IMPROVING THE DETECTION AND MITIGATION OF FORCED LABOUR IN AGRICULTURAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Project duration: November 2017 to October 2018

Despite many standards systems incorporating ILO agreements and conventions, rates for detection of forced labour remain low. This ISEAL Innovations Fund-supported project aims to identify new methods of detecting farms where the risk of forced labour is high, and offer effective solutions. Jessica Chalmers, Programme and Partnerships Manager at the Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) explains how SAN and partner UTZ will be leveraging their networks across Kenya, Guatemala and India to produce an industry-wide methodology to detect and address forced labour.

Why did you decide to launch this project?

The ILO estimates that around 21 million people around the world are victims of forced labour. While many standards systems have incorporated ILO agreements and conventions, rates of identification of non-compliance against related criteria remain low. Standards systems almost exclusively use audits to monitor compliance, and it is widely acknowledged that audits are not a good enough approach to detecting forced labour because abusive working conditions in agriculture, including forced labour, are often hidden and not easily detected.

The situation shows that there is a need to use new methods to identify high-risk farms and target additional detection efforts. We also need to know what data is most significant and useful, and how to collect and integrate this data into a system that can better assess and detect forced labour.

What are you hoping to achieve?

We aim to improve the assessment and detection of forced labour in agricultural supply chains, designing a methodology to better use existing knowledge and information, and collect and integrate new data. It is
expected to lead to a more nuanced and effective way of targeting local assessments and detection efforts in higher risk locations. The longer-term outcome is an improved assessment of vulnerability and detection of forced labour in agricultural supply chains, through the adoption and effective implementation of the methodology by standards systems and wider organisations.

The project also compiles initial information on locally appropriate and victim-centred considerations for addressing forced labour when detected, and aims to support organisations in better understanding their role in developing effective remediation strategies.

What are some of the specific activities in this project?

The first plan is to plan our in-country stakeholder engagement. After that is finalised, the stages will be:

- Develop an information base on forced labour in Kenya, Guatemala and India through a survey of SAN and UTZ technical communities, consultation with local civil society organisations, and interviews.
- Assess options for data collection and analysis.
- Develop draft methodology for forced labour assessment and detection.
- Pilot design in which two pilot plans and schedules for testing the methodology in two countries will be developed in collaboration with UTZ, technical partners and members of SAN.
- Stakeholder engagement activities to include the ISEAL community as a whole.

Any advice for other ISEAL members thinking of applying to the fund?

Definitely start early in the planning stage, and get on the same page as your collaborating partners. Having a common sense of shared values was critical in getting through the proposal development stage, and in keeping us aligned towards our goals. We had some very open conversations around standards systems and forced labour, and also felt the Fund was going to be a good opportunity to support new dialogue in ISEAL around forced labour.

“The ISEAL Innovations Fund appealed to us because of its thematic focus on new data and integration, which allowed us to take a step back and look again at forced labour and exploitation with partners who could bring different perspectives.”

Jessica Chalmers, Programme and Partnerships Manager, SAN

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The ISEAL Innovations Fund is supported by the following partners: