approach to rural workers' health and safety is a key component of rural development policy and initiatives at the national and local levels. Below are some main areas that need to be addressed.

Establishing a preventive culture of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in rural areas

- Respect at all levels the right to a safe and healthy rural working environment; promote the participation of the tripartite constituents and give priority to prevention.
 - ◆ Promote active participation of governments, employers and workers in securing a safe and healthy working environment through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties.
 - ◆ Accord highest priority to the principle of prevention.

Box 1

Major Occupational Hazards in Agriculture

- ◆ Dangerous machinery and tools, such as tractors, trucks and harvesters, and cutting and piercing tools
- ◆ Hazardous chemicals: pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics and other veterinarian products
- ◆ Toxic or allergenic agents: fungi, allergenic plants, flowers, dusts, animal waste, gloves (chrome), oils
- ◆ Carcinogenic substances or agents: certain pesticides such as arsenicals and phenoxy-acetic herbicides as well as UV radiations
- ◆ Parasitic diseases such as bilharziasis and facioliasis
- ◆ Transmissible animal diseases or zoonoses such as anthrax, brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, hydatid disease, tularaemia, rabies, Lyme disease, tinea, listerioses
- ◆ Other infectious and parasitic diseases: leishmaniasis, malaria, schistosomiasis, tetanus, mycosis
- ◆ Confined spaces such as silos, pits, cellars and tanks
- ◆ Loudnoises and vibrations
- ◆ Ergonomic hazards: use of poor or inadequately designed equipment and tools, unnatural body positioning or prolonged static postures, carrying of heavy loads, repetitive movements, excessive working hours
- ◆ Extreme temperatures due to weather conditions and agricultural processes
- ◆ Contact with dangerous and poisonous animals, reptiles, and insects.

- ◆ Increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of occupational hazards and risks in rural areas and how they may be reduced or prevented.
- ◆ Develop a knowledge base and capacity building in relation to occupational safety and health.
- ◆ Promote coherent and relevant strategies as well as appropriate national OSH policies, and integrate them into national rural development policy.
- ◆ Incorporate the gender dimension into national policy-making by developing, adapting and implementing gender-sensitive policies and strategies on OSH.
- ◆ Introduce a systems approach to OSH management at the national and local levels through the formulation of rural OSH programmes (covering risk assessment and risk management, training, information, etc.), the promotion of tripartite consultation, appropriate government policy and legal frameworks, compliance and enforcement mechanisms, such as labour inspections, as well as the provision of adequate OSH services in rural areas.

Promoting OSH in rural areas⁶

- Formulate and review a coherent national policy on safety and health in agriculture to prevent occupational accidents, injuries and diseases in rural areas.
- Ensure an adequate and appropriate system of inspection for agricultural and other workplaces in rural areas.
- Establish and improve record keeping and statistics on occupational accidents, injuries and diseases in rural areas.
- Disseminate information among agricultural workers and employers on safety and health matters, and encourage their participation in the application and review of safety and health measures.
- Ensure the compliance of machinery, equipment, appliances and hand tools used in rural areas with national or other recognized safety and health standards, as well as their appropriate use, installation, and maintenance.
- Protect agriculture and other rural workers through appropriate risk assessments (see Box 2), application of adequate preventive safety and health measures, and provision of appropriate welfare facilities.
- Ensure that workers and their representatives are consulted and encouraged to actively participate in all steps of OSH management (see Box 3).
- Introduce innovative approaches on providing advice to employers and workers on how to improve or maintain OSH standards, for example a system of roving worker safety and health representatives.⁷
- Establish specific criteria for the importation, classification, packaging and labeling of chemicals used in agriculture and other rural work and for their banning or limitation if needed.
- Extend the coverage of social security schemes against fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries and diseases or other work-related health risks to rural workers.
- Provide adequate health and safety measures for the most vulnerable groups of agricultural and other rural workers such as women, young workers, the aged, migrants and temporary workers.
- Integrate OSH into national rural development policies and programmes with a well-defined strategy.

Improving OSH in micro- and small rural enterprises (including informal businesses)

- Promote a systems approach to OSH management at the enterprise level by:
 - ◆ Formulating a clear and detailed occupational safety and health policy.

Box 2

Risk assessment in agriculture

“National laws and regulations or the competent authority shall provide, taking into account the size of the undertaking and the nature of its activity, that the employer shall:

(a) carry out appropriate risk assessments in relation to the safety and health of workers and, on the basis of these results, adopt preventive and protective measures to ensure that under all conditions of their intended use, all agricultural activities, workplaces, machinery, equipment, chemicals, tools and processes under the control of the employer are safe and comply with prescribed safety and health standards (...);⁸

A risk assessment involves a careful examination of the working environment to identify hazards (physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic, organizational) and to evaluate the potential harm that they could do. Evaluation of risk takes into consideration both the likelihood of the hazard causing harm to persons and the severity of such harm if it were to occur. Carrying out a risk assessment involves five steps:⁹

- (1) identification of hazards;
- (2) identification of who might be harmed and how;
- (3) evaluation of the risks and how to control them;
- (4) recording the results of the assessment and setting priorities for improvement;
- (5) reviewing and updating the assessment as necessary.

- ♦ Fostering OSH organization and arrangements for establishing responsibility and accountability, competence requirements and training, communication and information.
- ♦ Promoting planning, development and implementation.
- ♦ Providing performance monitoring and measurement, audit and management review.
- ♦ Taking preventive and corrective action as well as making continual improvements.
- Promote national training programmes (see Boxes 4 and 5) on practical and effective OSH measures in enterprises, such as:
 - ♦ Encouraging the proper use of materials storage and handling.
 - ♦ Providing well-designed workstations and ensuring machine safety.
 - ♦ Controlling hazardous substances and improving the working environment, for example through better lighting and ventilation.

Box 3

Participatory workplace OSH mechanisms¹⁰

“Employers should provide for the establishment and efficient functioning of OSH committees, and recognize workers’ elected OSH representatives. OSH committees should include workers or their representatives and employers’ representatives with the knowledge, experience and skills in OSH-related matters. Participation of women on these committees should be encouraged.” OSH committees should meet regularly, or if and when a specific need arises, and participate in the decision-making process related to OSH-related issues.

“Guidance on the composition, rights and responsibilities of OSH committees is provided in the Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No.164)”.

Box 4

Work Improvement in Small Enterprises (WISE)

The ILO’s WISE programme assists micro and small-sized enterprises to improve working conditions and productivity using an action-oriented training approach based on the diffusion of simple, effective and affordable techniques (related to lighting and ventilation, tools and work organization, chemical storage and handling, etc.), that provide direct benefits to owners and workers. The programme is based on six fundamental training principles: build on local practice; link working conditions with other management goals; use learning-by-doing; focus on achievements; encourage exchange of experience; and promote workers’ involvement.

Launched in 1988, WISE has been successfully implemented in over 20 countries worldwide. In the Philippines, the success of the programme has prompted the government to integrate it at national policy level. In Haiti, a WISE project contributed to improving working conditions and safety and health in the export apparel sector while promoting better linkages between the business sector and local vocational training and educational institutions.

See WISE methodology: http://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/instructionmaterials/WCMS_152468/lang-en/index.htm

- ♦ Providing appropriate welfare and sanitary facilities at the workplace.
- ♦ Ensuring proper treatment and disposal of contaminated substances, in energy-efficient machinery and using environment-friendly raw materials to reduce waste production.
- ♦ Promoting a balance between work time and breaks, and creating a positive workplace atmosphere.
- ♦ Specifically ensuring the protection of women, youth, the aged, disabled, and migrant workers.

These measures to improve OSH also increase productivity, and virtually all of them can be implemented at low cost.

Box 5

Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND)

WIND is an ILO programme aimed at promoting practical improvements in small-scale farms through the initiatives of local villagers. It is based on the WISE methodology and applies the same principles and approaches by providing a locally-grown and affordable support system that responds to farmers’ immediate needs through a participatory process, with an equal involvement of both women and men. WIND recognizes the lack of distinction in rural settings between work and living space. Its goal therefore is to improve both, as well as promote community development and empowerment of agricultural workers and farmers, and foster social dialogue and tripartite relationships.

Launched in 1995 in Vietnam, the WIND programme has reached 23 countries with encouraging results. In some cases, such as in Cambodia, Costa Rica, Thailand, Uruguay and Viet Nam, WIND has been incorporated into national OSH programmes. The Dominican Republic, Honduras, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Mongolia, have used WIND in their OSH training programmes for small-scale farmers.

See WIND methodology: http://www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_099075/lang-en/index.htm

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ILO's role

- The ILO works with its constituents (governments, employers' and workers' organizations) to ensure and promote a safe and healthy working environment, primarily through the promotion of international labour standards aimed at establishing sound prevention, protection and inspection practices.
- Over 30 ILO legal instruments target rural areas and agriculture. Among these, of particular relevance with regard to occupational safety and health measures are: Recommendation on Protection of Migrant Workers, 1955 (No. 100); Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 (No. 121) Recommendation (No. 121); Convention on Labour Inspection (Agriculture), 1969 (No. 129); Convention on Rural Workers' Organizations, 1975 (No. 141) and Recommendation (No. 149); Working Environment (Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration) Convention, 1977 (No. 148) and Recommendation (No. 156); Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) ; Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182); Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184) and Recommendation (No. 192); and Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187).
- The ILO's technical cooperation projects support improvements in working conditions in agriculture and other rural activities, and assists member States to implement specific programmes and projects aimed at applying ILO policies on OSH through the establishment and strengthening of national safety and health infrastructure, inspection services, training programmes, as well as the provision of international good practice and guidelines on OSH at enterprise level.
- The ILO promotes research, advocacy and awareness raising, knowledge development, management and information

dissemination, as well as technical assistance for implementing and improving OSH management systems and for supporting national policies to improve working and living conditions in rural areas.

- The ILO works in partnership with other international agencies, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), as well as international non-governmental organizations, such as the International Ergonomics Association (IEA) and the International Occupational Health Commission (ICOH), to promote OSH in rural OSH, particularly in agriculture areas.



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¹ILO: ILO Introductory Report: Global Trends and Challenges on Occupational Safety and Health, XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work: Istanbul, Turkey, 11-15 September 2011 (Geneva: 2011)

²Ibidem; ILO: Safety and Health in Agriculture (Geneva: 2000)

³ILO: Agriculture: a Hazardous Work (Geneva: 2009): http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/WCMS_110188/lang--en/index.htm.

⁴ILO: Children in Hazardous Work. What We Know. What We Need to Do (Geneva: 2011); ILO: Child Labour in Agriculture: <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>.

⁵ILO: Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A statistical picture (Geneva 2002) <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/infoecon/docs/441/F596332090/women%20and%20men%20stat%20picture.pdf>.

⁶In addition to specific codes of practice and technical guidelines on agriculture, national policies can use the framework provided by the Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184), the first international instrument addressing safety and health hazards facing workers in agriculture comprehensively.

⁷ILO: Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture (Geneva: 2010), Sectin 20.4 8Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184), Article 7

⁹ILO: Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture (Geneva, 2010), Arts. 4.2.4. and 4.2.5.

¹⁰Ibidem Arts. 3.4.11 and 3.4.12

Links

- ILO: Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork): <http://www.ilo.org/safework/lang--en/index.htm>

Tools

- ◆ ILO: *Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture* (Geneva: 2010) http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/forthcoming-publications/WCMS_159457/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety*, 4 vols. (Geneva: 1998) http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_PUBL_9221092038_EN/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Ergonomic Checkpoints, Second Edition* (Geneva: 2010) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS_178593/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Ergonomic Checkpoints in Agriculture* (Geneva: 2012) http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_168042/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Work Improvements in Small Enterprises (WISE)*. Package for trainers (Geneva: 2009) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS_110322/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ Tsuyoshi Kawakami, Ton That Khai and Kazutaka Kogi: *Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development programme (WIND): training programme on safety, health and working conditions in agriculture* (Can Tho City, Vietnam, 2005) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS_178800/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Safety and Health in the Use of Agrochemicals: A Guide* (Geneva: 1991) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/instr/WCMS_110196/lang--en/index.htm

Other Materials

- ◆ ILO: *Safety and Health in Agriculture: A Set of Fact-Sheets* (Geneva: 2000) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_110193/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Top on the Agenda: Health and Safety in Agriculture*, Labour Education 2000/1-2 Nos. 118/119 (Geneva: 2000) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_110198/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems. ILO-OSH 2001* (Geneva: 2001) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/standards-and-instruments/WCMS_107727/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health*, International Labour Conference, 93rd Session, Report IV (1) (Geneva: 2005) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/WCMS_111296/lang--en/index.htm
- ◆ ILO: *ILO Introductory Report: Global Trends and Challenges on Occupational Safety and Health*, XIX World Congress on Safety and Health at Work: Istanbul Turkey, 11-15 September 2011 (Geneva: 2011) http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_162662/lang--en/index.htm

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