

Human & Labor Rights Risk Assessments

Guidance for Agricultural Cooperatives and Farmer Organizations

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About This Tool

This guidance document provides general information for preparing for and conducting a human rights risk assessment within a farmer organization's coverage area. It was created as a resource for farmer organizations in the West African cocoa context, but the core practices can be applied to other geographic areas and commodities.

It is important for farmer organizations to carry out human rights risk assessments to identify and address potential human and labor rights risks affecting farmers and workers in their communities. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive or step-by-step process for conducting risk assessments but rather identifies good practices for farmer organizations to consider when conducting risk assessments.

A farmer organization is a member-based group of small-scale producers—such as cooperatives, unions, producer groups, and farmer associations—that represent farmers' interests. A farmer organization can sometimes describe groups formed or managed by companies to organize farmers together to implement human rights due diligence (HRDD) more easily.

Good Practice When Preparing for a Risk Assessment

► **Identify a human rights risk assessment template and accompanying interview tools**

Work with the companies that source from the farmer organization to identify a human rights risk assessment template and interview tools that align with their human rights due diligence (HRDD) policy commitments and overall strategy.

If such tools do not exist, the farmer organization may seek out publicly available risk assessment tools online. This can be done alone by the farmer organization or in partnership with the company that sources from them.

One such publicly available template is the [Rainforest Alliance Risk Assessment Tool](#). Additionally, worker interview tools such as the [Verité Assessment Questionnaire for Cocoa Farmers and Farm Workers](#) can be used as an accompanying tool for farmer and worker interviews. Publicly available tools might need to be adjusted to better fit the farmer organization's sourcing community and type of agricultural crop it produced.

▷ **Identify sources of data**

Farmer organizations can draw on multiple sources of information to complete a human rights risk assessment. Data sources can include:

- The knowledge of farmer organization staff, based on their interactions with farmers and workers
- Existing information gathered via internal inspection of farms and households
- Existing audit or grievance mechanism data
- Stakeholder interviews and/or focus group discussions (FDGs), such as with farm owners and farm workers, including migrants and women. Stakeholders can also include community members and social service providers.

▷ **Identify which staff are responsible for administering the assessment**

The field staff who regularly work with farmers and workers are likely best able to carry out the risk assessment within their respective farming communities. These staff will be the ones interviewing farm owners and farmworkers, including migrants and women, and filling out the risk assessment form. Field staff who conduct the risk assessment should be trained in using risk assessment tools.

The risk assessment and the analysis of the results should be overseen by the person or team accountable for implementing the farmer organization's human rights policy/commitments and programming, to make sure findings are a part of the farmer organization's HRDD strategy.

▷ **Identify which farming communities will be involved in the risk assessment**

It may not be realistic to carry out risk assessments in every farming community. Using existing knowledge about each community in the service area, staff

can prioritize which communities to engage in the risk assessment based on considerations such as:

- **Presence of vulnerable groups engaged in cocoa production.** Internal and international migrant workers and their families, women, and children are often more vulnerable to labor and human rights violations.
- **Remoteness of the community from social support and services.** Workers, including migrants and women, in farming communities that are remote and isolated from support and service networks can face problems in finding help when their rights are violated. This can enable human rights violations to go unreported/undetected.
- **History of human rights violations.** Consider conducting regular risk assessments in communities that are known to have had violations in the past, to monitor progress on addressing these risks.

▷ **Determine a target number of people to interview during the risk assessment**

Use existing knowledge about the people engaged in cocoa production in the farmer organization's coverage area to decide the total number of interviews and stakeholders.

- **Total number of interviews.** The number of interviews should be large and varied enough to uncover relevant human rights risks across different communities. While farm workers should be the primary focus, interviews with farm owners or employers can also provide valuable information about recruitment and working conditions.
- **Stakeholders interviewed.** The interviews should include a mix of different stakeholders and include women (both women workers and farm owners), migrants (both internal and international), worker types (day, seasonal, permanent, sharecropper labor), ages, etc. The stakeholders interviewed should represent a variety of different people and views, particularly from farm workers.

Good Practices When Conducting a Risk Assessment

- ▶ **Ensure the team of interviewers is composed of both men and women.** Ideally, there should be at least one male and one female interviewer present at the time of the assessment. Women interviewees may feel more comfortable speaking openly with a woman interviewer, whether due to cultural norms or personal preference or comfort level.
- ▶ **It is helpful to have the assessment administered by person(s) of a similar background to the people being interviewed, if possible.** This could mean the assessment administrator is from the same region or ethnic group, speaks the same language, or is of the same gender as the person(s) being interviewed during the assessment.
- ▶ **Prioritize conducting individual interviews over group interviews.** In group settings, timid or shy people are less likely to voice their experiences, whereas people who are outspoken may dominate the conversation. This can skew the impressions and information about risk. Individual interviews provide space for the respondent to share their experiences and for the interviewer to ask more tailored questions about specific experiences.
- ▶ **Determine whether gaining permission is necessary.** There may be circumstances when obtaining permission from the farm owner is needed, such as when the interview with the farmworker(s) occurs on the farm or in circumstances when there is risk that speaking with farmworker(s) could cause suspicion or possible retaliation by the farm owner.
- ▶ **Avoid interviewing a worker alongside or within the hearing range of their employer.** This can create an environment for intimidation, coaching, and/or retaliation by their employer and increase risk to workers. This can also affect how honestly the interviewed worker responds to the questions in the risk assessment and potentially lead to human rights risks or violations going unspoken or even lead to retaliation.