Protocol: Effects of supply chain sustainability approaches on decent work outcomes: a Systematic Review
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1. Background

1.1. Introduction

Recent shocks in supply chains have brought to light the vulnerabilities many workers face in global supply chains that are subject to fierce competitive pressures. Achieving decent work in agriculture and apparel sectors remains a major challenge, especially in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Low wages, poor working conditions, systemic human rights abuses, and overall worker vulnerability are often reported in academic research and mass media. These conditions reflect weak structural and associational power of workers in such settings (Selwyn 2016), whereby national labour policies and institutions seem insufficient to tackle the urgent need to improve working conditions, especially for the most vulnerable workers. Labour relations especially in apparel companies exporting to global markets are driven by the time efficiency, flexibility needs, quality demands, and compliance requirements of global production networks (Hammer and Plugor 2019; Alamgir and Banerjee 2019). Special attention has been devoted to these sectors, where workers seem particularly vulnerable to poor working conditions, either because of the informality of labour arrangements and lack of protections in local labour markets, or because of the double price/profit and sourcing squeeze to which employers are subject in highly competitive global production networks like textile and apparel (Anner 2020).

Achieving social upgrading in global supply chains by raising labour standards in globally interconnected production systems therefore requires a concerted agenda at transnational level. Third-party voluntary standards and certification, global framework agreements between unions and large multinationals, international normative frameworks, other forms of voluntary supply chain actions, and transnational NGO

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1For contributions of papers relevant to the topic of the review, particularly for grey literature (reports, policy literature, working papers, white papers) and unpublished papers that may escape searches in traditional academic databases, please address correspondence to d.skalidou@icloud.com
movements aim to play a role in delivering better outcomes for workers in global supply chains. The effectiveness of these interventions has been the subject of debate among researchers and industry practitioners. In the agricultural, textile and apparel sectors in LMICs these schemes emerge as key alternatives for social upgrading, in light of weakness of national labour institutions in such contexts. There is a wide range of studies that have produced inconclusive evidence on the effectiveness of such initiatives, and the stakes are high to generate more reliable and systematic evidence on the outcomes of these initiatives and what drives experiences of social upgrading in these global supply chains. This proposal tackles this challenge through a systematic synthesis and stocktaking exercise of the available evidence on a range of outcomes for wage employees working for smallholder farms, large agribusiness, textile and apparel companies. Therefore, we assume that unpaid family workers are not part of the study population.

1.2. The problem

The current dynamics of international political economy and local institutional contexts create power asymmetries in global supply chains, particularly in agriculture and apparel, that ultimately affect labour rights and conditions (Gereffi and Lee, 2014, Anner, 2020). New trade agreement and relations, such as the entry of China and Vietnam into the WTO, have significantly increased competition among supplying countries (Anner, 2020). On the other hand, the growing role of “impatient” finance capital, in permanent search of better returns for a given level of risk, is forcing lead firms to constantly demand increasing margins from their global supply chains in order to remain competitive, resulting in a price and sourcing squeeze of their suppliers (Anner, 2020). Recent technological improvements, reduction of transport costs, and improved logistics further contribute to the above dynamics, creating market concentration and increased competition, which can be observed in merges and acquisitions of retailers and brands. On the contrary, at the supplying level, we are observing domestic contexts of weak labour laws exacerbated by poor law enforcement in supplying countries, poor market information systems, lack of access to markets and credit, as well as lack of infrastructure and investment, resulting in fragmented and geographically dispersed production, and poorly protected and represented workers.

These two factors together, the global consolidation of buyers on the one hand, and the fragmentation and geographical dispersion of suppliers on the other, are therefore contributing to a growth in power asymmetries in agriculture and apparel, which involves intense competition, market volatility, as well as buyer advantage in setting prices and production contract terms. This power asymmetry is expressed through two mechanisms, particularly visible in the apparel sector: a price squeeze and a sourcing squeeze (Anner, 2020).
Given that power imbalances exist not only between lead firms and suppliers but also between suppliers and their workers, supplying firms transfer the double “squeeze” pressure onto their workers, in the form of low pay, increased work intensity (i.e. expectation that a worker will produce more in the same amount of time and with the same resources), excessive and forced overtime to deal with fluctuating orders, unsafe working spaces (as in the case of the Rana Plaza collapse), and repression of workers’ rights and representation through union avoidance strategies and lack of law protection.

In this complex dynamics, it is worth noting that the “squeeze” effects are not homogenous across workers. Labor conditions are worse among temporary/casual workers, while women workers are more likely to engage in insecure and low-paid work, often in temporary and seasonal arrangements. There are also differences in the agricultural sector, depending on the nature of the commodity, the scale of producers-employers, and the extent of underemployment affecting low-paid workers.

1.3. Pathways to social upgrading

We draw on Gereffi’s work on social upgrading in Global Value Chains (GVC) and industrial clusters (Gereffi and Lee, 2016) to conceptually frame the scope of this review and develop a theory of change about how supply chain sustainability approaches aiming at improving work outcomes may work. We use the term social upgrading to refer to the process of improving “the rights and entitlements of workers as social actors, which enhances the quality of their employment” (Barrientos et al 2011: 324). This review is particularly interested in understanding how positive impacts related to wages and remuneration, working terms and conditions, working rights, worker voice and representation can be achieved. The review will also explore other intrinsic subjective outcomes such as workers’ empowerment self-assessments or job “satisfaction”. Although not very usual, such outcomes are sometimes reported and can illuminate links to “extrinsic” outcomes, such as higher wages and better working conditions (see for example Krumbiegel et al, 2017).

Looking at how this can be achieved, we use Gereffi and Lee’s (2016) theorisation of pathways to social upgrading in GVCs, which builds on Puppim de Oliverira’s (2008) distinctions. As Gereffi and Lee highlight, these paths are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are interlinked, with key actors driving different approaches engaging and interacting in different levels across pathways (O’Rourke, 2006). Our purpose here, however, is to identify the main trajectories of social upgrading, as well as the key driving actors and mechanisms that distinguish them from the other paths in order to conceptually frame the scope of the review and be able to make decisions about which interventions should be included, which excluded, and why. Therefore, we refrain from exploring the linkages between pathways at this stage in order to facilitate the emergence of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. An in-depth analysis of these linkages will be conducted at the synthesis stage of the review, using the data from the included studies.
Gereffi and Lee (2016) identify six potential trajectories of social upgrading in GVCs:

1. The market-driven path, where market demand for goods produced with high social standards forces supplying firms to improve labour conditions to be more competitive.

2. The public governance path, where state actors (i.e. government, courts, labour inspectors), shape public regulation, enforce law, and resolve collective action problems among stakeholders, especially trade unions and employers’ representatives through standard tripartite collective bargaining.

The governance of these two paths is characterised as public, as it is exercised mainly by public actors (governments and international organisations), and through bilateral or multilateral trade agreements. It involves formal rules and regulations set at local, regional, national and international levels.

3. The supplying firms (cluster-driven) path, where supplying-based collective actions are undertaken to improve labour conditions, facilitated by trust and mutual dependence between closely knit supplying firms. Business associations, chamber of commerce, cooperatives, provide training and information on quality and social standards in external markets.

This path is driven by private governance in supplying firms. Economic transactions are regulated among supplying firms and with their external partners, aiming at achieving collective efficiency to overcome constraints resulting from small firm size, reducing compliance costs and increasing compliance through collective monitoring and sanctions.

4. The Corporate sustainability path, where global lead firms develop codes of conduct in order to avoid reputational damage and to ensure that future supply is sustained and uninterrupted. The effective implementation of such codes, and associated penalty and reward systems, result in supplying firms improving the treatment of their workers to access global markets.

This path is driven by private governance in lead/buying firms. GVCs are regulated through private standards that dictate what products are to be made by whom and how.

5. The multi-stakeholder path, where multiple (private and non-private) stakeholders cooperate in standards setting, monitoring and sanctions, and capacity building through standardised codes and third-party accreditation.

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2 Gereffi and Lee (2016) refer to this path as CSR-driven, but we will use the term corporate sustainability for the purposes of this review as our interest lays on the sustainability commitments undertaken by the corporate sector and their effects on decent work outcomes.
6. The labour-centred path, where workers and trade unions are active agents in improving their own social conditions, through collective bargaining, different forms of resistance and advocacy at workplace, local, national and global level.

These two paths are characterised by social governance. Civil society actors, such as NGOs and labor unions, aim at regulating Global Value Chains using codes of conduct initiated by NGOs, and multi-stakeholders initiates, such as ETI. It can also entail forms of activism such as boycotting, petitions, protests, which may involve consumers in a variant of a market-driven path. This form of governance relies on the impact that these movements have on private firms or governments, which have direct power to enforce codes and regulations. For this reason it often takes a multi-stakeholder form, in which public, private, and civil society actors pursue their common goals through joint action.

The scope of this review will include interventions occurring within the corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder paths. Interventions which are exclusively located within the market, government, supplier, or labour paths are out of the review scope. However, we recognize that the included paths may be influenced and shaped by the other three paths. This may be important contextual and background information that could be taken into account in the assessment of evidence.

1.4. How social upgrading interventions may work

A major challenge for this review is the fact that supply chain sustainability approaches for social upgrading differ in their model of intervention and in their theory of change (ToC). To deal with this challenge, we break down the different approaches that are of interest to this review (company sustainability codes, supply chain investment programmes, voluntary sustainability standards, third party voluntary sustainability codes of conduct, sustainability rating and performance tools, pre-competitive industry sustainability platforms, bans and boycotting, and framework agreements and initiatives) into five key intervention types: labour standards; price and contract interventions; premium-funded investments; market demand influence interventions; and creation of alliances. As with the pathways to social upgrading, we note here that the intervention types we identify here are not mutually exclusive, but rather interlinked. However, for reviewing purposes, and given the complexity of the causal chains of the different supply chain approaches, we opt at this stage for an over-simplification, in order to clearly frame the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the review.

Since each approach may involve multiple intervention types we first focus on how each intervention type may work, that is on the mechanisms that are expected to lead to positive impacts in terms of decent work
outcomes, as well as the assumptions that need to be place for these mechanisms to be effective. We then match each intervention type to the different supply chain sustainability approaches.

Below we provide illustrations of how different types of social upgrading interventions used by different supply chain sustainability approaches may affect decent work outcomes and therefore the assumed causal chains.

- **Labour standards.** Their implementation involves the establishment of some clearly defined and verifiable standards. Once these are set, a key aspect of this intervention path is the monitoring of safe working conditions, worker association training, the clear definition and enforcement of workers’ rights, and the monitoring and enforcing of living/higher wages, which are expected to result in the mid-term in skilled and motivated workers, living/better wages, safer working conditions, and enforced decent labour standards. If these outcomes are sustained, they can positively impact all final decent work outcomes, from wages and remuneration, to worker voice and representation, including working conditions and worker rights. For this to happen, however, the following assumptions need to be in place: standards are generally achievable in specific settings, given production conditions; the monitoring and enforcement mechanisms work and are more demanding than alternatives, and there is effective labour legislation in place; employers have pre-existing capacity to meet the standards; no compliance leads to sanctions; commercial departments in lead firms follow CSR/sustainability vetting; supplier margins allow for wage increases; workers are aware of standards and expectations; living wage benchmarks are estimated and achievable; cost of living inflation does not erode wage increases; and finally, improvements are sustained and not just temporary.

- **Price and contract interventions** are composed by price interventions (price floor, price premium) and contract interventions (pre-finance or credit; longer-term or more stable contracts). This combination is expected to result in higher and more stable producer/supplier prices, which can have a trickle-down effect on wages and working conditions. In this path trickle-down from better prices and margins to better working conditions is the key causal mechanism, in the absence of direct requirements on labour standards. Protection from price volatility can improve reliability of supplies and/or predictability of sales, and therefore improve remuneration while minimising work intensity and excessive and forced overtime. Finally, improved access to inputs, through pre-finance or credit, can improve employers’ capacity to invest and improve production conditions and productivity, which can then result in improved wages and working conditions for workers if productivity improvements are shared with workers. The following assumptions need to hold for these mechanisms to be effective: market conditions allow for price differentiation and volatility in contracting and prices is an issue; premium and new markets are sufficiently remunerative; costs of adoption are lower than benefits; access to pre-finance/ credit significantly improves suppliers’
bargaining power; trickle-down mechanisms from better prices and contract terms are effective; higher prices are passed onto better working conditions (more employment; higher wages); workers are aware of improved market conditions for employers and bargain accordingly.

- **Premium-funded investments** involve price premium offered on top of the market price to a Producers’ Organisation (PO) or a plantation in the form of a cumulative fund that can be invested in a variety of assets/ infrastructure and other uses for workers committees/ unions and their households. Such investments are expected to lead to better education and health access and/or other outcomes, which may also positively affect wealth and household investments in education and health; higher incomes if economic infrastructure /assets improve production and marketing conditions; empowerment via strengthened beneficiary organisations; better working conditions, when premium funded investments directly affect the non-wage conditions faced by workers. The necessary assumptions here include existing gaps in social infrastructure and demand for proposed services/infrastructure, while affordable service delivery should be possible. The premium is sufficient and effectively used, with equal distribution of benefits across workers and avoidance of elite capture, while the workers’ associations are democratic and well-functioning. Finally, it is assumed that the economic infrastructure/assets contribute to better market conditions, workers participate in decisions on premium fund investments, and investments contribute to workers’ bargaining power and better conditions.

- **Market demand influence** interventions include bans, boycotting, petitions and protests, as well as rating and performance tools. The key mechanism here is that suppliers are forced to improve labour conditions in order to be more competitive and maintain/improve their market share. For this to occur the following is assumed: information on production/working conditions is made public and civil society organisations, NGOs, and governments mobilise based on this information; rating affects brand reputation and brands /lead firms respond to reputational risk; boycotts affect large enough shares of market demand; workers and their organizations leverage on bans/buycotts to enhance collective bargaining and workers are able to switch between employers in search of better conditions.

- **Creation of alliances** refers to alliance/ agreement building between companies, suppliers, trade unions, NGOs and governments to address problems in sourcing countries and internationally. Such multi-stakeholder joint action is expected to enable effective and sustainable solutions to workers’ issues, while suppliers become subject to enhanced compliance demands from lead firms. The following assumptions need to hold for this to happen: companies, suppliers, trade unions, NGOs, and governments are able and willing to talk and negotiate; alliances agree on effective auditing mechanisms, minimum standards, and/or sanction/compliance mechanisms; sourcing by lead firms is consistent with CSR vetting emerging from
audits, while national-level unions are strong enough to implement agreements/auditing; outcomes exceed worker expectations.

A simplified synthetic theory of change, which captures the overall logic of interventions occurring within the corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder paths is presented in Figure 1, in the Appendix. In Table 1 that follows, we match each intervention type to the different supply chain sustainability approaches.

Table 1 Intervention type and Supply chain sustainability approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathways</th>
<th>Corporate Sustainability Path</th>
<th>Multi-stakeholder Path</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approaches</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Labour standards</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price and contact interventions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premium-funded investments</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Demand Influence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of alliances</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Another way of exploring these causal pathways is by tracing back the changes in wages/remuneration to specific interventions and combinations of paths. For example, wages in a particular industry in a particular setting may be achieved through a combination of interventions and contextual factors. In Northeast Brazil (Selwyn 2012; Damiani 2007), the introduction of export grape agriculture in a context dominated by local sugar producers led to local labour market changes that eventually resulted in more employment, higher wages and better working conditions. First, export grape investors arrived from a different region used to different (higher) labour standards. Second, the supply chain of exporters was subject to a number of basic requirements driven by existing third-party standards (e.g. Global Gap for access to EU markets) which could potentially be monitored and lead to penalties. Third, the market for grapes was subject to demands for quantity and quality in orders, which increased the structural power of agricultural workers were they ready to disrupt production due to poor working conditions. This potential capacity to disrupt was linked to the
particular market demands in this supply chain and the labour intensity in the farms. Any disruption carried potential reputational damage, which was riskier for exporters than local sugar employers. Fourth, the existence of a dynamic agricultural labour union movement in the area contributed to workers’ associational power and capacity to engage in collective bargaining with new agricultural (grape) investors, in a way that had not been so effective in the sugar sector. Therefore, in this example of a successful outcome in terms of wages and terms and conditions, we see the interaction of different causal pathways, from market-driven paths to multi-stakeholder path (labour standards), to labour-centred path and the creation of alliances, very much shaped by contextual factors. Therefore, while it is useful to think in terms of the intended outcomes and causal pathways of specific sets of interventions, it is also important to consider how important labour outcomes are achieved by working backwards in the causal chain of events, leading to different configurations of actors and pathways interacting with one another. This is a principle we intend to apply at the synthesis stage to explore (unexpected) linkages between outcomes, interventions, and approaches and reflect these nuances and complexities into an updated theory of change.

2. Review questions and scope

This systematic review will focus on two questions:

A. one examining the effects of supply chain sustainability approaches on decent work outcomes and
B. one exploring the adoption and implementation dynamics of supply chain sustainability approaches aiming to improve work outcomes.

We refer to the first one as RQ1, the effectiveness question, as it will be informed by empirical counterfactual evidence on the impact and effects (intended and non-intended) of an intervention. We formulate it as follows:

**RQ1: What are the effects of corporate sustainability and Multi-Stakeholder (MS) approaches on endpoint decent work outcomes, namely wages and remuneration; working terms and conditions; core labor rights; worker voice and representation; and other intrinsic and subjective outcomes?**

We refer to the second one as RQ2, the adoption and implementation question, which we formulate as follows:

**RQ2: How effective are corporate sustainability and MS approaches at implementing the decent work goals they set across contexts and sectors?**

To address RQ2 we will use evidence included for RQ1, as studies eligible for analysis of effects are likely to also provide evidence on context and implementation/adoPTION. Additionally we will conduct targeted
searches for institutional documentation, as well as selectively collect primary data if deemed necessary, to complement the factual evidence on specific interventions, contexts and sectors included for ‘the effectiveness question’. Snilsveit (2012) refers to such reviews as ‘effectiveness plus with parallel review modules’, meaning that they include additional sources of factual evidence not included for the ‘effectiveness question’, and therefore enable the review to address a broader range of questions. At the same time, however, they narrow the scope of the review to the interventions, contexts and sectors for which evidence has been identified in the ‘effectiveness review’. This makes the review manageable, while providing the necessary contextual and implementation information to answer the ‘individual effectiveness question’.

In terms of scope, we would include all available relevant counterfactual evidence for RQ1 produce by both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Hind, 2010), after conducting exhaustive searches to identify all existing relevant and trustworthy evidence. The scope of RQ2, however, will be defined by the range of evidence included in RQ1, meaning that we will only code factual data relevant to context, adoption, and implementation, and seek for institutional documentation and primary data if necessary, to complement the evidence on the specific interventions, contexts and sectors used to address RQ1.

3. Review methods

3.1. Inclusion criteria

The key principles for selection are noted here in detail. Studies will be included in the review if they meet the following selection criteria.

**Population:** The review will use the worker/employee (individual worker or workers’ collectives) as the population unit. Studies that report on the enterprise level (e.g. organisational, financial and productivity effects at the enterprise level) will be excluded, unless they contain relevant and sufficiently specific data at the worker level. Moreover, the review will focus exclusively on Low and Middle Income Countries (LMICs). Given the concentration of global employment in agriculture and textile/apparel in LMICs, we think that a sharp focus on these settings will make the review more consistent and policy-relevant. While questions about working conditions in these sectors in HICs remain highly relevant, a focus on LMICs will not only facilitate the manageability of the review, but also reduce excessive heterogeneity and will help the interpretation of results.

**Intervention:** As discussed in section 1.3, the review will include supply chain sustainability interventions occurring within the corporate sustainability and MS pathways involving private or social governance, such as Company Sustainability Codes; Supply chain investment programmes; Voluntary Sustainability Standards; Sustainability Rating and Performance Tools; Pre-competitive industry/ market-based sustainability
platforms; Bans, boycotting, petitions, protests; Framework Agreements and Initiatives, some times linked to Company Sustainability codes (e.g. the Global Framework Agreement between Inditex-lead firm-and IndustryALL -lead trade union for apparel sector-).

Comparison: To address RQ1, we will follow Oya et al (2017) and we will include counterfactual evidence produced by rigorous impact evaluation studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs, including controlled before and after (CBA) studies with contemporaneous data collection and with two or more control and intervention sites, as well as ex post observational studies with non treated comparison groups and adequate control for confounding. Adequate controls for selection bias and confounding factors are vital if we are to have confidence in the claims studies make about the causal effects of interventions. Studies following a pipeline approach can therefore only be included if they employ additional methods of ensuring group equivalence, such as matching on observables. Studies providing quantitative evidence with no counterfactual component will be excluded, unless they contain relevant factual evidence for interventions included in RQ1.

Studies providing descriptive statistics with no control for confounding factors will be excluded.

The number of such rigorous impact evaluation studies may be limited in the field of decent work outcomes and much of the literature published is likely to be qualitative in nature. To ensure the outcome of a meaningful synthesis, we will only include qualitative evidence that satisfies a set of minimum quality criteria. Studies that do not satisfy these criteria usually lack the depth of analysis and cannot add any significant information to the analysis or synthesis. Following Oya et al (2017), the following criteria will be applied to for qualitative studies:

A. The research question or objective has to be clearly reported.
B. Data collection methods and, where appropriate, sampling procedures have to be clearly reported.
C. The study has to provide evidence based on primary data collected from beneficiaries, facilitators, implementers, extension agents, auditors or experts analysed using qualitative methods.
D. The study has to provide substantive evidence relevant to at least one of the following themes: effects, adoption or implementation. By substantial primary evidence we mean that the material needed to provide at least one of the below:
   - A thick description: This means a detailed description of the relevant context together with an analysis of how this context affects at least one of three key themes.
   - Entire sections devoted to analysis of at least one of the key themes. Studies providing only mentions, or non-analytic descriptions of general or historical context will not included.
Institutional documentation used for RQ2 (Performance monitoring reports and reports that describe implementation and uptake; Company or supplier surveys; Project and donor funded grant reports) do not have to satisfy the above criteria.

**Outcomes:** As discussed in section 1.3, this review will include studies that report on endpoint decent work outcomes, namely wages and remuneration; working terms and conditions; human rights; worker voice and representation; and other intrinsic and subjective outcomes.

A summary of all the inclusion criteria is provided in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Low and middle income countries</td>
<td>High income countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>English, French, Spanish</td>
<td>Any other language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeframe</strong></td>
<td>2000 onwards</td>
<td>Before 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>Studies that provide evidence at the worker level (individual workers or workers' collectives)</td>
<td>Studies that report ONLY at the company level (e.g. organisational, financial and productivity effects at the company level).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intervention</strong></td>
<td>Studies that report on supply chain sustainability interventions occurring within the corporate sustainability and MS pathways involving private or social governance, such as Company Sustainability Codes; Supply chain investment programmes; Voluntary Sustainability Standards; Sustainability Rating and Performance Tools; Pre-competitive industry/ market-based sustainability platforms; Bans, boycotting, petitions, protests; Framework Agreements &amp; Initiatives</td>
<td>Studies that report other pathways to social upgrading and types of governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Studies that report on endpoint decent work outcomes, namely wages and remuneration; working terms and conditions; human rights; worker voice and representation; and other intrinsic and subjective outcomes</td>
<td>Studies that do not report on any endpoint decent work outcome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study Type</td>
<td>For RQ1: Quantitative evidence produced by rigorous impact evaluation studies using experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Qualitative evidence (factual and counterfactual) produced by studies meeting the quality criteria set by Oya et al (2017). For RQ2: Factual data and institutional information relevant to the context, adoption and implementation of the studies included for RQ1.</td>
<td>For RQ1: Studies providing quantitative evidence with no counterfactual component, unless they contain relevant factual evidence for RQ2. For RQ2: Factual data and institutional information NOT relevant to the context, adoption and implementation of the studies included for RQ1.</td>
</tr>
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3.2. Searching strategy and screening

Following Snilstveit (2012) and the process of an ‘effectiveness plus with parallel review modules’, we will initially search and screen evidence to address RQ1. We will use the search strategy developed by Oya et al (2017) with the help of searching specialists and adapt it to the scope and needs of the review. This provides a solid base for effective electronic searches, as well as targeted website searches that enables us to quickly develop a strategy that can yield precise and relevant results in a short period of time. The search strategy will focus on identifying all the available existing evidence in English, Spanish and French, that can inform RQ1. We will use pilot searches to identify optimal search terms and adapt to the particularities of each electronic database.

In order to identify relevant complementary evidence for RQ2, targeted searches will be conducted once the screening process is completed and we can have a clear image of the specific interventions, contexts and sectors included to address RQ1. The aim of these additional searches will be to complement knowledge gaps with factual evidence on context, adoption, and implementation.

Searching results will be screened on relevance and methods. Results that do not fit the PICOs or minimum methodological criteria for RQ1 will be excluded. The entire process will be documented in detail and illustrated using a PRISMA diagram. Research assistants will provide support with the searching and screening phases in order to proceed swiftly to the data extraction and analysis phase.
3.3. Data extraction and quality assessment

Data from included studies will be extracted using detailed coding sheets in MS Excel. Coding sheets will extract basic bibliographic and contextual from the included reports, as well as relevant information on the PICOs and key findings/results. Such ‘descriptive’ data can be then used to inform Evidensia’s knowledge map and geographic map features, and provide a systematic evidence gap map of interventions and outcomes by sector and product.

The quality of the included studies will be assessed to map the quality of the existing relevant evidence.

Regarding evidence produced by quantitative approaches, we will use the scoring system for risk of bias developed by Duvendack et al (2011), where the lowest score (1) is given for research designs and methods of analysis which involve low threats to validity (e.g. RCTs, IV, PSM, 2SLS, DID), while higher scores are given if the threats to validity increase (see Tables 3 and 4 in the appendix for more details). Scoring the studies according to their research design and statistical methods of analysis will allow us to quickly create a visual matrix depicting the quality of the quantitative evidence included in the review (see Table 5 in the appendix for an example).

Regarding evidence produced by qualitative approaches, we propose to adapt the qualitative quality assessment tool used by Oya et al (2017), which was already an adaptation of the CASP Qualitative Studies Checklist tool (see CASP, 2023). The assessment will combine both substantive and reporting-based criteria. Study quality will be assessed as either high confidence or low confidence along the following dimensions:

- Clarity of research question
- Justification of research approach and its appropriateness to the research question
- Clear description of the study context
- Clear description of the researcher’s or researchers’ role
- Where appropriate, clear description of sampling methods used, and the suitability of the sampling strategy
- Justification of the selection of the research site or sites and an assessment of whether the choice is appropriate
- Clear description of the methods used to collect data and an assessment of whether the methods are appropriate to answering the research question.
- Clear description of the method or methods used for data analysis and whether this is deemed appropriate
- Assessment of whether the data collected supports the claims made by the study
- Assessment of whether data are triangulated, that is, cross-verified across two or more sources.
3.4. Analysis and synthesis

In the case of included quantitative data, we will record the variable, direction of effect (positive/negative) and level of statistical significance (statistically significant or not). This approach, referred to as ‘vote counting’, is compatible with Evidensia’s Visual Summaries and therefore will facilitate the quick incorporation of the results. Although the approach does not account for the study size, it is seen as a cost-effective solution for synthesising quantitative evidence, particularly when the quantitative data is limited and does not allow for extracting effect sizes.

For qualitative data we will extract and code original text from the included reports. Following Thomas and Harden (2008), we will use a thematic synthesis approach. We will use an hypothesised intervention theory focused on the key themes of interest (effects, adoption, and implementation) and sub-themes (e.g. specific outcomes) to initiate the coding, but we expect to incorporate new emerging sub-themes in the process of coding data. Relevant data can be coded under one or multiple codes, a fact which will allow us to observe how the different themes interrelate, and inform the structure of the final synthesis.

Key qualitative and quantitative findings will be reported separately and then incorporated into an integrated synthesis, exploring how different type of data complement or contradict each other and what are the lessons that we can learn from possible concordances and discrepancies.

4. References


5. Appendix

5.1. Appendix: Simplified Synthetic Theory of Change
5.2. Scoring system for risk of bias for quantitative studies

Figure 1 Simplified synthetic theory of change

How social upgrading intervention types may work: causal chains and assumptions

Interventions

Assumptions

Labour standards

a. Monitoring of safe working conditions
b. Worker association training
c. Workers' rights defined and enforced
d. Monitoring and enforcing living/wage

Price and contract interventions

a. Price interventions (price floor, price premium)
b. Contract interventions (pre-finance or credit: longer-term or more stable contracts)

Price conditions allow for price differentiation; Volatility in contracting and prices

Premium-funded investments

a. Price premium offered on top of the market price to a Producers' Organisation or a planation that can be invested in a variety of assets/infrastructure
b. Premium-funded investments for workers' committees/unions

Premium is sufficient and effectively used; equal distribution of benefits across workers; elite capture is avoided; Workers' association are democratic and well-functioning

Market demand influenace

a. Bans, boycotting, petitions, protests
b. Rating and performance tools

Rating affects brand reputation; Brands/lead firms respond to reputational risks; Boycotts affect large enough share of market demand

Creation of Alliances

Alliance/agreement building between companies, suppliers, trade unions, NGOs and governments to address problems in sourcing countries and internationally

Assumptions

Employers have pre-existing capacity to meet standards; No compliance leads to sanctions; Commercial departments in lead firms follow CSR/sustainability vetting; Supplier margins allow for wage increases; Workers are aware of standards and expectations; Living wage benchmarks are estimated and achievable

Outcomes

Skilled and motivated workers

Higher and more stable producer/supplier prices

Protection from price volatility can improve reliability of supplies and/or predictability of sales

Support in input markets can improve capacity to invest and improve production conditions and productivity

Decent labour standards achieved

Economic infrastructure/assets contribute to better market conditions; Workers participate in decisions on premium fund investments; Investments contribute to workers' bargaining power and better conditions

Decent wages & remuneration

Improved working terms and conditions

Protected labour rights

Enhanced worker voice & representation

Improved intrinsic, subjective outcomes

Assumptions

Higher and more stable producer/supplier prices

Protection from price volatility can improve reliability of supplies and/or predictability of sales

Support in input markets can improve capacity to invest and improve production conditions and productivity

Workers and their organisations leverage on bans/boycotts to enhance collective bargaining; Workers are able to switch between employers in search of better conditions

Cost of living inflation does not outpace wage increases; Improvements are sustained and not just temporary

Economic infrastructure/assets contribute to better market conditions; Workers participate in decisions on premium fund investments; Investments contribute to workers' bargaining power and better conditions

Companies, suppliers, trade unions, NGOs, and governments are willing to talk and negotiate

Multi-stakeholder joint action enables effective and sustainable solutions to workers' issues

Suppliers are subject to enhanced compliance demands from lead firms

Sourcing by lead firms is consistent with CSR vetting emerging from audits; National-level union strong enough to implement agreements/auditing; Outcomes exceed worker expectations
Table 3: Threats to validity for quantitative studies: Research design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research design</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Validity and Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Blinding; failure to achieve random allocation, meaning (placebo) effects; adherence to treatment, randomisation/experiment effects; spill-overs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipeline</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random or non-random allocation; comparability of control groups; drop-outs &amp; attrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel or before/after &amp; with/without</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mostly non-random allocation, risk of confounding, selection &amp; programme placement bias, panels no ‘true’ baseline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either before/after or with/without</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mostly non-random allocation, risk of confounding, selection &amp; programme placement bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Duvendack et al (2011:31)

5.3.

5.3.

Table 4: Threats to validity for quantitative studies: Methods of analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of Analysis</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Threat to validity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV, PSM, 2SLS/LIML, DID</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Weak instruments, poor/too few matches (limited common support); unbalanced covariates; small control groups, flawed data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multivariate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Control of endogenous variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabulation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Control of endogenous &amp; exogenous variables</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Duvendack et al (2011:31)

5.4.

6.

6.1. Summary of included studies by scores
### Table 5: Summary of included studies by scores; number of papers in each category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>IV, PSM, 2SLS/LIML, DID</th>
<th>Multivariate</th>
<th>Tabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scores</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCT</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipeline</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panel or before/after &amp; with/without</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either before/after or with/without</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend: Low score | Medium score | High score (excluded)

Source: Adapted from Duvendack et al (2011:37)

6.2.