

Transparent Dialogue Can Enable Stronger Human Rights Action

Summary of Learnings from Oxfam and ETI Sweden Roundtables on Ethical trade in the Hand-Picked Fruit Sector in Morocco

APRIL 2024



April 2024

Oxfam and ETI Sweden organised several roundtable discussions on human rights challenges in the Moroccan handpicked fruits sector. Over the past year, a wide range of actors – supermarkets, suppliers, producers, civil society, trade unions, governmental officials, and standard owners – discussed how to prevent human rights violations in the sector. Prioritised human rights challenges were related to:

- (1) Transportation,
- (2) Global Sustainability Standards, and
- (3) Responsible Purchasing practices.

This document summarises the key take-aways from the roundtable discussions, lessons learned, and potential next steps.

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Introduction

The private sector is the largest employer globally, and plays a major role in people's lives, indeed, in all of society. Agriculture and food supply chains in particular generate millions of jobs worldwide and deliver customers a vast array of food products, all year round. At the same time, millions of people working in global food supply chains find themselves living in poverty and working under unsafe conditions. Harassment, forced labor and other human rights violations are common. This is also the reality for many workers in the handpicked fruit-sector in Morocco.

Many factors combined created momentum for Oxfam, ETI Sweden, Swedish Supermarkets and their suppliers, as well as other relevant actors to increase their efforts to improve human rights of workers in this sector in Morocco. Initial interest was sparked after a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) of Coop's Moroccan citrus supply chain that Oxfam worked together with Coop Sweden on. Two other Swedish Supermarkets and a supplier, all members of ETI Sweden, were also sourcing handpicked fruits from Morocco, and them being aware of the challenges in the sector - particularly the ones related to seasonal workers - resulted in the group considering joint efforts in the country. In addition, the momentum around the EU Corporate Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence Directive and several national laws sparked further interest among the involved companies to protect human rights in their supply chains.

Oxfam and ETI in UK have also collaborated for many years with a group of UK food retailers in the Better Strawberries Group (BSG) to improve the rights of workers growing strawberries. Since the ending of the BSG project, Oxfam has continued to engage on workers' rights in Morocco and learnings from that work was also a prominent part of this project.

Under the leadership of Oxfam and ETI Sweden, all relevant actors have gathered for a number of roundtable discussions during 2023 and 2024. The purpose of the discussions was to create a productive and constructive environment for all actors to develop a mutual understanding of the challenges that exist in the various stages of the supply chain and to make concrete suggestions for solutions. Another purpose was to enable the various actors to initiate a long-term collaboration that could inspire positive change in the entire sector, beyond this project.

This document summarises key take-aways from the roundtable discussions, lessons learned, and potential next steps.

Consultative Roundtable Discussions

The roundtable sessions served as a platform, both in-person and virtually, to engage Swedish supermarkets, their suppliers, Moroccan producers, and other relevant Moroccan stakeholders with the aim of enabling action for the improvement of working conditions within the agricultural sector in Morocco. The approach used was co-creative and solutions oriented. After the prioritization of challenges to work with, the participants were expected to collaborate to find solutions, and also identify what their role in the change should be.

The project unfolded in two distinct phases. Initially, an in-person session on March 14-15 2023 that provided a forum for participants to collectively identify and prioritize three key challenges. Subsequently, each of these challenges were discussed in virtual round-table discussions between March 2023 and February 2024. Each virtual round-table session presented an invaluable opportunity to discuss each challenge more in-depth and create mutual understanding of the challenges from the perspective of all stakeholders.

Prioritized challenges

- Safe transportation of workers
- Sustainability Standards
- Responsible purchasing practices



TRANSPORTATION

In Morocco, transport of workers is often organised by either labour providers or farms themselves. The transport conditions for agricultural workers are inadequate, adversely affecting the health and safety of the workers. The state of some vehicles and the condition of roads do not only result in delays but at worst to accidents. Transportation accidents occur due to unsafe vehicles, fatigue-related incidents due to long working hours, or injuries due to improper handling or loading of products.

Seasonal fluctuations in demand and production can lead to increased transportation activities, which may contribute to higher risks for accidents during peak harvest seasons. Understanding the specific patterns of accidents can enable targeted interventions and measures to prevent and address these risks.

Work-related accidents have a lasting impact on the affected workers. This is why the issue of transport conditions has been identified as a major problem requiring urgent attention. Audits carried out by sustainability standards can check the safe transportation of workers; in some cases, even if the transport is organized by subcontractors/ labour providers. There is, however, room for improvements, both in scope and the way audits are monitored (see next section on standards).

Key Takeaways and Recommendations of The Roundtable on Transport



- Monitoring transport conditions is an important first step to enable further action. The establishment of a national observatory of workers transport could keep records of transport conditions.
- Continued dialogue with standards can help to ensure that audits are better at discovering transport issues.
- The involvement of research and training institutions through partnerships and research projects could lead to innovative solutions to tackle transport issues.
- Raising transport standards of small to medium farms to those of larger farms could contribute to ensuring decent transportation for workers.
- Stakeholders could advocate for actions to be taken to improve transport and infrastructure conditions in a common co-signed letter to the Moroccan Government.

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

One of the takeaways from the first roundtable discussion, was that standards need to be more effective in detecting human rights violations such as unsafe transport and harassment of women workers. Several violations identified through the Coop Human Rights Impact Assessment undertaken by Oxfam, had gone undetected in regular audits.

It was mentioned that questions asked during audits need to be reworked to better detect human rights violations. For example, rather than only asking workers whether transport is provided, questions should also be asked about the quality of transport. Another notable obstacle highlighted was the language barrier, with most workers speaking Moroccan Arabic or Amazigh, but lacking translation during audits. It was also mentioned that workers, particularly women, do not feel safe to discuss their working conditions with auditors due to fears of job loss or other reprisals. In addition, they experience a lack of support systems. To avoid this from happening, sustainability standards need to work closely with civil society, especially women's rights organisations, to create safe spaces where women can voice their concerns.

Key Takeaways and Recommendations of The Roundtable on Global Sustainability Standards



- Sustainability standards need to be more effective in detecting human rights violations, e.g. by reworking questions asked during audits.
- Sustainability standards need to work closely with civil society, especially women's rights organisations, to create safe spaces where women can voice their concerns.
- At a minimum, standards should verify their findings with relevant NGOs and worker unions.
- Collaborative models involving NGOs, unions, businesses, and sustainability standards can support not only the identification of human rights violations, but also provide clear solutions about improvement suggestions – based on workers voices.
- A harmonized approach from buyers when using standards was identified as something desirable. It poses a challenge for the local producers when buyers use different standards with different requirements on the same market.

RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING PRACTICES

The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) require companies to identify, prevent and mitigate adverse human rights impacts and many countries have developed – or are in the process of developing – National Action Plans accordingly. National laws have been passed in many countries placing the responsibility for human rights in global supply chain on companies and by extension on the corporate executives that run them. The upcoming EU Corporate Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence Directive will extend the responsibility to thousands of more companies trading from and through the European Union.

There can be limits to what any individual company can do on its own to address human rights impacts in its supply chains. Usually, they are not the only ones buying from any given supplier, so acting alone might not always have a significant impact on conditions in the factory or farm they are sourcing from if it's just business as usual for all their other customers. Human rights violations are often caused by the way the industry as a whole operates. National and international legislation can create an enabling environment for human rights to be respected – national minimum wage levels that equate to a living wage, for example. But within those parameters, individual companies also need to change as their purchasing practices can contribute to human rights violations.

In the roundtable discussion, buyers underscored their unwavering commitment to respecting human rights, demonstrating a clear recognition of ethical responsibilities. This commitment encompasses aligning practices with international labor laws, ensuring fair treatment of workers, and promoting ethical business conduct throughout their value chain. Notably, several buyers advocated for the implementation of mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) legislation to strengthen these principles.

Buyers stressed the importance of a collaborative approach to address these challenges, emphasizing the need for close cooperation with producers, stakeholders, and other industry participants to develop mutually beneficial solutions for a more efficient and ethical supply chain.



Read more:

[The Workers Behind the Citrus Fruits \(Oxfam Research Report\)](#)

Key Takeaways and Recommendations of The Roundtable on Responsible Purchasing Practices



- Stakeholders discussed that it is difficult to detect if a higher consumer price is benefitting the workers in the end. They clearly highlighted the need for more transparency in supply chains, not least about the costs at each stage of the value chain.
- The participants emphasised the need for long-term collaboration between buyers, suppliers, and producers to build trust and enable transparency. Only when trust is established are supply chains actors able to openly discuss challenges in relation to sustainable sourcing.
- Abiding by standard requirements should be a base requirement. Supermarkets can make sure that only those suppliers upholding standards should be able to compete on prices in the first place.
- Suppliers are struggling to comply with the different requirements posed on them by local authorities and international buyers.

Results of The Project To Date



A dialogue between Swedish supermarkets and their suppliers, Moroccan producers, civil society, trade unions, governmental officials and standard owners has been achieved.



Producers are displaying increased openness towards initiatives that promote awareness of labor rights and are actively engaging in collaboration with civil society actors.



A majority of the stakeholders in the project have expressed an interest in continuing the collaboration.

Learnings



A clear learning was that separate discussions, with the different stakeholder groups, before the roundtable discussions clearly enabled trust building which was necessary to continue the project.



Stakeholders clearly appreciated the constructive approach of the roundtable discussions. It was mentioned that this creates more trust and enables dialogue.



The open dialogues enabled all stakeholders to better understand the challenges faced by each stakeholder in the supply chain and created a mutual understanding of human rights challenges. Stakeholders agreed that this fosters collaborative problem-solving to prevent human rights violations.



A general reflection from all the stakeholders is to narrow the scope in a next step and form working groups with concrete outputs.

A Potential Next Phase

For a potential next phase, there was a shared understanding that working groups should be formed to work on specific issues. A general reflection from all the stakeholders is to narrow the scope in a next step and form working groups with concrete outputs. Each working group should appoint a project leader and do research on existing projects and models to build on existing learnings and to prevent duplication of work.

Some of the potential themes for the work groups to focus on is building a Moroccan platform for ethical trade, implement pilot projects to improve standards regarding transport and gender equality, and continued capacity building for the stakeholders.

POTENTIAL THEMES & WORKING GROUPS

- Establishment of a Moroccan platform for ethical trade to bring all stakeholders together and ensure their continued engagement. Stakeholders should define an annual action plan which will be implemented and then evaluated the following year.
- Implementing a pilot project together with global sustainability standards to ensure audits will get better at discovering issues related to transport and/or gender equality.
- Create a best practice guideline for transport based partly on lessons learned from other sectors and/or countries.
- Capacity building (i.e. training of producers, workers and auditors)
- Advocacy on safe transport and/or gender equality and/or collective bargaining agreements.

Annex

Overview of Key-Participating Stakeholders

Swedish Supermarkets

- Axfood
- Coop
- ICA

International Suppliers

- Greenfood
- Greenpac
- Berryworld
- Dole Nordic
- Maroc Fruit

Moroccan Producers

- Adrar/Amcas
- Agrana
- Agsous
- Copag
- Delassus/Duroc
- Dirafrost
- Qualiprim
- Quality bean

Global Standards

- Amfori
- Global Gap
- Sedex

Civil Society

- Oxfam Morocco
- Entre-elles Souss-Massa
- Feminist union of Agadir
- Association Voix de Femmes Marocaines
- Association Migration et Développement
- ASFDC
- IEECAG Région Souss Massa
- Organisation Marocaine pour le Protection de l'Environnement et la Citoyenneté
- Association Al Oumouma Inzegane
- Association Al Wafae Féminine pour le Développement
- Réseau des association biosphère arganiers (Taroudant)
- ASVT

Labor Unions and Worker Representatives

- Democratic Confederation of Work Souss-Massa (CDT)
- Labor Inspection Souss-Massa
- Ministry of Employment Souss-Massa
- UMT

Acknowledgements

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This report was written by Christopher Atapattu Riddselius (ETI Sweden) and Caroline von Uexküll (Oxfam Sweden), with support from Mira Alestig (Oxfam Sweden). Oxfam and ETI Sweden acknowledge the important assistance in its production of Khalil Dekiki (Oxfam Morocco), Abdeljalil Laroussi (Oxfam Morocco), and Kamilia Rouane (Oxfam Morocco).

Oxfam and ETI Sweden gratefully acknowledge the valuable contributions of all stakeholders involved in the roundtable discussions.

Renderings & design: Julia Carlzon (Oxfam Sweden)

Cover photo: Hands Picking Citrus Unshiu (Tangerine). Credit: Canva

Who We Are



Oxfam is a global confederation fighting inequality to beat poverty and injustice. We fight climate inequality, economic inequality and injustices which cause poverty and oppression - and we are there during crises and catastrophes. Together with millions of allies, we work in over 80 countries. We bring new knowledge, we give people tools for change and demand that those in power take responsibility. Our work is founded in the human rights and we will not stop until everyone's rights and equal value is respected.



Ethical Trading Initiative Sweden (ETI Sweden) is a member organisation for companies, trade unions, NGOs and public sector, working together on responsible business conduct and human rights in global supply chains.