

Social Impacts and Labor Conditions on the Farm

liz muller, I.I.c.

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Background

- ▶ Sustainable agriculture respects workers' rights and needs, respects the environment, provides a fair income to the farmer, and supports and enhances rural communities.
- ▶ Social issues relate to both working conditions – labor standards – and socio-economic development.
- ▶ The issues associated with cotton are the same as those found throughout agriculture. The relative importance of each particular issue and means of improving conditions will vary from region to region and community to community.
- ▶ Global standards for labor rights exist: the challenge is how to effect the change needed.
- ▶ Issues and solutions for smallholders will differ from those in formal employment situations.
- ▶ Organic and Fair Trade are effective in achieving their goals, but there is room for other supply chain players to be engaged in efforts to promote better practices.

Decent labor conditions must be built on a foundation of basic human rights.



*The right to development is the **measure of the respect of all other human rights**. That should be our aim: a situation in which **all individuals are enabled to maximize their potential, and to contribute to the evolution of society as a whole.***

-- Kofi Annan, Former United Nations Secretary-General

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights contains 30 Articles that identifies issues ranging from basic freedom to freedom of speech and association, discrimination to land ownership rights, and wages and rest and core labor standards. It should be noted, that the broader issue of 'social conditions' are not, however, officially recognized as human rights.

Labor issues have been identified and programs exist to facilitate basic human rights in a labor context. National laws exist in most countries.

International Labor Organisation (ILO)*

Core Labor Standards

- Effective Abolition of Child Labour
- Elimination of Discrimination in Employment and Occupation
- Elimination of All Forms of Forced or Compulsory Labor
- Freedom of Association and the Effective Recognition of the Right to Collective Bargaining

Decent Work is work that:

- Is productive and safe work
- Ensures respect of core labor standards
- Provides an adequate income
- Offers social protection
- Incl. social dialogue, trade union freedom, collective bargaining & participation

* ILO is the tripartite UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world. ILO establish international labor standards and seeks to ensure they are respected in practice as well as principle.

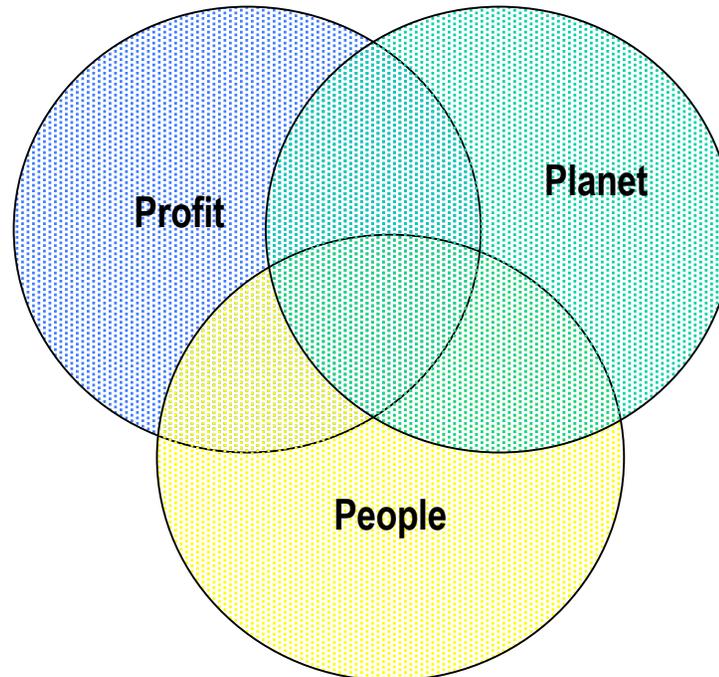
Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)*

Base Code

- Employment is freely chosen
- Freedom of Association and the right to collective bargaining
- are respected
- Working conditions are safe and hygienic
- Child labour shall not be used
- Living wages are paid
- Working hours are not excessive
- No discrimination is practiced
- Regular employment is provided
- No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed

ETI is an alliance of companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and trade union organizations. ETI exists to promote and improve the implementation of corporate codes of practice which cover supply chain working conditions.

Social justice is one of the three pillars of sustainability.



Social justice is a combination of labor, economic and environmental justice. It is important to understand the interconnection (often in cause and effect manner) of social, environmental and economic issues. With this understanding one can address the root cause and making lasting change. Some underlying economic factors that keep people in poverty are:

- High input prices,
- Crop failure,
- Delayed payment or no payment from purchaser/ginner,
- Unaffordable rates of interest, and
- Increased use of chemical pesticides, creating increased resistance, thence requiring additional applications and hence increased input debt.

How do we address labor and broader social issues on the farm in all regions of the world?



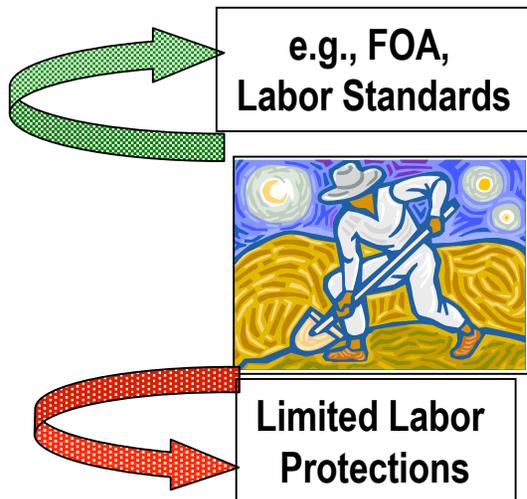
There are varying labor conditions in the agriculture arena. A few examples include:

- Smallholders are not employees and don't have certain protections. These same smallholders may employ others.
- Where formal employer-employee relationships exist, labor laws and protections may vary. For example, in some countries labor laws don't extend to the agriculture sector.
- Often in agriculture, housing and other needs are linked to their employment, creating additional complexities.

These issues are often much larger than what consumers/retailers can solve for at a global scale. However, we must start somewhere.

At a minimum labor laws should be enforced in formal employee/employer situations.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship



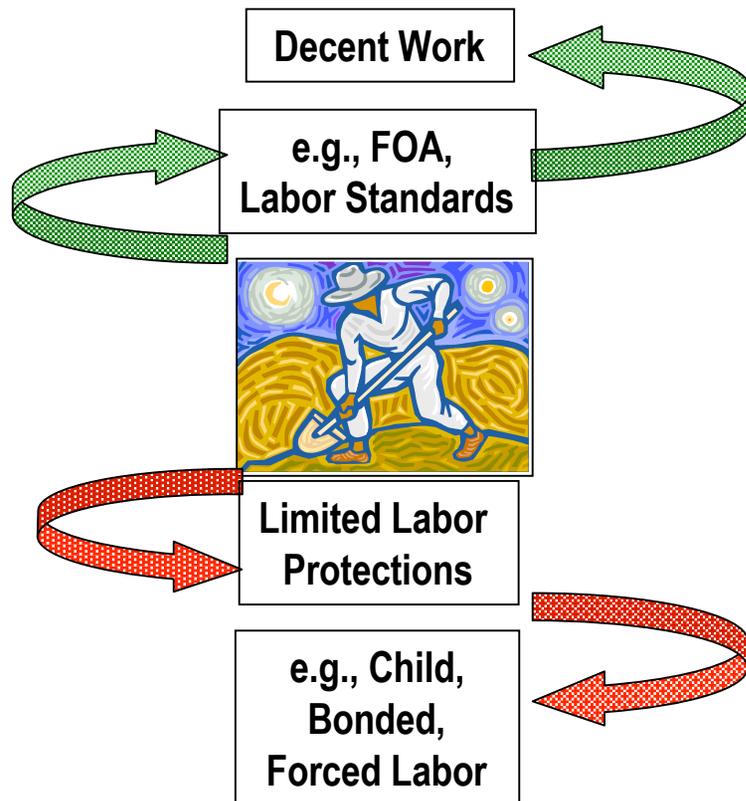
Freedom of Association allows employees to have a voice, even where labor laws may not officially apply. This collective voice can be empowering.

Smallholder



Proper working conditions can lead to additional social benefits while under protected workers can suffer additional ills.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship



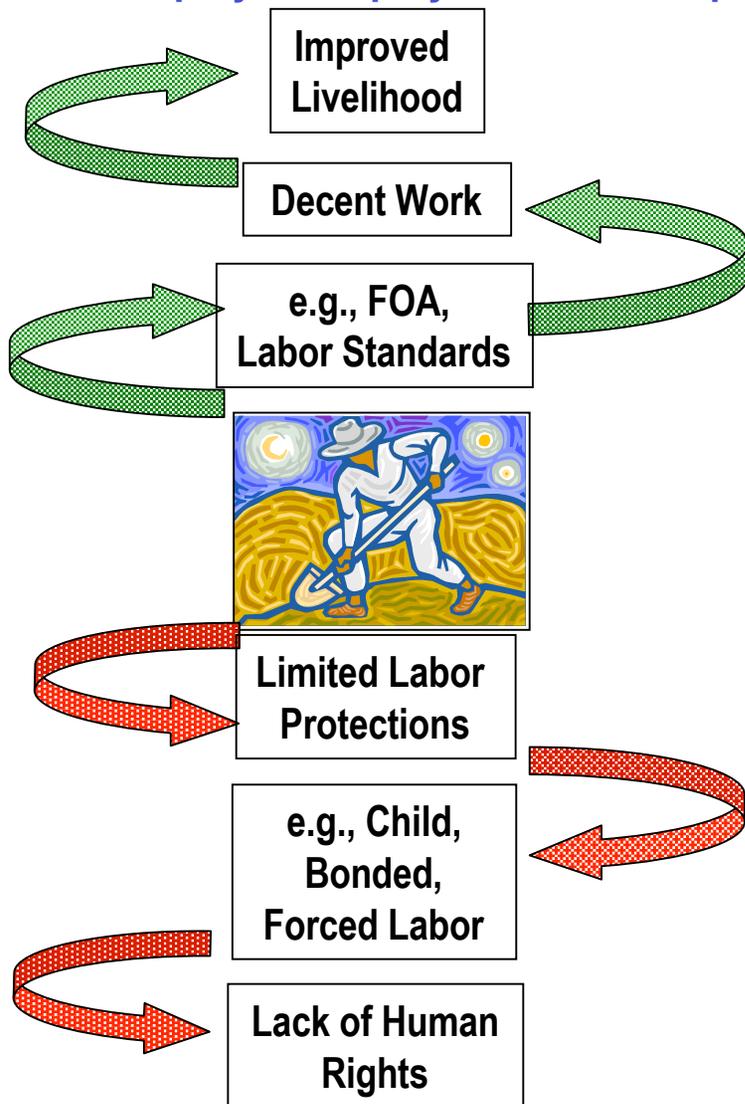
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Working together workers can bring about more positive change. Without protections, other abuses may follow.

Improved conditions on the cotton farm can lead to improved livelihoods while poor labor protections can lead to lack of basic human rights.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship

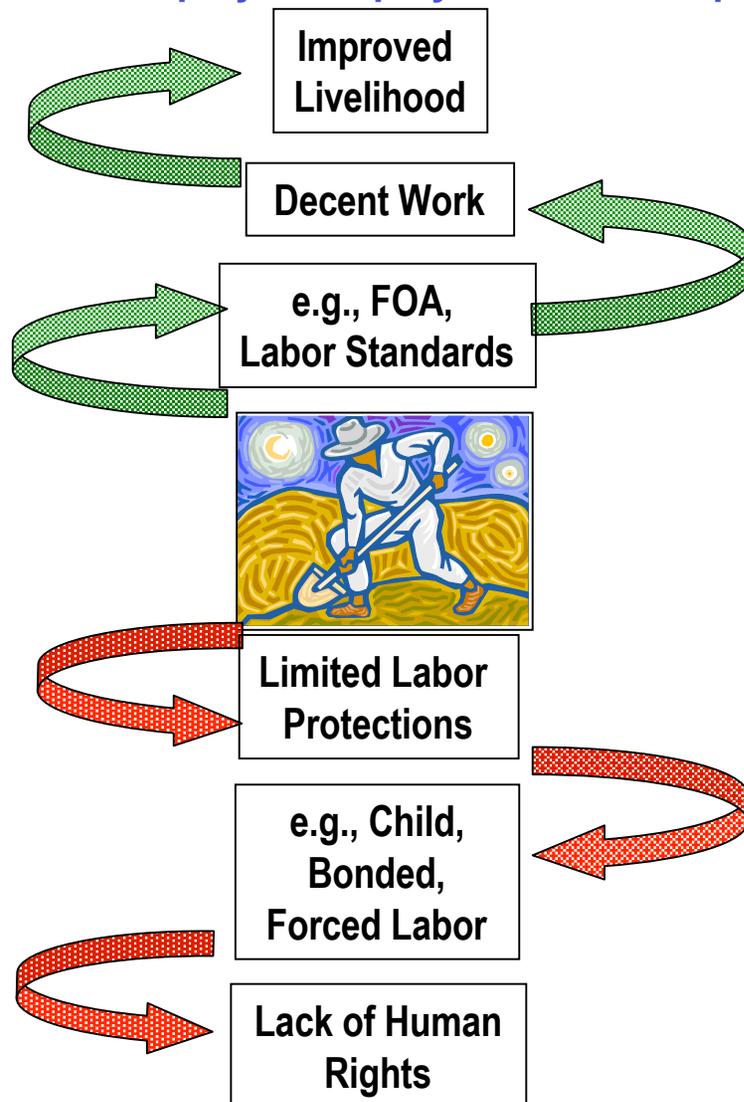


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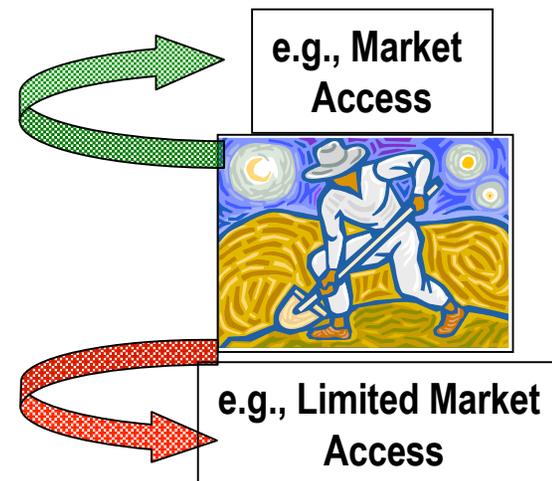


Smallholders may benefit from a collective voice when negotiating inputs and commodity prices.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship



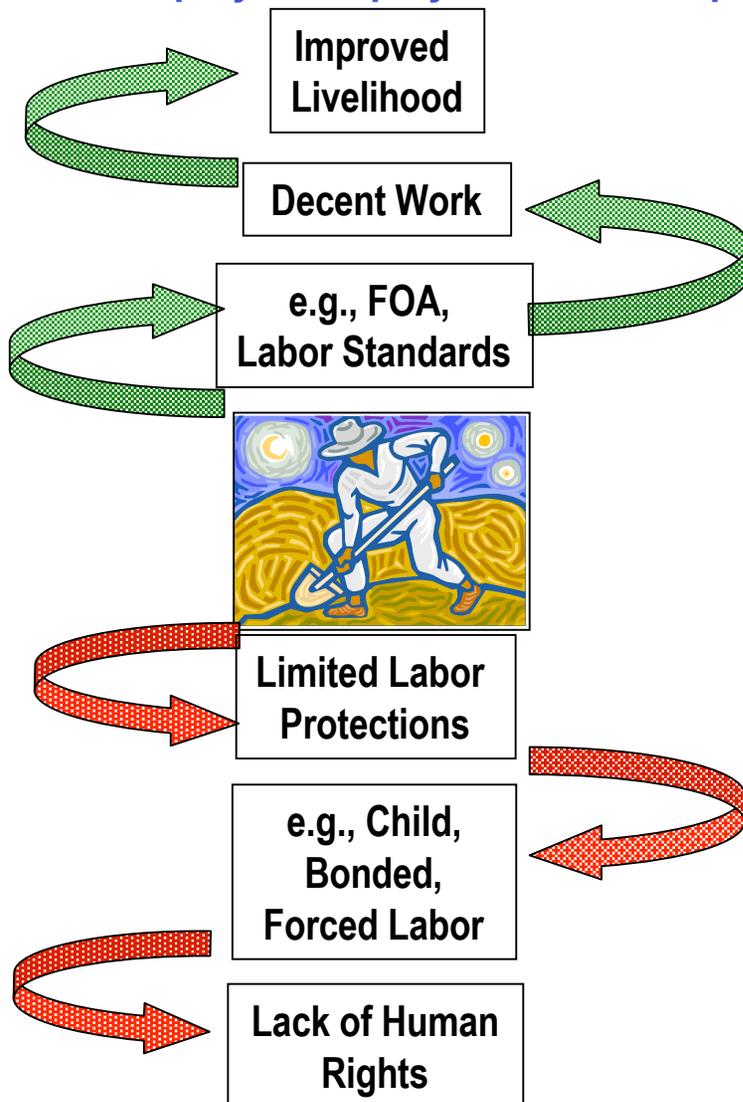
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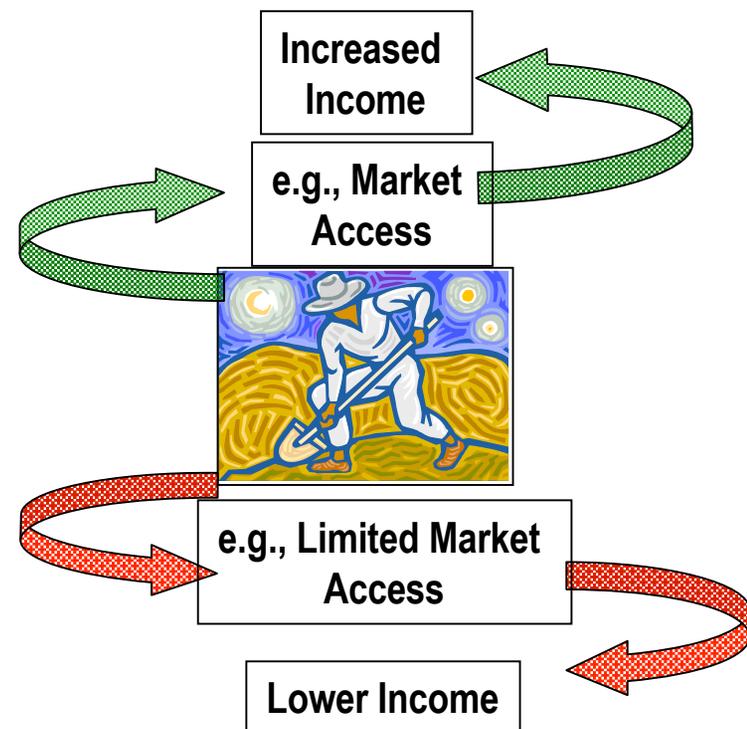
In a smallholder context, the solutions may be more closely linked to net income of the farmer.

Increased income allows growers to send children to school (if available), amongst other benefits. Limited income can be a downward spiral for a smallholder.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship

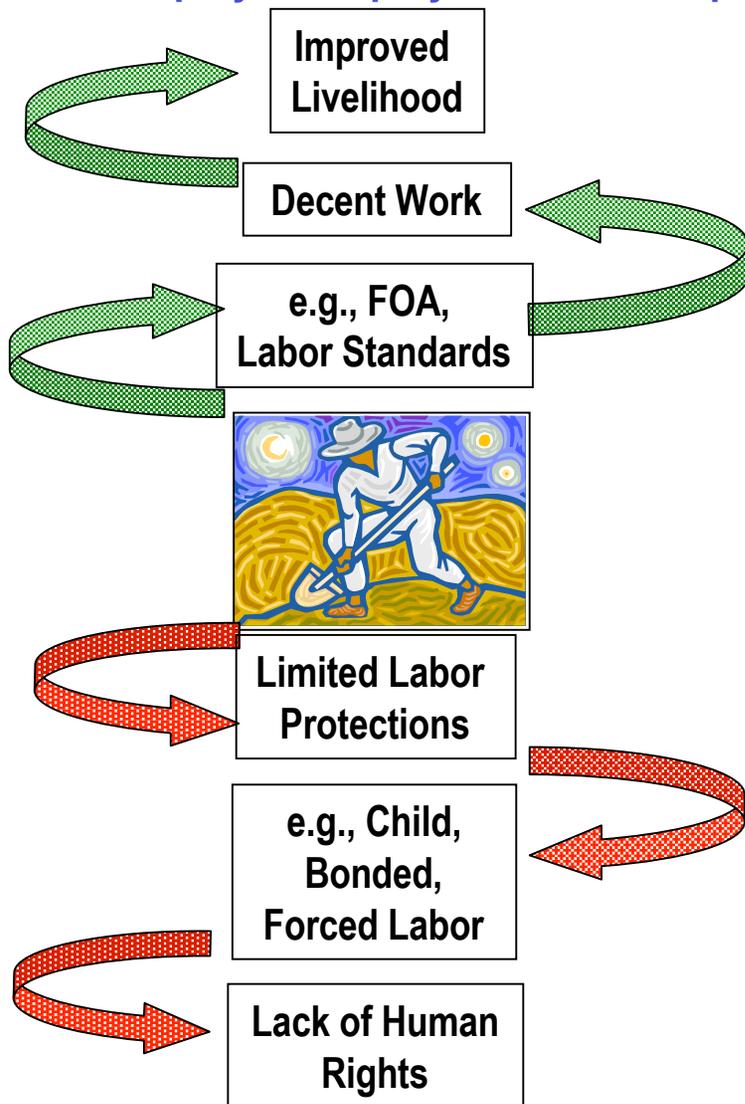


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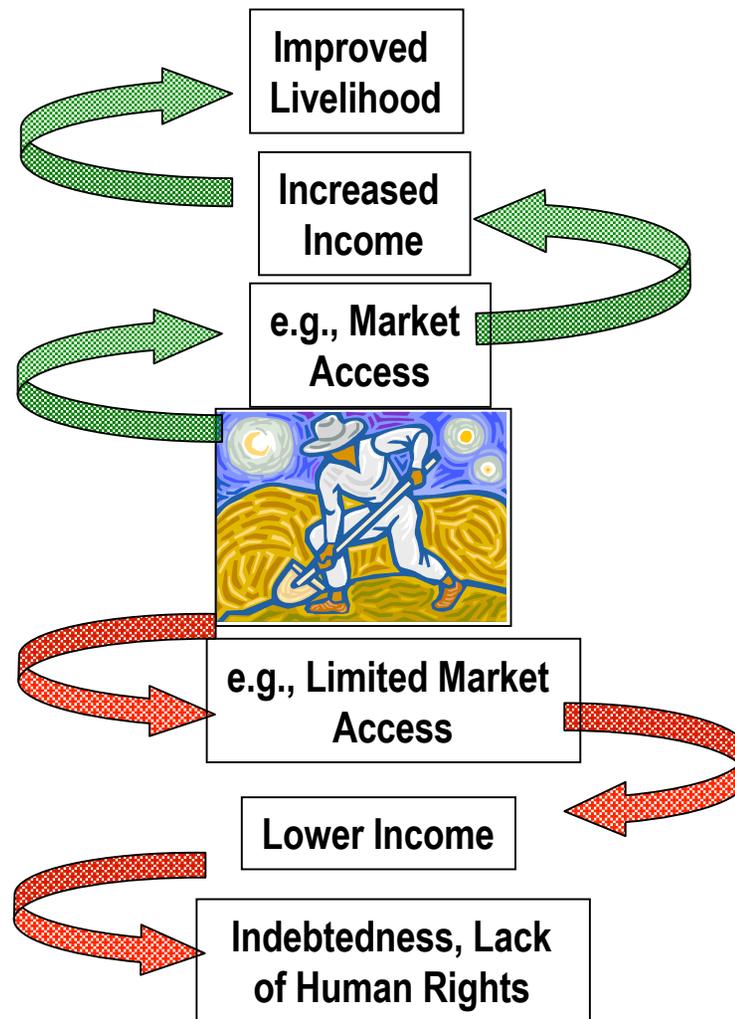


Through expansion of wealth and a collective voice, farmer communities would benefit. While high interest rates and/or crop failure can contribute to indebtedness.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship

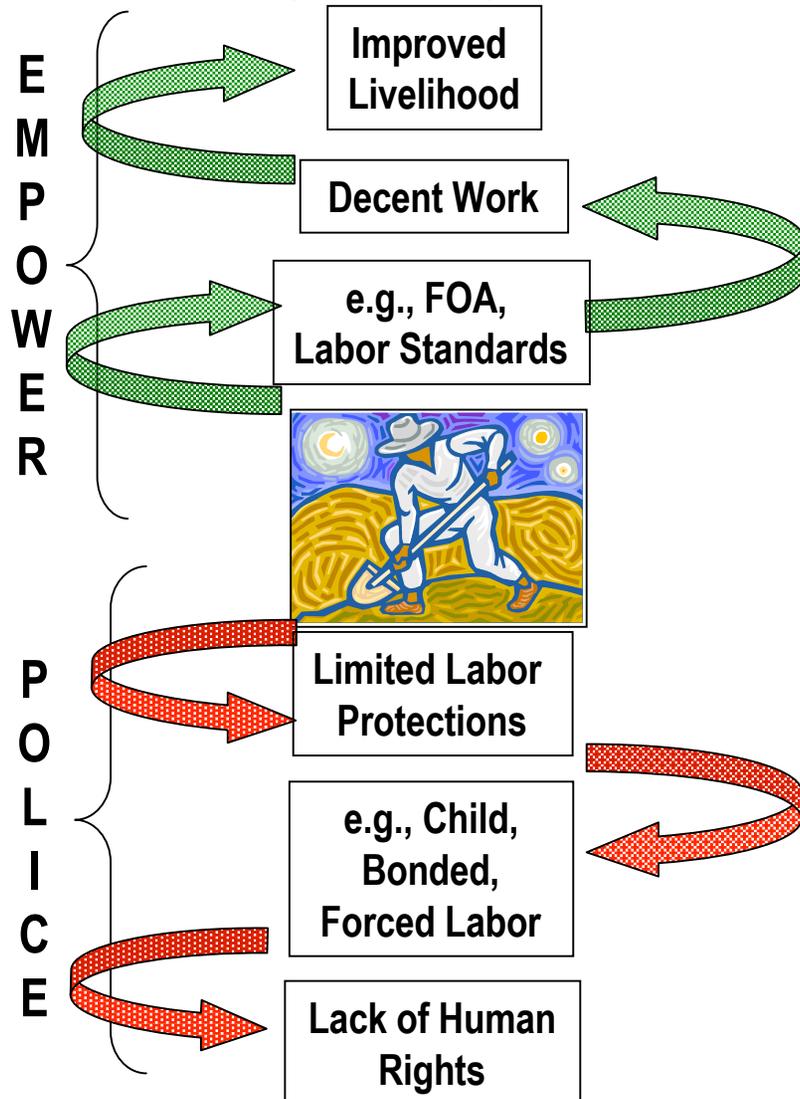


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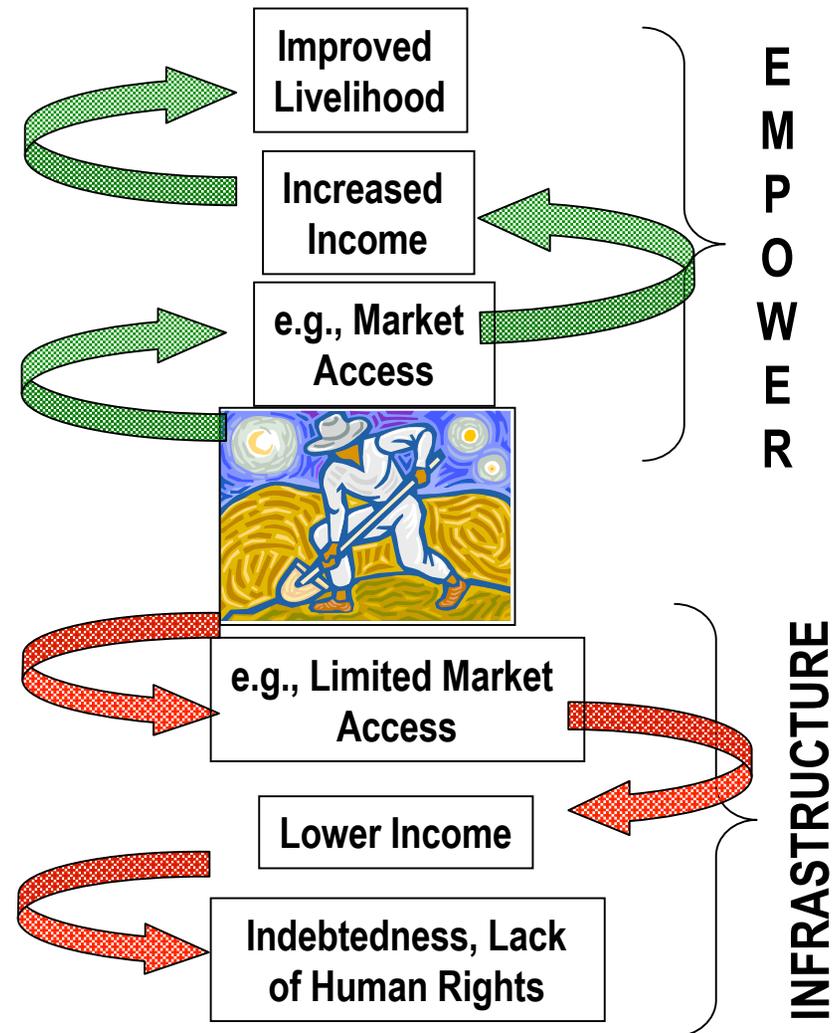


Different approaches must be applied to achieve different objectives.

Formal Employee/Employer Relationship



Smallholder



Thank you.

Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.

HH The Dalai Lama