DRIVING DECENT WORK:

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE SUPPLY CHAIN APPROACHES?

SYNTHESIS REPORT
June 2024

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With support from the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)

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Reviewers: Vidya Rangan and Vi Nguyen
Report design: Catherine Perry
Date of publication: June 2024

Suggested citation: Skalidou, D. and Oya, C., 2024, *Driving decent work: how effective are supply chain approaches?* Available at https://www.evidensia.eco

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List of abbreviations

GBA	Global Binding Agreements
GFA	Global Framework Agreement
HIC	High Income Country
ILO	International Labour Organization
LMIC	Low- and Middle-Income Country
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PICO	Population or Problem; Intervention or exposure; Comparison or control; Outcome(s)
ToC	Theory of Change
VSS	Voluntary Sustainability Standard

Glossary of key terms used

Accord and Alliance: The Accord for Fire and Building Safety (Accord) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Workers' Safety (Alliance), were the two main multi-stakeholder responses to the Rana Plaza tragedy. The scale of the human tragedy associated with this disaster brought long-ignored issues of health and safety to the forefront of the agenda for key international stakeholders and triggered a series of actions. Among them, the most prominent action was the adoption of the Accord, signed by "more than two hundred international brands from twenty countries (mainly European), two European-based international unions (UNI Global Union and Industrial Global Union), eight of their associated labour federations in Bangladesh along with four international NGOs as witness signatories" (Kabeer et al., 2019: 1365). The range of actors involved and the legally binding nature of the agreement marked a new era in multi-stakeholder action in the apparel sector.

Better Work programme: The Better Work programme is a collaboration between the United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group. The programme grew out of a trade agreement between the United States and Cambodia in 1999, in which access to the United States apparel market was dependent upon significant improvements in working conditions in Cambodian garment factories. Working conditions were monitored and reported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Oka, 2010a). Since then, the programme has expanded to 13 countries in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The Better Work programme assesses factories against ILO labour standards and national labour laws, whilst also providing factories with training and advisory services to improve their systems for pursuing compliance (Better Work, 2023; Babbitt et al., 2020). The programme also seeks to enhance gender equality, address sexual harassment, and close the gender pay gap in the industry through targeted factory initiatives (Djaya et al., 2019).

Corporate codes of conduct: This refers to a company's policy statements that define their ethical or sustainability standards or rules for sourcing and procurement. The way these statements are drafted can vary greatly. Corporate codes of conduct are completely voluntary and vary extensively in design and format. They can address any issue, such as workplace issues and workers' rights. Their implementation is driven by the company concerned (ITILO, 2024).

Counterfactual: Impact evaluations provide information about the observed changes or impacts produced by a programme. They establish the cause of the observed impacts by ruling out the possibility of any influencing factors other than the programme of interest. Key to an impact evaluation is the counterfactual, which assesses what would have happened if a person or unit of observation had not participated in the programme. Estimating the counterfactual requires identifying and comparing a statistically identical treatment group and comparison group to determine the cause of the programme's outcomes. The treatment and comparison groups must have identical average characteristics in the absence of the programme, the treatment should not affect the comparison group directly or indirectly, and the outcomes of units in the control group should change in the same way as outcomes in the treatment group.

Decent work: This involves opportunities for work that are productive, deliver a fair income, workplace security, and social protection, as well as provide better prospects for personal development and social integration. It also means freedom to express concerns, power to organize and participate in important life decisions and the provision of equal opportunities and treatment for all women and men (ILO, 2024).

Double squeeze: Suppliers in the apparel sector often face a double squeeze on their profits and sourcing practices to meet the rising demands of buyers (Anner, 2020). This double profit and sourcing squeeze can result in suppliers putting pressure on the working conditions of their workers, undermining wages, working hours, the health and safety of the environment, and increasing the risk of mistreatment and abuse. When this double squeeze is combined with informal labour arrangements and a lack of workers' protection in local labour markets, this can increase the vulnerability of workers.

Global Framework Agreement (GFA): This is an agreement between a multi-national company (typically a major buyer like Inditex) and a global union federation (such as IndustriALL) to ensure that the company's supply chain adheres to the same labour standards in every country in which it operates (Eurofound, 2024).

Key (or essential) workers: Key workers are needed for societies to function. They work in food systems, healthcare, retail, security, manual trades, cleaning and sanitation, transportation, or as technicians and clerks.

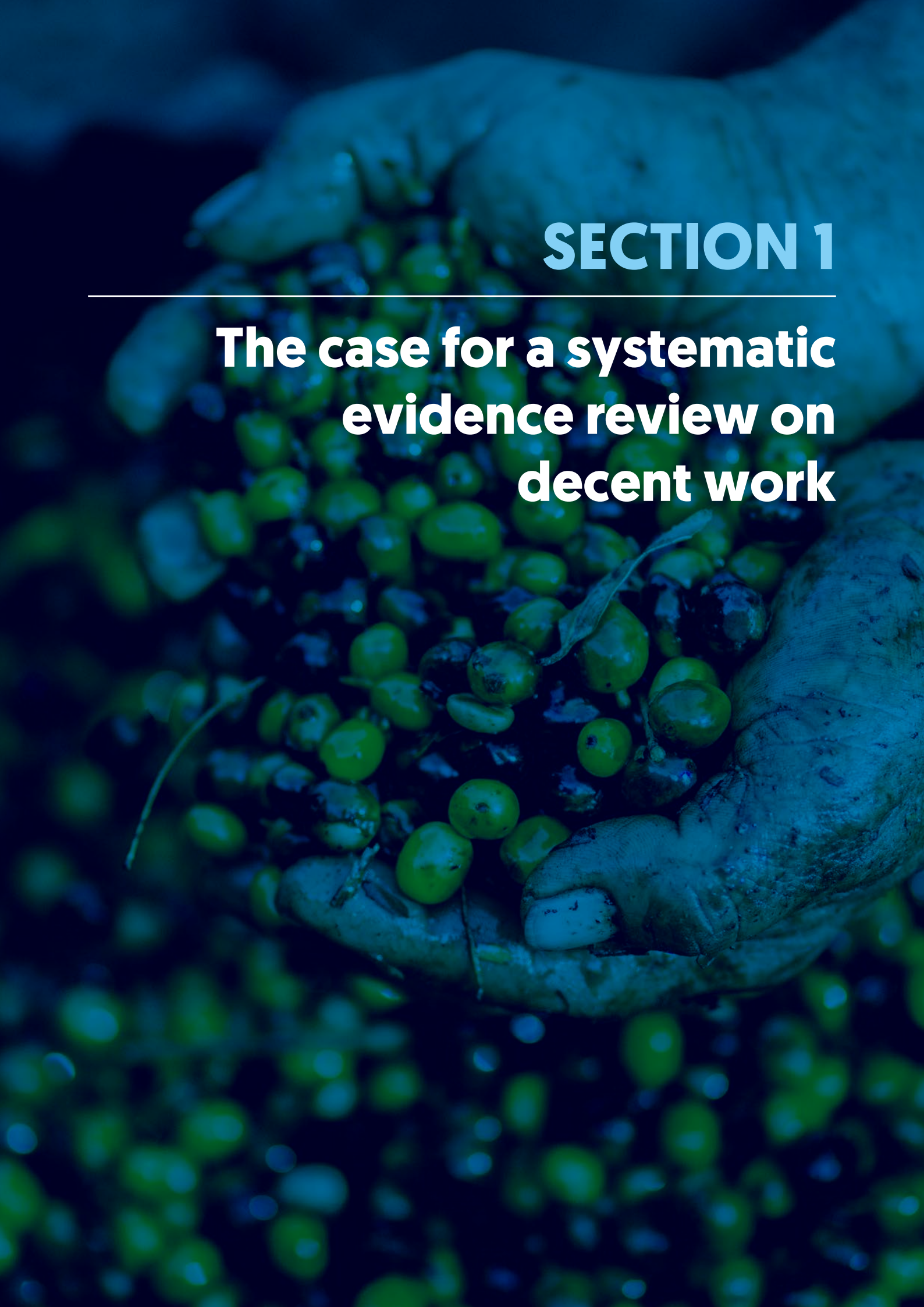
Non-counterfactual: Research methods that do not rely on constructing comparison groups with controls for confounding factors produce non-counterfactual evidence. These include research designs where the outcomes of interest of "treatment" and "control" groups are not compared (e.g. ethnography, case studies and other qualitative research designs and methods), or, research designs that cannot ensure that the only difference between the comparison groups is programme exposure. This includes before-and-after comparisons or enrolled-and-non-enrolled comparisons, without accounting for confounding factors and selection bias.

PICOS framework: This is the most commonly used model for structuring systematic review questions because it captures each key element required for a focused question. PICOS stands for Population or Problem, Intervention or exposure, Comparison or control, Outcome, Study Type/Design (Mssm, 2024).

PRISMA flow diagram: This depicts the flow of information through the different phases of a systematic review. It maps out the number of records identified, included and excluded from the review, and the reasons for these being excluded.

Social upgrading: This is the process of improving "the rights and entitlements of workers as social actors, which enhances the quality of their employment" (Barrientos et al 2011: 324).

Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS): These are private, voluntary standards that require products on the market to meet specific economic, social and environmental sustainability criteria. The requirements of such standards can refer to product quality, production and processing methods, and transportation. Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) are mostly designed and marketed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private firms. They are adopted by various actors along the value chain, from farmers to retailers. Sometimes, certifications and labels are used to identify products that have successfully implemented the requirements of a VSS (UNCTAD, 2024).



SECTION 1

The case for a systematic evidence review on decent work

Decent work in focus

Decent work is one of the most challenging aspects for advancing social sustainability. The dynamics of global business transformations, economic growth, and crisis have generated vast employment opportunities on a global scale.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that global supply chains employed 75 million workers in South-East Asia in 2021. This accounts for more than 25 percent of total employment in the region and marks a yearly increase of 7 million jobs (Viegelahn et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the working conditions of these jobs are often inadequate, and fall short of the ILO definition of decent work – work that provides opportunities for fair income, workplace security, social protection, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom to express concerns, and equal opportunities and treatment for women and men.

The scarcity of decent work in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) is well documented. This is particularly the case for the agricultural and apparel sectors, that are frequently singled out as facing some of the biggest challenges in achieving decent work. Put together, the apparel and agriculture sectors employ 40 percent of the global workforce. Approximately 430 million people or 12.6 percent of the world's working population work in the global garment and textile industries (Solidarity Centre, 2023). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimates that 873 million people or 27 percent of the global working population work in agriculture (FAO, 2023). Both sectors employ large numbers of vulnerable workers.

Among these workers are women, children and young workers aged 15-24 years, as well as migrant workers and temporary workers, who are all particularly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, or abuse. The precise numbers of vulnerable workers in both sectors is difficult to obtain as there are different definitions of 'vulnerability' and variations in how vulnerable workers are reported. Vulnerable workers also often work at the fringes of legal and formal employment, making them elusive and hidden from official statistics.

Nevertheless, it is well established that women make up 43 percent of the global agricultural workforce (FAO, 2024), and between 60 to 80 percent of the global apparel sector depending on the region. Child labour is prevalent in both sectors, with more than 100 million children estimated to be working on farms and plantations around the world (OHCHR, 2022). Estimates suggest that a similar number of children are negatively affected by the poor working conditions in the apparel sector. They are affected not only as workers, but also as children of working mothers facing weak maternity protection, absence of childcare and breastfeeding support in factories, and poor water, sanitation and healthand living conditions in garment worker communities (UNICEF, 2020).

The number of migrant workers involved in global agriculture is even more difficult to estimate due to the seasonal nature of their work. In the apparel sector we also lack concrete numbers on migrant workers involved, although we know that these numbers are rising. The Clean Clothes Campaign (2024) reports an increase in migrant workers in garment factories located in Europe, the United States and Australia, caused by brands and retailers relocating their production and manufacturing operations closer to consumer markets. This is being done to comply with the demand for tight turnaround times and to reduce their transport costs. However, to maintain the "low prices of the Asian or African industries", suppliers often end up employing migrant workers.

The prevailing labour regimes are also characterized by job insecurity, low wages, and lack of workers' representation. This can lead to exploitative working conditions as workers' rights are harder to defend without effective collective action. This also happens in High-Income Countries (HICs), especially for migrant labour in agriculture, but the challenges are pervasive in LMICs.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Media reports often highlight precarious working conditions in the global agriculture sector, such as cases of trafficked child labour in cocoa production in West Africa, or poor working conditions among migrant workers in vegetable fields in California and Southern Europe. The apparel sector has also been a frequent target of shocking reports of abuses and poor working conditions under the banner of "sweatshops", particularly after the Rana Plaza disaster (Mezzadri, 2016). Given the importance of food in human consumption, and how the COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the plight of 'essential workers' in these sectors,[1] it is ironic that poor working conditions continue to be frequently reported in media and research. Despite the growing media visibility of these workers since the pandemic, efforts to substantially improve their working conditions remain a challenge.

Decent work outcomes[2] include wages and remuneration, working terms and conditions, core labour rights and worker voice and representation. There is rich literature on these decent work outcomes, as well as on what drives them within the agriculture and apparel sectors. However, few efforts have been made so far to systematically review this body of literature, and to establish knowledge gaps and identify good practices.

There is growing urgency amongst governments and organizations promoting social sustainability standards to tackle challenges related to decent work and to find new ways of overcoming the vicious circles of job insecurity, workers' vulnerability, and low pay. The emergence of new European Union legislation with social conditionality to promote basic labour standards, and due diligence requirements for supply chains to safeguard human rights, are testament to the severity of these issues.

In response to this, VSS have focused on decent work in the agriculture and apparel sectors, through social compliance audits to assess against a set of social standards, raising awareness of the problem, supporting training on the issue, and fostering partnerships like the Global Living Wage Coalition to inform collaborative action on achieving a decent standard of living.[3]

Corporate codes of conduct based on sustainability initiatives have also proliferated in companies selling agriculture-based products and services, as well as those in the apparel sector. These include Mondelez, Nestlé, Starbucks, Sainsburys, H&M, Inditex, and many others. Some of these company sustainability initiatives mimic the strategies of VSS by developing their own in-house standards and codes of conduct. Yet, labour standards are not always as prominent as other issues, such as 'fair prices' to farmers. However, such company sustainability initiatives can result in more ambitious binding agreements between large brands, unions and governments, including social compliance audits and tighter monitoring of supply chains. Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) are examples of such multi-stakeholder initiatives.

The ILO has also stepped up efforts to accelerate the decent work agenda in global food systems, in alliance with other international non-governmental organizations like the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Care[4]. Understanding how core labour standards operate in different contexts, the impact of past and existing sustainability initiatives, and the drivers of these outcomes, is critical for informing ongoing and future decent work initiatives.

1. According to ILO (2023b) key workers are needed for societies to function. They work in food systems, healthcare, retail, security, manual trades, cleaning and sanitation, transportation, and as technicians and clerks.
2. The term 'outcome' here is understood as a change that we expect to observe as a result of a policy or intervention. A list of possible short- and mid-term outcomes, as well as impacts (long-term outcomes) are presented in the synthetic theory of change which can be found in Figure 1.
3. Please refer to: https://globallivingwage.org/
4. Please refer to: https://decentworkinfoodsystems.org/about/

How this study adds value

There is a rich literature on how production and trade dynamics affect labour outcomes for both agriculture and apparel. The literature also focuses on the different interventions, policies and forms of collective action that can affect labour outcomes in the agriculture and apparel sectors. However, **there is a lack of robust quantitative counterfactual evidence on their impact.** There is more non-counterfactual evidence in the literature, and particularly on the impact of VSS on labour outcomes.

There is a tendency among many organizations and researchers to look at these interventions using a mixture of different research methods, and combining a qualitative lens with some descriptive quantitative evidence, and/or from the perspective of before-after comparisons. The problem with this approach, however, is that it does not help establish causality or a sense of which effects are directly attributable to the interventions.

There is also a diverse range of supply chain sustainability approaches and interventions that vary in implementation and scope across different countries, geographical regions, commodities, production networks and beneficiaries. These include third-party certification, corporate social compliance audits, training and awareness campaigns, and multi-stakeholder alliances that focus on specific decent work issues. These different approaches and interventions can affect a vast array of labour outcomes for multiple types of employers, from smallholder farmers hiring casual workers to large agribusiness plantations and apparel factories.

Given the complex interplay of the multiple factors contributing to working conditions and decent work outcomes, it is challenging to establish a direct link between specific social sustainability interventions and decent work outcomes. To complicate matters, there are also multiple indicators for labour standards, which cover multiple diverse areas. Selecting the most appropriate indicators is also a matter of debate.

In response to this, ISEAL, IDH, Rainforest Alliance and Evidensia partnered to commission an independent systematic review of the literature. The aim was to understand the most effective supply chain sustainability approaches and interventions for improving decent work outcomes in agricultural and apparel production in LMICs, as well as grasping the key contextual, adoption and implementation dynamics affecting these interventions.

To this end, the systematic review identified and reviewed the body of literature providing counterfactual evidence on the effects of these approaches on a range of decent work outcomes for waged employees. This includes those working in various contexts, such as smallholder farms, large agribusiness companies, and textile and apparel companies.

As a result, the reviewed evidence refers to a wide range of employer types, which are characterized by different business imperatives and capabilities. The analysis of the effects of these different supply chain sustainability approaches is complemented by relevant factual, descriptive, and contextual qualitative evidence, which provides more insights on the adoption and implementation dynamics surrounding these approaches.

The findings from the systematic review are shared in three reports. This report shares key cross-sector insights and recommendations from both the agriculture and apparel sectors. It is accompanied by two separate sector-specific reports which offer an opportunity to dive deeper into sector results.

SECTION 2

Research scope and approach

Pathways to social upgrading

We draw on Gereffi and Lee's work on social upgrading in global value chains and industrial clusters (Gereffi and Lee, 2016) to conceptually frame the scope of this systematic review. From this we can develop a theory of change to illustrate how supply chain sustainability approaches that are aiming to improve decent work outcomes may work. 'Social upgrading' refers to the process of improving "the rights and entitlements of workers as social actors, which enhances the quality of their employment" (Barrientos et al 2011: 324).


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Six pathways to social upgrading are distinguished:

1. The **market-driven path**, where market dynamics and consumers lead to changes in labour outcomes.
2. The **public governance path**, through state actors and legislation shaping regulation at macro- and sector-level.
3. The **supplying firms (cluster-driven) path**, driven by collectives of suppliers agreeing to abide by minimum standards for reputational reasons.
4. The **corporate sustainability path**, where global lead firms develop codes of conduct to avoid reputational damage and to ensure that future supply is sustained and uninterrupted.
5. The **multi-stakeholder path**, where different stakeholders (global buyers, unions, civil society organizations, governments) establish collective agreements or alliances to tackle key challenges in supply chains.
6. **The labour-centred path**, driven by workers' organizations, especially democratically governed trade unions, engaged in various forms of collective action (strikes, collective bargaining, global campaigns, lobbying) to improve basic labour standards.

Our review focuses on the fourth and fifth of these pathways, which are more relevant to the approaches adopted by sustainability standards and similar systems to drive decent work. Within these two pathways, there are several supply chain sustainability approaches for social upgrading that involve different sets of interventions that vary greatly in their model of intervention and their theory of change. They also include different types of interventions operating in parallel or complementing each other.

To deal with this challenge, we identify the **supply chain sustainability** approaches that are of most interest to this review.

These include corporate sustainability codes, supply chain investment programmes, VSS, third-party voluntary sustainability codes of conduct, sustainability rating and performance tools, pre-competitive industry sustainability platforms, bans and boycotting, and framework agreements and initiatives. These approaches are broken down into **five key intervention types:** labour standards, price and contract interventions, premium-funded investments, market demand influence interventions, and the creation of alliances (Table 1). In Table 1, each intervention type that falls within a specific supply chain sustainability approach is marked.

Table 1. Overview of the key supply chain sustainability approaches and interventions included in the systematic review.

PATHWAYS	CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY PATH		MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PATH					
APPROACHES →	Corporate Sustainability Codes	Supply chain investment programmes	Voluntary Sustainability Standards	Third party Voluntary Sustainability codes of conduct	Sustainability rating and performance tools	Pre-competitive industry/market-based sustainability platforms	Bans, boycotting, petitions, protests	Framework agreements and initiatives
INTERVENTIONS ↓								
Labour standards	X	X	X	X				X
Price, sourcing and contract-based interventions		X	X					
Premium-funded investments		X	X					
Market Demand Influence			X		X	X	X	
Creation of alliances				X		X		X

The interventions that fall within a specific supply chain sustainability approach are marked with an 'X'.

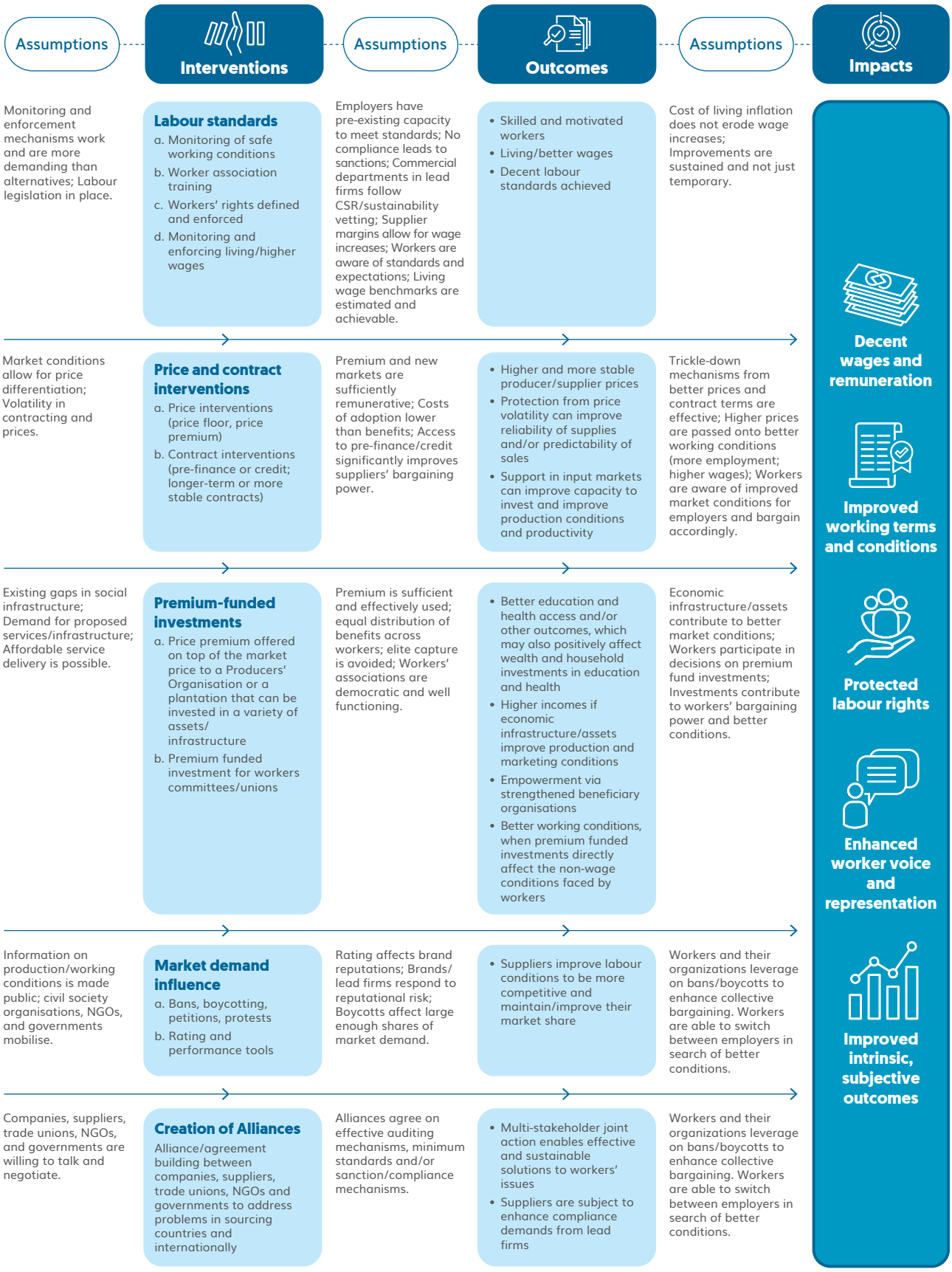
Theory of Change

Based on this, we develop a theory of change (Figure 1) to analyze the different supply chain sustainability approaches and their expected outcomes on decent work, and to explore several potential causes leading to these outcome pathways. These different causal pathways include interventions that are designed to *directly* impact labour standards, such as monitoring safe working conditions, worker association training, and enforcement of minimum or living wages through binding compliance audits. Other potential causal pathways also include interventions that may indirectly improve working conditions if their effects on buyers, producers or employers trickle down to workers, such as fair prices or premium-funded investments, and market influence mechanisms, like rating and performance tools.

Among the interventions shown in the theory of change (Figure 1), price and contract interventions and premium-funded investments are specific to the agriculture sector and some sustainability standards (e.g. Fairtrade). Multi-stakeholder alliances, such as global buyers, are more commonly found in the apparel sector.

In both sectors, we see common approaches in the use of workers' training, monitoring of health and safety, and compliance audits to generate the conditions for more decent work. Each causal pathway involves several assumptions that need to be verified and may or may not apply depending on the characteristics of each context. Therefore, further analyzing the contextual factors, barriers and enablers that affect the effectiveness of these interventions is critical for addressing these assumptions.

Figure 1. Theory of change



Source: Adapted from the theory of change developed by Oya et al (2017).

Research questions and inclusion of evidence

The systematic review focuses on two main research questions, which complement each other:

? Research question 1

What are the effects of corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder approaches on decent work outcomes? In particular, wages and remuneration, working terms and conditions, core labour rights, worker voice and representation, and other intrinsic and subjective outcomes?

We refer to this as the "effectiveness" question.

? Research question 2

How effective are corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder approaches at adopting and implementing the decent work goals they set, across contexts and sectors?

We refer to this as the "adoption and implementation" question.

To some extent this question implicitly explores the contribution of contextual factors to the implementation, adoption and effectiveness of interventions. In that sense, we also explore a range of barriers and enablers that affect the effectiveness of interventions.

We adopt the PICOS (Population or Problem, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Study type/design) framework to delimit the scope of the review. In other words, to help make standardized and consistent decisions about the types of studies to include and exclude from the systematic review, as well as the kinds of evidence to consider in the synthesis of key findings.

The PICOS framework is commonly adopted in systematic reviews exploring the effectiveness of interventions to clearly formulate the eligibility criteria for the inclusion of relevant studies for the review. This includes the population of interest, the relevant interventions, the comparisons, outcomes of interest, and study designs.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The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this review are as follows:

Population. The focus is placed on workers (individuals or workers' collectives) employed in smallholder or plantation production settings, as well as in factories in LMICs in the agriculture and apparel sectors.

Interventions. The scope of this review includes interventions occurring within the corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder pathways (the fourth and fifth social upgrading pathways described earlier). Interventions that are exclusively located within the market, government, supplier, or labour paths are beyond the scope of this review, as well as studies reporting only on these interventions. The review identifies evidence related to corporate sustainability – such as corporate sustainability codes and supply chain investment programmes - and multi-stakeholder approaches - such as VSS, third-party voluntary sustainability codes of conduct, sustainability rating and performance tools, pre-competitive industry or market-based sustainability platforms, bans, boycotting, petitions, protests, and framework agreements and initiatives.

Comparisons. Any synthesis of impact evidence needs to consider the treatment of comparisons. Treatment and control groups from experimental and quasi-experimental studies provide the standard counterfactual evidence. We consider both "with and without" intervention comparisons, as well as "before and after" intervention comparisons, as long as the study design is adequate (see below).

Outcomes. The focus is on decent work outcomes, particularly wages and remuneration, working terms and conditions, occupational health and safety, child labour, worker voice and representation, standards of living, and other intrinsic and subjective outcomes (e.g. job and life satisfaction).

Study type/design. Rigorous impact evaluation studies within a range of study designs are eligible in the review, if they conform with the minimum standards for counterfactual evidence.

These include:

- Experimental (e.g. randomized controlled trials)
- Quasi-experimental (e.g. propensity score matching, pipeline designs, panel data with difference in differences)
- Observational with sufficient analysis of confounders.

To assess the quality of the counterfactual evidence, we adapted a scoring tool developed by Duvendack et al (2011:37), which considers the strength of the research design in combination with the ability of the methods of analysis to control for selection bias and other confounding factors.

The "adoption and implementation" question (research question 2) is informed by studies providing relevant factual and contextual data, as well as thick qualitative evidence, for the cases in which counterfactual evidence is identified. A case is defined by the combination of supply chain sustainability approach, value chain, and country.

Searching and screening: how was evidence found and selected?

The search is a critical step in a systematic review and is essential to determine the potential pool of sources to be included. Electronic searches for relevant literature were conducted between June and August 2023 with the support of two research assistants. Academic and non-academic databases were searched, as well as targeting the websites of public and private institutions that are engaged in supply chain sustainability approaches for improving work outcomes in the agriculture and apparel sectors. These include ILO, VSS-related organizations, and other development agencies.

Targeted or 'hand' searching is a necessity for finding non-academic sources, as they cannot be found through standard bibliographic databases. In the context of the types of interventions considered in this review, we expected a significant number of sources to be drawn from targeted searching. The ISEAL Community of sustainability systems was consulted to contribute any studies that might not be readily available on website or bibliographic databases to ensure all relevant studies were included at this stage.

From an initial pool of over 12,000 reports, after the initial stages of screening, we identified 438 reports that were screened at full text stage. From these reports, 152 met the inclusion criteria of the review. The reports were then coded according to the research methods used (e.g. quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods) and the type of evidence (e.g. counterfactual and non-counterfactual).

This resulted in 41 reports containing counterfactual evidence, of which 23 reports used quantitative research methods and 18 reports used mixed research methods. These are the reports used to address research question 1. It is important to note that the counterfactual evidence does not tell us if an intervention has led to improvements. Rather, the evidence shows us whether an intervention has caused an effect in comparison to the control group, which may be due to the intervention.

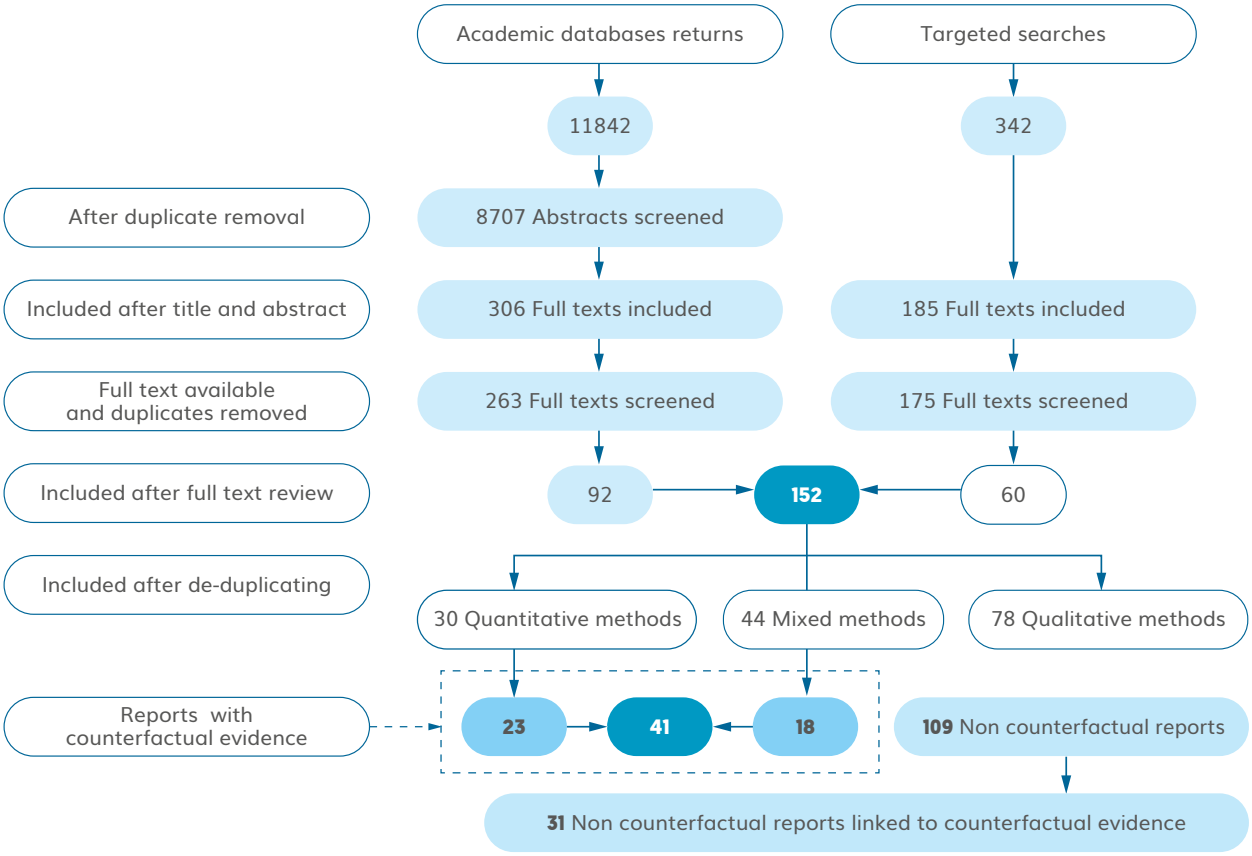
The remaining 109 reports containing factual, descriptive and contextual data form the pool of studies used to address research question 2. From this pool of studies, 31 reports - 13 on agriculture and 18 on apparel - provided data which could be linked to cases included for research question 1 on the basis of the product, country, and approach. These 31 reports were included in the review to inform research question 2.

These two sets of reports and sources of evidence constitute a reasonably strong evidence base for a systematic review on the two research questions, especially given that the focus is on decent work outcomes, rather than on broader welfare indicators.

For the counterfactual evidence, we analyzed 24 reports containing 28 unique datasets with counterfactual evidence on decent work outcomes from the agriculture sector, and 19 reports containing 23 unique datasets from the apparel sector.[5] This process is graphically represented by a PRISMA diagram (Figure 2), which depicts the flow of information through the different phases of the systematic review.

5. Two reports, Graz et al (2022 & 2023) contain datasets relevant to both agriculture and apparel, which is why the number of studies included for both sectors is higher (n=43) than the absolute number of reports included (n=41).

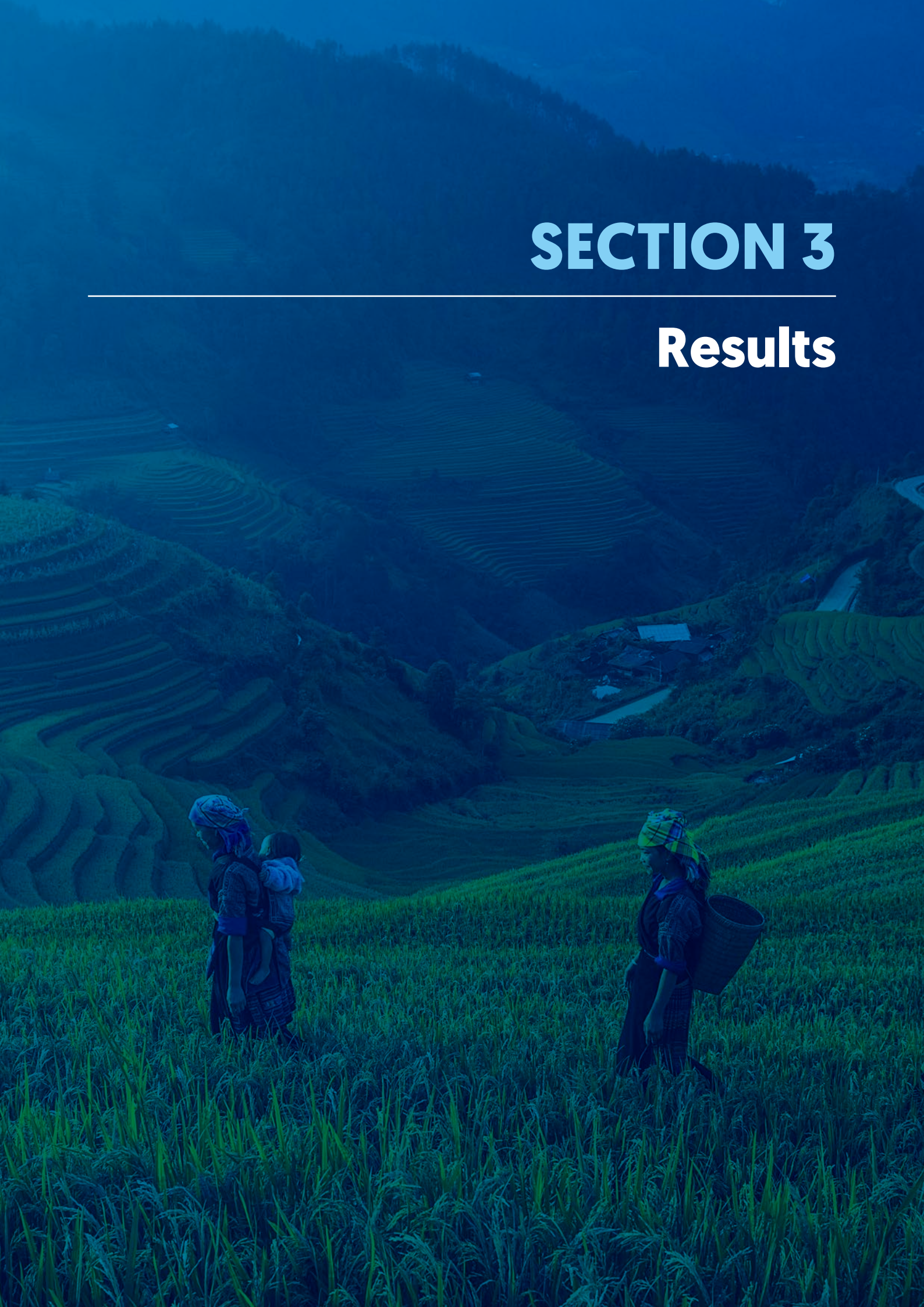
Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram of the screening process



Key characteristics of the counterfactual evidence

We briefly summarize the main characteristics of the counterfactual evidence included in this review and synthesis.

- Most studies on agriculture are published by the year 2019, with an increase in publications from 2014 to 2019.
- In terms of commodities, coffee is the most researched, followed by bananas, tea, cocoa and horticulture.
- In terms of approaches and interventions, VSS dominate the agricultural landscape, with Fairtrade and UTZ-Rainforest Alliance strongly represented.
- In the apparel sector, two main approaches dominate: a) global or regional implementation norms, and specifically the ILO's Better Work programme, and (b) post-Rana Plaza reforms implemented in Bangladesh, also referred to as the Accord and the Alliance.
- With regards to geographical scope, Asia and Africa dominate, with Asia overrepresented in apparel and Africa overrepresented in agriculture.



SECTION 3

Results

Understanding the evidence on the effectiveness of supply chain approaches

This section highlights the main findings from the synthesis of quantitative counterfactual evidence on the effectiveness of the supply chain sustainability approaches of interest. The analysis is complemented by qualitative evidence on contextual and implementation dynamics.

From the 24 reports on the agriculture sector containing quantitative counterfactual evidence, we extract a total of 170 estimates of effects on the impact of supply chain sustainability approaches on decent work outcomes.[6] Far more estimates of effects (317) are extracted from the 19 studies on the apparel sector. Apart from having more statistical power due to consistently larger sample sizes, apparel studies also collected evidence on a wider range of indicators.

There are different ways of looking at the evidence on effectiveness in a systematic review and from impact evaluations. A simple initial approach is to compare any positive and negative effects, or the evidence of something happening. However, some effects are not statistically different from zero. In other words, these are null effects - neither positive nor negative - suggesting that there is no impact.[7] We call this 'evidence of absence of effect'.

Therefore, for all decent work outcomes, we classify the effects into three different categories of evidence: statistically non-significant (no effect), positive and significant, and negative and significant. The final consideration is whether reported effects are found in all relevant contexts or whether some contexts (e.g. countries, commodities, interventions) have very few or no reported effects in the literature (e.g. where there is no available evidence). The latter scenario is one of 'absence of evidence'.

Below we offer a broad overview of the distribution of the evidence across these different categories of evidence in this review.

1 Evidence of absence of effect (statistically non-significant effects reported):

From all effects extracted from the evidence base, the proportion of statistically non-significant effects (no effect) is the largest for both sectors (55 percent for agriculture and 63 percent for apparel). In the case of the apparel sector where most studies use large sample sizes, this means that statistically non-significant results are likely to reflect reality and not the lack of statistical power. In other words, we rule out the possibility that the absence of effects is due to small sample size. We can then deduce that the reported interventions have relatively marginal impact on decent work outcomes, since the difference they make in working conditions is often statistically negligible.

6. The term "effect" refers to an estimate from a statistical model that assesses how the intervention being evaluated affects outcomes, whether these effects are intended or unintended.
7. Another way to describe a statistically non-significant effect is by saying that the observed difference between treatment and control (e.g. the intervention effect) is likely to be random or is expected to occur by chance.

This pattern is also observed across different decent work outcome categories, with some having higher proportions of effects than others. For example, in agriculture, we find a much larger share of statistically non-significant effects in occupational health and safety (OHS) - than in other decent work outcomes, such as wages or working terms and conditions, for which statistically significant effects (positive or negative) exceed 50 percent of all effects. In apparel, the proportion of no effects is more evenly distributed across decent work outcome categories, ranging between 62 and 68 percent of the total reported effects.

2 Evidence of something (statistically significant effect reported):

When we find effects that are statistically significant, they tend to be positive. This suggests a positive causal relationship between the intervention and the decent work outcome (e.g. the effects are not random or due to chance). It is important to note that the analysis of effects we conducted does not take into consideration the size of the effects, so we cannot say anything about the magnitude of the observed effect.

In this instance there is more confidence in the true impact of the intervention. Positive effects dominate over negative effects (Figure 3). However, there are some decent work outcome categories where the presence of negative effects is concerning, especially with regards to wages in agriculture.

In apparel, we find a larger number of positive effects in working terms and conditions, occupational health and safety (OHS), and workers' representation. In agriculture, the balance seems more positive for workers' voice and representation and working terms and conditions. However, the category of terms and conditions consists of a mixed set of outcomes with particular emphasis on access to training and protective measures rather than focusing on more standard decent work outcomes, such as job security, paid leave and benefits, working hours and treatment of workers by management. These outcomes are better represented in apparel studies, for which the picture is broadly positive with regards to job security and treatment of workers but is mixed in the case of working hours.

3 Absence of evidence (no effects reported):

We observe a number of different commodity, country and intervention contexts where there is very little or no evidence. In agriculture, for example, we see very few effects reported for flower production in South America or tea production in Asia, as well as a complete lack of quantitative counterfactual evidence for value chains such as palm oil, sugar, wine, groundnuts, or hazelnuts.

While VSS like Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance[8] dominate much of the counterfactual literature on agriculture, other important systems like GLOBALG.A.P. and the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil receive much less or no attention at all in the literature.

In apparel, we see very few effects reported for private codes of conduct, or traditional maquiladora countries such as Mexico, Paraguay, Honduras, and El Salvador. There is no evidence at all on the important brand-led GFAs, although there is some evidence on the Accord.

8. This also includes UTZ, which is now part of Rainforest Alliance (https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/utz/).

Another key evidence gap is on the working conditions for workers employed by smallholder farmers. Although the body of literature on this topic is expanding, the evidence is still very limited with few studies providing insights on impact and context (for example, Cramer et al , 2014; Riisgaard and Okinda, 2018). The evidence base is shaped by research interest in specific dominant topics and by the efforts of certain schemes in producing counterfactual evidence. This is the case for the Better Work programme , which contributes a disproportionate number of counterfactual studies in the apparel sector. This means the countries targeted by this intervention, mostly in South and Southeast Asia, feature prominently in the evidence base.

Combining findings of (1) and (3), the weight of evidence of no effect or no reported evidence is strong. In agriculture, 33 percent of reported effects are positive and statistically significant. In apparel, this proportion is 29 percent. **As such, we conclude that there is some evidence of positive impact of supply chain sustainability approaches on decent work outcomes.**

Evidence on effects against key decent work outcomes

This section discusses the findings across four key categories of decent work outcomes that this review focusses on – wages and renumeration, working terms and conditions, occupational health and safety (OHS), and workers' voice and representation - as these also constitute the main components of core labour standards.

Other decent work outcomes that are less central to the decent work agenda or that have a limited evidence base have not been included, as they can prevent meaningful comparisons. Figure 3 summarizes the results on effectiveness, with evidence on how the reported effects are distributed within each sector and for each of the four main decent work outcomes. For each decent work outcome category, we also report on the proportions of reported effects that are not statistically significant – or where there is no evidence of effect - and those that are statistically significant (positive or negative).

Findings from the apparel sector:

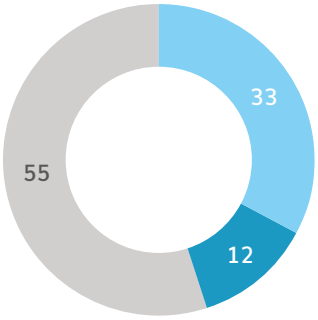
- From the 317 estimates of effects extracted, there is a substantial share of reported effects for the outcome of working terms and conditions (48 percent). This is not entirely surprising as some of the key objectives of the leading intervention in the apparel sector – the Better Work programme - involves improving industrial relations and a range of terms and conditions. These include excessive work hours, job insecurity, and management-employee relations, such as abusive behaviour by managers.
- OHS also features prominently (22 percent of extracted effects) compared to agriculture (8 percent).
- The evidence base on wages is more limited compared to the evidence base for the other decent work outcomes.

Findings from the agriculture sector:

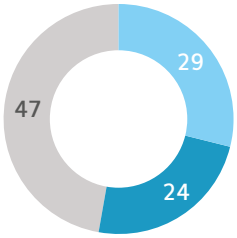
- From the 170 estimates of effects extracted, just under half fall into these three outcome categories: wages and remuneration (20 percent), terms and conditions (15 percent) and OHS (8 percent).

Figure 3. Percentage of effects extracted per sector based on statistical significance.
This figure provides an overview of the percentage of effects extracted from the literature on the impact of supply chain sustainability approaches on decent work outcomes based on their statistical significance and direction of change.

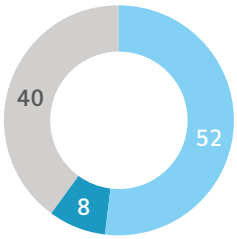
AGRICULTURE



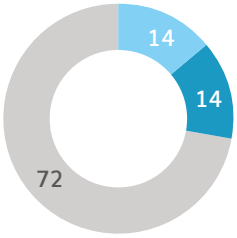
Across all outcomes



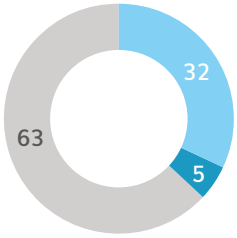
Wages and remuneration



Terms and conditions



Occupational health and safety

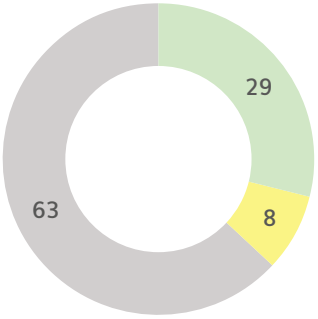


Workers' voice and representation

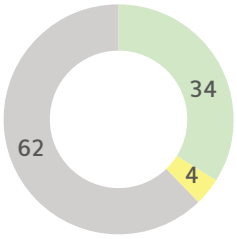
Key

- Positive and statistically significant effects (%)
- Negative and statistically significant effects (%)
- Statistically non-significant effects (%)

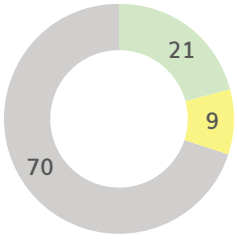
APPAREL



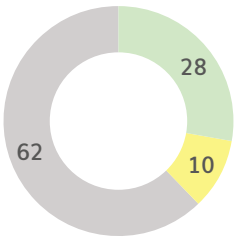
Across all outcomes



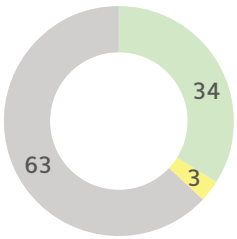
Wages and remuneration



Terms and conditions



Occupational health and safety



Workers' voice and representation

Key

- Positive and statistically significant effects (%)
- Negative and statistically significant effects (%)
- Statistically non-significant effects (%)

Wages and remuneration

For the outcome category of wages and remuneration, most attention in the literature is on studying comparative levels of wages, with very little on issues of no or late payment, wage discrimination, overtime pay and in-kind benefits. For both sectors, most studies explore whether wages are comparatively higher in settings targeted by different kinds of interventions. While in apparel there is a high share of no effects (62 percent), in agriculture we find more effects that are statistically significant. However, there is a mixed picture with both positive (29 percent) and negative effects (24 percent).

The way to interpret a negative effect on wages in this case, is to say that wages in settings with the presence of supply chain sustainability interventions, are on average, lower than in comparable settings where there is no intervention. This does not mean that wages did not improve over time, but that they remained lower than the comparison group. Considering the large proportion of no effects on wages and the evidence of some negative effects, the overall picture of supply chain sustainability approaches and interventions on wages and remuneration do not appear particularly positive.

The causal pathways explored in the theory of change (Figure 1) suggest several potential direct and indirect 'trickle down' effects. The counterfactual evidence suggests these causal pathways may be more complicated than previously assumed in the theory of change. Additional factors that are outside the control of intervening organizations may be affecting wages in different ways. To make sense of these effects and especially the negative effects, the qualitative evidence points to several reasons and factors that may explain the wage outcomes observed in this review.

- The different supply chain sustainability approaches and interventions analyzed in this review (Table 1) do not fully cover all workers. Most prominent is the lack of outreach to workers employed by smallholder farms, casual labour, undocumented migrant workers, or employees of sub-contractors. Therefore, in cases where minimum standards on wages (e.g. respect of the minimum wage) are monitored and enforced, only a small segment of the employed population is effectively covered by this.

- In the case of smallholder producers in the agriculture sector, their capacity to pay higher wages or to pay living wages may be hampered by the limited progress in achieving living incomes for producers and employers.

- For those workers who are covered by these types of interventions, monitoring and enforcement systems may not be effective in increasing wages.

- The benefits of some of the interventions, especially in the context of agriculture, may not be large enough to improve wages above what other employers pay, compared to other market dynamics or alternatives. In some contexts, employers not covered by VSS or other supply chain sustainability approaches pay comparatively higher wages for other reasons, such as premiums associated with product quality, or simply for higher levels of productivity.

- The interventions may not be designed to directly increase wages or achieve living wages, but adhere to minimum wages. If there is broad compliance with minimum wage laws and regulations in the sector, other employers not included in the scope of these interventions may be able to afford to pay higher wages for other reasons. For example, quality premiums, access to more remunerative markets, higher productivity, and seasonal dynamics.

- National institutional settings where minimum wages do not exist or are generally very weakly enforced (especially in agriculture) are not conducive to minimum wage monitoring and enforcement by VSS and other schemes.

Terms and conditions of work

For the terms and conditions of work, the most interesting and consistent evidence comes from the apparel sector, where a large number of estimated effects is observed (43 percent of all extracted effects). Overall, a large proportion of estimated effects are not statistically significant (70 percent). Yet the picture is somewhat positive for job security in contracts, which is an important feature given the excess flexibility and insecurity in this sector. However, the reported effects on leave and benefits, which are key aspects of terms and conditions, are limited.

Improvements in job security and the formalization of contracts suggest some success in approaches like the Better Work programme. Nevertheless, evidence on other important objectives, such as improving the treatment of workers by management, and reducing excessive hours or overtime work, is less promising given the small proportion of positive effects and the prevalence of statistically non-significant effects.
For the agriculture sector, the counterfactual evidence on job security, working hours and leave practice - all regarded as being key focus areas in this outcome category - is incredibly limited in terms of the number of reported effects. One outcome that is only loosely relevant to the terms and conditions of work and that is more frequently reported in agriculture, is training, which underpins much of the evidence on positive effects. Whether training improves other terms or conditions of work through raising awareness is not entirely clear from the reviewed literature.

The mixed results in both sectors and especially in apparel (given the Better Work programme's emphasis on these aspects), may be explained by a range of different contextual factors and implementation issues.

- Restrictions on working overtime can be controversial and counterproductive if minimum wages are below living costs. Many workers will opt to work excessive hours to meet their basic needs and reject any restrictions on working overtime. In the apparel sector, excessive working hours are a structural feature of a labour regime that is shaped by the double squeeze on prices / profit margins and sourcing lead times, and which puts pressure on workers to rely on working overtime and excessive hours.9 Unless this global business model is fundamentally changed, existing interventions are unlikely to significantly improve this outcome.

- Poor external housing conditions from factories, and the high living costs associated with housing may also drive workers to accept excessive hours and overtime. In most cases, the reviewed programmes did not directly tackle the problem of living costs to reduce the incentive to work overtime.

- Non-wage benefits are rare, such as paid leave, health insurance, paid medical attention. This is particularly the case in the agriculture sector, given the nature of labour regimes, which are often characterized by non-permanent precarious employment, resource-poor employers, and lack of formal contracts.

- Weak auditing processes fail to capture large segments of vulnerable workers. Vulnerable workers include those employed on informal working terms and without the basic formalities of written contracts and formalized rights, such as migrant and casual workers. If the auditors do not see these workers, compliance audits may be ineffective in improving their terms and conditions of work.

- Greater formalized and improved terms and conditions of work tend to be driven by labour demand and supply, as well as the demands of buyers, legislative and enforced obligations, and the scale of production from employers.[10]

- In apparel, some evidence suggests that for cases where programmes have been implemented over an extended period, compliance audits tend to contribute to better practices in terms of contract formalities and more protection for workers. This suggests that time and consistency in programme implementation eventually succeeds in shaping some practices that are conducive to better terms and conditions.

9. Suppliers in the apparel sector are often subject to a double price/profit and sourcing squeeze (Anner, 2020). In other words, they are subject to low prices due to stiff competition, while expected to deliver last-minute changing orders within tight timelines. This puts pressure on working conditions, undermines wages, working hours, the health and safety of the environment, and increases the risk of mistreatment and abuse. When this double squeeze is combined with informal labour arrangements and lack of workers' protection in local labour markets, this increases the vulnerability of workers.

10. For example, in Northeast Brazil's export grape production, Selwyn (2007: 526) finds that "the need to upgrade production continually in response to retailers' demands gives workers' strategic leverage which, together with a strong and continuing tradition of rural trade union organization, means that they have been able to extract significant concessions from exporting farms."

Occupational health and safety

OHS is a critical labour outcome in both sectors, but the review suggests much more attention has been paid to this decent work outcome in apparel studies. Only 8 percent of all reported effects for agriculture fall under this category. Whether this reflects more attention to this issue from programmes and employers is another matter, but it could be an indication. This does not mean the issue is not equally relevant in agriculture since health hazards in this sector are likely to be more frequent and dangerous than in many other sectors.

The lack of effects - and especially positive effects - in agriculture is alarming. In the case of apparel, where this has been a core issue in several programmes - especially in the Accord and Alliance - the evidence is mixed. There is some evidence of positive effects, even if no effects dominate.[11]

For OHS, some outcomes are either too broad in scope or are not sufficiently specific, which complicates the interpretation of these outcomes. Researchers ought to focus on more concrete and verifiable outcomes even if these are not always sufficiently close to the wellbeing of workers. For example, the availability and use of protective equipment or medical facilities is easily verifiable and can be clearly interpreted, whereas workers' perceptions of 'good health' or better 'health and safety practices' may be harder to evaluate, interpret and attribute to an intervention.

In addition to these broader findings, the qualitative literature offers a range of cross-sectoral insights.

- A key enabler of effectiveness across both sectors is the facilitation of training and campaigns, which lead to a greater awareness of the key elements that constitute a healthy and safe environment. This can empower workers to demand and push for better OHS standards.
- Some evidence suggests that health and safety committees are poorly implemented and do not fulfil their expected roles.[12]
- There are instances where the formation of health and safety committees across both sectors is used as a box-ticking exercise rather than a genuine mechanism to improve workplace practices.
- Access to health coverage, especially emergency access to medical care, can enable safer environments in both the agriculture and apparel sectors. However, their implementation is patchy, and the quality of care is also uneven across different contexts.

11. The Accord for Fire and Building Safety (Accord) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Workers' Safety (Alliance), were the two main multi-stakeholder responses to the Rana Plaza tragedy. On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza Tower, an eight-story commercial building located on the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh, collapsed killing 1133 workers and injuring another 1800 workers (Kabeer et al., 2019). The scale of the human tragedy associated with the disaster brought long-ignored issues of health and safety to the forefront of the agenda of key international stakeholders and triggered a series of actions. Among them, the most prominent one was the adoption of the Accord, signed by "more than 200 international brands from 20 mainly European countries, two European-based international unions (UNI Global Union and IndustriAll Global Union), eight of their associated labor federations in Bangladesh along with four international NGOs as witness signatories"(Kabeer et al., 2019: 1365). Kabeer et al (2019) and Anner (2021) argue that the range of actors involved and the legally binding nature of the agreement marked a new era in multi-stakeholder action in the sector.

12. The formation of democratically elected workers' health and safety committees is a requirement of the Accord. Their role is to identify and act on health and safety risks (for more see Bair et al., 2020).

Workers' voice and representation

The counterfactual evidence seems to show a more positive outlook for workers' voice and representation in both sectors. In agriculture, the positive effects on workers' awareness of labour rights, procedures, and policies are noteworthy. This is generally a weak area in agriculture, largely down to the extremely weak levels of unionization. The agricultural workforce is typically characterized by casual, seasonal workers employed by scattered small- and medium-scale producers, which can add challenges to collectively organizing workers in a union.

The opposite is true in the apparel sector, where collective action is historically stronger. However, there are few cases of positive results in worker-management communication and cooperation, and collective bargaining agreements. This partly reflects the continuous harsh nature of industrial relations in the apparel sector.

By contrast, the reported interventions tend to be broadly effective in improving union or worker representation in factories, and workers' awareness of their working rights. Given the importance of established unions for a more conducive decent work environment, it is critical that programmes and interventions focus more efforts on expanding union representation and helping unions strike collective bargaining agreements at sector level, rather than only at firm level.

The qualitative literature helped shed light on several important contextual features and implementation dynamics across both sectors.

- A low number of grievances reported does not necessarily indicate that the number of grievances is indeed low. It can also reflect workers' lack of knowledge of grievance mechanisms, or fear of speaking out. There is evidence that even when activities have been implemented to raise awareness amongst workers, this does not sufficiently empower workers to take risks and report grievances for fear of losing their jobs. This is an issue that existing interventions fail to prevent.

- In some contexts, a high number of reported grievances can indicate worsening conditions at the workplace. However, it can also indicate the presence of more effective grievance mechanisms. Building trust and confidence in workplace grievance mechanisms requires sustained action and an understanding from employers on how they may also benefit from these mechanisms.

- The implementation of Workers' Committees or Joint Bodies is particularly common in agriculture, as well as in some apparel settings. Yet they are fraught with issues of trust and effectiveness. There are also some cases of manipulation from management when Workers' Committees are needed for compliance audits, but do not function in the day-to-day running of operations. Workers' Committees seem to particularly struggle with bargaining over payment and reporting grievances on working conditions.

- The capacity of Workers' Committees in strengthening communication between managers and workers depends on the extent of existing tensions in labour relations, job (in)security, and (lack of) trust. Interventions that have worked on building trust between management and workers through training and continuous dialogue are regarded as being more conducive to better and clearer communication.

- In the apparel sector, various factors seem to contribute to gradual changes in workers' voice and representation. This includes the pervasive resistance to the recognition and acceptance of trade unions in the workplace in combination with training and awareness efforts, and the effect of "compliance" where buyers pay particular attention to union representation as part of their conduct codes.

- The role of international union federations in empowering local unions is critical, according to research that highlights the key role played by alliances between federal unions and powerful buyers, such as Inditex, H&M, or Adidas. These alliances are reported to play a crucial role in compliance as it gives unions the leverage to put pressure on factories. The Better Work programme, Accord and Alliance, and GFA interventions are increasingly moving in this direction, which may explain the improvements observed in unionization in different countries.

SECTION 4

Discussion

Are corporate sustainability and multi-stakeholder approaches effective at driving decent work in supply chains?

This section brings together the key characteristics of the evidence, the synthesis of studies around the effectiveness question in this review, and key insights emerging from qualitative studies in an analytical discussion that focuses on three questions.

- What are the dominant patterns of effects in both sectors and how do they differ?
- What are the main knowledge gaps for each sector and what do these gaps tell us about the existing evidence base?
- To what extent do we see patterns, differences, and similarities across the different types of supply chain sustainability approaches and across different contexts?

Building on the previous section that shared the main findings of the overall counterfactual evidence for each decent work outcome. We consider some of the emerging patterns from the evidence that describe the impact of different supply chain sustainability approaches on key labour outcomes.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What does research focus on and why?

A wide range of outcome effects reported

The literature reports on a wide range of labour outcomes, instead of focusing on a limited set of key labour indicators. This partly explains the large number of effects listed in both sectors, but especially in the case of apparel. The current evidence does not focus on a narrow set of outcomes, such as wages or occupational health and safety, but is characterized by analyzing a wide range of labour indicators. This is a result of various research attempts to capture as much evidence on working conditions as possible when engaging in direct data collection.

Unsurprisingly, the ILO core labour standards form the basis for the key decent work outcomes where we find the most effects in the literature. For example, excessive hours, clear terms and conditions, workers' representation, and OHS. Within each decent work outcome category, we find a substantial range of indicators, especially in the case of apparel. This allows for a greater granularity of effects in apparel compared to agriculture. This is reflected in the substantially greater number of effects extracted for the apparel sector (317) compared to the agriculture sector (170), even though the number of included studies for each sector does not differ much.

Terms and conditions of work is the most prominent outcome category

Some decent work outcome categories are overrepresented, and others are underrepresented in the literature.

This partly reflects the priorities of the programmes under evaluation in the studies, and partly reflects the preferred research focus. In agriculture, there is some balance across the decent work outcome categories, with wages or remuneration, worker voice and representation, and intrinsic subjective outcomes (e.g. job and life satisfaction) representing roughly two thirds of all reported effects. The distribution of effects in the apparel sector is less balanced and dominated by terms and conditions of work and OHS, which together account for 70 percent of all reported effects.

In the agriculture sector, we find that OHS and child labour have a much lower number of reported effects than expected. These two issues feature prominently in the general literature on labour standards in the sector.

Likewise, there is relatively little attention on wages and remuneration, and intrinsic subjective outcomes in the literature for the apparel sector. This may reflect the fact that the Better Work programme dominates the literature, meaning that there is less focus on wages and subjective perceptions, and more focus on basic improvements in OHS and the terms and conditions of work (e.g. job security, excess hours, and management treatment of workers). Similarly, the two main post-Rana Plaza agreements - Accord and Alliance - also dominate the apparel sector literature. The focus is mostly on OHS to prevent future disasters leading to the injury and deaths of workers.

Which sustainability approaches are most researched?

In both sectors, we observe a disproportionate share of certain programmes or interventions, especially in the quantitative counterfactual evidence. In agriculture, Fairtrade features prominently, and together with Rainforest Alliance (and the erstwhile UTZ), they account for over 70 percent of the counterfactual evidence. This leaves some interventions with substantial outreach being underrepresented in the literature, such as the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and GLOBAL G.A.P. Another key evidence gap is the lack of more systematic and rich evidence on labour outcomes in smallholder farms, which potentially constitute the biggest employers of farm wage labour in LMICs.

In apparel, the imbalance is even more stark. Only two programmes dominate the counterfactual evidence - the post-Rana Plaza agreements - Accord and Alliance, and the Better Work programme. The Better Work programme accounts for the largest share by far. Although this shows that Better Work is an important intervention in the apparel sector in its own right, it is overrepresented in the literature because it has recently invested more in high-quality counterfactual evaluations compared to other programmes. In fact, a lot of the counterfactual evidence on the apparel sector is rather recent, with the older studies included in this review being published only as far back as the year 2010.

In the apparel sector, there is an urgent need for theory-based high-quality evaluations of some of the approaches that are deemed to be potentially effective, namely GFAs and GBAs. Another important evidence gap concerns private codes of conduct. Despite every major brand having one, we know very little about what these codes do, besides what is being communicated by the brands themselves.

What type of research and study designs prevail?

Although the body of qualitative evidence seems to be more abundant than quantitative counterfactual evidence, there were enough rigorous quantitative impact evaluations to be included in the review. We found a relatively wide range of eligible research designs, partly reflecting the openness of this review to a range of designs, as long as enough counterfactual evidence and confounding factors were built into the data collection and analysis.

This wide range of studies also reflects the fact that Randomized Controlled Trials do not abound in this field. The realities and effects of the interventions often call for a more pluralistic choice of quantitative research design. There are some particularities to how these research designs are implemented between the two sectors. In agriculture, there is a proliferation of quasi-experimental designs (Propensity Score Matching or others) and a more explicit consideration of control or comparison groups without an intervention, in more crude comparisons of with or without intervention. For example, some studies compare conditions with or without certification, even if being certified reflects a bundle of interventions rather than a single intervention.

In the case of apparel, we see more sophisticated approaches that build on the length of exposure to the intervention and comparisons between different components of interventions to obtain more fine-tuned effects across different decent work outcomes and settings. The diversity of research designs in the literature makes comparisons between studies and especially between sectors difficult, since there is not a single type of research design that dominates the review.

What is the evidence of impact and why is impact limited?

Limited evidence of significant impact

An unexpected result of this review is the large proportion of statistically non-significant or no effects from robust studies on this topic. This applies to both sectors, but especially to apparel, where 63 percent of reported effects are statistically non-significant compared to 55 percent for agriculture.

In the apparel sector, the lack of significant impact is similar across the decent work outcome categories but is especially high in the case of sexual harassment in factories, the management's treatment of workers, and incidences of working overtime. These are important facets of the Better Work programme, which are designed to be direct targets of compliance and training mechanisms.

In the agriculture sector, we find that the highest incidence of no effects is found in OHS and worker voice and representation. A different pattern emerges here. This reflects the low effectiveness of interventions on these particular issues, as well as the wider variety of outcomes across different settings, where context plays a more significant role.

Some positive outcomes in specific areas

For those effects that are statistically significant, generally the direction is positive for both sectors, albeit slightly more in the case of agriculture (33 percent compared to 29 percent in apparel). However, there is a higher incidence of negative effects in agriculture (12 percent) compared to apparel (8 percent), where the absence of an intervention demonstrates better decent work outcomes than in areas or employers that are subjected to an intervention.

In apparel, the categories where we find a relatively large share of positive effects are workers' voice and representation (34 percent), and wages and remuneration (34 percent). This latter category, however, has a relatively low number of total effects.

In agriculture, the picture is also mixed, with terms and conditions of work, and workers' voice and representation receiving the largest share of positive results. This is in contrast with wages and remuneration where the picture is more negative. In the case of terms and conditions, the effects are largely driven by the appreciation of training (a direct input into many interventions) and in some cases, by improvements in 'protective measures'. However, this is a vaguely understood outcome that is not clearly spelt out in the literature and does not refer to OHS. In general, VSS seem to contribute to improving outcomes related to workers' voice and representation, mainly by providing trustworthy processes, improving relations with management and fellow workers, and facilitating awareness of labour policies and workers' rights.

Similarly in agriculture, GLOBALG.A.P. certification appears to be more effective compared to other VSS in improving key decent work outcomes, such as wages and employment duration in the horticulture sector. Fairtrade certification also appears to be more effective in improving decent work outcomes in banana plantations in central and Latin America, particularly with regards to in-kind benefits, paid leave and protective measures. These variations are partly explained by the nature of the interventions and by the specific country and commodity context where studies are undertaken.

Limited positive impact on wages and remuneration

Perhaps the most puzzling finding on the effectiveness of supply chain sustainability approaches is the limited positive impact on wages. The proportion of negative decent work outcomes in agriculture is relatively high (12 percent) compared to other outcomes. In apparel, there are many statistically non-significant effects (62 percent). In the case of apparel, one caveat is that the focus of the reviewed interventions is not directly on wages, but mostly on OHS, terms and conditions of work, and workers' representation. Compliance audits also focus on the respect for minimum wage legislation when this exists, but many of the interventions are not designed to achieve higher wages when compared to workplaces in the absence of the intervention.

Although it is expected that the improvements in other areas of labour standards should result in better wages, the qualitative evidence on the contextual and implementation dynamics show a possible trade-off between OHS and wages (and terms and conditions). For example, studies on post-Rana Plaza Bangladesh illustrate how requirements for safety upgrades without financial support can result in wages and working hours being undermined (Kabeer et al. 2020). Moreover, many of the interventions in the apparel sector focus on the basic minimum ILO standards, and particularly on respecting minimum wages rather than achieving living or higher wages. Therefore, the pressure to increase wages is left to employers who are working within a context where increasing productivity is challenging, and where global competition continuously squeezes supplier profit margins. This is a recurring theme in key studies on global production networks in the apparel sector (Anner 2020).

In the case of agriculture where low pay is the norm, increasing wages is a well-known challenge given the multiple factors contributing to low wages. The question is why areas receiving VSS interventions have relatively lower wages in some cases. A limited number of studies report significant benefits to plantation workers, specifically in terms of transport,

housing, education and capital for small businesses. There is not sufficient evidence to suggest that such interventions systematically produce better non-wage benefits. In other words, there is no clear evidence of low cash wages being offset by higher 'social wages' or in-kind benefits.

Reported variations in cash wages are most likely driven by contextual factors, global value chain drivers of cost-cutting, as well as the very low bargaining power of agricultural workers in most contexts. They can also be driven by a 'negative selection' process, where less competitive businesses are more likely to engage with VSS as a way of market differentiation, whereas already competitive and higher-paying agribusinesses do well in the international market on their own.

For example, in certain contexts and value chains, such as banana plantation production, some non-certified businesses are reported to be more professional and established in the conventional market. They can make more profit, resulting in them having larger profit margins that they can use to pay their workers better wages (Ruiz, 2022; Cramer et al., 2017).

Higher wages may be linked to specific local labour market dynamics, or to other pressures (e.g. to gain access to higher quality premium markets). This could counteract the potentially positive effects of interventions from VSS. Some studies suggest that factors like quality premiums and access to higher-end markets that operate within a context of highly differentiated commodity prices (e.g. coffee) may contribute to higher wages. Some of these benefits trickle down to seasonal workers, especially in harvesting, and are more dominant than the trickle-down effects triggered by other kinds of factors related to VSS interventions, such as the Fairtrade premium (Cramer et al 2017). This can explain instances where wages in some VSS settings are lower than among uncertified employers. This does not mean that VSS interventions drive wages down over time, but rather that they do not match the wages paid by competing employers without such certifications.
Pressures to keep wages low in the apparel sector are also well-known, given the double squeeze that manufacturers face in global production networks. There is an aspiration to go beyond statutory minimum wages towards living wages, which most supply chain sustainability approaches and programmes share. However, this requires concerted action by all stakeholders, and especially by lead global buyer firms which exert huge influence on supplier labour regimes.

Unfortunately, we have not identified any studies on some of the most promising initiatives in the apparel sector, such as Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) and Global Binding Agreements (GBAs). These initiatives involve binding alliances between global buyers and trade union federations, including some government support. These alliances have substantial power over suppliers/employers of apparel workers, thus creating strong incentives to improve labour standards across the board. However, on the wage front, the main commitment is still limited to respecting statutory minimum wages, such as the Inditex-IndustriAll GFA.

In the case of agriculture, this would also entail paying more attention to what smallholder farmers can afford to pay their seasonal and casual workers, in a context where producers are squeezed by other increasing costs. Evidence on wages in smallholder settings is scarce and unsystematic at best, and is completely absent at worst. Therefore, an imperative for future evaluations is to assess which programmes or interventions are most successful in raising wages within contexts where wages are being kept low across different settings.

How contextual factors shape decent work outcomes

We highlight several key contextual factors and implementation issues that may act as either barriers or facilitators to the realization of better work outcomes. These factors and issues emerge frequently in the non-counterfactual (qualitative) and quantitative counterfactual studies. Rather than occurring in isolation, two or more of these factors and issues interact with each other, which can counteract or amplify the effects of specific interventions. Many of these factors relate to issues of implementation fidelity, while some are linked to the context in which these interventions take place.

Quality and outreach of compliance audits.

The review of the non-counterfactual evidence has shed light on other contributing factors to observed decent work outcomes. These can help explain some of the relatively marginal effects on working conditions across different settings and interventions.

An important theme is the quality and outreach of compliance audits, which are a pervasive form of intervention in both sectors. In the apparel sector, this is particularly important in terms of the coverage, where improvements in the quality of the auditing culture have been noted. The post-Rana Plaza interventions and the Accord seem to have set a trend in the apparel sector of moving away from top-down "audit" approaches towards integrating workers' unions in the interventions. This contrasts with agriculture approaches that are still focused on basic auditable standards in a narrower range of settings where some VSS operate.

Kabeer et al. (2020:1360) comment on this, emphasizing the role that unions can play:

> *"These [post-Rana Plaza] agreements represented a move away from the buyer-driven, compliance-based model, which hitherto dominated corporate social responsibility initiatives, to a new cooperation-based approach. The Accord in particular, which included global union federations and their local union partners as signatories and held global firms legally accountable, was described as a 'paradigm shift' with the potential to improve industrial democracy in Bangladesh."*

There is no doubt that compliance auditing remains a crucial tool in both sectors. However, much of the non-counterfactual evidence raises questions about its efficacy. Auditing is being criticized as a 'hear no evil, see no evil' approach, seemingly encouraging suppliers to hide problems and being inefficient in getting to the root cause of the problem to find solutions.

Reinecke and Donaghey (2021: 472) illustrate the risks arising from 'zero-tolerance' approaches to non-compliances:

> *"Zero-tolerance is just a tool for plausible deniability so you can say "we have told you we have zero-tolerance, we have auditing, so we take no responsibility if things go wrong. Instead, brands realized that a zero-tolerance policy would constrain dialogue partners to discuss the 'real' issues and push them into hiding. Brands declared that they wanted transparency about the 'real' workplace issues going on at the factory: "We want the actual challenges, we don't want a second set of books."*

Engagement with established trade unions and national labour institutions.

An important question is whether trade unions should be more present in these interventions or should play a role in leading them. Some studies argue that unions are crucial and should not be replaced by different types of workers' "committees". These committees are a prevalent form of intervention in both the agriculture and apparel sectors. However, they are a "relatively weak worker voice mechanism" and are far less transparent in areas affected by the sourcing squeeze, such as cost-sensitive and overtime issues (Anner, 2018).

Bair et al. (2020:985) illustrate the reasons why in the case of Bangladesh:

> *"As they began to facilitate the creation of safety committees in factories with Participation Committees as opposed to unions, Accord staff found it was often difficult to assess how the Participation Committees had been constituted, whether there was management interference in the election process, and therefore how genuinely the Participation Committees could safeguard the interests of workers in nominating representatives to the safety committee."*

The above suggests that worker committees may not be effective substitutes for nationally constituted unions. Anner (2021) shows how unions play a central role in at least two labour governance mechanisms, namely (1) encompassing collective bargaining agreements and (2) multi-actor global binding agreements, including Accord and Alliance and brand-led GFAs. None of these mechanisms are viable with micro-interventions aimed only at the factory floor in specific firms.

Importance of public governance and the state.

The qualitative evidence also points to the importance of public governance and institutions. Solid institutions, capable of providing clear guidance with the law, can be used as leverage to enforce compliance to labour standards. On the other hand, a lack of clarity can create grey zones of non-compliance with agreed labour standards.

Amengual and Chirot (2016:1070) provide the following example from Indonesia, where the ministry's response to factory non-compliance influenced the capacity of the Better Work programme to take effective actions. In cases where the ministry stepped in with clear affirmative guidance, Better Work staff had leverage to press the factories to comply. On the other hand, when the ministry was not clear about how the law should be applied, the Better Work programme was not able to put pressure on non-compliant factories.

Anner (2021) also provides evidence of how differences in public governance and institutions can explain substantial differences in labour control mechanisms and their outcomes across different countries. This is especially clear in comparisons between different Asian countries. Such dynamics also suggest that even multi-stakeholder interventions like the Better Work programme, are not able to go beyond minimums and compliance with law. As Amengual and Chirot (2016:1066) conclude on the Indonesian case, Better Work "took modest actions to prevent the worst abuses of fixed-term contracts but did not take strong actions to reinforce the weak domestic institution."

Specific market and commodity dynamics.

Some studies, primarily in agriculture, emphasize the importance of commodity-specific market dynamics that may affect the comparisons between settings in which VSS are present or absent. The existence of quality premia or specific buyer-driven production networks that push producers to reward more skilled agricultural labour may result in higher wages. This is in comparison to alternative settings where such rewards for quality do not exist and where the focus is on different kinds of criteria and interventions.

An example is Fairtrade's price/social premium that is linked to the small producer organizations' governance and compliance audits (Cramer et al., 2014). In short, sometimes VSS compete with other market channels that may offer higher rewards for product differentiation and quality.

Challenges in reaching the most vulnerable workers.

A constant cross-cutting theme affecting both sectors and across multiple contexts is the plight of the most vulnerable workers. Vulnerable and marginalized populations may not benefit equally from interventions, even if these interventions are effective for the 'mainstream' population.

Migrant workers may not be able to benefit from interventions due to direct discrimination, lack of legal status, or other complications arising from their migrant status, which undermine their visibility and voice. The government of Malaysia is reported to place certain restrictions on transnational labour migrants which breach garment industry codes of conduct (Crinis, 2010).

In the case of Dominican Republic banana plantations, the qualitative evidence suggests that Haitian migrants feel less secure in filing complaints: 'Those who don't have a passport, don't complain' (van Rijn et al., 2016: 61). Generally, such workers tend to be more invisible and therefore harder to reach by a wide range of interventions.

Multiple certification and auditing fatigue.

Another emerging topic from the evidence is the duplication of efforts and free riding among interventions. This is particularly the case in the apparel sector and is also common in agricultural settings receiving VSS interventions.

In apparel, factories reportedly join multiple programmes such as the Better Work programme, Fair Labor Association (FLA), Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and private codes of conduct. This demands considerable resources from factory managers in preparing different audits across these multiple programmes, which can create reluctance towards any new initiative. It also leads to auditing fatigue and a "compliance limbo" by suppliers, who spend their resources preparing for audits, rather than dedicating resources in addressing actual problems (Jerrentrup, 2021:6).

Systematic selection of over- or under-performing participants into programmes.

Issues of selection bias in compliance are also reported in the literature. In apparel it seems that interventions target the already better performing factories, whereas this is not the case in agriculture where less competitive farming units appear to be self-selected into VSS.

Jerrentrup (2021:15) explains how this may occur in the case of apparel factories.

> *"Collective Arrangements (CAs) cover typically large-scale factories that supply well-known international brands and belong to the country's exporters association. These characteristics imply that "these factories already provide better working conditions".The variety of programmes in these factories may be driven by initiatives targeting the "low hanging fruits" by working in factories that already have higher standards. In this way, they are able to fulfil their key performance indicators of "impacting" a specific number of workers. The following quote describes these dynamics: "Everybody's trying to claim positive outcomes, but negative outcomes are typically someone else's fault, [...] and at the same time there's a lot of free riding."*

Small and sub-contracting factories are not addressed by the efforts of any Collective Agreements. This is illustrated in the case of Bangladesh, where there is an estimated 2,000 unregistered sub-contractors who are paying below minimum wage and do not comply with local or national laws or any codes of conduct (Labowitz and Baumann-Pauly, 2014). Jerrentrup (2021:15) describes this as follows:

> *"The moment you move to factories that are not part of the [country's exporting association], and that are not part of these multiple initiatives, it is almost like night and day. This gap between hard-to-reach small scale factories and those covered by multiple initiatives impedes Collective Agreements to achieve improvements in labour standards on an industry level."*

Weak implementation and reporting bias.

Understanding the context and the implementation dynamics are key to interpreting the effects of a certain intervention.

As previously discussed, the number of reported grievances can be interpreted positively or negatively. The interpretation of effects also requires a clear understanding of what is being measured and how close the reported effect is to a meaningful impact. For example, in the case of OHS in agriculture, certification is reported to increase the presence of health and safety officers on site as well as that of management health and safety committees. However, these improvements remain only superficial if their purpose is limited to satisfying "bureaucratic" audit requirements.

The following quote from a member of a health and safety committee, provided by Mengistie *et al*. (2017:806), is characteristic of this issue:

> *"As a member of health and safety committee, I experienced signing minutes for the purpose of audit without conducting actual meetings."*


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Probing the theory of change and structural dynamics in the agriculture and apparel sectors

In this section we summarize some of the key differences by sector, by exploring their labour regimes, the dominant approaches and interventions in each sector and how they address decent work deficits. We return to our theory of change in light of the findings of this review.

First, we begin by reviewing the structural nature of labour regimes in both sectors and how labour standards are affected. Second, we summarize the insights from the review on the different supply chain sustainability approaches, the reliability of their implementation and their capacity to affect the structural conditions of existing labour regimes. Third, we highlight the implications for the theory of change.

? In what ways do the labour regimes in both sectors differ?

AGRICULTURE

Labour regimes are variable, but often tend to be characterized by two patterns. First, the intrinsic seasonality of crop production results in the dominance of casual and seasonal wage labour without job security and formalized arrangements. Second, across both LMICs and HICs, low wages, unsafe working environments, mistreatment and abuse, weak or total lack of unions also abound.

Agricultural wage labour agreements vary substantially. These can range from sharecropping agreements (that can be extended from one year to another), to semi-permanent or seasonal wage labour lasting 6–8 months, or casual wage labour mobilized during peak labour shortages. The overall bleak picture masks variation in work conditions, across countries, types of employers, value chains and end markets. This variation is driven by a complex combination of factors, including those that contribute to labour market tightening at a local level. For example, where the bargaining power of workers is enhanced by labour shortages and the expansion in labour demand from multiple sources.

APPAREL

Labour regimes are characterized by low wages, long working hours, and harsh treatment of workers. This is strongly linked to the structures of apparel global production networks. The apparel sector is characterized by a two-tier system dominated by lead buyers controlling large shares of the sale of clothing and apparel in HIC markets, as well as large numbers of manufacturers or suppliers – mostly in Asia - competing for slices of these expanding markets and increasingly driven by the imperatives of 'fast fashion'.

In such highly competitive environments, employers are often subject to a double price/profit and sourcing squeeze (Anner, 2020), putting pressure on working conditions, undermining wages, working hours, the health and safety of the environment, and increasing the risk of mistreatment and abuse. When this double squeeze is combined with informal labour arrangements and lack of workers' protection in local labour markets, workers become increasingly vulnerable.

? How do the reviewed interventions and approaches tackle these decent work deficits and with what success?

AGRICULTURE

Based on the review of the evidence, we can conclude that there is a variety of interventions and approaches trying to tackle different kinds of deficits in decent work. VSS often address the

welfare of workers through setting standards and compliance audits that monitor issues such as child labour, forced labour, and health and safety. Working terms and conditions, and workers' representation receive varying degrees of attention among VSS. However, the latter is often addressed through the formation of workers' committees and councils rather than through active engagement with local unions or the active promotion of unionization.

Wages are often considered, but mostly in relation to existing minimum standards (or minimum wages) and through indirect trickle-down effects from the impact on prices and premiums that may benefit producers or employers, and thereby workers' remuneration.

A key difference with the apparel sector is that agricultural workers are often more sparsely distributed and harder to reach than factory workers. Monitoring labour standards in agriculture, and especially in smallholder farms (e.g. certified small-producer organizations), is far more difficult than in factories that directly supply to global buyers, and which constitute the bulk of workplaces targeted by the interventions in this review, such as the Better Work programme and Accord and Alliance.

APPAREL

The interventions and approaches in apparel often target OHS issues, especially those built around multi-stakeholder partnerships to avoid Rana Plaza-type disasters. They focus on workplace relations in terms and conditions, managerial treatment of workers, excessive hours and job security. They also monitor core labour standards in factories, as defined by the ILO. This is conducted through a combination of compliance audits and training for managers and workers, particularly for human resources departments, which are an important target.

Workers' voice and representation are also addressed through awareness raising and engagement with local unions. Achieving greater unionization is an objective of interventions and approaches, but this varies greatly across different country settings and depending on the prevailing politics of labour relations.

While monitoring and compliance audits may be easier to organize and implement in the apparel sector, this is particularly true for suppliers or factories taking direct orders from global buyers, and therefore subject to closer scrutiny. The qualitative (non-counterfactual) literature on this sector has repeatedly stressed the challenges in adopting and monitoring these standards in informal sub-contractors. This includes homeworkers who are often outside the reach of decent work interventions and may only benefit indirectly if suppliers aim to showcase progress in their sub-contracting chains.

? What are the implications for the study's theory of change?

We considered five different causal pathways linked to different kinds of approaches and interventions, namely: direct monitoring and enforcement of labour standards (including training for that purpose), price and contract interventions, premium-funded interventions, market demand influence mechanisms (performance and rating tools), and the creation of multi-stakeholder alliances with high-level agreements between global buyers, unions and suppliers (Figure 1).

We have mixed evidence of positive effectiveness of the more direct approaches of these pathways. For example, the monitoring and enforcement of labour standards through a combination of compliance audits and training. There are clear implementation fidelity issues in this pathway. These partly explain the limited effectiveness of this pathway, which calls for more resources and efforts to improve reliability and efficacy.
This pathway also overlaps and is strongly linked with the market demand influence pathway, which generally builds on tools to exert pressure on global buyers to adopt more direct monitoring and enforcement of labour standards. Therefore, it would be possible to establish explicit linkages between these two pathways and explore their

different degrees of effectiveness depending on the specific tools (e.g. monitoring and enforcement through compliance audits, training to raise awareness, and public rating or performance tools).

There is limited evidence of a positive effectiveness of indirect pathways (e.g. price or contract interventions and premium-funded investments) on wages, terms and conditions, or OHS. This is mainly the case in agriculture, where the direct monitoring or enforcement of labour standards and workers' representation tools seem to be more relevant and effective in the correct context and conditions. However, they are unlikely to be deployed in smallholder settings. The working conditions in smallholder farming settings is an area that is particularly hard to tackle, given the casual nature of the workforce, their vulnerability and lack of representation, together with the limited capacity of smallholder employers to afford to offer decent work conditions. It is generally hard to find clear evidence that price and contract interventions in agricultural commodity markets trickle down to the most vulnerable agricultural workers.

Finally, regarding multi-stakeholder alliances, there is a lack of quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of GFAs or GBAs between global buyers, unions, and suppliers. This is despite the fact that qualitative evidence suggests that this pathway is important in altering the structural dynamics that drive the existing labour regimes in the two sectors. These agreements are more common in the apparel sector, and are mostly absent in agriculture. Therefore, it is a pathway for which rigorous impact evaluation evidence is needed for the apparel sector.


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SECTION 5

Key recommendations

Recommendations for key stakeholders

A key aim of this review was to draw from available evidence and offer insights to inform future research and practice in this field. We offer a range of recommendations based on this work.

Recommendations for VSS practitioners

- Explore and tackle the main challenges of monitoring labour standards, particularly for smallholders in the agriculture sector.
- Adopt living wage campaigns and seek to go beyond minimum wage standards.
- Embed interventions that address working terms and conditions and workers' representation in existing structures and processes of collective action. This can strengthen existing and permanent labour institutions, such as trade unions and their mechanisms of collective action.
- Use a holistic approach for wage improvements and living wage pledges by engaging with a wide variety of actors that can influence wages, such as governments and local unions.
- Consider the main drivers leading to poor working conditions in each sector to better understand the potential impact of micro-level interventions compared to broader global agreements.
- Assess the reliability and efficacy of audits on labour standards to drive improvement, and move towards more comprehensive independent assessments.

Recommendations for private sector actors (especially global buyers)

- Improve the sanctioning mechanisms for situations of non-compliance, such as linking non-compliance with orders from buyers.
- Engage with established trade union organizations rather than opting for management-led worker councils or committees.
- Commit to living wage pledges and go beyond the enforcement of basic minimum wages.
- Engage with a wide variety of influential actors to holistically improve wages and living wage pledges, such as with governments and local unions.
- Have an all-encompassing view of the supply chain by considering monitoring and enforcement of labour standards across sub-contractors. Alternatively, avoid sub-contracting by first-tier suppliers if labour standards cannot be monitored or enforced.
- Use evidence-based research and information to back up company pledges and claims of impact.

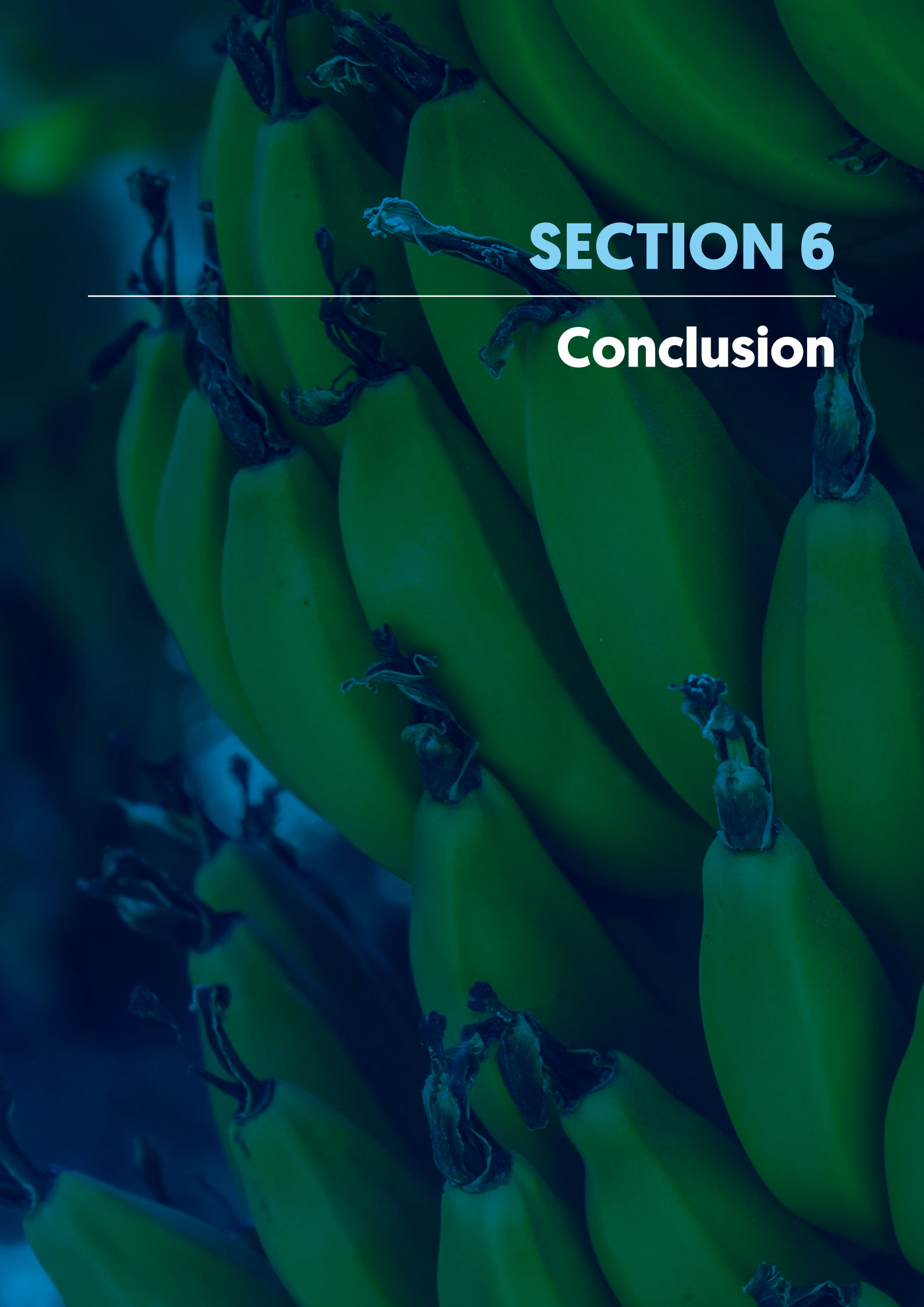
Recommendations for all stakeholders

- Promote collective bargaining at sector level to further strengthen the collective voice of workers.
- Seek multi-stakeholder alliances that include the most powerful actors, such as global buyers and international union federations, so that a more effective dialogue on standards and compliance mechanisms are built in with contributions from different sides of the table.
- Put pressure on governments to enact enforceable supply chain legislation that is conducive to decent work in both buying and producing countries.

Recommendations for researchers

Develop common guidelines on how to conduct theory-based impact evaluations in relation to decent work outcomes, including:

- A common conceptual framework that could be adapted to different sustainability approaches, value chains, and geographical regions.
- Improve the coordination of research resources to address key evidence gaps.
- Improve the quality of the evidence – such as the research design and methods of analysis - as well as the reporting of the findings.
- Go beyond black-box evaluations and focus on implementation dynamics and the conditions that need to be in place for an approach or tool to be effective. Consider more process evaluations to complement counterfactual evaluations.
- Create common methodological standards. These can include capturing the intensity of the exposure to an intervention (such as the percentage of certified products sold), accounting for variation in the population in terms of vulnerability and marginalization (e.g. migrant workers and female workers), or focusing research more on sensitive issues, such as child labour.



SECTION 6

Conclusion

Concluding thoughts

This report summarizes the main findings of a systematic review on the effectiveness of supply chain sustainability approaches in achieving decent work outcomes for the agriculture and apparel sectors. Overall, the evidence suggests that there is limited positive impact of a wide range of sustainability approaches and interventions. This leads to two main reflections.

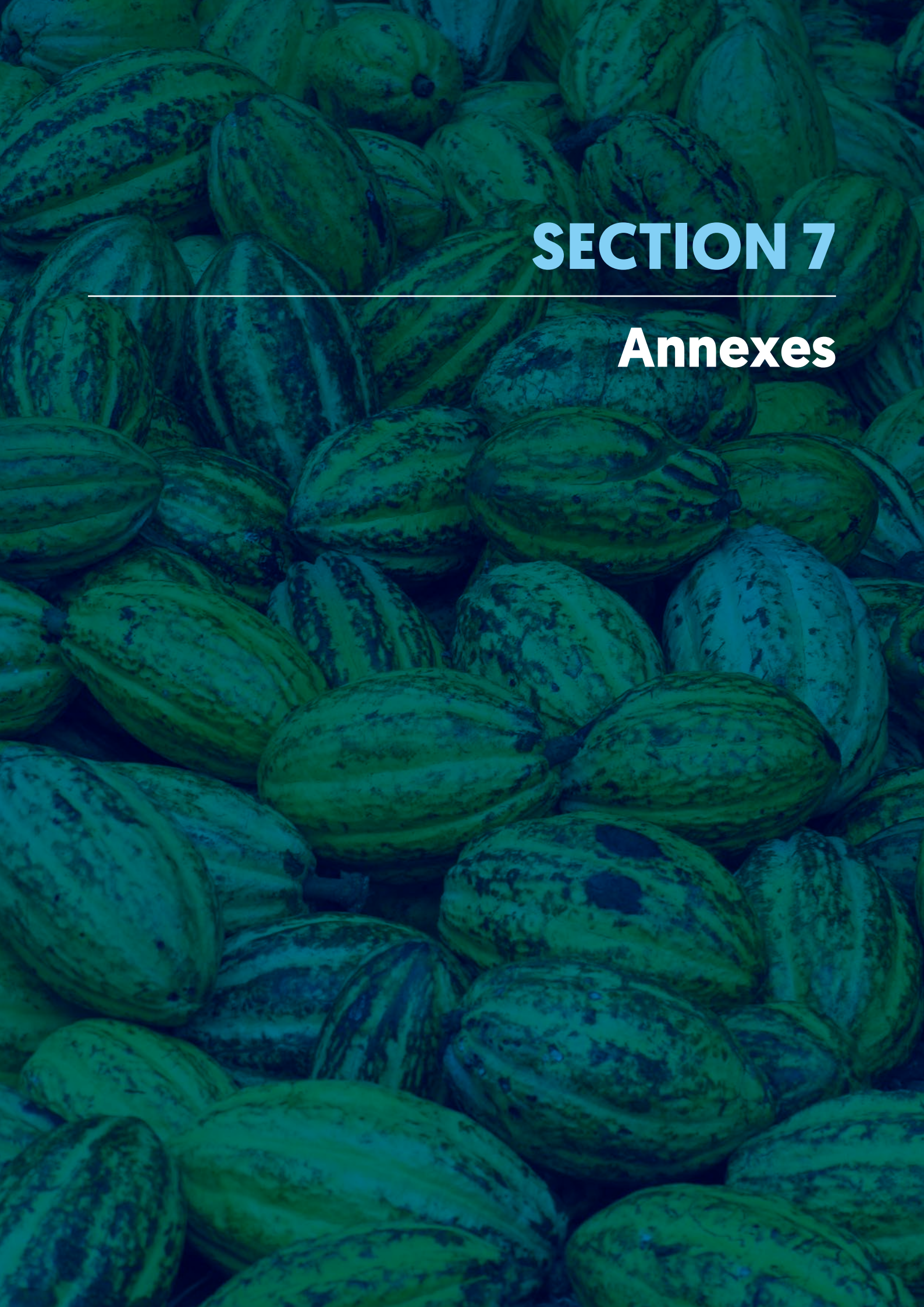
First, decent work encompasses a wide range of outcomes that are challenging to tackle simultaneously. The reality of current economic and labour market dynamics is that not all good things go together. It may be possible to tackle some decent work outcomes, such as workers' representation or occupational health and safety more easily than wages, job security, and other terms and conditions of employment. Trade-offs are unavoidable. VSS, the private sector, governments, unions and other civil society organizations may contribute to some improvements in decent work outcomes, but only to a limited extent if interventions are not far-reaching enough.

Second, labour regimes in agriculture and apparel are inherently exploitative and produce job insecurity and low remuneration for workers. This is an outcome of deeply entrenched global and local market dynamics, which, through competition, lack of protections, and weak collective action, powerfully shape how suppliers or producers treat their workers. A reality check is needed, as this review suggests. Voluntary (such as VSS) or company-driven tools (such as corporate sustainability pledges) can drive change on some aspects of working conditions, but not at a systemic level.

Overall, they are clearly unable to drive radical change and a systemic and bold move towards decent work in all its dimensions of pay, security and representation. Perhaps better decent work outcomes might be achieved with improved implementation of interventions, more coordination, and less selection bias.

However, the nature of labour regimes, as described in this report, together with the weakness of institutional and legal frameworks for workers in LMICs, are the product of forces that micro-level interventions are unlikely to fundamentally alter. Therefore, sustainability approaches to decent work in agriculture and apparel need to reflect on what kinds of changes can be driven through these types of interventions.

Systems approaches are more likely to yield long-lasting effects. For example, multi-stakeholder binding agreements including enforceable legislation in buying and producing countries borne out of lobbying, and collective action with workers at the centre. However, the pathway towards these kinds of agreements remains slow and bumpy.



SECTION 7

Annexes

Annex A:
Reports included in the systematic review

Counterfactual reports included for research question 1 - Agriculture

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