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Informal Workers in Global Horticulture and Commodities Value Chains: A Review of Literature

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Executive Summary

This paper presents and analyzes the key findings from a comprehensive review of value chain-related studies on the commodities and horticulture sectors, focusing on what this literature reveals about the conditions of informal workers. The literature review was underpinned by two key research questions, which address both empirical and methodological concerns. Firstly, what are the roles and conditions of informal workers in these chains, and what policies, actions and research are needed to improve their conditions? Secondly, to what extent does the value chain approach (as applied in existing literature) incorporate a labour perspective, and how can the value chain approach be strengthened to better incorporate the interests of informal workers?

Overall, 49 value chain-related studies and resources were identified and reviewed. These resources were identified through a combination of general Internet research on the one hand, and a selective review of specialist websites and resources on the other hand. A review of the scope of these resources revealed that over the last decade and a half, a considerable body of work has emerged on formal and informal workers in the focus value chains. At the same time, important gaps are apparent. In the first place, the literature is quite imbalanced in that certain types of workers are given much more attention than others: broadly speaking, smallholders, along with informal (and formal) workers in formal enterprises, are relatively well addressed; whereas small-scale traders and processors, informal workers in informal enterprises, and contributing family labour, are all given little attention. In the second place, the literature is biased towards certain crops and geographic regions; for example, the large majority of studies on informal workers in formal enterprises have been conducted on horticultural crops in Africa.

Notwithstanding these knowledge gaps, the literature revealed some important general patterns and trends regarding the conditions of informal workers in the focus value chains. First and foremost, all types of informal workers face substantial constraints and experience working conditions that are far from ideal. Moreover, the evidence unfortunately does not point to substantial improvements in conditions for the majority of these workers over the last 10-15 years.

In addition, the literature makes it clear that informality is the norm rather than the exception: informal workers make up the majority of the workforce, even in formal enterprises. All types of informal workers were also found to be very vulnerable to changes in market conditions, and overall, women informal workers tend to experience worse conditions than their male counterparts.

While these cross-cutting patterns were observed across all worker categories, most constraints were found to be quite specific to each type of informal worker. Thus, for workers in formal enterprises, the main concern is the disparity between the conditions of informal as compared to formal workers and the weaker legal protection afforded to the former group. In the case of smallholders, the key issues were found to be the exclusion of the majority of smallholders from global value chains (GVCs), and the limited returns experienced by many of those who *are* engaged in GVCs. In contrast, hired workers on smallholder farms faced a different range of issues including poor wages, poor health and safety standards, inadequate leave entitlements, and gender discrimination. For contributing family labour, the key concern was the fact that they were providing much of the labour on smallholder export farms, yet receiving little of the rewards from GVC engagement.

Therefore, to reflect these distinct constraints, most policy recommendations arising from the literature review are specific to one of the four categories of worker. Nevertheless, two cross-cutting recommendations are important. Firstly, value chain programmes must systematically include all categories of workers as key stakeholders and target beneficiaries as a matter of course: this is critical not only from a workers' rights perspective, but also from a poverty reduction and gender equity perspective. Secondly, international food sourcing companies need to review and revise their purchasing practices, in order to reduce the continued pressure on suppliers/employers to downgrade working conditions for all categories of worker.

With regard to specific policy recommendations for particular worker categories, bringing conditions and legal protections for informal workers in line with those of formal workers is crucial for informal workers in formal enterprises. Equally, efforts must be made to improve the implementation of international labour standards for both informal and formal workers in these enterprises, in particular in relation to wages, overtime, trade union rights, sexual harassment and gender discrimination. In the case of smallholders, policy needs to focus on removing barriers to entry to the focus GVCs for poorer smallholders (including women), and on increasing returns for participating smallholders. However, policies to improve opportunities for paid employment and improve access to domestic markets are also important, in order to provide viable livelihood alternatives for the most marginalized smallholders.

With respect to hired workers on smallholder farms, policy must focus on educating workers about their legal rights and supporting them to access these rights, and also on supporting smallholders themselves to improve their own awareness of labour rights and to upgrade their health and safety facilities and practices. As regards contributing family labour, policies are needed to promote more equal sharing of costs and benefits of GVC engagement between husbands and wives, in particular through challenging traditional gender roles.

Research recommendations arising from the literature review incorporate both methodological and empirical dimensions. In terms of methodology, the review highlighted the need to re-double efforts to incorporate a labour perspective into value chain approaches as standard practice. To enable this, improved collaboration is needed between value chain and labour specialists, as well as the development of more tailored and pragmatic guidance on labour-sensitive value chain analysis. In addition, a value chain perspective or approach must be supplemented by an analysis of the socio-cultural and regulatory environment(s) in which the focus value chain operates, in order to ensure a full understanding of why certain workers benefit more than others, and hence how positive change might best be leveraged.

Finally, the literature review clearly pointed to the need for further empirical research on three key groups of hitherto neglected informal workers: owners of informal processing and trading enterprises; informal workers in all types of informal enterprises; and contributing family labour.

1. Introduction

The last decade and a half has witnessed a growing interest in the value chain approach within the agricultural development sector, among practitioners as well as researchers (African Cashew Initiative 2010; Joshi 2008; Project Co-ordination Unit of the Promoting CARICOM/CARIFORUM Food Security Project 2009; Schmitz 2005; Barrientos, Dolan and Tallontire 2003; Barrientos and Smith 2006). This increasing interest has been evident in the horticultural and commodities sub-sectors (among others), as evidenced by the burgeoning number of value chain-related studies on these crops (Huque 2007; Panlibuton and Lusby 2006; Challies 2010; Coulter and Abena 2010).

At the same time, labour advocates have criticized the failure of most value chain-related studies and programmes to adopt a labour perspective, and in particular their lack of focus on the needs, constraints and priorities of informal workers in these chains (Barrientos, Gereffi and Rossi 2010; WIEGO 2012). Others have argued that a labour focus is critical not only from a workers' rights perspective, but also from the viewpoint of promoting poverty reduction and gender equity goals, given that both women and the poorest members of society are typically more strongly represented as workers rather than owners of enterprises within global agricultural value chains (Chan 2011b; International Trade Centre et al. 2011).

These trends raise a number of questions in relation to the treatment of labour issues in recent value chain work in the commodities and horticultural sub-sectors. Key questions include: has the recent proliferation of value-chain related studies in these sub-sectors addressed the labour gap? To the extent that that this gap *has* been addressed, why and how has a labour perspective been incorporated? What do these studies tell us about the roles and conditions of informal workers in these chains? What are the resulting policy implications? What conceptual or methodological contribution does the value chain approach provide towards improving understanding and protection of informal workers' rights? How can the value chain approach be strengthened in this regard?

These questions were the starting point for a literature review commissioned by WIEGO in 2011. On the positive side, a preliminary analysis of the existing literature revealed a growing body of work focused on assessing the impact of GVC engagement on workers. However, it also became clear that no attempt had as yet been made to synthesis the findings from this existing literature, or to identify the policy and research implications arising from these findings. Nor had an attempt been made to assess the extent to which the value chain approach, as applied in these studies, had incorporated a labour perspective. The aims of the literature review were, therefore, firstly, to conduct a meta-review of existing value chain-related studies on the horticultural and commodities sectors, and provide a synthesis of the key findings in terms of the key roles, constraints and opportunities faced by informal workers in these chains. Secondly, an aim was to assess the extent to which recent value chain-related studies have incorporated a labour perspective, and consider the potential contribution of the value chain approach towards understanding and promoting informal workers' rights going forward.

The findings of the literature review were originally published by WIEGO in July 2011 (Chan 2011a), and the report of these findings is available online for free.¹ This current paper synthesizes the main findings from the review; in addition, it provides new reflections and a broader perspective on the policy and research implications arising.

Before turning to the methodology used for the literature review, some discussion is required regarding what constitutes informal work, and the different categories of informal workers found in global horticulture and commodities value chains.

The definition of "informal work" has been the subject of international debate over the last four decades (WIEGO nd). However, there appears to be growing recognition and acceptance of the broad concep-

¹ See: <http://wiego.org/resources/review-value-chain-analyses-commodities-and-horticulture-sectors>.

tual approach taken by the International Labour Office (ILO) as presented in its 2002 report;² thus, this paper uses the definitions and categorizations of informal work contained in the 2002 ILO publication as the basis for analysis. According to the ILO definitions, an “informal job” is any job that falls outside the framework of regulations. This may occur either because: (a) the enterprise in which the job is located is too small and/or not registered under commercial law; and/or (b) the employment status associated with the job is “atypical” and is therefore not specifically covered by labour legislation, or labour legislation has not been tested in application to that type of job. Based on this ILO definition, this paper defines an “informal worker” as anyone who engages in one or more informal jobs. It should be noted that, according to the ILO definition, informal workers can be found in formal as well as informal enterprises, and an owner-manager of an informal enterprise is an informal worker by virtue of the informal status of his or her enterprise.

Different types of informal jobs or workers can therefore be categorized based on the type of enterprise in which the job takes place, and by the employment status associated with the job in question. The following four categories of informal jobs or workers were considered to be most relevant to global horticultural and commodities value chains:

- *Informal workers in formal enterprises* are workers employed in atypical jobs in formal sector enterprises. In the case of the focus value chains, the most common types of workers found in this category are seasonal, temporary, casual and contract workers employed in commercial farms/plantations, pack-houses and processing units.
- *Owners of informal enterprises* are own account workers and employers who own informal sector enterprises. The most common types of owners of informal enterprises found in the focus value chains are smallholders (i.e., owners of small-scale farming enterprises), small-scale processors and small-scale traders.
- *Informal workers in informal enterprises* are workers employed in atypical jobs in informal sector enterprises. In the focus value chains, these principally comprise seasonal, temporary and casual workers on smallholder farms and in small-scale processing and trading enterprises.
- *Contributing family labour* refers to family members who work in small-scale enterprises that are owned and managed by other family member(s). In the case of global horticultural and commodities value chains, these are family members working on smallholder farms and in small-scale processing and trading enterprises.

The above categorization of informal workers is used throughout the remainder of this paper, which is structured as follows. section 2 outlines the scope and methodology of the literature review. section 3 presents the findings from the review, starting first with an assessment of the extent to which the existing literature addresses the roles and conditions of informal workers, and following with the main findings as regards the roles and conditions faced by each of the four categories of informal workers found in the focus value chains. Finally, section 4 summarizes the key findings from the study, and discusses the policy and research implications and recommendations arising from these findings.

² See: International Labour Office (2002) *Report VI: Decent work and the informal economy. Sixth item on the agenda, International Labour Conference, 90th Session, 2002*. Geneva: International Labour Office.

2. Methodology

This section outlines the scope of literature included in the review, the specific search approaches and terms used, and key methodological limitations of the study. With regard to the scope of the review, the main selection criteria used were as follows:

- The resource included a significant description or analysis of one or more types of informal workers in the target GVCs, of the roles and conditions they face, and of the impacts of GVC engagement on their conditions; *and/or*
- The resource included substantive methodological guidance on how to incorporate an analysis of labour issues into value chain-related studies.
- In order to be included in the review, the resource also had to satisfy the following additional criteria: the resource was freely available on the Internet, published in English between January 1995 and May 2011.

In order to identify resources that satisfied these criteria, three complementary search approaches were used. The first was to review over 80 relevant resources known to the author from previous work conducted on global supply chain labour conditions and gender issues in agricultural value chains. The second approach was to review a number of specialist websites focusing on gender and/or labour issues in global supply chains, in order to identify potentially relevant publications. Specific websites reviewed were:

- www.capturingthegains.org
- <http://genderinvaluechains.ning.com>
- www.ethicaltrade.org
- www.fairlabor.org
- www.etiskhandel.no/English
- www.sa-intl.org
- www.women-ww.org
- www.bananalink.org.uk

The third approach was to conduct a general Internet search. The following specific searches were conducted using the advanced search facility of the general Google search engine (www.google.co.uk):

- find web pages with the following search terms in the title of the page: the exact wording or phrase “value chain”, and one or more of the words “worker”, “labour” or “employment”
- find web pages with the following search terms in the title of the page: the exact wording or phrase “supply chain”, and one or more of the words “worker”, “labour”, “employment”, “women”, “gender” or “female”
- find web pages with the following search terms anywhere in the page: the exact wording or phrase “value chain”, and one or more of the words “horticulture”, “fresh produce”, “vegetable”, “fruit” or “flower”

In addition, the following specific searches were conducted using Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.co.uk>):

- find articles with the following search terms in the title of the article: the exact wording or phrase “value chain”, and one or more of the words “worker”, “smallholder” or “labour”
- find articles with the following search terms in the title of the article: the exact wording or phrase “value chain”, and one or more of the words “cocoa”, “coffee” or “tea”

Thus, a significant attempt was made to ensure that all relevant resources were identified and included in the review. Nevertheless, certain methodological limitations mean that it is not possible to guarantee that all relevant resources were identified. In the first place, due to budgetary constraints it was not possible to review publications that were only available at cost; thus for example, a number of relevant academic journal articles were identified using Google Scholar that were only available to subscribers. However, in most cases the abstracts (which were usually freely available) indicated that few if any of these studies provided substantive analysis of informal workers other than smallholders. Thus, it would appear unlikely that inclusion of non-free publications would have substantially altered the key findings from the review.

In addition, the lack of consistency in the terminology used to refer to the different crops and types of informal workers also created methodological challenges. With regard to crops for example, there was no guarantee that the words “commodity” or “horticulture” would appear in a publication about a specific commodity or horticultural crop. This was particularly challenging in the case of horticultural crops, since it would not have been possible to search for every conceivable species of horticultural crop. The only practical solution was to search for sub-sectoral categories, such as “flowers” or “vegetables”; inevitably however, relevant resources are likely to have been omitted.

A similar challenge existed in relation to the terminology used for informal workers. For example, smallholders are not usually considered by development researchers or practitioners as a type of informal worker. More importantly, there is no consistency in the way that the other relevant categories of informal workers are referred to in the literature. As already noted, the terminology used in this study is based on ILO definitions, but these are not widely understood or used in the literature. Thus for example, the term “contributing family labour” is rarely used in literature describing the roles and conditions of wives working as unpaid labour on their husbands’ farms.

A final limitation of the study worth noting relates to the defined scope of this review. Given that the rationale and focus of the literature review was centred around the value chain approach, the review only included resources that directly related the conditions of informal workers to their engagement in the focus value chains. It is therefore conceivable and probable that there are additional resources not included in the review that provide further information about the conditions of relevant informal workers, but that do not specifically relate these conditions to their engagement in specific GVCs.

There are thus several significant limitations to this review. Nevertheless, the author believes that the main findings presented in this paper, and the ensuing recommendations, provide an adequately reliable representation of the main trends to be found in existing value-chain related literature, and of the key policy and research implications of these trends.

3. Findings

This section of the paper presents the key findings from the literature review. It commences with an assessment of the extent to which existing value chain-related studies address the roles and conditions of informal workers in the focus GVCs (section 3.1). It then presents the main empirical findings from these studies, that is, what these studies tell us about the roles and conditions faced by each of the four categories of informal workers found in the focus value chains. A more detailed account of these findings, including further empirical examples, can be found in the original literature review (Chan 2011a).

3.1 Coverage and Gaps in the Existing Literature: The Extent to which Existing Value Chain-Related Studies Address the Roles and Conditions of Informal Workers

Overall, 49 resources were identified that met with the criteria identified in section 2 above. These resources can be categorized into three broad types of resources: firstly, value chain analyses; secondly, value chain impact studies; and thirdly, guidance documents that provide methodological insights on how to incorporate a labour perspective into value chain studies. A review of the coverage and gaps in this literature revealed some clear trends; these are outlined below, addressing each of the three types of resources in turn.

Reviewing the scope of existing value chain analyses (VCA) on the focus crops revealed some key concerns from a labour perspective. For the purposes of this paper, a VCA is defined as a study that systematically describes the roles of the key actors involved in the production and trade of the focus crop; the costs, benefits, opportunities and/or constraints accrued or faced by each actor; and the relationships between the different actors in the value chain. Of concern, the review clearly revealed that the incorporation of a labour perspective continues to be very much the exception rather than the rule. Many VCAs identified did not include an analysis of any type of worker at all, formal or informal. Of those that did, the vast majority only incorporated an analysis of smallholders, and not of other types of informal workers. This was largely a consequence of the studies' sole focus on *owners* of enterprises, rather than on those who provide labour to these enterprises. In fact, of the more than 20 VCAs that were identified on the focus crops, only two of the studies incorporated a significant analysis of types of workers other than smallholders.

With respect to the VCAs that only incorporated an analysis of smallholders, the majority (four out of seven) were focused on coffee, two on horticulture, and one on cocoa; and none were identified with a focus on the tea sector. In terms of geographic coverage, three studies related to African countries, three to South/Central America, and none to Asian countries.

As regards the two studies that incorporated a comprehensive analysis of *all* types of informal workers, both studies focused on horticultural value chains: one studied the thornless artichoke value chain in Peru (GATE 2007), and the other the mango value chains in Ghana and Mali (ITC et al. 2011). In terms of the worker categories addressed, both studies incorporated an analysis of the roles and conditions faced by informal and formal workers at all key levels of the value chain (i.e., production, processing/packing, and distribution/transport).

Assessing the coverage of value chain impact studies (VCIs) also revealed some clear trends and knowledge gaps. The term VCI is used here to refer to any study that examines the impact of global value chain participation on one or more groups of workers in the chain. VCIs are distinguished from VCAs in that they do not provide a systematic analysis of the roles and conditions of *all* stakeholders in the chain, or of the relationships between them. VCIs might be further sub-divided into empirical studies (herein referred to as “empirical VCIs”) on one hand, and “overview VCIs” on the other hand (that is, studies that constitute reviews of secondary literature). Overall, 28 VCIs on the focus crops were identified, of which 18 were empirical VCIs and 10 were overview VCIs.³

³ None of the 10 overview VCIs were focused specifically on the target crops/sectors; they reviewed labour impacts across the agriculture or food sectors as a whole. Nevertheless, they were included in the review because it was judged that many of the labour trends/impacts identified for the agricultural sector as a whole were potentially relevant and applicable to workers in the focus sub-sectors. Three of the studies also included specific horticulture case studies.

One interesting pattern observed was that over half of the VCIs (17 out of 28) had gender issues and women's value chain participation as their core focus. One explanation of this trend is the growing interest among development donors and agencies in the gender impacts of GVC participation (Chan 2011b). More fundamentally however, it is also likely to reflect the fact that a gender focus almost forces the adoption of a labour perspective, given women's predominance as employees and unpaid family labour, rather than as entrepreneurs, in GVCs (ITC et al. 2011).

With regard to the empirical VCIs, clear biases emerged in the scope of these studies. Firstly, there was a strong bias in the type of workers being studied: the large majority (15 out of 18) focused on impacts of GVC engagement on employees in formal enterprises, that is, informal (and formal) workers in commercial plantations, packhouses and processing units. In contrast, only four of the empirical studies included an analysis of impacts on smallholders, only three studies analyzed impacts on unpaid family labour, and only two studies explored conditions of informal workers in informal enterprises (hired workers on smallholder farms). Equally, a marked imbalance existed in terms of crop coverage: 15 of the 18 studies were on horticultural products, mostly specific fruits or vegetables. In contrast, only two of the studies focused on the coffee sector, two on the cocoa sector, and only one on the tea sector. From a geographical perspective, the majority (14 out of 18) of the studies were conducted in African countries, with only four studies in South or Central America, one in the USA and one in the UK. No studies of Asian countries were identified.

Similar to the VCIs, a strong gender focus was also found among the third and final category of resources, that is, guidance documents that provide practical guidance on how to incorporate a labour perspective into VCAs.⁴ Ten of the 12 guidance documents identified were focused on how to conduct gender sensitive VCAs and/or design gender sensitive value chain interventions. As with the VCIs, it would appear that the gender focus of these resources necessitated the adoption of a labour perspective, due to women's predominance as workers rather than entrepreneurs in agricultural GVCs. Also of note is the large number of guidance documents or manuals of this genre: their relative abundance is striking when compared to the small number of actual empirical gender-sensitive VCAs that have been conducted on specific agricultural crops. In fact, only two such empirical VCAs were identified (GATE 2007 and ITC 2011).

The remaining two guidance documents focused on how to address the needs of smallholders, and in one case the needs of workers on smallholder farms, in value chain interventions. However, neither systematically addressed the needs of all types of workers along the value chain. Therefore, while all of the 12 resources incorporated a partial analysis of labour issues, no guidance documents were identified that specifically provided guidance on how to incorporate a systematic assessment of labour issues into VCAs and value chain interventions.⁵ Moreover, most of the existing guidance documents are highly complex, many are quite conceptual rather than practical, and most are not user friendly for practitioners.

In conclusion, a large number of resources were found that provided *some* information on *some* types of informal workers in global horticulture and/or commodities value chains; and a significant number of resources were identified that provided some degree of methodological guidance on how value chain-related studies in these sectors might be made more labour-sensitive. However, clear gaps and weaknesses were identified in the availability of information and guidance on certain types of informal workers, on certain crops and on certain geographical regions. The specific knowledge gaps and their implications for future research are further discussed in section 4 below.

⁴ This category of resources was included in the review partly because of their potential *methodological* contribution to labour-sensitive value chain studies, but also because of their *empirical* contribution. Like the overview VCIs, they provide a good indication of key labour issues found in global agricultural value chains; moreover, 3 of the 12 guidance documents included specific case studies of one or more of the focus crops.

⁵ Since the literature review was conducted, WIEGO has commissioned and published a labour-sensitive value chain analysis manual in response to this gap: see Chan 2011b.

3.2 The Roles and Conditions of Informal Workers: What Existing Value Chain-Related Studies Can Tell Us

Despite the gaps and weaknesses highlighted above, the existing literature does provide a rich, albeit sometimes patchy, body of knowledge on the roles, conditions and constraints faced by different types of informal workers in global horticulture and commodities value chains. The key findings for each of the four categories of informal workers are summarized below: further details and empirical examples can be found in the original literature review (Chan 2011a).

Informal Workers in Formal Enterprises (Workers In Packhouses, Processing Units, and Commercial Farms)

A review of the literature indicated that there were certain types of conditions and constraints that are common to workers in a range of focus commodities and countries, and thus appear to be general, cross-cutting trends.

First and foremost, the literature clearly demonstrated the predominance of informal employment, even in formal workplaces. At the most fundamental level, most workers in commercial packhouses, processing units, and on commercial farms do not have written contracts: for example, research conducted by Oxfam (2004) found that the majority of workers on Chilean fruit farms did not have a written contract. Moreover, the majority of workers are not permanent, but rather are employed on a seasonal, temporary or casual basis; thus, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study on the export artichoke sector in Peru (GATE 2007) found that 79 per cent of all men and 84 per cent of all women working in processing plants and on artichoke farms have insecure jobs. A third aspect of informality is the substantial proportion of the workforce that is employed via a third party labour contractor or agent, rather than directly by the production/processing enterprise – a practice that is typically associated with an erosion of employers' responsibilities and the transfer of employment costs to the worker (Barrientos and Smith 2006 and GATE 2007).

Secondly, the literature pointed to the fact that many of these informally employed workers are legally entitled to greater legal protection and benefits than they currently receive. While the limited cropping seasons of many horticultural crops (e.g. mangoes) and commodities (e.g. coffee) mean that seasonal employment is often both legal and legitimate, the literature clearly demonstrated that it is also common for workers to be employed on a temporary or seasonal basis even when the actual number of days worked entitles them to permanent employment status. Thus, in a study of migrant workers in the export pineapple sector in Ghana (Barrientos et al. 2009), 94 per cent of the workers surveyed reported that they worked all year round, yet only 55 per cent of them had permanent contracts. Since permanent workers are usually legally entitled to greater social security benefits and protections than non-permanent workers, these "permanent-temporary" workers are losing out on benefits they are legally entitled to. Hence, Oxfam's study (2004) found that women illegally employed on a seasonal basis were not receiving paid sick leave or maternity leave that they should have been entitled to under law.

The literature also highlighted common labour rights abuses that were found across the various different crops and countries. For both formal and informal workers in formal enterprises, labour abuses commonly reported in the literature were the use of irregular employment to avoid legal obligations (as already discussed), poor wages, excessive overtime, lack of respect for trade union rights, and gender discrimination (addressed further below). With respect to wages, the studies indicated that while wages in the export horticulture and commodities sectors are often higher than those found in other sectors, nevertheless a substantial proportion of workers in the focus sectors still earn only the minimum wage or less (Barrientos et al. 2009; Oxfam 2004). Moreover, even when employers are paying the minimum wage or slightly above, this can still fall far short of a living wage (Oxfam 2004). With regard to trade union rights, the literature indicated that these rights are frequently curtailed. In Chile, for example, most workers on fruit farms are afraid to join unions for fear of being blacklisted, since employers share information about which workers are considered "troublemakers"; also, seasonal workers are prohibited from bargaining collectively (Oxfam 2004). Finally, a number of studies highlighted the fact that working hours are frequently excessive, and that overtime is often compulsory and inadequately compensated (Barrientos and Smith 2006; Oxfam 2004).

While these labour rights abuses are common for all types of workers, the literature demonstrated that, in general, workers with less formal/insecure contracts tended to have worse pay and conditions than those with more formal jobs. Thus, Barrientos et al. (c. 2003), for example, found that in South African apple farms and packhouses, the permanent workers had the best pay and conditions, followed by seasonal and temporary workers, with contract and migrant workers at the bottom of the scale. Moreover, non-permanent workers tended to have poorer access to social security protection and benefits. One reason for this is the fact that, in most countries, non-permanent workers have fewer legal rights to social security protections and benefits than permanent workers. In addition, even where non-permanent workers *are* legally entitled to social security benefits, employers are less likely to honour the legal entitlements of non-permanent as compared to permanent workers (IFAD 2010; Oxfam 2004; Barrientos et al. 2009).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that non-permanent workers do not always have worse conditions, and workers can sometimes prefer the flexibility of non-permanent employment (Barrientos et al. 2009). In the Peruvian artichoke sector for example, while workers with insecure jobs have poorer access to non-wage statutory benefits, on average they earn slightly higher wages than those with secure jobs (GATE 2007).

The literature also revealed some important common trends in terms of gender roles and constraints. Firstly, across different crops and countries, women constitute a substantial proportion, and often the majority, of the workforce in packhouses and processing units (GATE 2007; Oxfam 2004; WEMAN Productions 2007; ITC 2011). Secondly, marked horizontal segregation of jobs by gender appears to be widespread in all stages of the value chain, with women tending to be employed in harvesting, peeling/slicing of fruit, sorting, grading and packing, while men were employed in operating machinery, loading and unloading of boxes/crates and other heavy work (GATE 2007; IFAD 2010; ITC 2011). Vertical occupational segregation by gender is also commonplace, with women typically under-represented in better-paid and more secure jobs in all of the focus sectors (IFAD 2010; Smith et al. 2004). Moreover, the literature highlighted the fact that certain poor working conditions, such as excessive and unannounced overtime, can have a greater negative impact on women than men, due to women's primary responsibility for reproductive work (Oxfam 2004; Smith et al. 2004). Finally, the literature indicated that sexual harassment is widespread, with male supervisors commonly demanding sexual favours in return for jobs or promotion (Smith et al. 2004).

Thus, the literature highlighted many trends and conditions that were common across different crops and countries. Nevertheless, important differences also emerged. In the first place, the degree of seasonality in employment varies significantly by crop, a consequence of their different agronomic characteristics; IFAD for example highlights the differences between coffee and tea in Rwanda (IFAD 2010). Moreover, whilst women tend to be well represented in packing and processing units for all crops, the extent of women's representation in the workforce on commercial farms tends to vary significantly by crop (IFAD 2010; GATE 2007; ITC 2011). Importantly, the literature also indicated that the extent to which horizontal job segregation by gender translated into gender inequality in pay and conditions depended on the country, crop and level in the chain, demonstrating that horizontal segregation does not always lead to women being worse off than men (IFAD 2010; GATE 2007; ITC 2011).

Finally, the literature also provides important insights into what has changed, and what has *not* changed, in terms of labour conditions in the focus sectors over the last 10-15 years. Interestingly, little evidence was found in the focus sectors of the often-reported feminization and casualization of the labour force. This of course does not imply that these changes are not taking place, but the evidence remains thin. However, the literature did provide some evidence that workers are being put under increasing pressure to meet production targets and deadlines (Oxfam 2004), and that a significant number of producing countries have relaxed their labour laws in response to global market pressures (Oxfam 2004).

Moreover, the literature clearly showed that, while voluntary labour codes and standards has improved working conditions for many permanent workers, informal workers have typically seen little improvement in their working conditions as a result of these codes (Barrientos and Smith 2006; Barrientos et al. 2009). One key reason for the limited impact of these codes has been the significant change in the nature of buying practices used by global food retailers and purchasers – a shift that has taken place during the same

period. Purchasing strategies such as “just in time delivery” and downward pressure on prices have put suppliers under increasing pressure to cut costs, which has frequently translated into worsening working conditions and increasing flexibility of employment (Oxfam 2004; Barrientos and Smith 2006).

In the next section, we turn to the key conditions and constraints faced by owners of informal enterprises, which unsurprisingly are quite different from those experienced by workers in formal enterprises.

Owners of Informal Enterprises (Smallholders, Small-Scale Processors and Traders)

As implied in section 3.1 above, the existing literature provides a sizeable knowledge base about certain types of owners of informal enterprises, namely smallholders, but is much less forthcoming about other types of workers within the category, that is, small-scale processors and traders. For this reason, this section will focus primarily on smallholders, but will return briefly to the latter two types of worker at the end of the section.

The literature highlighted a number of key characteristics and constraints faced by smallholders that were found to be common across a range of crops and countries. Starting on a positive note, several studies provided evidence that engagement in the focus export chains *can* contribute significantly to smallholders’ household incomes and improve livelihoods. When compared to growing crops for domestic markets, a key advantage of the focus export crops is that they typically fetch higher farmgate prices: thus for example, FAO (2004) reports that in Kenya, exotic (exported) mango varieties fetch higher farmgate prices than local varieties. Moreover, the literature provided evidence that the extra income from export sales has often had positive impacts on the livelihoods of smallholder households, including improvements in children’s education, greater investment in small business ventures, and providing women greater flexibility to combine productive and reproductive activities (Challies 2010). Nevertheless, several studies also reminded us of the fact that engagement in the focus value chains frequently does not lead to dramatic improvements in household income, since smallholder households typically rely on multiple sources of income, of which export commodity production is only one (Challies 2010; WEMAN Productions 2007).

Moreover, the literature also highlighted the fact that barriers to entry into the focus export chains are often high, and that therefore the poorest – possibly the majority – of smallholders are unable to participate. This is because production costs associated with the focus crops are typically higher than those for alternative domestic crops, due to higher requirements for agricultural inputs (such as seedlings and pesticides) and higher labour requirements (GATE 2007). Distributional issues are therefore a concern.

Furthermore, even those smallholders who *are* able to participate in the focus value chains face many constraints that limit the amount of income and benefits they can gain from chain participation. For one, income provided by the focus export crops is typically only seasonal, as is the case for cocoa in Ghana, mangoes in Mali, and raspberries in Chile, for example (Chan 2010; ITC 2011; Challies 2010). Secondly, the high production costs alluded to above can limit profitability (GATE 2007). Moreover, due to asymmetric power relations in the value chain and weak producer organizations, smallholders tend to have weak negotiating power and are therefore forced to accept sub-optimal prices and contractual conditions (GATE 2007; Fromm and Dubon 2006; FAO c.2004). Even where smallholders are organized, producer groups’ poor knowledge of international commodity markets often leads to poor decision-making and reduced income (IFAD 2010). Finally, the smallholder sector is typified by low productivity (Institute of Development Studies c.2009; Coulter et al. 2010), yet smallholder farmers face substantial constraints to improving productivity, including the lack of ability to afford fertilizers and pesticides, poor availability and/or uptake of improved planting material, poor technical knowledge, weak access to credit, and poor transport and communications infrastructure (IDS c.2009; FAO c.2004; Coulter et al. 2010).

The literature also draws attention to the fact that smallholder gains from participation in the focus export chains are precarious, in that they can be swiftly eroded by changes in export market conditions. Thus, Tuvhag (2008) argues that the negative impact of falling coffee prices during 1998-2001 on coffee producers in Nicaragua demonstrates smallholders’ vulnerability to fluctuating prices in export markets. During this

period, extreme poverty increased and primary school enrolment rates fell in coffee growing areas, yet on a national level extreme poverty decreased by almost 50 per cent, and primary school enrolment rates rose.

The literature also points to clear gender disparities in terms of benefits gained from chain participation. The literature provides considerable evidence to show that fewer women than men smallholders are involved in production of the focus export crops, because women face greater barriers to entry than men (Schneider et al. 2010). Many studies highlight the importance of women's poor and insecure access to land as a key constraint (WEMAN Productions 2007). Thus for example, ITC et al. (2011) reports that in Mali, women make up less than 1 per cent of mango smallholders involved in export production, primarily because women do not have secure access to land. Moreover, several studies showed that even where women *are* engaged as smallholders in the focus export chains, they face greater constraints and lower returns than men. In the first place, women smallholders have less land to farm, due to smaller plot sizes than men (IFAD 2010; UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009). In addition, women also tend to produce lower yields per hectare, due to poorer access to other factors of production (UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009; ITC et al. 2011), and the limited amount of time they can spend on the farm due to their reproductive responsibilities (Chan 2010; IFAD 2010).

Nevertheless, as with workers in formal enterprises, important differences exist between smallholders, depending on the crop and country. Firstly, the literature indicated that the profitability and therefore income available to smallholders from export production varies significantly by crop. Challies (2010) for example notes that export raspberry production is quite lucrative for smallholders in Chile, whereas GATE (2007) found that the high cost of inputs makes export artichoke production in Peru less profitable for some farmers than growing local artichoke varieties for domestic markets. Equally significant, profitability for any one crop can vary greatly between countries, a fact indicated by Coulter et al.'s findings (2010) that the productivity of smallholder coffee production differed almost tenfold between Cameroon and Vietnam. Last but not least, although in general women smallholders participate less than male smallholders in export production, the literature also highlights that this can vary significantly by crop and country, with estimated female participation rates ranging from as low as 1 per cent for mangoes in Mali (ITC et al. 2011) to over 50 per cent for some non-traditional vegetable crops in Kenya and Zimbabwe (Schneider and Gugerty 2010).

The literature also drew attention to some significant changes in the terms and conditions of smallholder engagement in the focus export chains over last 10-15 years. Firstly, studies show that producers of traditional export commodities have faced a decline in their conditions over this period. Producers (in particular coffee and cocoa producers) have faced falling real prices during this period (Fitter et al. 2001; IDS c.2009), and the adoption of market liberalization policies promoted by global finance institutions has led to a decline in price stability and product quality (Coulter et al. 2010), and reduced access to production inputs and services (IDS c.2009).

Secondly, the literature shows that while increased market diversification has created higher value export opportunities for some smallholders, benefiting in particular those producers engaged in the burgeoning specialty, organic and fair trade market segments, for example in coffee (Fromm and Dubon 2006; Tuvhag 2008), the majority of smallholders have not been able to benefit from these opportunities. The key factors at play are the relatively small share of the export market represented by these high value products (Fitter and Kaplinsky 2001; Fromm et al. 2006), and the increasing concentration of power at the consumer market end of supply chains, meaning that higher retail prices are rarely passed on to producers (Fitter and Kaplinsky 2001; Tuvhag 2008). The literature also highlights how voluntary codes and standards, such as GLOBAL GAP and USA GAP, have increased barriers to entry to the focus export chains – barriers which exclude the majority of smallholders (FAO c.2004; Challies 2010). Finally, a further trend noted by some studies was the increasing scarcity of labour for smallholder export crop production, due to growing rural-urban migration and changing youth aspirations (e.g. IDS c.2009).

Thus, the literature provides a fairly comprehensive picture of the constraints and conditions faced by smallholders in the focus value chains, of the key factors affecting these constraints, and of changes in conditions over the last 10-15 years. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of other types of informal entrepreneurs, including small-scale traders and processors. In fact, only one of the 49 resources reviewed (ITC 2011) provided a substantive description of the roles and constraints faced by informal processors

and intermediaries/traders in the focus value chains. The ITC study, which focused on women's roles within the export mango sector in Mali and Ghana, found that the majority of informal processors in both countries were women, and that the key constraints they faced were limited access to finance, difficulty in finding markets, and poor access to operational equipment and materials. The study also found that women predominate as *pisteurs* (traders/intermediaries) in the Bamako area, one of Mali's main mango export production zones, and that the key constraints faced by *pisteurs* are the difficulty in raising start-up funds, lack of capital to expand/upgrade their operations, and high rejection rates from exporters.

Informal Workers in Informal Enterprises

The roles and conditions of informal workers in informal enterprises are not well covered by existing value chain literature. Of the 49 resources reviewed, only five studies included an analysis of hired workers on smallholder farms in the focus sectors. Thus, to the extent that the literature revealed certain trends and characteristics about this type of worker, it is difficult to ascertain the wider prevalence of these observations. With this caveat in mind, the following characteristics were identified from the available information.

In the first place, the studies indicated that although many smallholders rely primarily on family labour, many do hire additional labour during peak production periods – for example at harvest time. Moreover, migrant workers can constitute a substantial proportion of the hired workforce (ITC 2011; Barrientos et al. 2009; UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009). Female hired labour is also significant for many crops, including mango in Ghana and French beans in Kenya (Dolan 2002; ITC 2011). However, gender division of labour (horizontal segregation) appears to be prevalent and marked (ITC 2011; UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009), and this often leads to gender inequality in pay and conditions. For example, UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad (2009) found that on cocoa farms in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, tasks done by women tend to be associated with lower pay, whereas more physically demanding tasks, which are mainly done by men, are better paid.

According to one study, common problems faced by hired workers (men and women) on smallholder farms include poor wages, lack of paid annual and sick leave, lack of proper compensation for overtime work, restrictions on freedom of association, and poor access to health and safety equipment and facilities. However, this study also drew attention to the fact that smallholders themselves are usually constrained by a lack of resources and poor knowledge of labour rights, and therefore they need to be supported in order to improve conditions for their workers (Ethical Trading Initiative 2005).

For hired workers on smallholder farms, the literature did not provide any conclusive insights regarding variations in working conditions by crop and country, or regarding changes in conditions over the last 10-15 years.

Contributing Family Labour

The literature is also relatively reticent in the case of contributing family labour: only seven of the 49 resources reviewed provided an analysis of this category of workers in relation to the focus value chains. Moreover, contributing family labour is only given any visibility at all in the literature that focused specifically on gender issues. Nevertheless, the available information is relatively detailed, and thus the literature provides some reliable insights into the conditions and constraints faced by this group of workers. Firstly, a number of the studies emphasized that contributing (unpaid) family labour is of critical importance to the very economic viability of export smallholder production: agri-food companies tend only to outsource highly labour intensive crops to smallholders, yet most smallholders would not be able to make a profit if they had to rely solely on their own and hired labour (Dolan 2002). Secondly, the literature clearly highlights the predominance of women as unpaid contributing family workers. Thus, the studies on gender and contract farming drew attention to the fact that in the majority of cases, it is men who are given the supply contracts, whereas it is women who are supplying the majority of unpaid family labour. In fact, the studies indicate the fact that unpaid female family labour (usually the wives of male smallholders) typically

supply a substantial proportion, and often the majority, of all labour on men's smallholders' export plots (Mehra and Rojas 2008; Chan 2010; Dolan 2002). This was found to be the case in a wide range of crops, including coffee in Uganda and Tanzania (Chan 2010), cocoa in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire (UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009) and French beans in Kenya (Dolan 2002).

Frequently however, wives are not adequately compensated for their labour. The literature showed that women are typically not given a fair share of the income from export crops (e.g., Chan 2010 and IFAD 2010). In the case of French bean production in Kenya for example, Dolan (2002) found that while women provided 72 per cent of the labour on men's bean plots, they only receive 38 per cent of the income from bean sales. Nor are men providing compensation in-kind. In the Kenya French bean case, since engaging in bean production, men have actually contributed less labour to their wives' plots than before, such that women have had to hire in extra labour to make up the shortfall (Dolan 2002). Moreover, the literature provides considerable evidence that men spend a substantial part of their share of the income on personal items rather than on meeting household needs (Chan 2010; IFAD 2010).

Worryingly, the literature further indicates that not only do women typically fail to receive a fair share of the benefits, in some cases they actually suffer a net loss in income and/or well-being as a result of the household's engagement in export production. Several studies draw attention to the fact that unequal distribution of income from export crop production can trigger intra-household conflict and domestic violence (Schneider and Gugerty 2010; Dolan 2002; Chan 2010). Moreover, the literature also reports cases of men appropriating land over which their wives previously had usufruct rights, in order to engage in export production. Given women's limited access to land, such expropriation can have dire consequences for women's income-earning opportunities (Dolan 2002).

While the trends highlighted above were found in a range of different crops and countries, the extent of the constraints and inequalities borne by contributing women family workers were found to vary significantly depending on the crop and country. In particular, the literature showed that the extent to which wives contribute to husbands' export plots differs substantially depending on the crop involved, with women performing the vast majority of labour for some crops (for example on coffee farms in Uganda) but only carrying out a small number of specific tasks for other crops, as is the case for mango farms in Ghana and Mali (Chan 2010; ITC 2011). The literature also hints at the fact that the extent to which wives are rewarded for their labour is dependent on women's relative status and role within the communities in question (Dolan 2002; Chan 2010; UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad 2009).

Overall, the literature did not suggest that any substantial changes have taken place in the relative conditions of contributing family labour over the last 10-15 years, apart from in cases where there had been specific external interventions to address this issue, for example by development organizations. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that cultural norms endorsing these gender inequalities are gradually being eroded, at least in some cases. For example, recent research in Nandi Hills, Kenya shows that traditional land tenure practices that have prevented women from owning and inheriting land are slowly changing with modernization (Chan 2010), and Dolan (2002) and WEMAN Productions (2007) provide examples of women successfully challenging their husbands over the distribution of land and income from export crops, including winning legal compensation.

Finally, the literature also points to how the introduction of sustainability certification initiatives, which have burgeoned over the last 10-15 years, can significantly influence the roles and rewards received by unpaid women family workers, both negatively as well as positively. For example, UTZ CERTIFIED and Solidaridad (2009) highlight how the adoption of organic production methods often lead to an increased labour burden for contributing female family labour, and provides examples both of where this has had a negative impact (where women receive a net loss in income due to having less time to spend on other income-generating activities), and of where it has had a more positive impact (where increased reliance on their labour increases the wives' bargaining power within the household).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In concluding this paper, we first provide a summary of the key findings from the literature review: this is the subject of section 4.1. We then turn to a discussion of the policy implications of these findings (section 4.2), and end by outlining key research implications and recommendations section 4.3).

4.1 Summary of Findings

Scope of the Value Chain Literature: Key Coverage and Gaps

In reviewing the literature that fell within the scope of this study, three key types of value chain study were identified: value chain analyses (VCAs), value chain impact studies (VCIs), and value chain guidance documents. With regard to the first type, while there appears to be a proliferation of VCAs conducted on the focus crops over the last 10-15 years, sadly these more recent studies are no different from earlier work in this genre in that the vast majority continue to focus solely on *owners* of enterprises, while ignoring *workers* employed by these enterprises as key value chain actors in their own right. Thus, while a significant minority of VCAs do include an analysis of the roles and conditions faced by smallholders, an analysis of other categories of informal workers remains all but absent.

In the case of VCIs, a substantial number of these studies have emerged over the last 10-15 years, more than half of which have focused on gender impacts of GVC engagement. They provide a valuable and rich source of information about conditions of informal workers in the focus GVCs, and on the impact of chain engagement on these conditions. However, clear biases and gaps exist in this literature. For one, the large majority of these studies have focused solely on informal (and formal) workers in formal enterprises, with few studies conducted on the other three categories of informal worker. In addition, the majority of VCIs have concentrated on horticultural crops in African countries, with little attention given to informal workers in tea, coffee and cocoa value chains in Asian and Latin American countries.

In terms of the guidance documents, a strong gender focus is also evident in this genre. But while all of the resources incorporated a partial labour analysis, addressing some types of worker and some key labour issues, none of the resources provided for a systematic analysis of key labour issues affecting all four categories of informal worker, both women and men, in GVCs. Moreover, most of the guidance documents are highly complex, with many including detailed conceptual analyses, and thus are not appropriate for practitioners.

Empirical Findings: Roles and Conditions of Informal Workers

From several perspectives, the literature paints a similar picture for all four categories of informal workers in the focus value chains. In the first place, all types of worker face substantial constraints and experience working conditions that are far from ideal; and unfortunately the evidence does not point to substantial improvements in conditions for the majority of these workers over the last 10-15 years. Moreover, the literature makes it clear that informality is the norm rather than the exception: informal workers make up the majority of the workforce, even in formal enterprises. All types of informal workers were also found to be very vulnerable to changes in market conditions; and overall, women informal workers tend to experience worse conditions than their male counterparts.

However, despite sharing these broad similarities, the literature clearly shows that the particular constraints and the workers' rights issues are in fact quite different for each of the four categories of informal worker. Moreover, patterns of gender discrimination and changes in working conditions over time were found to vary significantly from context to context. The following paragraphs therefore provide a summary of the specific constraints faced by each category of worker, together with a more nuanced overview of the key gender issues and of key changes in working conditions over time.

For *informal workers in formal enterprises* (i.e., commercial farms, packhouses and processing units), the central concern is that informal workers generally experience worse working conditions than those of formal workers in the same enterprise or sector. This is in part a reflection of a two-tier legal system (where informal workers are granted fewer legal rights and protections than formal workers), and in part a result of the fact that applicable laws tend to be more poorly enforced for informal as compared to formal workers. A further and related concern is that many informal workers are, in fact, legally entitled to formal/permanent employment contracts, by virtue of the actual duration and frequency of their employment, and hence are being denied their legal entitlements. Common labour rights abuses experienced by informal workers in formal enterprises are poor wages, excessive overtime, lack of respect for trade union rights, gender discrimination and sexual harassment. In terms of gender discrimination, both vertical and horizontal job segregation by gender is widespread.

In contrast, the key concerns for *smallholders* are the existence of substantial barriers to entry into export markets, high production costs, and constraints to productivity improvement, which in turn create distributional concerns and low returns for many smallholders. The literature shows that production of focus crops for export *can* contribute positively and significantly to the incomes and livelihoods of smallholder households. However, the poorest – which often means the majority – of smallholders are typically unable to participate; and even for those that can participate, the poor availability and high cost of key factors of production often limit the profitability of engagement. In general, far fewer women than men are engaged as smallholders in focus export chains, largely due to women's weaker access to land and other key factors of production. Nevertheless, the literature does point to significant variation between crops and countries, both in terms of women's participation rates and the overall profitability of chain engagement.

With regard to hired workers on smallholder farms, the literature indicated that while many smallholders rely predominantly on family labour, many do use hired labour during peak production periods. Migrant workers (both from within and from outside the country) often make up a significant proportion of hired workers. Common problems faced by hired workers on smallholder farms are poor wages, lack of paid annual and sick leave, lack of proper compensation for overtime work, restrictions on freedom of association, and poor health and safety facilities. Horizontal job segregation by gender is marked and commonplace, and this often translates into poorer pay for women workers.

A key feature of contributing family labour is that it is predominantly female. The literature showed that the majority of export contracts in the focus value chains are given to male (rather than female) smallholders, but that wives typically provide a substantial amount, and often the majority, of the labour on these male smallholder export plots. Frequently however, wives are not compensated for their labour and receive little of the income and benefits from engagement in export value chains; and in some cases even, chain engagement has a net negative impact on wives' income and well-being.

Common themes emerge across the four categories of worker in terms of gender. Overall, the literature shows that women informal workers are in general worse off than men informal workers, with men predominating in the higher status and better paid types of work (that is, vertical occupational segregation by gender). Thus, within formal enterprises, men are more likely than women to have formal jobs, and within the smallholder sector, men are more likely than women to engage in the chain as smallholders rather than act as contributing family labour. Moreover, horizontal job segregation by gender is widespread for all categories of worker. However, the extent to which the latter translates into gender inequality in pay and conditions appears to depend considerably on context, with substantial variation by crop, country and level in the value chain. Women's participation rates were also found to be highly context-specific. Thus, whereas women tend to comprise a substantial part, and often the large majority, of the workforce in commercial packing and processing facilities, women's participation tends to be lower in commercial farms. And whereas in general women smallholders are a minority in the focus value chains, this varies substantially by crop, with women actually forming the majority of smallholders in some cases.

In terms of changes in working conditions over the last 10-15 years, a mixed picture emerges, with evidence of both positive and negative trends. The literature suggests that those who are better off among the

working poor, such as permanent workers and richer (male) smallholders, have benefited from engagement in the focus value chains and from specific sustainability initiatives, including labour codes and fair trade markets. However, both value chain engagement in general and sustainability schemes in particular have tended to offer, at best, a limited impact (and perhaps more typically no impact at all) on those working poor people who were worse off to begin with – and this includes the majority of informal workers.

4.2 Policy Implications and Recommendations

The empirical findings from this literature review point to a number of recommendations for the following types of policymakers and practitioners: international food companies involved in horticultural and commodities value chains; development donors; development NGOs; organizations promoting workers' rights in global supply chains; national governments; and trade unions and other workers' organizations. These recommendations are outlined below.⁶ The first two recommendations are generic in that they relate to all categories of workers; however, the remaining recommendations are specific to each of the four categories of workers, reflecting the fact that the key constraints faced by each category are quite distinct.

Firstly, in order to ensure that value chain programmes (and value-chain related interventions such as export promotion strategies) benefit informal workers, it is critical that they systematically include all categories of workers as key stakeholders and target beneficiaries as a matter of course. Specifically, these programmes must address the constraints and needs of female as well as male workers, and of informal as well as formal workers; and they must address the needs of all four categories of workers discussed in this paper, namely, employees in formal enterprises, employees in informal enterprises, owners of informal enterprises, and contributing family labour. A focus on workers is critical not only from a workers' rights perspective, but also from a poverty reduction and gender equity perspective, since the majority of women, as well as the majority of the poor, are typically found as workers rather than entrepreneurs within the focus global value chains.

Secondly, international food sourcing companies need to review and revise their purchasing practices, in order to reduce the continued pressure on suppliers/employers to downgrade working conditions. In particular, sourcing companies should ensure that the prices paid to suppliers allows adherence to international labour standards, ensure lead times are reasonable, and work towards longer term relationships with suppliers. Moreover companies, in conjunction with other players, including national governments, need to find ways to better mitigate the negative impacts on informal workers of sudden changes in market conditions, for example by improving the registration of informal workers under relevant state employment/social security schemes.

In order to improve the conditions of *informal workers in formal enterprises*, the following specific recommendations are important. Firstly, a concerted effort must be made by relevant policymakers to regularize and improve the conditions of informal workers to bring them in line with those of formal, permanent workers. This includes making sure that all workers entitled to permanent status are upgraded accordingly; bringing legal protections (including trade union rights) for informal workers in line with formal/permanent workers; and improving enforcement of existing legal rights for informal workers. Secondly, increased efforts to promote the implementation of international labour standards for all workers, informal and formal, must be made, with particular attention given to improving wages, reducing excessive overtime, improving respect for trade union rights, and addressing sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

Given its pervasiveness, specific efforts are needed to address gender discrimination. Thus, promotion of equal opportunities for women and men workers must be taken much more seriously than at present by legislators, food companies and labour code initiatives alike. In particular, the adoption and promotion of affirmative measures is needed to tackle vertical occupational segregation by gender and the concentration of women in

⁶ The recommendations contained in this section are the author's own. For a synthesis of relevant policy recommendations and examples contained in the existing value chain literature, please refer to the original literature review (Chan 2011a).

informal jobs. Equally, adoption and implementation of strict policies on sexual harassment are needed, as are policies and practices that allow women workers to better balance their productive and reproductive roles.

With regard to *owners of informal enterprises (specifically smallholders)*, policy priorities include the following. Firstly, efforts must be made to reduce barriers to entry into focus export value chains in order that more smallholders can participate in these chains, for example by providing training and support to a greater number of smallholders to meet the quality and sustainability standards required by the relevant export markets. Secondly, attention needs to be given to increasing returns for those smallholders who *are* able to participate in these chains. Key to this is improving the terms and conditions of trade for smallholders, including by strengthening smallholder organization (and hence increasing their bargaining power) and otherwise promoting clearer and more favourable terms and conditions in contracts between smallholders and buyers. Also important are continued efforts to improve the quality of, and access to, key production inputs, including credit and extension services.

Ultimately, however, it is also important to recognize that whatever efforts are made to improve their market access and returns, the majority of smallholders are likely to remain unable to meet the requirements of export markets, at least in the short to medium term. The policy interventions outlined above therefore need to be supplemented firstly by efforts to expand the number of decent paid employment opportunities provided by the focus export value chains, and secondly by policy initiatives that expand and strengthen domestic market opportunities for smallholders.

The same two-pronged approach applies in the specific case of women smallholders. On the one hand, interventions are needed to increase women's ability to engage as smallholders in target GVCs, for example by improving women's access to land and other production inputs, promoting crops traditionally grown by women, and adopting gender-sensitive membership rules for contract farming schemes. Equally important, however, it is prudent to acknowledge that engagement in GVCs as *smallholders* is likely to remain a limited option for the majority of poor rural women, due to their poor access to land and other entrenched constraints. Therefore, other policy options need to be considered. For example, when designing value chain interventions, particular attention should be given to supporting processing and packing operations (where female employment tends to predominate) and/or to promoting other waged employment opportunities for women; equally, efforts to increase returns for contributing family labour are also important in this regard.

In terms of specific recommendations for *hired workers on smallholder farms*, the starting point is that the employers (that is, smallholders themselves) are typically constrained by limited resources and poor knowledge of labour rights. There is thus a need to, firstly, educate both smallholders and their workers about labour rights, and to support workers to access their legal rights, including social security benefits, where these are applicable to informal workers. In such awareness-raising efforts, education methods must be accessible to both women and migrant workers, and special emphasis should be given to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Secondly, efforts are also needed to support workers to join relevant workers' organizations should they so choose, by providing relevant information and contacts. Thirdly, external support is needed to support smallholders to improve on-farm health and safety facilities and infrastructure.

Finally, central to improving conditions for *contributing female family labour* is to promote more equal sharing of costs (in particular labour costs) and benefits (in particular income) of GVC engagement between husbands and wives. Key to this is the introduction of awareness raising efforts in order to change men's and women's attitudes toward gender roles; and it is not only development organizations, but also governments and international food companies, that can play a part in challenging these patriarchal norms. In the longer term, supporting women to become smallholders or contract farmers in their own right is crucial (see above); promotion of waged employment and other income-generating opportunities for these women is equally important.

In the concluding section, we turn to the research implications and recommendations arising from the literature review.

4.3 Research Implications and Recommendations

The literature raises two types of research implications. One is methodological, that is, it concerns the current limitations of the value chain approach and how it can be strengthened. The second relates to the scope of the current knowledge base and the knowledge gaps identified, and hence concerns priority areas for future research. Each of these is addressed in turn below.

Strengthening the Value Chain Approach: Methodological Implications and Recommendations

The review of literature clearly shows that the vast majority of existing VCAs relating to the focus crops do not incorporate a labour perspective. However, there are no methodological constraints intrinsic in the VCA approach that prevent the incorporation of such a perspective, as demonstrated by the two labour-sensitive VCAs identified. Thus, a key recommendation arising from this paper is that any VCA that includes developmental aims must incorporate a labour perspective. Specifically, this means that VCAs, as a matter of course, need to consider workers at all levels in the chain as key value chain actors. Informal as well as formal workers, and women as well as men workers, need to be included. VCAs need to systematically analyze workers' roles, constraints, and relations with other value chain actors, and they need to assess how improving workers' conditions might help achieve poverty reduction goals. Such an approach is not new conceptually: the need for a labour perspective has been recognized by gender and labour protagonists for some time. However, practice continues to lag far behind the theory; and it is likely to require greater collaboration between value chain practitioners and labour specialists to bring about real change.

A second important methodological insight that emerges from the literature review is that both VCAs and VCIs, while valuable in their own right, have certain limitations, and hence need to be supplemented by additional modes of enquiry in order to paint a full picture of the world of informal work. The strength of VCAs and VCIs is that they provide a useful insight into the location, roles and conditions of informal workers in GVCs, and shed light on how value chain governance affects workers' conditions. However, they are less informative in terms of revealing *why certain workers are worse off than others*, and they do not provide a comprehensive framework for identifying *how to improve workers' conditions*. This is because the answers to these two questions rely as much on social, cultural, political and regulatory contexts as they do on value chain governance. Therefore, both VCAs and VCIs need to be supplemented by an analysis of these other situational factors, in order to present a complete picture and identify effective strategies for improving workers' conditions. As the literature demonstrates, many value chain analysts are aware of this need; however, the limitations of the value chain perspective deserves more emphasis, especially in the context of increasing interest in the "value chain approach" among development donors and practitioners.

A final methodological point revealed by the existing literature is the need for more simplified and practical methodological guidance on how to incorporate a systematic analysis of key labour issues into VCAs. This is not strictly a research issue, of course, but the expertise of labour and value chain researchers is needed to address the issue. There are three key target groups for this guidance, each of which is likely to require tailored guidance to suit their particular circumstances and needs. The first group comprises value chain practitioners within development organizations; development of practical guidance on labour-sensitive value chain analysis is important to encourage better uptake of a labour perspective within VCPs. The second group is workers' organizations. Practical guidance is needed to help these organizations analyze their own positions within GVCs, identify key value chain-related constraints, and identify potential leverage points for improving their conditions.

The third and final group is international food companies who have made ethical sourcing commitments. Practical guidance is needed to help them develop a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing labour issues in their supply chains. Currently, corporate ethical sourcing programmes tend to focus solely on workers in formal enterprises, and to a lesser extent on smallholders. The development of

appropriate guidance that helps them identify the roles and conditions of other categories of worker in their chains (that is, informal workers in informal enterprises, and contributing family labour) could increase the benefits of these programmes for informal (rather than just formal) workers.

Addressing Existing Knowledge Gaps: Priority Areas for Future Research

The literature reveals several clear priorities for future research on informal workers in the focus value chains. First and foremost, more research is needed on the following three groups of workers: informal workers in informal enterprises, including (but not limited to) hired workers on smallholder farms; small-scale processors and traders (that is, owners of informal enterprises other than smallholders); and contributing family labour (on smallholdings but also in other informal enterprises). This research is needed in all geographical regions and for all focus crops.

Secondly, in relation to informal workers in formal enterprises (that is, informal workers in commercial farms, packhouses and processing units), more research is needed on all focus sectors in Latin American and Asian countries. In terms of crop focus, additional research on informal workers in coffee, cocoa and tea value chains (rather than horticulture) would also be helpful.

In terms of the scope of research, studies that address the key research questions emphasized in this paper would be most valuable – that is:

- What are the roles and conditions of informal workers?
- How have they experienced GVC engagement?
- What are the key gender differences and other distributional issues?
- What are the common themes that emerge, and what are the key differences between crops and countries?
- How have working conditions changed in the last 10-15 years, and what has driven these changes?

In addition, the following research questions also need attention:

- What socio-cultural and regulatory contexts influence working conditions?
- What are key strategic entry points for improving workers' conditions?

Should a subsequent literature review of this nature be conducted in a further 10-15 years' time, it is hoped that a good number of these research gaps will have been addressed.

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About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information see www.wiego.org.



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