



SEEDS OF CHANGE: A PILOT PROJECT TO ADDRESS WAGE IMPROVEMENT IN INDIA'S SEED SECTOR

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INTRODUCTION

More than one billion people worldwide depend on agricultural work to make a living. Field production is exhausting work and often among the lowest paid, where legally required minimum wages – let alone living wages – far too often remain elusive.

Prevailing wages in the agriculture sector are often lower than the region's legal minimum wage, an unacceptable reality that leaves many hard-working Indians living in poverty. Faced with evidence of this problem in regions where it grows seeds for global commodities, Syngenta—one of the largest seed companies in the world—leveraged its affiliation with the Fair Labor Association to raise wages in two regions in India. This report provides an overview of its efforts, successes, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

The findings show that a company can make important progress by taking action to understand and improve wages in their supply chains. While the efforts of individual companies can make a difference, the report concludes that for sustainable progress this challenge must be addressed as an industry, similar to joint efforts deployed to combat child labor on India's seed production farms.

Paying decent wages is the best remedy to many other labor issues. Similarly, a lack of decent wages is directly related to an increase in child labor and forced labor. While child labor has been greatly reduced in the past few years, persistent legal minimum wage violations threaten to erode that progress.



Shobha's¹ first experience with farm work came at the age of 12. It was the same year she stopped going to school. Though she had hoped to become a school teacher, she started working on her mother's land instead.

After marrying at 18, her husband built a kutcha house on her mother's property. The house, constructed with wooden poles, mud and straw and a tin roof, is where she, her husband and seven-year-old son live.

At age 18, she also began walking to neighboring farms when their owners needed more hands, finding work in soya, corn and tomato seed fields for about 10 months of the year. The farmer tells her how much she will earn, and she keeps a small notebook which she updates every evening to track her work.

¹ The farmworker's name and some other details have been changed to protect her privacy.

Shobha, now 26, enjoys village life with its comfortable weather and fresh air. She has strong personal relationships with other residents, and they help and support each other whenever someone is in need. She is proud of herself and her ability to work and make money for her family. Shobha said she may be poor, but she is living a healthy and satisfied life.

Still, she worries about her son's future. She would like to make enough money so that she could accumulate savings over time. Currently she makes 220 Rupees per day—about \$3.08 U.S. As the primary breadwinner for her family, all of her money goes to household necessities and there's no money left at the end of the pay period. If she made more and could save money, she says, then her son could pursue higher education and get a job in the government or at a company. The way it is now, though, Shobha worries she won't have tuition money when he finishes his primary education in a few years.



“Seeds of Change” is a resource for those who share the commitment to make agricultural supply chains more sustainable and a positive force for all workers. We call on other seed and agriculture companies to implement practices that will raise the prevailing wage well above the legal minimum.

More than one in three people depend on agricultural work worldwide. In India, that number is even higher, with about 43 percent of workers engaged in farm labor. (World Bank)

BACKGROUND

In many parts of the world, agricultural workers are among the poorest and most vulnerable. They may face ethnic, social and gender discrimination, deal with language and education barriers that are easy to exploit and have few and seasonally limited work options—a recipe for poor pay and poor working conditions. Farm work’s poverty wages are plagued by prevailing wages that fall below legally required minimum wages. This is a well-known and widespread abuse that impacts the health and livelihoods of millions of families.

Global agricultural companies may not directly employ the workers, but their failure to press for change contributes to the problem and the violation of well-established legal, ethical, and moral frameworks, such as those articulated in the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the [FLA workplace code of conduct](#), increases their business risk.



Commitment to the UN Global Compact means complying with legal minimum wage requirements: Improving minimum wage compliance is consistent with company commitments to the principles of the UN Global Compact and Sustainable Development Goals.



WHAT IS AN AGRICULTURAL WORKER?

While about 30 percent of small-holder farmers in India live in poverty, this report focuses on those who work on other people's land. This type of wage work is considered a critical means to earning income, especially for the rural poor. (USAID report, 2015, 65-67)





[T]here is a very strong link between the prevalence of child labour and the non-payment of minimum wages. Individual companies should however at least abide by the law and at least ensure that the official minimum wages are paid and that the prices payed to farmers make this possible.”

([Source](#): Arisa (formerly the India Committee of the Netherlands) and Stop Child Labour Coalition)

AGRICULTURAL SECTOR'S ROLE IN RURAL INDIA

More than 70 percent of India's population lives in rural villages. Paid work is scarce and almost entirely dependent on the village's surrounding farms. Most of the time, whatever work exists is seasonal, so families must stretch a few months of paid work out over the entire year. This means farmworkers are often short on money. They may negotiate an advance from the farmer, paying it off through their work. Pay rates might be set as a daily or hourly wage, a piece rate, or for task-based work.

India has become an important market to grow hybrid seeds and commercial crops like tomato, okra, peppers, corn, cotton, beans, wheat and rice for both domestic and international markets. It is for this reason that multi-national agricultural companies now find themselves so deeply entwined with rural Indians' livelihoods.

MINIMUM WAGE VIOLATIONS ARE FORCED LABOR

The Indian Supreme Court wrote in 1982 that, “when a person provides labour of service to another for remuneration which is less than the minimum wage, the labour or service provided by him clearly falls within the scope and ambit of the words ‘forced labour’ under Article 23 [of the Constitution of India]” (People's Union for Democratic Rights and others Vs. Union of India and others [1982])



SEED SUPPLY CHAIN

It is common that multi-national seed companies, like Syngenta, are **both the seller and the buyer** of seeds to farmers and the intermediaries. As such, they exert control over seed production by providing seedlings grown in company-owned **nurseries** to farmers, either directly or through intermediaries.

For some regions and crops, Syngenta staff work directly with farmers. In others, Syngenta contracts with intermediaries called **seed organizers**. The seed organizers manage the relationship with the farmers and communicate and oversee growing guidelines that are laid out by Syngenta.

In India, most seed production **farmers** own small pieces of land—usually two or three acres. On that land they grow several crops throughout the seasons. Crops can be grown for seed, as well as for the commercial industry and for family consumption.

Most of the farm work is done by the family, but for time-sensitive, peak production tasks like weeding, pollinating, harvesting or fertilizing, a few **seasonal agricultural workers** are hired.

Workers may be hired and paid directly by the farmer or by the seed organizer. This means that on a given farm, there may be some workers who are employed by the farmer and others by the seed organizer (e.g. seed corn production).

Agriculture workers usually come from surrounding local villages but might also come from farther away in India and stay on or near the farm during the work season.

Because either the seed organizer or a Syngenta representative regularly stops by the farm to check on the crop and make sure their guidelines are being followed, farm workers likely are supervised and take direction from both the farmer and from a seed company representative.

64: Percent of the poor who rely on farm work (on an owned farm, or as a laborer) as their primary source of income (World Bank)

25,000: The number of farms Syngenta sources from in India, either directly or indirectly

200: The number of seed organizers Syngenta works with in India

1/4: Number of acres of typical size of plot for hybrid seed plot per farmer



THE PROBLEM—FARMWORK'S POVERTY WAGES

Despite having policies that commit to fair wages, Syngenta found legal minimum wage violations in the company's India supply chains. The violations are not unique to Syngenta. Several other seed companies in India have acknowledged the same issue exists in their supply chains.

The FLA's farm-level monitoring for Syngenta showed that for certain farm jobs mostly delegated to women, workers in India were often paid a "prevailing wage" which was lower than the regions' legal minimum wages. In 2016 and 2017, FLA's external monitoring data showed legal minimum wage violations on 122 of the 148 assessed farms.

Industry experts point to complex supply chains, an historic lack of urgency, limited awareness about regulations at all levels of the supply chain, competitive factors for international seed companies and local farmers, and a lack of grassroots power to effectively press for change as factors that contribute to unacceptably low wages.

These challenges do not exempt employers from the obligation to pay legal minimum wages. Further, responsible companies are expected to advocate for wages sufficient to afford workers' basic needs and allow for discretionary income. The result would lift some of the poorest people in India out of poverty, ensure compliance with international norms and standards, and reduce risk to companies.²

² It's important to note that the current legal minimum wages addressed during the time period covered in this report still were not more than \$3.20 per day, which is the World Bank poverty line for low-middle income countries like India ([World Bank](http://www.worldbank.org)). This is [commonly the case](#) with farm labor throughout the world.

SUB-MINIMUM WAGES SURFACE IN FLA MONITORING

The FLA conducts unannounced visits at farms to verify working conditions, using its Workplace Code of Conduct to measure compliance with international standards for decent work. The visits include a comprehensive review of processes and procedures, as well as extensive interviews with farmers, farmworkers, and labor contractors where relevant. The findings are published on the FLA's website.

Aside from legal minimum wage violations, monitors have also identified additional risk factors:

- Farm work tasks assigned by gender
- Weak government regulation
- Overall lack of knowledge of or commitment to meeting minimum wage laws, resulting in setting "prevailing" wages lower than the region's legal minimum

Additional red flags were regularly identified, which could further contribute to wage violations on farms:

- Cash wage payments
- Withholding wages until the end of the season
- Paying group wages to the head of the family when several family members are employed on the same farm
- Providing workers cash advances without documentation
- An overall lack of record-keeping





PROGRESS THROUGH ACTIONS— SYNGENTA'S JOURNEY

Recognizing that minimum wage issues affect entire communities of farmworkers, the FLA and Syngenta set out in 2015 to raise awareness among peer companies and spearhead a collective effort to combat minimum wage violations.

The FLA and Syngenta co-organized a multi-stakeholder consultation in Hyderabad in early 2016, bringing together 11 companies representing 80 percent of the hybrid seeds industry in India, and 21 civil society representatives from trade unions, worker organizations, farmer associations, and other advocates, researchers and agencies.

The discussion, however rich, did not lead to consensus about a collective approach. Syngenta leadership decided to move forward informed by the convening and an assessment conducted by the FLA and Glocal Research, an India-based research and consultancy. Syngenta developed a six-step action plan to address the issue of low prevailing wages.



FAIR LABOR ASSOCIATION WORKPLACE CODE OF CONDUCT ON COMPENSATION

Every worker has a right to compensation for a regular work week that is sufficient to meet the worker's basic needs and provide some discretionary income. Employers shall pay at least the minimum wage or the appropriate prevailing wage, whichever is higher, comply with all legal requirements on wages, and provide any fringe benefits required by law or contract. Where compensation does not meet workers' basic needs and provide some discretionary income, each employer shall work with the FLA to take appropriate actions that seek to progressively realize a level of compensation that does.



SYNGENTA'S OUTREACH TO WOMEN, BY WOMEN³

Manjula grew up in a poor family was married off at 13. Widowed at 18 when her husband died of a snake bite and left with no property, she returned to her parents' house, resolving to help other women like herself. She was selected by her village to train as a community health activist, helping rural women learn about things like immunizations and reproductive health.

When Syngenta realized its own awareness-raising efforts were not reaching women even though they made up most of the seed production workforce, an expert suggested using women community leaders to support the effort.

Manjula had just what Syngenta's field staff was looking for. She now regularly visits farms and houses of workers to spread awareness on

Fair Labor Association decent work standards, children's education, health and sanitation, safe use of chemicals and prevention against animal or insect bites, and other topics. In five years, she trained 500 farmers and around 2,500 farm workers spread over 35 villages.

Syngenta now has two women mobilizers, as the company calls them. They play an important role in spreading information about workers' rights to be paid a minimum wage.

"I struggled too much in life," Manjula said. "Nobody came forward to stop my marriage at an early age. I am determined now to ensure that no girl child in the village suffers the fate that I did. I support Syngenta's initiative wholeheartedly; it has given me a good platform to serve rural women and make a difference."

³ Adapted from www.syngenta.co.in/syngenta-me-and-mine, with additional inputs from Syngenta staff



Syngenta's 6-step minimum wage pilot project focused on raising wages for corn de-tasseling in Andhra Pradesh and hot pepper production in Maharashtra

1. Create an internal oversight committee

Needs authority, buy-in, relevant department representatives, and commitment

2. Internal review of procurement prices and calculations

Raising wages requires understanding pricing and budgeting for possible increased costs

3. Increasing awareness and capacity

Work with internal and external stakeholders—CSOs, unions, government, industry peers, business partners

4. Strengthen wage documentation

Training and templates for workers, farms and companies to record and track wages

5. Monitoring effects

Farm visits to verify changes

6. Analysis

Lessons learned for next steps and future strategy



Through the pilot, Syngenta made improvements to procurement practices and internal management systems, strengthened bonds with on-the-ground business partners, and raised awareness of the need to prioritize increasing wages to meet legal minimums.

Farm-level monitoring showed that wages for hot pepper and corn de-tasseling workers improved during the pilot. In the hot pepper pilot area, wages have reached the legal minimum wage. In corn production, the gap between minimum and prevailing rates for corn de-tassling before the pilot was significant – about 40 percent less than the legal minimum. After the pilot, wages increased but did not reach the legal minimum wage, suggesting that an industry-wide approach may be better positioned for meaningful impact than a single company acting alone.



The Syngenta-FLA wage pilot project had a positive impact. The learnings from this project are debated at multistakeholder forums and put pressure on other industry players to pay serious attention to the issue. The nonpayment of legal minimum wage is linked to child labour and forced labour. Without addressing the legal minimum wage issue, it is difficult to sustain the gains made by the industry on the child labour front. Inaction at this point makes the seed industry in India complicit of legal wage violations and contributes to possible forced labor in their supply chains”

Dr. Davuluri Venketeswarlu (Glocal Research)

TWO REGIONS AND CROPS. TWO SUPPLY CHAIN MODELS. 2,000+ WORKERS

By selecting two distinct supply chains, Syngenta tested the effectiveness of its approach with different leverage points.

Hybrid Corn Production in Andhra Pradesh:

- 87 villages
- 5,899 farms
- 5,510 workers

Notable variables:

- De-tasseling is the main work-intensive activity for hybrid corn
- Seed organizers pay workers directly, giving Syngenta more control
- Production concentrated in Andhra Pradesh

Key Outcomes:

- Wages increased, but still had not reached legal minimum wages in 2018.
- Workers paid by piece rate
- Increased awareness by seed organizers of the minimum wage.
- Seed organizers maintained wage records, but discrepancies were noted.
- Syngenta raised its procurement rate to account for minimum wage payments.

Hot Pepper Production in Maharashtra:

- 31 villages
- 203 farms
- 2,118 workers

Notable variables:

- Several farm tasks are conducted and paid at different rates
- Farmers (not the seed organizer) hire workers and pay them, adding another tier between Syngenta and the worker
- Compact production area

Key Outcomes:

- No instance of minimum wage violations at farms visited in October 2018
- Seed organizers' and farmers' awareness increased
- More farmers maintaining some wage records, though discrepancies noted
- Strengthened contractual relationship now requires paying legal minimum wages to workers



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Properly pollinating a hybrid hot pepper takes focus and skill. The timing has to be right—one can't be too early or too late. It is time consuming. It requires dismantling the plant's blossom by removing the petals and the pollen-producing anthers. It also requires more than one plant because the pollen from another is used to fertilize the what remains of the blossom. The process leaves the blossom exposed and vulnerable, in need of protection.

Syngenta's efforts to raise wages have also required focus, skill, time and cooperation. But the company's pilot project yielded learnings that can raise wages, leading the way to more just, equitable and sustainable agricultural practices. Key learnings include:

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION HELPS FRAME THE PROJECT

Input from the January 2016 meeting guided the project by:

- Collecting input on the design and implementation of actions;
- Building credibility and support;
- Fostering industry-wide collaboration



Key Takeaway: Stakeholder consultation should continue throughout the project's implementation. Meetings at key points during the project activities lets stakeholders share challenges and ideas, improving the outcome and building rapport in the process.

IMPROVING INTERNAL PROCESSES IS A KEY STARTING POINT

Syngenta looked inward to better understand its on-the-ground realities in India and analyze ways the company could exert its influence. The process resulted in a "Project Charter" with the objective to ensure minimum wage payments to all farmworkers involved in Syngenta's India seed production. The charter included tangible, crop-specific indicators to strengthen internal management systems, including:

- Improving farm monitoring by adding wage collection to its monitoring tool
- Rolling out a plan to use legal minimum wages instead of lower prevailing wages in its procurement price calculations
- Revising procurement contracts with seed organizers and farmers to reflect Syngenta's commitment and legal obligation to pay at least the legal minimum wage to workers



Key Takeaway: Companies can start by acting alone

Syngenta did not wait for other seed companies to act. Revising procurement prices so they include improved wages for workers requires significant internal commitment from top management and relevant business units.



INTERNAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE HARNESSES KNOWLEDGE

To oversee the pilot, Syngenta created a Project Advisory Committee made up of key people from various departments within the company as well as representatives from the FLA and from Glocal Research. With monthly phone calls and quarterly meetings, the group researched, designed, reviewed and monitored all aspects of the pilot.

Key Takeaway: Improve collaboration by making it official

Formally creating a cross-departmental committee that is responsible for a project allows the departments to get on the same page and assist each other in understanding both the social and business cases for addressing minimum wage issues. External experts bring added perspectives and knowledge to the team.

MINIMUM WAGES IN INDIA

Currently, formal minimum wages in India are meant to guarantee bare livelihood. They can be set by both federal and state governments and vary by job and location. They are often adjusted annually, based on how the cost of living is calculated. Wage rates can be hourly, daily, monthly or even piece-rate and take into account the type of work, age of worker, skill required and the location of the work.

Informally, “market” wages can be set for a region and are industry and task based. They can be negotiated between farmers/seed organizers and hired

workers/labor contractors either individually or as a group. However, a lack of organized worker groups or unions and uneven power dynamics between dominant landowners and workers, as well as a lack of knowledge about legal minimum wages, means that often times the prevailing wage is set below the legal minimum wage.

The formal minimum wage setting process can be complicated⁴, and members of the Indian Parliament have launched efforts to consolidate the regulations. (India Today)

⁴ For more information on minimum wage setting in India, see www.india-briefing.com/news/india-minimum-wage-a-brief-explainer-15102.html/

BY THE NUMBERS: WAGES IN HOT PEPPER FARMS IN MAHARASHTRA

214.11: Average legal minimum daily wage in Indian Rupees, July-October 2017

200: Prevailing daily wage, in Indian Rupees, paid for cross pollination in 2017

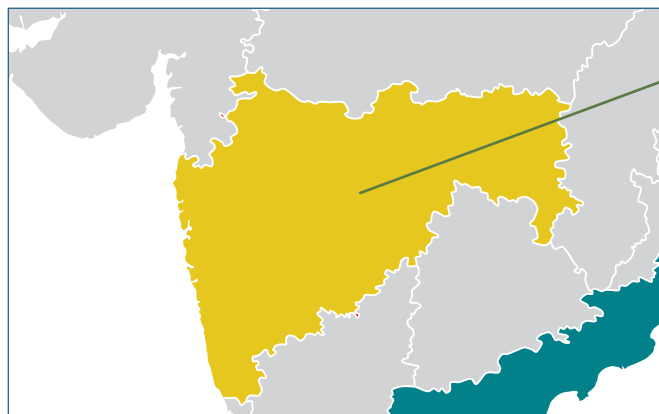
3.07: Prevailing daily wage rate in US Dollars

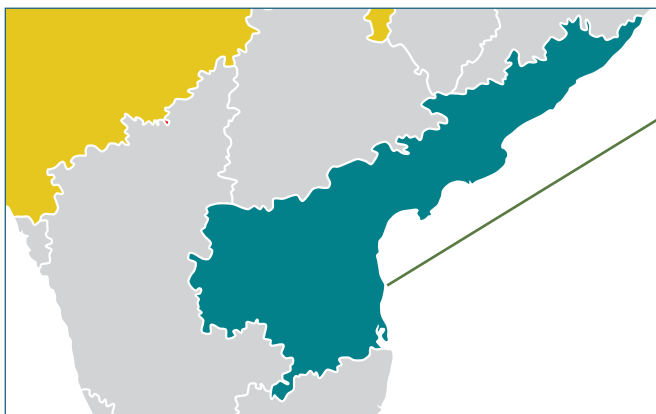
8: Maximum number of work hours to collect daily wage

4: Minimum number of work hours to collect daily wage

1.5: Overtime rate for work performed beyond the 8-hour workday

III: The wage zone in which the majority of hot pepper farms were located





BY THE NUMBERS: WAGES IN HYBRID CORN IN ANDHRA PRADESH

353: Legal minimum wage for corn de-tasseling in 2017, in Indian Rupees⁵

200-220: Prevailing daily wage paid in 2017, in Indian Rupees

40: percent below the legal minimum wages corn de-tassellers were paid in 2017

6: Maximum number of work hours to collect daily wage

1.5: Overtime rate for work performed beyond the 6-hour workday

4: Minimum number of work hours to collect daily wage

II: The wage zone in Andhra Pradesh in which the majority of hybrid corn farms were located

ADDRESSING DEEP-ROOTED ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL NORMS ABOUT WAGES FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES

To raise awareness about the legal minimum wage and promote ways to ensure its payment, the pilot focused attention on building awareness and capacity on the ground. This included in-person trainings, developing materials and fostering ways to share information and increase trust. Asking a group of farmers to pay the legal wages, while others in the same community continue to pay the prevailing wages requires consistent awareness raising and buy-in from the farmers, as well as dialogue with the community leaders.

During meetings, Syngenta staff, seed organizers, and farmers voiced concerns about the effects of raising wages related to lower profitability, labor supply, and concern of backlash by non-Syngenta farmers. Without building trust, these issues may not have come to light and then would not have been addressed openly. The groups also provided valuable knowledge and feedback, offering ways to raise farmers' awareness and farmers' incomes. No such platform existed for



Key Takeaway: Ongoing engagement allows for more candid feedback

During meetings, Syngenta staff, seed organizers, and farmers voiced concerns about the effects of raising wages related to lower profitability, labor supply, and concern of backlash by non-Syngenta farmers. Without building trust, these issues may not have come to light and then would not have been addressed openly. The groups also provided valuable knowledge and feedback, offering ways to raise farmers' awareness and farmers' incomes. No such platform existed for these discussions before the launch of this project.

⁵ The applicable rate for Zone II, the location of most Syngenta production. The rate for Zone I is 402.40 and Zone III is 315.30.



these discussions before the launch of this project.

These efforts have included:

- Conducting two training sessions facilitated by Glocal Research—one in Andhra Pradesh and one in Maharashtra. In total, about 75 people attended, including Syngenta staff, seed organizers, some farmers, and Syngenta-employed outreach workers focused on reaching women farm laborers.
- Using existing multi-stakeholder networks like ECHO⁶ to raise awareness and solicit feedback for the pilot's objectives. FLA attended three meetings to present the outcome of a previous Procurement Study, to share the concept note for this pilot project, and to update the group on the project's activities and learnings. Through this, FLA learned that some companies were also strengthening internal policies and tools, and participants shared insights and recommendations to work collectively to monitor wages and maintain records.
- Laying the foundation for regular consultation with regional civil society organizations, including with women's organizations since the legal minimum wage gap disproportionately affects women.
- Meetings with local government bodies to share project information.
- Holding a national CSO round table dedicated to wages in January 2018 to brainstorm possible next steps.

⁶ ECHO is a multi-stakeholder forum set up in 2003 in India by the seed industry association, NGOs and research institutes aimed at addressing child labor through working with stakeholders in the Indian seeds sector. This group was formally known as the Child Labor Elimination Group (CLEG), then the Child Care Platform (CCP). Currently, 13 seed companies and four civil society organizations are part of ECHO.

“

Widespread and effective solutions require collective action from industry, farmers, governments and other stakeholders. Through working closely with the FLA, and with the full support of Syngenta leaders, we achieved real improvements addressing legal minimum wage violations in our Indian seed supply farm network. We are confident that there are other responsible companies and stakeholders who are keen to collaborate to bring similar initiatives forward. This project is only the beginning.”

Nalan Gurol, Global Field Sustainability Lead
Syngenta



“

In our area, wages are paid as per the local wage rates which is always governed by demand and supply. Minimum wages are never considered while paying the wages, and there is a fixed mind set of the people to adopt the local wage rates. Syngenta with FLA has taken a very good step to comply with the state minimum law which will really benefit the workers to get their rights.

Our persistent efforts from the last two years have started changing the situation. As the issue is very complex it will take its own time to change the situation. I feel very proud that we have really started addressing a very critical issue in the interest of workers. I will continue supporting Syngenta in addressing the issue and become the pathfinders in the projects such as this.”

Prabhakar Rao, long-time seed organizer in
Bhadrachalam for corn seed production



ONWARD: BUILDING ON THE PILOT'S FOUNDATION

Through the pilot, Syngenta improved its procurement practices and internal management systems, strengthened bonds with on-the-ground business partners, and raised awareness of the need to prioritize raising wages to meet legal minimums. Wages did increase, though not enough to lift workers out of poverty.

Syngenta faced resistance from local farmers and some seed organizers to raise wages, and the company's efforts to increase awareness around legal minimum wage with farmworkers reached a limited number of people. There is a need for a concerted, industry-wide effort, similar to the seed industry's initiative to eradicate child labor a decade



ago. Inaction at this point makes the agriculture industry in India complicit in legal wage violations and contributes to possible forced labor in their supply chains.

We call on the seeds companies and the agricultural industry at large in India to align its practices so that it can:

- Ensure procurement practices and contracts that guarantee no less than payment of legal minimum wages and increase over time to meet basic needs and more;
- Work together to incentivize farmers and seed organizers to keep accurate time and pay records, and to pay legal minimum wages;
- Work with local partners, including relevant workers and advocates, to raise awareness among farm workers about their rights to a legal minimum wage;
- Monitor farms and collect wage data to track progress;
- Support government efforts to enforce minimum wage laws and ensure that those wages meet the needs of farmworkers.

CONCLUSION

This report describes a pilot project that is part of a broad commitment by FLA-affiliated companies to work toward wage progression in their supply chains. In this example, Syngenta recognized the urgency of prevailing wages in its seed supply chain in India.

Tackling legal minimum wage violations is complex but necessary. Syngenta understands the legal, moral and social risks associated with the problem. With assistance from

“Agricultural companies contribute to the wellbeing of the world, beginning in the rural communities where seeds and crops are cultivated. The strength of rural communities and the farmworkers who live in them depend upon the payment of fair wages, as much as their plantings rely on sunlight and water. The Seeds of Change project shows that deliberate leadership on improving farmworker wages is a catalyst, and that collective action is essential to achieving sustainable change that benefits workers, communities, companies, and the world’s agricultural economy.”

Sharon Waxman, President & CEO
Fair Labor Association

the FLA, the company took steps to strengthen internal pricing and wage tracking tools, increase collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, and pilot efforts to improve wages. Through this work, Syngenta has continued to build on its reputation as an industry leader in the establishment of fair working conditions and practices for seed workers.

While some of Syngenta’s peers have made commitments around wages in their supply chain, they have not yet equipped themselves with the information, tools, partnerships, and strategies to close the gaps between applicable standards, wages, and practices at the farm. Lack of coordination among companies limits the efforts



to individual supply chains without achieving large-scale impact or change on the farms. To reach scalable and sustainable results, collaboration and engagement amongst the seed industry, community-based organizations, and government entities is a must.

Improving wage rates will require breaking deep-rooted sentiments towards wages and behavioral change interventions. This calls both for an approach where supply chain partners and community thought leaders and labor contractors are involved and where existing local social norms are aligned with the legal minimum wage rate and workers are made aware of their rights.

Some companies may feel reluctant to change, fearing unknown consequences. But just as with child labor, one company cannot solve the problem alone. In 2018, Arisa (formerly the India Committee of the Netherlands) drew the link between child labor and legal minimum wage violations. They called on agricultural sector companies in India to join efforts to raise wages. That challenge remains, as does the opportunity for multi-national agriculture companies to heed the call to take action to guarantee field workers and farmers a prevailing wage that is well above poverty that meets basic needs and provides discretionary income.

THE FAIR LABOR ASSOCIATION

Since 1999, Fair Labor Association has helped improve the lives of millions of workers around the world. As a collaborative effort of socially-responsible companies, colleges and universities, and civil society organizations, FLA creates lasting solutions to abusive labor practices by offering tools and resources to companies, delivering training to workers and management, conducting due diligence through independent assessments, and advocating for greater accountability and transparency from companies, factories, farms, and others involved in global supply chains.

In 2018, the organization created the Fair Labor Agricultural Alliance, a multi-stakeholder platform dedicated to improving working conditions and human rights in agricultural supply chains. The FLAA brings together business, civil society, governments and other key stakeholders to learn, share and collaborate on-the-ground remediation efforts.

