

Key intervention: Equitable Food Systems

Thematic Area of the Coalition	<p><i>Realizing human rights and related labour rights, ensuring human dignity and meeting basic needs</i></p> <p>Human rights and related labour rights underpin the realization of social justice. Using them as guardrails in policymaking, business and investment decisions and consumer choices, as well as a compass for navigating the multiple transitions and crises facing the world today, will leave no one behind. Work in this area seeks to further the implementation of the norms, standards and principles that are part of the universally endorsed United Nations legal framework and include the international labour standards giving effect to human rights in the world of work. In pursuance of the implementation of the SDGs, this intervention will contribute to strengthening the rule of law and good governance and to ensuring that people's basic needs are met, thus supporting human dignity and agency. This includes promoting and ensuring effective access to services that fulfil basic human needs that are crucial for well-being, social inclusion and active participation in society at the local and national level, such as healthcare, education, adequate nutrition, housing, water and sanitation, and energy, with special attention to the most vulnerable. Actions in this area will be carried out with full respect for cultural diversity, guided by a commitment to mutual understanding and collaboration across countries and regions. The collective ambition of partners contributing to this thematic area is to bridge the gap between economic growth and social justice and to harness the full potential of the universally endorsed international norms, standards and principles that are part of the United Nations framework, ensuring that progress is not only made but also accelerated to achieve SDGs 8 and 16. These efforts will also exert a multiplier effect conducive to tackling global challenges like poverty, inequality, and labour exploitation more effectively thereby also contributing to the realization of SDGs 1, 5 and 10, among others.</p>
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1. Background and context

In the context of the 2021 Food System Summit, several coalitions have been formed to promote a systemic, integrated approach to addressing food system challenges, aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Their primary objective is to drive the achievement of the SDGs by supporting national pathways for food systems transformation by 2030. This Coalition will serve as a platform to enhance their delivery by strengthening cross-sector collaboration, mobilizing additional resources, and scaling up successful initiatives to drive systemic change in food systems and advance social justice globally.

Food system workers are fundamental to global food security but often face severe socio-economic challenges, including high levels of working poverty, poor health and safety conditions, and inadequate labour and social protections. Approximately two thirds of the extremely poor work in agriculture, with child labour pervasive in this sector —70% of the 160 million child labourers globally work in agriculture.

Agricultural workers are often excluded from labour protections such as minimum wages, paid sick leave and union rights. This exclusion limits their ability to access fundamental labour rights and collective bargaining. Migrants and casual labourers face additional barriers, exacerbating their vulnerability.

Recognizing these systemic issues, the UN Food Systems Summit has identified “advancing equitable livelihoods, decent work and empowered communities” as a priority for achieving sustainable food systems and supporting the SDGs. The Coalition of Action on Decent Work for Equitable Food Systems, initiated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the ILO and CARE International, addresses these challenges by driving global and national efforts to ensure decent work for food system workers.

2. Collective ambition and rationale

The Coalition of Action on Decent Work for Equitable Food Systems envisions “Economic and social justice through decent work for all food system workers “. Its mission is to accelerate impactful, collaborative actions that improve the livelihoods of food system workers while promoting equitable and sustainable food systems.

This initiative aligns with international frameworks, including the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda, the SDGs and key international labour standards, ensuring collective impact through strengthened partnerships among governments, multilateral organizations, private sector actors and civil society.

3. Actions and expected results

Key areas of action:

- Policy advice: Supporting policy development and implementation that integrate labour and employment concerns into food systems.
- Systems approach: Facilitating dialogue among relevant stakeholders (such as Ministries of Labour and Agriculture, employers and unions) to adopt comprehensive approaches to decent work in agriculture.
- Knowledge and advocacy: Advancing research and raising awareness globally about the importance of labour rights and decent work in food systems.

Expected results and deliverables:

- Convene a roundtable of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), e.g. at the World Economic Forum, engaging agri-food companies to commit to promoting decent work, culminating in a joint communiqué.
- Mobilize national commitments for decent work in specific sectors, replicating successful models like Indonesia’s agreement on palm oil.
- Deliver global and regional events to promote the ILO Policy Guidelines on Decent Work in the Agri-Food Sector.

- Campaign for ratification of key ILO Conventions related to agriculture.

4. Partners' contributions

The Coalition benefits from the expertise and resources of its founding members:

- ILO: Leads advocacy, technical support and normative frameworks for decent work.
- IFAD: Strengthens rural livelihoods and integrates decent work into its programmes.
- CARE International: Focuses on gender equity and social inclusion in agricultural systems.

Collaboration with multilateral agencies, private sector entities, trade unions such as the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), and the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) is essential to achieve systemic change. Partner contributions include:

- Technical and financial resources.
- Advocacy for labour rights in multilateral settings.