

SHARED HARVESTS: Agriculture, Trade, and Employment

Editors: David Cheong, Marion Jansen, and Ralf Peters



Shared Harvests: Agriculture, Trade and Employment

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FOREWORD

The world is still reeling from the effects of the global food, fuel price, and financial crises in the second decade of the 21st. century. Almost a billion people are suffering from chronic hunger, 200 million people are out of jobs, and markets are in disarray. Agriculture has both played a role in and been affected by these global crises. As a consequence, many countries have refocused attention onto the agricultural sector and seek new policy responses to enhance food security, employment creation and structural transformation.

Almost half of the developing-country workforce is employed in agriculture - often in informal, low-paid or unremunerated jobs and under poor working conditions - because few alternative employment opportunities exist. Agriculture provides a livelihood directly to these workers and their families and indirectly to other members of their rural communities as well as those in related sectors such as fertilizer production and retailing. Most developing-country farmers have low yields from their crops and limited access to markets from which they can source agricultural inputs and to which they can supply their harvests.

Agricultural trade, as a share of domestic agricultural production and consumption, has been increasing despite relatively high trade distortions. Agricultural trade is an opportunity for many developing countries and at the same time a sensitive area. It appears that trade policy has not always been very development friendly. In some cases, rapid liberalization with a parallel dismantling of extension services for farmers has led to a drying up of investment in the agricultural sector. In many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, agricultural production has been almost stagnant. Coupled with expanding rural populations, this has resulted in falling farm incomes and increased poverty. Some countries subsidize and protect their farmers, preventing other more competitive producers from selling their agricultural products.

Agriculture is key to the structural transformation agenda. Without productivity improvements in agriculture, resources will mostly be used to meet basic food demands instead of being allocated towards “modern” agricultural products, manufacturing and services. Vulnerable employment, concentration in a narrow range of products, food insecurity, and high poverty rates can be linked to low agricultural productivity. Therefore, development is likely to be catalyzed and sustained with increases in agricultural productivity, which may come through national or international channels. However, the short- and medium-term adjustments, particularly in labour markets, will have to be managed.

Shared Harvests: Agriculture, Trade and Employment

The work on this edited volume grew out of a technical cooperation project entitled “Assessing and Addressing the Effects of Trade and Employment” managed jointly by the European Commission and the International Labour Office (ILO) with funding from the European Union, and collaborative work between the ILO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The research findings in this volume emphasize the need to make agriculture (or re-establish it as) a high policy priority, particularly in the domains of trade and employment. This volume suggests that policymakers can maximize the development benefits from agriculture by carefully considering agricultural trade policy and its effects on employment within the context of national development strategies that aim at economic diversification, sustainable growth, and social inclusion.

The ILO and UNCTAD have collaborated on this edited volume given their shared interests in how the agricultural sector affects the world of work and broad development processes. It is hoped that, even though we are quickly approaching 2015, this volume can still contribute in part to work in line with the targets set under the first Millennium Development Goal of eradicating poverty and hunger through poverty relief, productive employment, and food security.



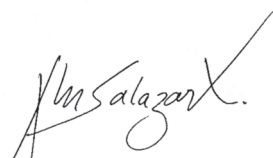
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