

DECENT WORK IN GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS:
A STUDY OF ESWATINI'S SUGARCANE OUTGROWER SCHEMES

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ABSTRACT

Research on Eswatini's sugar industry has expanded rapidly over the past few years, which has provided information on increasing efficiencies under climate change, market competitiveness, and business integration in the industry. Such studies explore opportunities to increase profitability and sustainability in the sugar industry; motivated by low world sugar prices and rising costs of production. However, studies on farmworkers' conditions of work at the production node of the sugarcane production network are limited. Often, suppliers/producers in the agricultural sector are faced with a dilemma of meeting market demands and maintaining secure work for their employees – but the market and institutional pressures in Eswatini's sugar industry, because of the country's participation in the global sugarcane production network, continue to contribute towards decent work deficits on sugarcane farms. This study, being informed by the Global Production Network (GPN) framework, evaluates workers' conditions in the context of local embeddedness. The GPN framework enables a deeper analysis of the role of labour and the value workers add to the production process. Imperative to this study is to recognise workers' struggles as they participate in the sugarcane production network as an effective way of locating decent work in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms. Using seven indicators adopted from the International Labour Organisation's Decent Work pillars, this study shows how the specific conditions at the production node of the network (farms) are embedded in a particular historical, institutional, and regulatory context, which included non-firm actors (in particular, Eswatini's government) who, in combination, shape the dynamics of the sugar industry. The study concluded that decent work deficits include informal and flexible employer-employee relations between farmers and farmworkers; the unfair treatment of women farmworkers on small-scale sugarcane farms; Eswatini's political climate and its impact on trade union representation on farms; and the effects that climate change has on farmworkers' conditions of work.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DEL – South African Department of Employment and Labour

ECGA – Eswatini Cane Growers Association

ESA – Eswatini Sugar Association

ESMA – Eswatini Sugar Millers Association

EU – European Union

GCC – Global Commodity Chains

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GPN – Global Production Network

GVC – Global Value Chains

ILO – International Labour Organisation

ITUC – International Trade Union Confederation

RESC – Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation

SACU – South African Customs Union

SADC – Southern African Development Community

SAPWU – Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union

USA – United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Many firms/industries (in developing countries) participating in Global Production Networks (GPNs) are faced with the challenge of maintaining standards associated with ‘decent work’ (initiated by the International Labour Organisation [ILO]). Suppliers/producers in the agricultural sector are faced with a dilemma of meeting market demands and maintaining secure work for their employees. A key conceptual challenge in analysing the effects of market and institutional pressures on workers is determining if opportunities for decent work in the agricultural industry, specifically the sugar industry, can be realised. Decent work involves opportunities for productive work that delivers fair income, security in the workplace, social protection, social integration, social dialogue (freedom for workers to express their concerns, to organize and participate in decisions that affect their lives), equality of opportunity and treatment for all workers and prospects for personal development (ILO, 2006). This study examines the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini’s small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms, and the challenges they face in trying to realise decent work at the production node of the network.

Eswatini’s sugar industry plays a significant role in the global sugarcane production network. The Kingdom is the fourth largest sugar producer in Africa and the 25th largest producer in the world (Globe Newswire, 2020: 1). Eswatini’s sugar industry is characterised by an oligopolistic relationship where two sugar mills are the only buyers in the region, which can be clouded with problems. Farmers can perceive unfair distribution of the industry’s proceeds by the sugar millers, which is, in turn transmitted to working conditions for farmworkers in the lower tiers of the production network. Farmworkers participating at the production node of the network are faced with challenges in realising decent working conditions. Masuku *et al.* (2007: 94) suggest that the lack of education among workers makes participation in the network a challenge and leads to a misunderstanding of labour laws and their rights in the workplace. On the other hand, external and internal factors such as increasing production costs, competition, currency fluctuations (Euro and

US Dollar), climate change and water availability affect labour conditions on sugarcane farms, thereby giving rise to decent work deficits (ESA, 2019: 8).

A significant body of literature (ITUC, 2016; Taruvinga, 2011; UNCTAD, 2000; ILO, 2005; Matofari & Muthui, 2016) shows that workers' struggles in the sugarcane sector include opposition to informal and flexible labour, which is usually involved in low-skilled manual tasks that are associated with authoritarian and/or paternalistic forms of managerial control, poor working conditions, and low wages. Hence, recognising workers' struggles as they participate in the sugarcane production network can be an effective way of locating decent work deficits in the network. This will be achieved through farmworkers' responses, which reflect their experiences of working on outgrower sugarcane farms in the different sections of the network. A careful analysis of their responses will help locate decent work deficits in the production network.

For this study, I used the following seven indicators to assess the working conditions of farmworkers employed in selected sugarcane farms: employment opportunities; stability and social security at work; adequate earnings and productive work; conditions of work; treatment of, and opportunities for, men and women; safe work environment; and promotion of social dialogue. These indicators were derived from the four pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. With the aid of the above indicators, I examine the conditions of work at the production node of the network, and the position of Eswatini's sugar industry in the global sugarcane production network and the ways in which the structure of the sugar production network shapes conditions at the site of production (selected small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Regional, national, and international economies are integrated through GPNs by the movement of goods and services. Value is added at each stage in the network; in this case, from when the sugar is harvested, produced and refined to its end use by consumers. GPNs have become a source of employment in many developing countries through the outsourcing of production from countries in the Global North to the Global South. This is because production costs are considerably lower in developing countries, which makes it easier to maintain or improve productivity, increase sugarcane yields and increase profits. The majority of the labour on sugarcane farms is sourced

from rural areas, which usually means that farmworkers have minimal education. The lack of education has affected how they participate in the production network, because it has led to the misunderstanding of labour laws in the sugarcane sector and their rights in the workplace. Farmworkers' lack of education has shaped the possibilities for and limits their actions. Farmers often make unilateral decisions, which lead to informalities in the employee-employer relationship between farmers and farmworkers. To contextualise and understand the role that farmworkers in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms play in the global sugarcane production network, this paper made use of the GPN analysis.

The nature of work and the role of workers continues to be marginalised in the Global Commodity Chain (GCC) and Global Value Chain (GVC) literature (Bair & Werner, 2015; Barrientos *et al.*, 2011). The GPN framework – which is the theoretical framing for this study – is the favoured alternative to the GCC and GVC analyses. This is because this dissertation aims to understand workers' conditions in the context of local embeddedness. The GPN framework enables a deeper analysis of the role of labour and the value workers add to the production network. As Rainnie (2013: 180) explains: “GPN approach has a deeper spatial awareness concerning workers' lives than do either GCC or GVC analyses. GPN analysis takes more seriously how workers' embeddedness in place shapes the possibilities for their action.” The GPN approach helps me understand how Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms are embedded in the global sugarcane production network, as well as situate the farmworkers in the production network. The GPN approach has also been able to frame the progressive outsourcing of production by lead firms in developed countries to low-cost/low-wage countries and regions (Neilson *et al.*, 2014: 1). I use the GPN framework as an integrated approach that helps shed light upon how global buyers in the sugar industry can potentially influence decent work in the lower tiers of the production network (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011; Alford *et al.*, 2017).

The sugar industry, which includes the growing of sugarcane and the processing of raw and refined sugar and its by-products, is of great importance to Eswatini's economy. The industry contributes about 35 per cent of agricultural wage employment and 18 per cent of country's GDP (ITUC, 2016: 3). The majority of waged employment in the sugarcane sector is from outgrower schemes (or contract farming). Eswatini's sugar industry mainly consists of small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms of large sugar companies that own sugarcane estates and mills. The

relationship between contract farmers/outgrower schemes and sugar millers is important for the overall success of the sugar industry. However, research on the relationship between outgrower farmers and their farmworkers is limited. (Given the similarities between contract farming and outgrower schemes, I use the terms interchangeably). The few available studies (Masuku *et al.*, 2007; Masuku, 2011; Taruvinga, 2011; ESA, 2020) on Eswatini's sugar industry focus on the determinants of profitability and the value added at the producer/supplier level of the production network, while paying little attention to farmworkers' participation in the production network and how their embeddedness in place shapes the possibilities for their action.

The purpose of this study is to contextualise and examine the labour conditions of farmworkers in the lower tiers of Eswatini's sugarcane production network. The study draws on the insights gained from a review of the literature on global sugar production networks and industries. The imperative is to understand labour processes on outgrower sugarcane farms that participate in global production networks. Participation in GPNs promises employment creation, decent working conditions and a reduction in poverty, especially in developing countries (Das, 2012: 1). However, most literature reviewed on Eswatini's sugar industry avoids dealing with the exploitative nature of work in the production node of the network (i.e., sugarcane farms).

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this dissertation is to examine the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms. The secondary objectives include:

- a) To examine how the market and institutional pressures that contribute towards decent work deficits in sugarcane production networks – as revealed by a review of the available literature – are experienced by selected workers on Eswatini's outgrower sugarcane farms.
- b) To examine how farmworkers' embeddedness in the production node of the network shapes the possibilities for and limits to their actions.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

To achieve the above research objectives, I carried out interviews with farmworkers from small- and medium-sized outgrower sugarcane farms in The Kingdom of Eswatini. I was interested in understanding the quality of working life for farmworkers – whether their employment provided them with decent work that delivered a fair income, stability and social security in the workplace, occupational health and safety at work, access to social dialogue, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all workers. I interviewed farmworkers from different farms to get as broad a sense of decent work in the sugarcane sector as possible. This proved to be an effective way of locating decent work deficits in the network. Hence, a qualitative data collection method was adopted to help in understanding social phenomena (standards of work) in the production network through the eyes of the farmworkers (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016: 56).

Upon arrival at sugarcane farms, the study was explained to the participants. They were asked whether they were prepared to participate, and the privacy of their information was guaranteed. They were asked to explain to me the work that they were doing on my arrival, which was a good way of putting the participants in a position where they teach me about their farm and work, rather than passively learning from an outside researcher. This was followed by in-depth and semi-structured telephonic interviews in which information was collected by asking open- and close-ended questions (see Appendix A). Using telephonic interviews was more suitable than face-to-face/focus group interviews, given the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Telephonic interviews adhere to prevailing regulations such as, social distancing, which are enforced during the pandemic (Dodds & Hess, 2020: 2). Interviews were conducted with an individual farmworker to gain an in-depth perspective on standards of work from the participants' perspectives.

Research participants were not obligated to answer any question during interviews and could withdraw from the interview at any point in time. None of the participants withdrew from the interviews – so, the planned data collection process was not compromised. However, there were questions that participants were not comfortable answering, like how much they earned and whether they were union members or not, which left some gaps in the information collected. To fill these gaps, I had an informal interview with the Secretary General of Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union (SAPWU), who gave me a rough idea of how much farmworkers earn and what union representation looks like in the sector. Also, this was where documentary

research became useful. I made use of public documents, which emanate from government publications, as well as annual reports and integrated reports that were available online. Documentary research is useful for categorising, investigating, interpreting and identifying the “limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents whether in the private or public domain” (Mogalakwe, 2006: 221-222).

Participants were primarily from communities in the Malkerns and Manzini area, in the Lowveld. Ten farmworkers were contacted during resting hours and after work. The participants’ telephone numbers were collected after they agreed (and signed) to the terms and conditions stipulated in the consent forms (see Appendix B). Snowball and convenience sampling methods were used, depending on the availability of, and access to workers on sugarcane farms. Due to time constraints, the convenience sampling method was the easiest, because participants were selected based on availability and willingness to take part in the study. On the other hand, the snowball sampling method was helpful in getting hard-to-reach individuals. Getting access to farmworkers without a gatekeeper (which would compromise the authenticity of information collected) proved to be a challenge because I had to approach farmworkers on sugarcane farms during resting hours to talk to them. The farmworkers I approached and interviewed were asked to nominate additional participants, known to them, to increase the sample size.

The instruments of data collection were in the form of an interview schedule with open-ended questions organised by topics. Female and male farmworkers were interviewed from three different sugarcane farms in the Manzini region, which is also situated in the Lowveld. Though this study does not seek to provide a gendered analysis, including both genders facilitated an awareness of the diversity of working experiences, given the vital role of the sexual division of labour in agriculture. The purpose of interviewing farmworkers from different farms was to show the contrasting attitudes the farmworkers have towards their roles in, and experiences of decent work in the sugarcane production network. Conducting interviews with farmworkers on different farms helped achieve diversity in the narratives on the nature of work in this production node of the network.

The study ensured quality and integrity as it was based on informed consent from the respondents. The confidentiality and anonymity of the research respondents were respected. The in-depth

interviews conducted via telephone were done anonymously, and participants were provided with consent forms to sign before participating in the research.

1.5 DISSERTATION OUTLINE

The next chapter contains the literature review and contextual discussion where I present the theoretical framing of this study and review literature on the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, the global sugar production network and industry, with a particular focus on Brazil and South Africa's sugar industries before moving on to a discussion of Eswatini's sugar industry. Outgrower farming in the industry and the labour conditions of farmworkers working in the lower tiers of the farms are discussed in detail. Chapters three and four are the empirical (data analysis) chapters. In Chapter three I address the second (secondary) objective of this study: to examine the market and institutional pressures that contribute towards decent work deficits in sugarcane production networks – as revealed by a review of the available literature – are experienced by selected workers on Eswatini's sugarcane farms. To address this objective, I focus on the nature of employment in Eswatini's sugarcane sector; Eswatini's participation in the global sugarcane production network; and the country's labour laws and farmworkers' knowledge and understanding of them. Following this discussion, Chapter four addresses the main and third (secondary) objectives of this study: (a) to examine the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms, and (b) to examine how farmworkers' embeddedness in the production node of the network shapes the possibilities for, and limits to their actions. In this chapter I focus on assessing decent work on small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms, and factors that may contribute towards decent work deficits at the bottom of the sugarcane production network. Lastly, Chapter five concludes the dissertation by drawing its arguments together and making some recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO:

SUGAR, LABOUR AND PRODUCTION NETWORKS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The structure of global trade, employment and the production of goods and services has significantly changed, with a great proportion conducted through GPNs; where lead firms outsource production to low wage developing countries. However, the growing economic importance of GPNs has implications on the terms and conditions of work and labour regulations. Hence, many firms/industries (in developing countries) participating in GPNs are faced with the challenge of living up to standards associated with decent work. Suppliers/producers in the production network are faced with a dilemma of meeting market demands and achieving decent working conditions for their employees. Using literature, this chapter seeks to contextualise the study to understand the conditions of employment and work in sugarcane production networks. This study is informed by the GPN theoretical framework, which offers a lens to understand the position of labour in production networks.

Moreover, this chapter will examine leading and successful global sugar production networks and industries by looking at two case studies: Brazil and South Africa. This (in comparison to Eswatini's sugarcane industry) is to determine if opportunities for decent work in the agricultural industry, specifically the sugarcane industry, can be realised. Lastly, the chapter will review literature more specific to sugarcane farming in Eswatini. In particular, the study examines labourers (farmworkers) who work in Eswatini's outgrower sugarcane farms and their access to decent working conditions in the lower tiers of the production network.

2.2 CONTEXTUALISING LABOUR IN GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS

By way of introduction to GPN as a framework, it is important to make mention that it was developed (separately and simultaneously) from the GCC and GVC frameworks (Hess, 2018: 2). Through the movement of goods and services, regional, national and international economies are

integrated through GVCs. GVCs link local producers from developing countries to international markets, emphasizing that the local could prosper only when it develops interconnectedness with the global (Das, 2012; van Dijk & Trienekens, 2012). Value is added at each stage in the chain, from when the sugar (for example) is harvested, produced and refined to its end use by consumers in their households. The GVC analysis draws its inspiration from the GCC framework which grew from the world systems theory (Hess, 2018: 2). GCCs can be understood as the network that exists between labour and production processes whose objective is to create finished goods and services for consumption in the global economy (Bair, 2009; Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986).

A key focus of the GCC framework is the dispersion of the production process by lead firms to low-cost production countries. Although helpful in framing how firms gather resources to produce finished or semi-finished goods or commodities, to then sell them to consumers, this framework is limiting. The GCC does not pay specific attention to the nature of work and standards of labour in commodity chains (Selwyn, 2013: 77). Instead, its core focus is on how lead firms in specific industries govern commodity chains, and the influence they have on chain participants (Selwyn, 2013: 77).

In GCC literature, workers appear as passive and victims who are usually viewed simply as being on the receiving end of a new kind of international division of labour (Selwyn, 2013; Rainnie *et al.*, 2011). For example, garment production in the Dominican Republic was a major attraction for firms in the United States because of cheaper production costs – and once they discovered cheaper labour elsewhere, they re-structured commodity chains to those countries (Selwyn, 2013: 77). According to Gibbon & Ponte (cited in Selwyn, 2013: 77), GCCs do not pay close attention to the relationship between labour and capital: how workers are exploited in factories as producers and lead firms try to maximise profits. Instead, attention is paid to the product/commodity: from the final commodity operation to the raw material inputs used to make the product (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986: 160). Also, literature and research on GCCs is largely based on tracing the economic flows between states such as “trade, migrations, or capital investments” (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1986: 160). This premise omits aspects of labour and the working conditions of labourers in commodity chains.

Global chain research exhibits a splintering of the GCC framework and the development of new frameworks, with one of them being the GVC approach. The GVC framework highlights the ‘value

added' at each state of the chain (Sturgeon, 2009; Bair, 2009). This framework focuses on the dynamics that exist between firms at different levels of the value chain, such as the patterns of international trade, production and employment, and the influence this has on development and competition in the chain (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 321). Moreover, the GVC analysis focuses on how industries are organised, coordinated, governed, and the consequences and causes of changes in the organisation of a chain (Gereffi, 2015: 1). Although commodity chain and value chain literature provides great insight into the contemporary globalised economy, it fails to “consider labour as an active agent capable of shaping” structures in chains (Rainnie *et al.*, 2011: 155). Bair & Werner (2015: 119) contend that labour continues to be marginalised in GCC and GVC literature. As a result, there have been attempts to remedy the limitations in GCC and GVC literature regarding the analysis of work and workers (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011; Gereffi, 2015).

Although the conceptualisation of all three frameworks (GCC, GVC and GPN) is similar in terms of the operations and transactions constituting a chain or network – from the production of goods and services to their distribution and consumption – they are different in practice (Coe *et al.*, 2008: 3). The GPN analysis – which is the theoretical framing for this dissertation – therefore came as a favoured alternative to the GCC and GVC approaches because it provides a better analysis of the consequences of contemporary capitalism (Hess, 2018: 1). The GPN analysis (albeit showing similar shortcomings), advances GCC- and GVC-inspired analyses in that it has a significant contribution to make to the study of work and employment in production networks (Rainnie *et al.*, 2011: 156).

Moreover, production networks are embedded within broader, multi-scalar structures and institutions of the global economy because they are constituted by the social, economic, and political processes of the places they inhabit (Selwyn, 2013: 77). The GPN analysis also observes the distribution of power of different forms within networks in the process of value creation. What makes the GPN different from the other frameworks is that it looks at non-firm actors such as the state, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions and the individual roles they play in shaping production networks, which makes it suitable for this study. This dissertation is not about the GPN itself, but rather about the ways in which the (macro) pressures of the network interact with or influence (micro) conditions on the sugarcane farms. Using the GPN framework, this study shows how the specific conditions at the production node of the network (farms) are in a particular

historical, institutional, and regulatory context, which includes non-firm actors (in particular, Eswatini's government) who, in combination shape the dynamics of the sugar industry.

When studying decent work in Eswatini's outgrower sugarcane farms, I analyse the role that Eswatini's government and ILO labour standards change and regulate working and employment conditions in production networks. In addition, the study seeks to understand the level of social dialogue and trade union representation on sugarcane farms. Therefore, the GPN analysis serves as an appropriate framework because it considers how the above non-firm actors contribute to the conditions of work in its analysis.

Issues concerning the complexities and dynamics of GPNs, at an industry and firm level, as well as the challenges around the flexibilization and casualisation of work and promoting decent work in production networks have been dealt with separately in literature, which has encouraged a view of these phenomena as mutually exclusive, when they are not (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 300). In essence, the complexities that exist in how industries/production networks operate, like fluctuating prices and demand for goods and services, may affect the conditions of work in the lower tiers of the network. What happens at an industry or firm level influences the nature of work and how workers are treated. Hence, I use the GPN framework as an integrated approach that helps shed light upon these different levels of analysis simultaneously, as well as how global buyers in the sugar industry can potentially influence decent work (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011; Alford *et al.*, 2017). Arguably, most production networks in developing countries, such as Eswatini's sugar production network, are buyer-driven networks/chains (Gibbon & Ponte, 2005: 79).

Gereffi (1994, cited in Gibbon & Ponte, 2005: 79) claims that producers in buyer-driven networks are "subordinate to lead agents controlling design and marketing, specifically those controlling international brand names and retailing, where barriers to entry are high and profits concentrated" and the manufacturing is outsourced to other countries or firms (ILO, 2016: 20). Consequently, production in these countries is characterised by low profit and low income due to the competitive and decentralised systems of subcontractors (Gibbon & Ponte, 2005: 79). In order to understand the dynamics in the workplace, we cannot only focus on the relations between employers and employees, but also need to consider the position of the firm/farm in the GPN as well as the governance structures of that network. This insight highlights the interconnections between the spheres of production, distribution and consumption. The argument of Selwyn (2013) and others

is: the GPN approach is strong on the wider political economy but weak on the processes of control and resistance in the workplace. Labour process theory, by contrast, is strong on the latter but weak on the former. As such, a combination of these two approaches allows for an appreciation of both the internal/local and external/global context of the workplace.

Bair & Werner (2015: 131) argue that labour shapes GPNs through their struggles over value creation, stringent labour markets, everyday practices and worker mobility between formal and informal forms of work. The GPN approach is useful to this study because it focuses on, firstly, firms' efforts to improve their position in the production network, and secondly, labour processes and how they are shaped by the interactions between managerial control and workers' struggle (Bair & Werner, 2015: 120). Insofar as the GPN framework considers labour and institutions in production networks, it aids in contextualising the challenges in realising opportunities for decent work in sugarcane production networks.

Furthermore, the GPN framework seeks to integrate workers as productive and social agents into global networks to understand how strategies of upgrading can benefit both firms and workers (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 322). According to Gereffi & Lee (2016: 30), the economic upgrading of suppliers/producer firms in developing countries, which stems from their integration into production networks, will automatically lead to social upgrading for workers. Economic upgrading is a move to "higher value-added activities in production, to improve technology, knowledge and skills, and to increase the benefits or profits deriving from participation in GPNs" (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 323). Upgrading is important for economic development and job creation in countries participating in GPNs where production is geographically dispersed and competition is intense (Gereffi & Lee, 2016: 25). The GPN framework's assumption (borrowed from the GVC framework) is that developing countries have much to gain by integrating into GPNs, which enhance the economic upgrading prospects of supplier/producer firms, which will, in turn, translate to social upgrading through better working conditions for workers (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 319). As a result, developing countries continue to pursue economic upgrading opportunities to capture a higher share of economic gains in GPNs, which can translate to improved standards of work and living for workers participating in the lower tiers of the production network.

The concept of social upgrading is associated with the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, which encompasses employment, standards and rights at work, social protection and social dialogue

(Selwyn, 2013; Barrientos *et al.*, 2011). It is through these four pillars that social upgrading in GPNs can be achieved. It is also through these four pillars that I derived the seven indicators used to assess decent work in Eswatini's outgrower sugarcane farms.

GPNs in developing countries are driven by comparatively low labour costs (Rossi, 2013: 223). To achieve mutually-beneficial processes and outcomes in GPNs, questions are raised about whether it is possible for firms and workers to simultaneously improve their position within GPNs (Selwyn, 2013: 79). In practice, as we will see below, workers are often faced with social downgrading. This is because of their employers' participation in production networks, has "significant implications on workers, their terms and conditions of employment, and labour regulations" (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 300). The ILO has made attempts to address social downgrading and achieve decent work by developing the Decent Work Agenda.

2.3 THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

The concept of decent work was founded by the ILO, and it remains a centrepiece of policy for the organisation. Moreover, the concept was adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 to encourage the creation of sustainable employment (Matofari & Muthui, 2016: 5). The ILO implemented the Decent Work Agenda to promote "work performed under conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, in which rights are protected and adequate remuneration and social coverage are provided" (Selwyn, 2013: 76, 79). The Agenda provides opportunities for productive work where workers have access to occupational health and safety, freedom to express their concerns and demonstrate through social dialogue, equal treatment and fair pay for all men and women in the workplace (Matofari & Muthui, 2016: 5). It is every worker's fundamental human right to have access to a safe and healthy workplace, and one that offers prospects for personal development. However, employment in most developing and poor countries is characterised by low labour productivity, insecure work and incomes barely able to sustain workers' livelihoods (Matofari & Muthui, 2016: 5). Most of the labour in Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini's agricultural production networks is sourced from poor and rural communities. Moreover, labour in these communities is informal, predominantly casual and flexible (Matofari & Muthui, 2016: 5).

2.3.1 Defining Decent Work

A key conceptual challenge in analysing the effects of market (demands) and institutional pressures on workers is determining if opportunities for decent work in the sugar industry, can be realised. According to the ILO (2006, cited in Matofari & Muthui, 2016: 6), decent work involves opportunities for productive work that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection, social integration, social dialogue (freedom for workers to express their concerns, to organise and participate in decisions that affect their lives), equality of opportunity and treatment for all workers and prospects for personal development. While these are admirable goals, they are vague and open to many interpretations. As such, these goals need to be operationalised so that we can assess the manner and degree of their implementation.

2.3.2 Assessing Decent Work in Sugarcane Production Networks

A significant body of literature shows that workers' struggles in the agricultural sector include casual and flexible labour involved in low-skilled manual tasks that are often associated with poor working conditions and low wages. Hence, recognising workers' struggles as they participate in the production network can be an effective way of locating decent work deficits in the network. To assess decent work, this dissertation will use decent work indicators derived from the pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda for the evaluation of decent work in Eswatini's sugarcane outgrower farms. This is because the ILO's four pillars cannot be used to assess decent work for an individual worker or at an industry level (Webster *et al.*, 2015: 126).

While maintaining some comparability with the ILO's decent work pillars, Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) proposes nine indicators to assess decent work at an industry level that "develop evidence-led strategies to overcome decent work deficits" (Webster *et al.*, 2015: 123). These indicators include employment opportunities; stability and security at work; adequate earnings and productive work; decent hours of work; combining work, family and personal life; equal opportunity and treatment; safe work environment; social security; and promotion of social dialogue. However, I modified the above indicators to developed seven indicators of decent work that can be applied to this study.

The following seven indicators were used as a yardstick to assess whether there were decent working conditions for farmworker on sugarcane outgrower farms: employment opportunities; stability and social security at work; adequate earnings and productive work; conditions of work; treatment of, and opportunities for men and women; safe work environment; and promotion of social dialogue. The only indicator from Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) that did not seem feasible for this study was ‘combining work, family and personal life’, which requires a focus on the livelihoods of farmworkers outside the workplace. Although this will be discussed in partial, I focus more on farmworkers’ quality of work life on sugarcane farms, and the challenges faced by farmworkers in trying to realise decent working condition in the production network. As an alternative, I modified the above indicator and combined it with Webster’s *et al.* (2015: 126) fourth indicator – ‘decent hours of work’ – to create what I termed ‘conditions of work’. In addition, I have treated ‘stability and security at work’ and ‘social security’ as one indicator (stability and social security at work) instead of two separate measures as Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) does. These modifications made it possible to apply decent work measures to a specific industry and individual. The ILO’s decent work pillars assess decent working conditions and labour standards on a national level, which makes it difficult to capsule into a series of questions to ask an individual.

In the following section, I review literature on global sugar production networks and industries: the Brazilian and South African sugar industry. Furthermore, I study the nature of employment and labour in these industries. This discussion will provide context for a later study on Eswatini’s sugar industry, as we will see below.

2.4 SUGAR PRODUCTION NETWORKS: BRAZIL AND SOUTH AFRICA

Production networks may vary in size, but they share similar characteristics because the responsibility of designing, planning and post-production strategies like product promotion and marketing remain with the transnational corporations, and the procurement of raw materials, processing, labour-intensive work, and manufacturing is subcontracted to developing and poor countries (Das, 2012: 2). A sugar production network consists of the production of the raw (cane) product until it becomes a finished product, which we call sugar. This section reviews literature on global sugar production networks and highlights the opportunities and challenges for decent

work in these networks. This will be achieved by: (a) studying Brazil and South Africa's sugar industries and assessing the conditions of employment and work on sugarcane farms; and (b) assessing Eswatini's sugar industry, specifically its sugarcane outgrower schemes and the quality of working life on sugarcane farms.

Sugarcane industries worldwide are complex. The production networks are generally made up of the following sectors: "cane growing, harvesting and transport, milling and marketing" (Everingham *et al.*, 2002: 459). Most sugar industries globally are push chains (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). This means that the sugar is pushed through the network to produce raw sugar with minimal product differentiation and sold at market value as a bulk commodity (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). Sugarcane is considered a tropical plant that is best suited to tropical environments (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). Usually, the cane grows to "a height of about 3 m at 12 months of age and yields approximately 60-120 tons per hectare at harvest" (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). As such, sugarcane is harvested annually.

The sugarcane is harvested annually either by mechanical harvesting or hand cutting, with the latter being especially common in developing countries (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). Once the cane is harvested, the sugarcane stalks are transported to the mills by road or rail transport to be processed into sugar (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). The sugar mills are usually located close to or in the same region as the sugarcane farms. Higgins *et al.* (2007: 612) calls these regions 'growing regions': where sugarcane farms/estates and mills are situated. Growing regions in Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini are situated in the lowveld and/or tropical areas – favourable for cane growing. Sugar mill capacity varies across countries (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). For example, Brazil's sugar mill can process between 1,000,000 and 5,000,000 tons of sugarcane per mill, and it is the leading sugar industry, globally (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). Sugarcane production and processing is highly intensive and requires a lot of energy/electricity. Therefore, sugar industries produce their own source of energy to remain productive. Aside from the production of sugar, Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini produce ethanol fuel from the sugarcane.

At the shipping/marketing end of the network, the raw sugar produced in the mills is transported to "storage facilities at shipping terminals for export to sugar refineries" (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). While producing sugar, sugar companies also produce molasses (a thick syrup texture) and bagasse (to generate power/electricity) (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). Beyond this point, sugar

industries are varied, with few selling their sugar domestically and others being export oriented. Sugar industries in Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini participate in both – selling sugar in domestic and international markets. Although all sections of the network are important, however, this study pays particular attention to the growing end of the network, as well as the quality of employment and working life in the sector.

The sugar industry is one of the largest agricultural industries globally, with global production exceeding 165 million tons of sugar per year (Chingono, 2019: 19). Sugar industries vary in size (the number of farms) and in ownership structures (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). In South Africa, most of the sugarcane farms and harvesters are privately owned with their primary focus to generate a sustainable income from sugarcane farming (Higgins *et al.*, 2007: 612). On the other hand, in Brazil and Eswatini, most of the sugarcane land is owned and controlled by a few milling companies, with profitability being their main goal. Brazil's sugar industry is the world's largest sugar and sugarcane producing industry. It accounts for 25 per cent of the world's sugar production (Chingono, 2019: 19). Aside from Brazil, the South African sugar industry is also one of the world's leading cost-competitive producers of sugar.

2.4.1 Brazil's Sugar Industry

As mentioned above, a great proportion of production is conducted through global production networks, where lead firms outsource some of their production to low wage emerging and developing countries. Most of these countries are in the Global South, and their participation in production networks has been a source of employment to many, especially in the rural areas. South America is the world's largest sugar producer and exporter (ABARES, 2016: 63). Among the countries that produce sugar in South America, Brazil has the largest sugar industry, contributing approximately 82 per cent of the region's sugar production and about 95 per cent of exports in 2014 (ABARES, 2016: 63). The large-scale growth in the Brazilian sugar industry began in 1975, when the Brazilian Government implemented the *ProAlcool* (the National Programme of Alcohol) (ABARES, 2016: 63). This programme was implemented to promote the use alcohol made from sugarcane (ABARES, 2016: 63). The plan was to use the sugarcane ethanol to produce an alternative to fuel (ABARES, 2016: 63). Brazil has three main types of mills: those that produce

sugar or ethanol, or a combination of sugar and ethanol (Chingono, 2019: 20). Due to the country's large-scale production of ethanol and sugar, there are about 438 sugar mills across the country (Chingono, 2019: 20).

Sugar exports in Brazil continue to increase amidst the Covid-19 global pandemic. This increase was due to decreasing sugar production in Thailand, which was Brazil's main competitor in the sugar global market. According to Arruda in 2011 (cited in Chingono, 2019: 19), the Brazilian sugar industry is an example of a countrywide industrial success because it joins effort from "agriculture, bio-sciences and engineering and the auto industry to develop a modern agricultural industry." The Brazilian government has played a pivotal role in the success of the country's sugar industry. To encourage sugar and ethanol production, the government has implemented policies in the form of subsidies like lowering interest on loans taken by agro-business firms; lowering excise taxes; "fixing of hydrous ethanol prices at 59 per cent of the government-set gasoline price at the pump" (ABARES, 2016: 63). All these subsidies – combined with "relatively favourable climate, land availability and low-cost labour – encouraged the expansion of sugarcane production" (ABARES, 2016: 63). By 2014, Brazil was (and still is) the largest global producer of sugarcane crop, as well as raw and refined sugar (ABARES, 2016: 63). Soon after, the country became the world's second largest ethanol producer, with the United States being the first (ABARES, 2016: 63). Sugarcane growing and production is concentrated in two regions: Centre-South and the North-Northeast regions (Bolling & Suarez, 2001: 15). The Centre-South region, which is predominantly the state of Sao Paulo, accounts for 60 per cent of the country's cane production; accounts for 70 per cent of the sugar output; and produces about 90 per cent of the ethanol (Bolling & Suarez, 2001: 15). On the other hand, the North-Northeast region, which comprises of the Pernambuco and Alagoas state, is responsible for about 20 per cent of the country's sugarcane production; between 25 and 30 per cent of the country's sugar output; and 10 per cent ethanol production. Harvesting seasons vary in each region due to different climate conditions and location.

Brazil is able to maintain low production costs despite the decrease in global sugar prices in the global market. This is how the industry remains the most competitive in the international sugar market (Bolling & Suarez, 2001: 17). The Brazilian sugar industry and its success is also dependent on the increased demand and production for ethanol for the domestic alcohol industry and the

consumption of sugar in the country (Bolling & Suarez, 2001: 17). To increase cane crop production, Brazil is “expected to remain a relatively low-cost sugar producer despite its infrastructure challenges and rising production costs” (ABARES, 2016: 66). If lowering sugar production costs is Brazil’s response to increasing sugar market pressures, what implications can this potentially have on labourers in the country’s sugarcane production network? Below I discuss the conditions of labour in Brazil’s sugar production network.

2.4.1.1 Labour in Brazil’s Sugarcane Production Network

Sugar and sugarcane production in Brazil is done using machinery. The industry has successfully transitioned from manually harvesting cane, to mechanical harvesting; with some sugarcane harvesting still carried out manually. However, mechanisation of production has had economic, environmental and social implications on Brazil’s sugar industry (Amezcuca, 2012: vii). From an economic viewpoint, mechanisation had improved productivity and reduced the costs of production (Amezcuca, 2012: vii). Through mechanisation, pre-burning practices, especially in the production of ethanol can be avoided, which has a positive impact on the environment (Amezcuca, 2012: vii). In addition, mechanisation “enables the harvesting of raw sugarcane, dry leaves and tops (trash) are left on the field, which could have agronomic advantages” (Amezcuca, 2012: vii). However, from a social perspective, agricultural mechanisation has caused a negative balance in rural job creation, because of the increasing demand for specialised and skilled farmworkers instead of non-specialised and unskilled farmworkers (Amezcuca, 2012: vii). There are mills that prefer mechanically harvested sugarcane, with some being established to be fully mechanised from the get-go (Amezcuca, 2012: 38). Although there have been attempts to remedy this, the sector has not been able to relocate its rural employees, because most of them come from deprived regions in Brazil where there is poor education and most farmworkers being illiterate (Amezcuca, 2012: vii).

Rural economies are of great importance to Brazil’s sugar industry as most farmworkers come from here. There are about one million people employed in the industry (Amezcuca, 2012: 30). These workers are probably spread on all sectors or levels of the network. Amezcuca (2012: 30-31) says that, approximately 629 thousand workers are employed for the production of sugarcane.

Employment in the Brazilian sugar industry is distributed along two major production processes in the network: the “agricultural (sugarcane production) and industrial (raw and refined sugar and ethanol production)” (Amezcu, 2012: 32). The transition to mechanical harvesting in the lower tiers of the production network has reduced the demand for manual sugarcane harvesters, thus, leaving many farmworkers at this level of the production network with no jobs (Amezcu, 2012: 49). Amezcu (2012: 49) shares a forecast of the evolution of the number of workers in Brazil’s sugarcane sector, between 2006 and 2015. In 2006, there were 189, 600 manual harvesters, and this number decreased to 107,400 by 2010, and eventually there were no manual harvesters by 2015. Although mechanisation resulted in an economic upgrade, it has also caused social downgrading for workers at the bottom of the production network, because many farmworkers have lost their income security over the years.

2.4.1.2 Employment Status in Brazil’s Sugarcane Production Network

Studies that examine the conditions of employment and work in sugarcane production networks are directly relevant to this study. Hence, an analysis of employment and work in the Brazilian sugarcane sector will help with understanding the nature of work and the conditions of labour in global sugarcane production networks. An analysis on labour in Brazil’s sugarcane production network is relevant to this study because it has one of the most successful industries and is the largest contributor in the global sugarcane production network.

There are two major categories of employment in the Brazilian sugarcane sector: permanent and temporary farmworkers. Employment opportunities vary with each category. In recent years, Brazil’s mechanisation has had an impact of the demand and creation of certain job positions, for example, the demand for permanent farmworkers increased as a “consequence of the mechanisation in Brazil’s sugar industry” (Amezcu, 2012: 124, 125). Consequently, demand for temporary farmworkers that are not specialised or skilled continues to decrease (Amezcu, 2012: 124). Having more permanent farmworkers could reduce employment opportunities in the network, because of a decrease in the farmworker’s rotation and demand for seasonal employment. Also, creating more permanent jobs would reduce migration flows, which means that there will be

fewer farmworkers coming in from rural areas – therefore, leaving many unemployed (Amezcu, 2012: 125).

According to Amezcu (2012: 125) a “high rotation leads to low qualification of the workforce.” This means that the more rotations a sugarcane farm has, fewer farmworkers get to specialise on a particular skill. One would assume that farmers would prefer an unskilled worker, which is considered ‘cheaper’ than one that is skilled – but this is not the case in the Brazilian sugarcane industry. In a modernised and mechanised sugarcane industry like that of Brazil, farmers require permanent specialised workers that can operate the machinery, instead of temporary non-specialised farmworkers. Temporary farmworkers are mostly women and aged individuals, who resort to family agricultural work (Amezcu, 2012: 125). Amezcu (2012: 125) noted that “within the temporary salaried rural labour market neither the employer nor the employee had an incentive to invest in the workforce qualification.” Moreover, there is a significant gap between specialised (permanent) and non-specialised (temporary) farmworkers, where specialised farmworkers earn about 22 per cent more than non-specialised farmworkers (Amezcu, 2012: 126). Besides the inequalities that exists between non-specialised and specialised farmworkers, conditions of work on sugarcane farms seem to be decent. Below, I discuss the conditions of work in the Brazilian sugarcane production network based on literature reviewed on Brazil’s sugar industry.

2.4.1.3 Conditions of Work in Brazil’s Sugarcane Production Network

Brazil’s long-standing and extensive exposure to international markets prompted a greater concern for social issues in the sector (Amezcu, 2012: 106). Amezcu (2012: 106) suggests that there has been an improvement in several socio-economic indicators over the years, and that this is owed to the pressure of the organised *syndical* movement and the effective enforcement of labour laws in the industry. As a result, the quality of working life in the sugarcane sector has significantly improved. There has been an increase in job formality, improved benefits received from the employers, increased schooling, the reduction of child labour, and real salary gains (Amezcu, 2012: 106).

There is a level of stability and social security in the sector. There are formalised work and employment conditions, and farmworkers have access to retirement and medical aid schemes. They also enjoy rights such as being paid overtime (Amezcu, 2012: 107). This was achieved through the implementation of the ‘work and social security card’ (Amezcu, 2012: 106). In Brazil, the sugar industry has the highest level of formal employment among permanent farmworkers, who are protected by labour legislation (Amezcu, 2012: 107).

The Brazilian Ministry of Labour identified cases of slavery in the rural sector, large corporation groups and small production scale (Amezcu, 2012: 109). In 2009, the Brazilian government together with international and regional organisations and workers’ organisations implemented ‘The National Commitment’ as a response to the slavery cases. The Commitment is there to ensure that there are good business practices in production networks such as “work contracts, hiring migrant workers, transparency in measuring production, labour health and safety ... commitment to promote literacy, qualification and strengthening social actions and services in the regions of origin of the temporary migrants” (Amezcu, 2012: 109). According to Amezcu’s (2012: 109) study, there are more than 300 (about 70 per cent of industry) sugar and ethanol producers that adhered to the terms and conditions of the Commitment. The Brazilian sugar industry seems to adhere to decent working conditions by committing to stability and social security, improved productivity and employment opportunities, and social dialogue for farmworkers in the production network.

There are labour laws in place make sure that occupational health and safety standards are adhered to in the local sugarcane production networks. For example, there is the Health and Medical Control Program NR7 (*Programa de Controle Médico de Saúde Ocupacional*) and the Regulatory Norm of Labor Safety and Health in Agriculture NR31 (*Segurança e Saúde no Meio Rural*) (Amezcu, 2012: 98). Together they hold employers accountable and responsible for guaranteeing a safe, hygienic, comfortable and adequate working conditions for their farmworkers (Amezcu, 2012: 98). In addition, employers are also responsible for providing “quality accommodation for migrant workers to supply free and safe transport to the rural work areas, and provide training for workers that apply, handle, transport or are in contact with chemical, agrochemicals and/or operate machinery” (Amezcu, 2012: 99). This is especially important because most farmworkers are rural

dwellers. Moreover, training farmworkers is an important step to ensuring decent work in the workplace.

Collective bargaining and the freedom of association are not foreign concepts in Brazil's sugar industry. In Brazil, farmworkers have the right to meet and organise and bargain collectively on their conditions of work under the protection of labour laws – *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (Amezcuá, 2012: 64). Farmworkers are free to associate themselves with unions and demonstrate. Brazil is the world's largest producer and exporter of sugar, and the government policies in place are likely to stimulate productivity among farmworkers, which is important for the country's sugar industry. When standards associated with decent work are achieved and maintained on sugarcane farms, farmworkers' productivity can improve. Below, I review literature on South Africa's sugarcane production network and industry to gain an understanding of labour in the production node of the network. Through this discussion, I aim to provide another lens through which we can look at labour in GPNs.

2.4.2 South Africa's Sugar Industry

The agriculture sector in South Africa has played a prominent role in the country's economic growth despite the large presence of the mining sector (Vink & Kirsten, 2010: 204). The South African sugar industry is one of the world's leading producers and exporters of sugar and sugarcane, and it makes an important contribution to the country's economy (DAFF, 2017: 3). Similar to Brazil's sugar industry, the South African industry has been a source of employment for many people, especially in rural communities. According to DAFF (2017: 3) statistics, the sugar industry directly supports between 79,000 and 85,000 jobs in production and processing, and indirectly provides another 350,000 jobs. The industry has provided income security for more than two per cent of the country's population (DAFF, 2017: 3). Part of the industry's success is owed to its "agricultural and industrial investments, foreign exchange earnings, its high employment and linkages with major suppliers, support industries and customers" in both international and regional economies (DAFF, 2017: 3). The industry produces raw and refined sugar, syrups and specialised sugars, and a range of by-products (DAFF, 2017: 3). South Africa's sugar industry produces between 2.2 million and 2.5 million tons of sugar per year (DAFF, 2017; Chingono, 2019). The

sector has good export infrastructure, world renowned agricultural and industrial research platforms and an efficient organisation that have led to its success (Chingono, 2019: 22).

As mentioned before, sugarcane is a tropical plant and requires tropical locations to grow. The sugarcane in South Africa is grown in 14 areas across the country such as the Northern Pondoland in the Eastern Cape province, Kwazulu-Natal midlands, and Mpumalanga Lowveld (DAFF, 2017: 4). There are about 362,100 hectares used to produce sugarcane. About 68 per cent is grown within 30km of the coast and 17 per cent in the high rainfall areas of Kwazulu-Natal with the balance grown in the northern irrigated areas that comprise Pongola and Mpumalanga Lowveld (DAFF, 2017: 4). All 14 areas have sugar mills where the cane is crushed and produced into raw and refined sugar (DAFF, 2017: 5). Similar to Brazil, sugarcane in South Africa is still mechanically harvested, but the burning of the cane is done manually. For example, there is still open-field burning of sugarcane before harvesting (Mashoko *et al.*, 2010: 804). Using mechanical harvesting methods have helped to avoid environmental damage and improve productivity. Similar to Eswatini (as we will see), South African sugarcane production, specifically in the cane growing sector, is heavily reliant on rain to grow (Mashoko *et al.*, 2010: 805). About 20 per cent of sugarcane production is under irrigation (Mashoko *et al.*, 2010: 805). Due to inconsistent and uncertain climate conditions, sugarcane farms with irrigation systems have higher yields.

The South African sugar industry is made up of mainly two categories of farmers – subsistence farmers in the former homelands and large-scale commercial farmers, with a large percentage of the registered growers in the industry being small-scale sugarcane growers (Kirsten & van Zyl, 1998: 552). According to DAFF (2017: 5) statistics, in 2014/15 there were 21,889 registered cane growers and 20,562 of those were small-scale growers. This number has increased over the years to approximately 20,711 small-scale cane growers and 1,126 large-scale cane growers (SASA, 2021: 1). Most of these farmers are black South Africans who come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and have turned to commercial farming to generate an income.

Aside from sugar, South Africa also produces bagasse which is used as heat for the boilers, and co-generated electricity (ethanol) for sugar production (Chingono, 2019: 22). Sugar mills often have minimal storage facilities, so raw sugar is transported and exported to the far and Middle East refineries (Chingono, 2019: 22). Brazil and South Africa compete for raw sugar markets and with refineries in the European subsidised sugar exports (Chingono, 2019: 22). Moreover, South Africa

sells sugar in international markets like the EU and domestic markets like the South African Customs Union (SACU) which consists of Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Eswatini (DAFF, 2017: 7). Based on the revenue generated through sugar sales in the SACU region as well as the international market (through exports), the South African sugar industry makes an important contribution to employment in the country, particularly in rural areas. In the following section I discuss employment in South Africa's sugar industry.

2.4.2.1 Employment in South Africa's Sugarcane Production Network

Farmworkers have been among the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in South Africa. The deregulation that took place in the 1990s in the country resulted in majority farmworkers becoming seasonally and casually employed. Consequently, this change has provided “unregulated labour providers the opportunity to exploit the increasing population of vulnerable seasonal workers” (ETI, 2021: 1). Due to a lack of representation and bargaining structures on farms, many farmworkers have poor working and living conditions (ETI, 2021: 1). Producers/suppliers in the sector are constantly concerned with meeting international market standards and demands (ETI, 2021: 1). The South African sugar industry provides employment to people in regions often in the deep rural areas where there is little to no access to formal schooling and economic activity (SASA, 2021: 1). Employment in the industry amounts to 11 per cent of the total agricultural workforce in the country, where direct employment occurs in both sugarcane fields and sugar mills (SASA, 2021: 1). Imperative to this study is to understand the conditions of work for farmworkers employed in the lower tiers of the sugarcane production network. In the discussion below, I review a study conducted by the South African Department of Employment and Labour (DEL) on the decent work deficits that still prevail in South Africa's agriculture sector.

2.4.2.2 Conditions of Work in South Africa's Sugarcane Production Network

This section will provide a general analysis of what conditions of work look like in the South African sugarcane sector. The DEL (2020: 1) provides insight into the status of decent work deficits on farms in South Africa using the ILO's four pillars of decent work. In terms of stability and social security in the workplace, a majority of permanently employed farmworkers have

employment contracts, with the remainder having verbal contracts (DEL, 2020: 1). Temporary and seasonal farmworkers have contracts that are 3 years or more (DEL, 2020: 1). Farmworkers work decent hours between 40 and 45 hours per week (DEL, 2020: 1). In terms of combining work, family and personal life – “a total of 63.2 per cent had access to family responsibility leave; while 47.5 per cent received maternity leave and 76.5 per cent had access to vacation leave” (DEL, 2020: 1). Among the social security benefits that farmworkers receive (such as compensation for occupational injuries and disease and pension/unemployment insurance fund) they do not have access to medical aid or allowances (DEL, 2020: 1).

Moreover, there are still areas of concern that need attention, such as the lack of occupational safety. According to statistics provided by the DEL (2020: 1), “most employees mentioned that they know of someone who experienced a fatal incident at work. It found that 19.6 per cent of fatalities were sustained ... 8.5 per cent of employees were found to have contracted diseases, while 17.5 per cent employees sustained injuries on duty.” In addition to these concerns, over 70 per cent of farmworkers are not unionised (DEL, 2020: 1). This highlights the challenges that workers may be faced with concerning access to freedom of association and collective bargaining in the sector. Although some farmworkers are unionised – based on the data above most of them find it difficult to collectively bargain and negotiate for better salaries and working conditions. For example, a total of 25 per cent of employees admitted to unilateral decision making in the sector, where employers decide on their salaries. Some of the conditions of work in the South African sugar industry, bear a resemblance to those in Eswatini’s sugar industry (as we will see below). The sugarcane industry in Eswatini is similar to the Brazilian and South African sugar industries in that all three industries have been catalysts to socio-economic development by creating employment in rural and deep rural areas where there is often little economic activity. The following section provides an analysis of Eswatini’s sugar industry

2.5 ESWATINI’S SUGAR INDUSTRY

Eswatini’s sugarcane industry is the largest industry in the country, contributing approximately US\$400 million of revenue per year to the country’s GDP (ESA, 2017). The Kingdom’s economy is largely based on the agriculture sector, specifically sugar production (Anderson, 2018: 1). The sugar industry, which comprises more than half of the country’s agricultural output, is of great

importance to Eswatini (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 95). This is because it has provided a significant number of workers with employment, which illustrates the economic and social significance it has in the wellbeing of Eswatini (ESA, 2016; Anderson, 2018). About 16 per cent of the total workforce in the country works directly or indirectly in the sugar industry (Anderson, 2018: 1).

In Eswatini, the cultivation of sugarcane is done through a quota system that is issued by the Sugar Industry Quota Board (ITUC, 2016: 3). The sugar quota or license is calculated as the “sugar produced during the year to the maximum aggregate of all quotas attached to the mill (the amount of brown and white sugar the mill should produce) plus any quota shortfall reallocated from another mill” (Masuku, 2011: 210). The quota is not there to limit production, rather it is an agreement between the millers and the growers that “the miller will take the cane produced and harvested by a grower in a specific harvesting window” (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 96). Achieving the sugar quota may be challenging for small- and medium-scale growers due to inconsistent weather patterns.

Eswatini’s sugar industry shares similarities with the Brazilian and South African sugar industries in that they are all heavily reliant on climate conditions. Most of the sugarcane farms in these countries require irrigation systems. However, Eswatini (unlike Brazil and South Africa) is still heavily reliant on surface water (mainly rivers) to provide irrigation (Anderson, 2018: 3). Empirical evidence in this study highlights the impact that extreme weather conditions have had on farmworkers’ productivity and sugarcane production in the growing and harvesting sectors of the industry. As such, sugarcane production in the country is heavily reliant on irrigation systems in a semi-arid area spanning over 57,000 hectares of land (ESA, 2020: 4). With this development, Anderson (2018: 3) suggests that rain-fed agriculture could fall by up to 50 per cent in the next few years.

Eswatini’s sugar industry consists of large millers and estates, large growers, medium- and small-scale growers (ITUC, 2016: 3). Sugarcane in the industry is milled in three sugar mills, which are Mhlume, Simunye and Ubombo Sugar Mills (ESA, 2020; ITUC, 2016). Mhlume and Simunye sugar mills belong to Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation (RESC) and Ubombo sugar mill is owned by Ubombo Sugar Limited. These are the largest companies in the Kingdom, in terms of sugarcane and sugar production, as well as capacity. Ubombo and Mhlume mills produce raw and refined sugar, while the Simunye mill produces about 12 million litres of alcohol from 48,000 tons of

molasses (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 97). RESC and Ubombo are the main buyers in the industry, where they outsource production to outgrower farms to meet market demand, increase productivity and generate profit. Sugar mills belonging to both companies are situated in the eastern Lowveld (Eswatini's growing region), where they grow their own cane and produce raw and refined sugar, which is later sold on international and domestic markets like the United States of America (USA), European Union (EU) and the SACU region. Together, the sugar mills have the capacity to produce about 800,000 tons per year (ITUC, 2016: 3). On the other hand, there are 489 cane growers of which 459 are smallholder growers and together produce an average of 670,000 tons of sugar per year (ESA, 2020: 4). The cane growers in the industry are represented by the Eswatini Cane Growers Association (ECGA), and the millers are represented by the Eswatini Sugar Millers Association (ESMA) (ITUC, 2016: 3).

The business environment in which the country's sugar industry operates continues to be challenging and highly competitive (ESA, 2019, 2). Eswatini Sugar Association (ESA) together with the government work closely with industry players in the African and international trade blocs to ensure access to sugar markets in the industry (ESA, 2019: 2-3). All the sugar produced in Eswatini is sold and marketed by ESA, for which it has the sole responsibility to sell to various export markets (ESA, 2019: 6). These export markets include the EU, the USA, SACU, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (ESA, 2019: 7). To show Eswatini's participation in the global sugarcane production network, South Africa's three biggest sugar companies, Illovo Sugar Limited, Tongaat Hulett Sugar Limited, and TSB Sugar RSA Limited, have co-ownerships in production estates and mills in the country (ITUC, 2016: 4). For example, Illovo has a 60 per cent share in Ubombo Sugar Limited and Tongaat Hullet expanded its operations to include Eswatini's Tambankulu Estate, of which it purchased in April 1998 (ITUC, 2016: 7). Furthermore, the country exports about 350,000 tons per year to the EU; 16,000 tons per year to the USA; and 330,000 tons per year to the SACU market (ITUC, 2016:4).

Eswatini is expected to produce about 743,000 tons of sugar in the 2019/20 season with most of it making its way onto the South African market, free of any import tariffs in line with the free trade agreements in the SACU region. Eswatini's sugar exports are almost completely unaffected by decreasing demand and prices in the global sugar market, because of the existing preferential and

regional agreements (UNCTAD, 2000: 5). Similar to Brazil and South Africa, Eswatini's sugar industry is one of the lowest-cost producers in the world (UNCTAD, 2000: 5). Production inputs are maintained as low as possible, and this has had an impact on cane growers that work in the lower tiers of the sugarcane production network. To maintain low costs of production and increase productivity, producers/suppliers often opt to reduce labour costs like cutting farmworkers' salaries/wages.

Cane growers in the industry amount to about 53 per cent of agricultural output (UNCTAD, 2000: 14). This means that majority of workers in the industry are employed at this node of the network. Approximately 16,000 people are directly employed in Eswatini's sugar industry (UNCTAD, 2000: 14). Moreover, about 80,000 people are dependents of those employed in the sugar industry (UNCTAD, 2000: 14). As such, the industry plays a significant role in the livelihoods of many Swazis. According to the ESA (2020: 4), the sugar industry contributes towards "social services in the form of education, healthcare, housing, water, sanitation and recreational facilities, as well as poverty alleviation, rural development and environmental protection." To further understand Eswatini's sugar industry, the following section will discuss contract farming/outgrower schemes in the country. This is because contract farmers/outgrower schemes remain major contributors to the country's sugarcane production, and empirical data is collected from the farmworkers that work on these farms.

2.5.1 Contract Farming/Outgrower Schemes in Eswatini's Sugar Industry

Contract farming in developing countries in the Global South is viewed as an important institutional innovation for improving productivity and sugarcane output of larger sugarcane farming companies. As mentioned above, sugar millers in the industry outsource production to small- and medium-sized outgrower sugarcane farms to increase productivity and sugarcane yields. In Eswatini, small- and medium-sized sugarcane farmers are contracted to the sugar mills to supply them with sugarcane (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 94). These growers have the best sugarcane yields in the industry, and this has been encouraging when compared to the South African industry; where small-grower yields are about 37 per cent below the national average (UNCTAD, 2000: 19). Despite their significant contribution to sugarcane production in the industry, contract farmers face unequal relations, which leaves them vulnerable (Martin & Sharp, 2016: 2).

The exchange relationship between the millers and growers seems to “be clouded with problems as farmers perceive unfair distribution of the industry’s proceeds by millers” (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 94). Few farmers understand how proceeds are distributed in the production network. This is because they still lack commercialisation skills like decision-making on production input use, which is an important step in the profit maximization principle (Masuku, 2011: 211). Most cane growers in the industry lack this skill because they have minimal education, which has led to their misunderstanding of the industry rules and regulation and their enforcement (Masuku, 2011; Masuku *et al.*, 2007).

Consequently, there is unilateral decision-making in the sector where millers re-enforce their own rules. For example, if growers are unable to meet sugarcane yields demanded by the mills because of the expenses involved in controlling diseases, the mill will not take the cane. Eswatini’s sugar industry is oligopolistic because few sugar mills are the only buyers (of sugarcane) in a region and determine the proceeds of outgrower farmers, where several potential situations of opportunistic behaviour and mistrust can occur” (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 95). Masuku *et al.* (2007: 101) suggests that this can be addressed when there are high levels of cooperation and trust between millers and cane growers. The relationship between the relationship between cane outgrower schemes and millers is important for the success of the Kingdom’s sugar industry. Though this relationship is of great importance in the success of the industry, this study seeks to understand how farmworkers’ embeddedness in the production node of the network impact their conditions of work on sugarcane outgrower farms, because most of these farming jobs are outsourced to people in the rural areas, which are expected lead to better incomes and livelihoods (Martin & Sharp, 2016: 2). The section below provides an analysis of work and employment of workers employed in Eswatini’s sugarcane production network.

2.5.2 Work and Employment Status in Eswatini’s Sugarcane Production Network

Sugarcane farmworkers are women and men who labour on sugarcane farms to produce sugar. These farmworkers are either employed in small- and medium-sized or large industrialised sugarcane farms (ILO, 2007: 23). Employment on sugarcane farms varies, which creates diverse categories of employment: there are permanent, casual, temporary or seasonal farmworkers (ILO, 2007: 23). While terms and conditions of employment vary within each category, the employment

relationship is between a farmworker and a “farm, farming or plantation company, or labour contractor or sub-contractor” (ILO, 2007: 23). Empirical evidence for this study was based on farmworkers employed by small- and medium-sized sugarcane farming companies and independent farmers.

Demand for labour on sugarcane farms changes with the season and demand for sugar in the various markets that Eswatini trades in. These changes impact hours of work, working conditions and remuneration. In terms of remuneration, farmers want to increase productivity and output with as little costs as possible and since most costs other than labour are largely fixed, farmworkers’ wages and benefits become a primary target of ‘cost-saving’. Now relating to changes in market demand and seasonal changes; harvesting and cane growing (planting, pest control and adding fertiliser to sugarcane) seasons are the busiest and require more farmworkers to make sure that daily thresholds are met, and that sugarcane is harvested in time for production and processing. During this time, outgrower farmers outsource seasonal and temporary farmworkers. Seasonal changes also refer to climate changes. For example, if it is too hot, farmworkers usually work overtime (paid or unpaid) to manage irrigation systems. This is because the sprinklers need to be changed and rotated manually. Sugarcane farmers and farming companies have a strong financial incentive to extend working hours for farmworkers to maximise their profits (ILO, 2007: 23). Many farmworkers are affected by seasonal changes, especially casual, temporary or seasonal farmworkers. Change in seasons is especially reflected in the employment of seasonal farmworkers on sugarcane farms. This is because seasonal, casual and temporary farmworkers are not full-time employees but are employed when demanded. To better understand work in Eswatini’s sugarcane production network, it is necessary to recognise that labour is employed under different arrangements in the sugarcane sector.

In Eswatini, there are various categories under which farmworkers are employed: namely permanent, casual, seasonal and temporary, with permanent and seasonal employment being very prominent in the sector. Permanent farmworkers enter an employment relationship of unlimited duration with a farmer or farming company, and are provided with a formal, written contract of employment (ITUC, 2016: 8). On the other hand, casual, seasonal, and temporary farmworkers in the industry are employed on a task basis and on a short-term contract, the longest period being nine months (ITUC, 2016: 8). In addition, there are often returning seasonal farmworkers who are

engaged every season year to year (ITUC, 2016: 8). This group of seasonal farmworkers can remain employed on the same farm for as long as ten years without their employment status changing to ‘permanent employee’. Farmworkers may want to be permanent employees, but farmers want ‘flexible’ or ‘non-standard’ workers. In Eswatini, seasonal farmworkers are not entitled to social security benefits like medical aid and pension fund. This gives employers the incentive to employ more seasonal farmworkers which increases productivity at the lowest cost possible. Apart from seasonal farmworkers, contractual farmworkers are a category of workers that is also prevalent in Eswatini’s sugar sector. To cut production costs, large sugarcane-producing companies outsource cane growing jobs to contractors (ITUC, 2016: 8). Most of these farmworkers are from rural areas and lack the formal education necessary to help them understand industry rules and regulations (Masuku *et al.*, 2007: 94).

All farmworkers, whether seasonal or permanent, have rights that are provided for in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Eswatini Act, 2005 (ITUC, 2016: 9). Moreover, workers in the sector are represented by the SAPWU (ITUC, 2016: 9). However, seasonal farmworkers enjoy rights to freedom of association on paper and not in practice (ITUC, 2016: 9). A case study done by the ITUC (2016: 10) stated the following: in 2014, about 3000 members of SAPWU went on a strike demanding a 14 per cent salary increment but were intimidated by the military and security forces during the strike (ITUC, 2016: 10). This suggests that collective bargaining in the sector is minimal. The section below discusses in detail Eswatini’s labour laws and how these are implemented at the production node of the network.

2.5.3 Eswatini’s Labour Laws and ILO’s Labour Standards

Labour laws in Eswatini sugar industry include the Employment Act of 1980, Industrial Relations Act and the Sugar Act (ITUC, 2016; ESA, 2020). However, Eswatini has been under scrutiny for ratifying the ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and ILO Convention No. 98 on Collective Bargaining. There have been attempts to remedy this through the establishment of the ILO National Steering Committee on Social Dialogue in 2010 (ILO, 2014: 16). The Committee was established to facilitate tripartite decision-making and to influence socio-economic policies

(ILO, 2014: 16). Still, most of the farmworkers, especially on outgrower farms, are not unionised due to the intimidation and discrimination that comes with being a part of a union.

It is the Government's responsibility to protect the rights of farmworkers and to ensure that there are good conditions of work on farms through regular occupational labour, health and safety inspections. The Employment Act (1980: 10) states that an inspector is "a person appointed or deemed to have been appointed as Deputy Labour Commissioner, Senior Labour Officer, Labour Officer, Factories Inspector or Labour Inspector in the public service and includes any other person to whom the Labour Commissioner has delegated in writing." According to international labour law standards (the ILO Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection), governments should guarantee that workers have access to a safe and healthy work environment (ITUC, 2016: 16). The Government has ratified Convention No. 81 on Labour inspections, and in 2010, the ILO established a Labour Inspection Policy to support and provide a new vision for labour inspection in Eswatini (ILO, 2014: 14).

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a review of the scholarly and official literature on sugarcane production and distribution in the Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini's sugar production networks and industries. It is evident that sugarcane industries are integrated into the global economy, trade and operate at a global level. Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini's participation in the global sugarcane production network has integrated workers at the production node of their networks into the global sugarcane production and processing. These opportunities for work have opened an important source of income for workers and their families in the agricultural industry and raising many above the poverty line. However, the terms and conditions of employment, as well as conditions of work are often poor, with many workers experiencing insecure and unprotected forms of work due to external and internal factors, like market pressures that lead to an increased focus on network solutions to increase productivity and profitability.

Evidently, labour shapes GPNs through their struggles over value creation, stringent labour markets, everyday practices and worker mobility between formal and informal forms of work. Hence, I argue that the GPN approach is useful to this paper because it focuses on how: (a) the

firms' efforts to improve its position in the value chain – to upgrade – affects workers, and (b) it looks at labour processes and how they are shaped by labour struggles (Bair & Werner, 2015: 120).

The external and internal market pressures may have an impact on farmworkers at the bottom of the network because all sugarcane farms are embedded in the global production network. Also, with most networks being buyer-driven, sugarcane farmers are price-takers which forces them to produce sugar at low prices. This can have implications on labour conditions and give rise to decent work deficits. Factors such as increasing production costs, competition, currency fluctuations (Euro and US Dollar), climate change and water availability affect the sugarcane growing business, which could potentially have a negative impact on farmers and farm workers (ESA, 2019: 8). The following chapter presents an analysis of empirical data on the nature of employment in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms; Eswatini's participation in the global sugarcane production network; and labour laws (and farmworkers' knowledge of these) in Eswatini's sugar industry.

CHAPTER THREE:

QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: ASSESSING ESWATINI'S SUGARCANE PRODUCTION AND LABOUR LAWS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Eswatini's sugar industry employs approximately 35 per cent of all the farmworkers in the country and is therefore a significant source of paid employment to many Swazis in rural areas (ITUC, 2016: 3). Despite the industry's integration into the global sugar production network, paid employment on Eswatini's sugarcane farms is not always a means to escape poverty. Most of the farmworkers interviewed for this study lived on or below the poverty line and were trapped in compromised living conditions. The interviewees ranged in age from 22 to 50 years. Three of the farmworkers I interviewed were females and seven were males, of which six are breadwinners in their families. All ten farmworkers interviewed come from rural areas in the Lowveld and have to migrate the Manzini region to find work. Half (five) of the sample group have a formal education (attended primary and/or secondary school), and the rest did not have access to or could not afford an education. Farmworkers' lack of education (and the few that were not able to complete it) has influenced their participation in the production network and their quality of working life. Factors such as not having an education can affect farmworkers' understanding of the relevant rules and regulations that govern work and employment in the industry, and their rights in the workplace. All workers have the right to work in a safe and healthy environment and in jobs that pay them an income that is sufficient to meet decent living standards.

The concept of 'decent work' in this dissertation is informed by the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Decent work indicators inspired and developed from the ILO's pillars of decent work and labour standards are used as a 'yardstick' to analyse the current working conditions of labourers on Eswatini's sugarcane outgrower sugarcane farms. Farmworkers' struggles in achieving decent work include the lack of education which often leads to a misunderstanding of labour rules and regulations and their rights in the workplace, as well as casual and flexible labour conditions characterised by low-skilled manual tasks that are often associated with poor working conditions and low wages.

In this chapter, I address the first (secondary) objective of this study: to examine how the market and institutional pressures that contribute towards decent work deficits in sugarcane production networks – as revealed by a review of the available literature – are experienced by selected workers on Eswatini’s outgrower sugarcane farms. I achieve this by analysing the nature of employment in Eswatini’s small- and medium-sized outgrower sugarcane farms; Eswatini’s sugarcane production network; and labour laws (and farmworkers’ knowledge of these) in Eswatini’s sugar industry through farmworkers’ responses.

3.2 EMPLOYMENT ON SUGARCANE FARMS

Most sugarcane farmworkers employed by outgrower farmers grow and harvest cane for larger sugarcane companies, like RESC, Ubombo and Tambankulu (ITUC, 2016: 6-7). RESC is the largest grower and producer in the industry, employing over 3500 workers (ITUC, 2016: 6). Simunye and Mhlume sugar estates, established by RESC, have the capacity to produce over 290,000 tons of sugar combined (ITUC, 2016: 6). Ubombo has a sugar output of more than 580,000, while Tambankulu produces about 62 000 tons of sucrose per year (ITUC, 2016: 7). To meet their annual targets, all three companies outsource sugarcane production to small- and medium-sized outgrower farms who deliver approximately 2.3 million tons of cane per season (ITUC, 2016: 6). For example, RESC’s 2019 Integrated Report shows that 3.7 million tons of sugar was crushed in that year (considering the tons of sugar both Simunye and Mhlume sugar estates produce per year as noted above), which means that most of the sugarcane was grown and harvested from the companies outgrower farms. As a result, outgrower sugarcane farms have been a great source of employment for many Swazis.

Employment in Eswatini’s sugarcane farms varies, with diverse categories of employment such as permanent and seasonal employment. To better understand work in Eswatini’s sugarcane production network, it is important to note that labour on sugarcane farms is employed under different arrangements. The following sections (3.2.1 and 3.2.2) will discuss in detail employment status (permanent, seasonal, temporary, and casual) in Eswatini’s sugarcane sector. The data collected is from interviews conducted with permanent and seasonal farmworkers.

3.2.1 Permanent Farmworkers

Permanent farmworkers enter an employment relationship of unlimited duration with the farmer or farming company and are provided with a formal and written contract of employment (ITUC, 2016: 8). According to global standards, permanent farmworkers are meant to experience greater social security at work – such as housing, health and work benefits – compared to all other farmworkers (ILO, 2007: 24). However, this does not mean that the former earns high wages (above the minimum wage). In fact, permanent farmworkers in Eswatini’s sugarcane sector live on or below the poverty line (ILO, 2007: 24). Of the ten farmworkers interviewed, only four were permanent farmworkers. I found that in most cases, farmers want flexible and ‘non-standard’ farmworkers which is provided through seasonal and temporary employment. Therefore, majority of my interviewees were seasonal farmworkers, with some having a seasonal employment status for more than two years. In Eswatini, seasonal and casual employees are not entitled to social security benefits like pension fund and medical aid and cannot be members of a trade union (ITUC, 2016: 8). This gives farmers more of an incentive to employ seasonal and casual labour.

3.2.2 Casual, Temporary and Seasonal Farmworkers

There is an increasing number of casually, temporarily, and seasonally employed farmworkers in the sugar sector in developing countries. Casual farmworkers are employed on a task basis and are paid a daily wage (ILO, 2007: 24). They are considered to be the lowest paid in the industry. This is true for casual, seasonal and temporary employment in Eswatini. Six out of ten farmworkers identified themselves as seasonal workers. In Eswatini, a seasonal farmworker is employed on a fixed term contract, with the longest period being nine months (ITUC, 2016: 8). As mentioned in the above section, there are farmworkers who have been seasonal employees for over 2 years, who are often classified as “returning seasonal employees, and are engaged every season year to year” (ITUC, 2016: 8). They work as seasonal farmworkers on the same farm for years with no social security, low wages, and no employment contracts or benefits. For example, Zandi (16/11/2020) said:

I am a seasonal farmworker. I have been working as a farmworker since 2008. I did not start here [the farm she is currently working on] though, I have worked on several farms, both big and small. Planting other crops at first and then I moved to sugarcane. I have been working as a seasonal farmworker on this farm for four years ... I do not have an employment contract, but my seasonal employment only lasts for 3 months.

The data collected show that permanent employees on some of the sugarcane farms are treated like seasonal employees, in that they are not given employment contracts. For instance, three of the permanent farmworkers that were interviewed did not have employment contracts, with Thembi (07/11/2020) being one of them. Without these contracts, their employer was able to keep working conditions on the farm as flexible as possible. Thembi (07/11/2020) worked as a permanent farmworker for 22 years on the same sugarcane estate with no employment contract: “I do not have an employment contract. I am a general worker, so I do not have a specific job description. I work wherever I am asked to work.” Without an employment contract stating the terms and conditions of employment, Thembi (07/11/2020) worked on weekends without being paid for working overtime – instead, she was paid in kind. Instead of paying workers in actual money (cash) for working overtime, farmers would pay farmworkers by reducing the number of hours they work during the week.

Seasonal contracts varied in length depending on the sugarcane farm. For example, Muzi’s (17/11/2020) seasonal contract lasted for nine months, whereas Zandi’s (16/11/2020) lasted for three months. Also, farmworkers often look for work elsewhere to make ends meet for the remainder of the year. This is because seasonal farmworkers did not earn enough income to sustain their living standards and were forced to look for work elsewhere. Muzi’s (17/11/2020) seasonal compensation was not enough to sustain him for the months he was not working on the farm. So, he also worked as a builder to earn an extra income. On the other hand, Zandi (16/11/2020) saved her earnings and bought beer and cigarettes to sell from the comfort of her home. It may seem as though Zandi (16/11/2020) had an adequate income to save and buy stock to sell, but she did not have any dependent, whereas Muzi (17/11/2020) had to send money home at the end of every month.

‘Contractual farmworker’ is a category of workers that is prevalent in Eswatini’s sugar sector. To cut production costs, large sugarcane-producing companies outsource jobs to contractors to grow

sugarcane (ITUC, 2016: 8). To meet market demand and sugarcane yields in each season, big companies like RESC and Ubombo outsource the most jobs to outgrower sugarcane farmers. According to the ITUC (2016: 8), “the contractors do not sign contracts of employment with their employees. Contractors do not provide workmen’s compensation insurances, leaving those injured at work without any support.” These terms and conditions are also prevalent in seasonal employment in Eswatini’s sugarcane sector. Most farmworkers did not have a “workmen’s [sic] compensation” or medical insurance when they got ill or injured. As Zandi (16/11/2020) pointed out:

Our boss is aware of the dangers of working on the farm when it is raining, but we are still expected to work anyway. If it rains and we just added or are adding manure to the soil, this can affect us. The manure can burn us. There was a time where it rained, and we were handling manure. Most, if not all the farmworkers got burnt because it got into our clothes, and we could not go to work for some time because of the injuries ... We paid for our own medical costs.

Zandi’s (16/11/2020) response showed that the absence of an employment contract between an employer and a farmworker encourages ‘flexible’ labour conditions. If any accidents happened on the farm, farmers were not liable for a breach of contract – instead, farmworkers were left to take care of their own medical costs. For example, if any of the farmworkers incurred permanent injuries that indefinitely restricted any future employment on the farm, again, farmers could not be held liable as there are no terms and conditions of employment written on paper. This means that farmers are free to alter the terms and conditions of employment without farmworkers’ knowledge. Furthermore, the absence of an employment contract between farmers and farmworkers may lead to work characterised by functional flexibility.

3.2.3 Functional Flexibility on Sugarcane Farms

Work on outgrower sugarcane farms is characterised by ‘functional flexibility’; where farmers allocate farmworkers any job or task, at any time the farmer desires based on what needs to be done on the farm, despite their ‘job titles’. Occupational roles on sugarcane farms often overlap, as some of the farmworkers are formally (possess an employment contract) employed as irrigators

but will end up doing more jobs depending on what the farmer desires. A worker could be working as an irrigator today, and then spray fertilizer or solutions to control insects, fungi, and weeds, or plant the cane in the ground on the next day. Seven of the farmworkers interviewed identified themselves as ‘general workers’, which means that they can work on any section (production process) of the production network and shift with the seasons. As noted by Thembi (07/11/2020):

I am a general worker, which means I do not have a specific job title. Today I can wake up and they can tell me to go remove the weeds from the sugarcane, and tomorrow morning I could be assigned with a different task.

Of the ten farmworkers, there were seven irrigators, six cane growers and two harvesters. The data collected from the interviews conducted show that five of the irrigators did the weeding and sprayed fertilizer and solutions to control pests and fungi when there was a demand for labour in these sections of the farm. For example, Sipho (17/11/2020) said:

I do not have a specific job title because I do different things on the farm, depending on what needs to be done. On this plantation, I am responsible for changing and fixing the sprinklers and fixing pipes that are broken. I also do the weeding.

Having functional flexibility on sugarcane farms is an incentive for farmers because they did not want to hire more labour because it would mean incurring additional costs. Instead, they would have farmworkers do several tasks depending on the season and the work that needed to be done on the farm. This flexibility is advantageous to employers. Also, the farmworkers do not have the collective power (union representation) to force the employer to introduce job descriptions.

The data suggests that there are probably no job descriptions on sugarcane farms, rather, farmworkers identified the tasks they did the most as their job descriptions. Therefore, given the workers’ lack of organisational and labour market power, farmers can keep them busy throughout the working day by giving them whatever jobs need to be done. So, while a worker may claim that he/she is an ‘irrigator’ (because that is his/her main job), in reality he/she is a general labourer. Such functional flexibility (doing different tasks) reflects the power of the employers to impose intense and unrelenting workloads and the difficulties confronted by workers in combatting these work practices. In any case, the farmers will argue that the workers are paid, not to do a single task, but for a whole day’s work.

3.3 ESWATINI'S SUGARCANE PRODUCTION NETWORK

In this section of the study, I examine Eswatini's sugarcane production network. The data show that my findings (based on participant's responses) on Eswatini's sugarcane sector are not very different from those of studies on Brazil and South Africa, particularly in the sugarcane production processes. For example, Brazil, South Africa and Eswatini's sugarcane sectors are affected by factors such as water availability and climate change; and South Africa and Eswatini's sugar industries are both characterised by contract farming. Furthermore, this section shows how Eswatini's sugarcane outgrower farms and farmworkers are embedded in the GPN. This will help in examining how internal and external pressures in the network contribute towards decent work deficits on sugarcane farms, and how these were experienced by the selected farmworkers. Moreover, I attempt to situate labourers working in Eswatini's outgrower sugarcane farms in the global sugarcane production network as they contribute towards sugarcane production processes in the lower tiers of the network. Farmworkers' responses related to the structure of sugarcane production network from the point of growing the cane, harvesting it, and transporting it to sugar mills for processing.

Sugarcane farmers in Eswatini's sugar industry are often affected by external and internal factors such as increasing production costs, competition, currency fluctuations (Euro and US Dollar), climate change and water availability. It is these 'effects' on sugarcane farmers that are, in turn, transmitted to the farmworkers, and give rise to decent work deficits on sugarcane farms. For example, to keep up with rising production costs and competition in domestic and international sugar markets, farmers often force farmworkers to work more hours (overtime) to increase productivity and sugarcane output, while keeping production costs as low as possible. To reduce production costs, farmers paid farmworkers in kind for working overtime instead of money. For example, Hloniphile (07/11/2020) said:

There is no time where we do not deliver the requested amount of sugarcane per hectare. If we have been asked to grow sugarcane on a specific hectare, we do whatever it is in our power to make sure we deliver ... If it rains heavily, we do not go to the farm, because there is not much we can do. We then make up for the lost time on the weekend ... We are not paid for working overtime, in fact we are paid in hours not money. The hours worked

overtime are deducted in one of the working days, which means that you will knock off early.

On the other hand, factors such as water availability on farms and climate change could potentially affect farmworkers productivity. Growing sugarcane requires sufficient amount of water and suitable weather conditions. Temperatures that are either too hot or cold can affect the production of sugarcane. Like Brazil, Eswatini's sugarcane production is highly influenced by climate variability, fertilizers used, the management of pests and weeds, water availability, and the techniques of planting and harvesting (Amezcu, 2012: vii). As we will see below, climate change in Eswatini's sugarcane production network can have a significant impact on farmworkers at the bottom of the network.

3.3.1 Climate Change and Sugarcane Production in Eswatini

Production of sugarcane in Eswatini is highly dependent on natural resources like the sun and the rain. Inconsistent climate changes where there is either too much rain or it is too hot impact sugarcane production processes. All the irrigators interviewed for this study said that if it is too hot for a long period of time, the water in the rivers evaporates, which in turn affects the sugarcane crop as well as their productivity. Like the South African sugar industry, Eswatini's industry is heavily reliant on irrigation systems where the water is drawn from nearby rivers and dams (Anderson, 2018: 14). The production of cane crop in Eswatini is already affected by changing weather patterns like rising heat levels and recurring droughts. As Sithole (17/11/2020) noted:

Factors such as too much heat and no rain for an extended period of time affect our harvest. It is the rain that makes the sugarcane grow. The sprinklers are there to manage the present [drought] situation.

Cane growing in Eswatini requires a sufficient and sustainable amount of water. However, water availability can be affected by the very high temperatures in the country (Mhlanga-Ndlovu & Nhamo, 2017: 41). Besides water availability, changes in temperature damages the sugarcane crop, by affecting the ripening and quality of the cane (Mhlanga-Ndlovu & Nhamo, 2017: 41). For example, rain is necessary for growing sugarcane, but too much of it can affect productivity on the farm and the cane crop. According to Mhlanga-Ndlovu & Nhamo (2017: 41), "high temperature

and patterns of rainfall will lead to the reduction of sugarcane yields, proliferation of pests and weeds and increased crop failures coupled with production declines.” Therefore, to manage climate changes, farmworkers often worked overtime and on weekends to make sure that they met or exceed production targets (per hectare) agreed to with the milling companies. As Sifiso (17/11/2020) asserted:

Factors such as too much heat and no rain affect the sugarcane; it may burn if we are not consistent with watering it. For example, it has been a month now with no rain, and we really need it to rain. Having sprinklers is just to maintain the situation, but it does not really help, because after a while the sugarcane gets really dry. This also affects my work because it is embarrassing when the sugarcane [that he was meant to take care of] burns. It makes it look like you are not careful or working hard enough. The sugarcane plantation is big, so moving the sprinklers from one point to another takes time.

As noted by Mhlanga-Ndlovu & Nhamo (2017: 42), Eswatini’s sugarcane sector will need more frequent irrigation cycles to meet the demands of the sugarcane crop. In the event that farmers do not meet targets, they rely on complementary crops.

The changing climatic and weather conditions are very beneficial for other seasonal crops that farmers grow alongside sugarcane. Swazi farmers grow complementary crops during ‘off crop season’ (when the sugarcane has been harvested and sent to mills for production). Some of the complementary crops have short growing seasons and others are often grown in the period when the sugarcane is uncultivated (DAFF, 2014: 1). These crops are grown adjacent sugarcane plantations. This is a system used to generate more income in the event that sugarcane production yields are low. For example, Vusi (17/11/2020) said: “The company grows maize, beans and dragon fruit. They also have a dairy farm.”

Complementary crops are grown on sections of sugarcane farms that are under-utilised (DAFF, 2014: 1). There are potential benefits associated with growing complementary crops: first, adopting a complementary crop system will have a “significant impact on the soil’s physical, chemical and biological health” (DAFF, 2014: 1). Second, this system will also “provide an opportunity for cane farmers to diversify their income streams” (DAFF, 2014: 1). These practices could therefore contribute to sustainable sugarcane production in the sector.

3.3.2 Contract Farming/Outgrower Schemes in Eswatini's Sugarcane Sector

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the relationship that exists between contract farmers/outgrower schemes (farms) and sugar millers is important for the overall success of the country's sugar industry. Under a contractual farming system or outgrower scheme, a sugarcane farmer agrees to grow and supply a quantity and quality of sugarcane at a pre-agreed price and time to a larger sugar-processing company (Martin & Sharp, 2016: 2). These farmers hire permanent, seasonal and temporary farmworkers to grow and sometimes harvest the cane. Ten farmworkers from small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms in Eswatini were interviewed for this study. All of these outgrower farms had a quota agreement with RESC and Ubombo Sugar, where they grew them a certain amount of sugarcane which is later produced and processed into raw and refined sugar for domestic consumption and exports.

The two milling companies, RESC and Ubombo Sugar, have well-developed outgrower schemes. Both RESC and Ubombo Sugar out-growers sell their sugarcane to the milling companies on a contractual basis (Martin & Sharp, 2016: 2). Small- and medium-sized farms did not have the capacity to run their own sugar mills. As Thembi (07/11/2020) noted:

We supply sugarcane all over Eswatini. We are the first farm that most companies go to when they need sugarcane to meet their threshold. For example, we grow sugarcane for companies such as: Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation, Illovo and Tambankulu.

Martin & Sharp (2016: 2) argue that contract farming does not encourage outgrower farmers to produce their own sugar; instead, the system creates an overreliance on dominating monopolies like Eswatini's RESC and Ubombo Sugar Limited. This is evident in Muzi's (17/11/2020) response:

No, this plantation does not have a sugar mill of its own. After the sugarcane is cut down and burnt, trucks are sent from Simunye [one of RESC's estates and mills] to collect the stalks. The company I work for hires these trucks from RESC. We basically grow our sugarcane for RESC.

Most of the outgrower farmers are heavily dependent on RESC and Ubombo for transporting, producing and processing sugarcane. Only a few farmers in the industry transport their own

sugarcane. Muzi's (17/11/2020) response highlights the oligopolistic nature of Eswatini's sugar industry, in that few sugar companies have significant influence in the market.

3.4 LABOUR LAWS AND ESWATINI'S SUGAR INDUSTRY

The Employment Act of 1980, the Industrial Relations Act of 2000 (amended in 2014) and the Sugar Act of 1967 regulate employer-employee relationships and labour standards in the sugar industry. For better participation in the sugarcane production network, farmworkers need to be educated on labour laws so that they are aware of their rights in the workplace. However, key themes in farmworkers' responses are their lack of knowledge about labour laws and rights in the workplace. This has contributed towards decent work deficits, especially regarding occupational health and safety in the workplace. Having regular health and safety labour inspections in the workplace can address some of the decent work deficits experienced by farmworkers working at the bottom of the production network. The aim of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda is to assist countries to develop and implement strategies that help with addressing decent work deficits by providing frameworks (from ILO pillars) that outline good standards of work and practices in the workplace.

3.4.1 Lack of Knowledge about Labour Laws and Rights at Work

The ILO has adopted conventions on core labour standards that all ratifying countries need to implement to ensure decent work in the workplace. These include "freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, non-discrimination, equal pay for men and women workers, the abolition of forced labour, and the elimination of child labour" (ILO, 2007: 27). According to the ILO (2007: 27), core labour standards are "often referred to as human rights at work." However, workers in Eswatini are not free to exercise their rights in the workplace. The country's political climate is different from that of Brazil and South Africa in that it is an absolute monarchy. King Mswati III exercises a level of authority over the government, where political power remains largely vested with the King. For example, trade union activities in Eswatini's sugar industry are highly suppressed with farmworkers not being able to practice the freedom of association and bargain collectively in the workplace (ITUC, 2016: 3). All the farmworkers interviewed seemed

very uncomfortable when asked about their trade union membership. When I asked farmworkers about trade union representation on the farm, most called it a ‘political issue’, of which they were not comfortable speaking about or knew little about. This begs the question of whether core labour standards (as recommended by the ILO) can be implemented in Eswatini, specifically her sugar industry? As a contributor in the global sugar market and sugarcane global production network, it is imperative for Eswatini’s government to adhere to the ILO’s labour law standards and to allow farmworkers to exercise their rights in the workplace.

Labour laws exist to ensure that employees’ rights are protected and that they experience decent working conditions and are fairly compensated. Farmworkers whom I interviewed for this study lacked knowledge about labour laws and rights in the workplace. In addition, seven farmworkers indicated that they either did not know or partially knew about the Government Gazette. They were not aware of national labour standards or their right to freedom of association and to bargain for better wages and working conditions. Consequently, farmworkers were forced to accept poor terms and conditions of employment put forward by their employer because they had no power to bargain for better living and working conditions. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020), a permanent farmworker who lived in company housing, said: “We once met with our employer to negotiate for electricity, food rations and better water services, but our requests were declined. Our employers always say that they cannot afford these things.”

Employers in the sugarcane sector, especially in the lower tier of the production network, fail to respect the national labour laws where contracts are either not signed or issued to farmworkers. Recruitment on sugarcane farms is based on the employers’ criteria. A farmworker who had little to no formal education could not enquire about an employment contract because he/she lacked knowledge and understanding of what it was and its importance in the workplace. Moreover, these employees were rural dwellers, where having work is important to them. Employers used this as an advantage to pay farmworkers salaries/wages that were below the minimum wage.

However, farmworkers like Thembi (07/11/2020) had a formal education and could read. She had some knowledge of the minimum wage in the sector, which she read about in the Government Gazette. According to the Gazette (2000: S14) the minimum wage in the country is E110.88 per week. Although having this knowledge as a worker is important, many were discouraged by it. This is because farmworkers found themselves limited and needed access to collective means of

interest representation where they were able to bargain for better conditions and higher wages. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) expressed:

Whether I have the Gazette or not, there is nothing that I can change. Knowing how much I should be earning compared to what I earn will not help me in any way. How much I earn will never be the same as what is written in the Gazette. Honestly, having the Gazette is useless. I could lay on it as a pillow.

Workers may not know labour laws and their rights in detail or as stipulated in the industry's Acts, but they knew what good working condition look like. They knew this information through media like newspapers and the news on radio (which most of them listen to), and conversations with other farmworkers working on other farms. Poor conditions of employment are often imposed on farmworkers by management. Also, it is that lack of trade union representation that has allowed managers to exploit workers' vulnerability. As noted by Muzi (17/11/2020):

We are all the same. Farmworkers do not have enough knowledge on labour laws. You learn about these laws as time goes on and as you gain experience as a farmworker ... As I had mentioned before, it is really up to us to learn and teach each other about these things. We learn from each other what is permissible and what is not.

The data show that it is not that farmworkers are unaware of the difference between poor and good working conditions, rather they lacked the bargaining power to be able to negotiate better working conditions.

3.4.2 Occupational Health and Safety in the Workplace

Farm work is labour intensive and characterised by uncertain weather conditions. When I visited the sugarcane farms, I noted that farmworkers were faced with a wide range of hazardous conditions like exposure to toxic pesticides and high temperatures. Therefore, improving occupational health and safety on sugarcane farm will help improve farmworkers' standards of work. Moreover, the type of outgrower farm or farming company that farmworkers were employed in could also influence whether safety and health practices were followed or not. Nine of the farmworkers I interviewed said that managers had put safety and health measures in place to ensure

that they had access to medical support when injured on the farm and that they wore adequate gear when working. On the other hand, one of the farmworkers I interviewed said that there were no occupational health and safety measures put in place where she worked. Although access to adequate and appropriate clothing contributes to workers' safety and health on the farm, these do not replace the need for regular occupational health, safety and labour inspections. Small- and medium-sized farming companies and farms, in contrast to larger ones, rarely have occupational and safety labour inspectors or safety representatives visit their farms when they are key to maintaining and improving health and safety standards in the workplace. According to the Government Gazette (2000: S5), a labour inspector is an "employee with not less than six months experience as an assembler who inspects the work on a production line."

According to ILO labour standards, carrying out labour inspections is the government's responsibility as it is a public function (ILO, 2007: 34). Labour inspections are there to "provide to both employers and workers, to administer social and labour policy, and to supervise and enforce labour legislation and standards, effective national systems of labour inspection are required" (ILO, 2007: 34). However, there were no labour inspections carried out on the small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms that I visited. Instead, workers were given their daily tasks and were left to manage themselves. They reported directly to the managers that regularly visit the farm. Managers and farmers were not there to inspect whether there were good working conditions, rather to see if daily targets were being met. Three farmworkers said that they were supervised by a headman to ensure good and consistent working conditions. However, this could be a problem because the headman is employed by the same farmer, which can make him too biased to inspect labour conditions objectively. For instance, Zandi (16/11/2020) said:

If I die on the farm no one would know. There was an incident that happened about 2 years ago: the headman left a farmworker dead, and he/she was found dead. The boss [farm owner] got questioned by the police, but he showed no remorse about the situation.

If the headman said something about the incident noted by Zandi (16/11/2020) then the police would have had a case against the farm owner. Instead, the headman did exactly what the farm owner did – which was to ignore that someone had died on the sugarcane farm. Farmers benefit from having a headman as an 'inspector' rather than having someone sent by the Labour

Commissioner. Labour inspectors are meant to be employed by the state and not by the sugar company or farmer. It is important to have an inspector visit sugarcane farms regularly because they encourage employers to listen to the concerns of farmworkers and supervisors, and to identify existing and potential hazards on the farm. Without regular inspections, protection guaranteed to farmworkers by social laws and regulations is compromised and no one can be held accountable for what happens on the farm.

The primary purpose of having regular occupational health and safety inspections on sugarcane farms is to ensure compliance with relevant national labour laws and standards, which are designed to protect farmworkers. However, the Eswatini Government says this on paper but does not practice this law. According to the ILO (2014: 36), Eswatini ratified Labour Inspection Convention No. 81 of 1947, which called for the establishment of a Labour Law Policy in 2010 to address the identified deficits. One of the farms visited had a headman that the workers reported to if they had any concerns or requests. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) said:

No one comes to sit with the workers to educate them on labour laws, instead we rely on what our headman tells us. Whether it is the truth or not, I do not know ... We do not have any labour inspectors on this plantation, perhaps they only visit larger sugarcane farms that belong to the big companies. If I have a complaint, I will tell my headman who will then relay my complaint to the boss, who is a white man.

Thembi (07/11/2020) and Muzi's (17/11/2020) responses are similar in that they both work on sugarcane farms that did not have labour and health inspections. Moreover, they both rely on other workers to learn about labour laws. This is a concern because collective bargaining for farmworkers on small- and medium-scale farms cannot be realised insofar as farmers make unilateral decisions about trade union activity on the farms.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The data show that internal factors such as water availability; climate change; the oligopolistic nature of Eswatini's sugar industry; the lack of knowledge about labour laws and rights at work among farmworkers; and the lack of trade union representation have had an impact on farmworkers' working conditions at the bottom of the sugarcane production network. Faced with

downward pressure to meet market demand for sugar, farmworkers were forced to work overtime, which is involuntary and is paid in kind. For instance, challenges of high variability in both the timing and amount of total rainfall in the country have lowered yield potential and have resulted in farmworkers working tirelessly to ensure that sugarcane yields remain constant.

Farmworkers are often portrayed as passive participants in the production network: not able to exert influence over their work or working condition on sugarcane farms. However, this is not the case. Farmworkers interviewed for this study lacked the necessary education to be able to understand labour laws and their rights in the workplace; few did not even have access to this information; and trade union activity in the industry was highly suppressed. To be able to address poor working conditions on farms, farmworkers needed to be educated on labour laws and their rights at work.

The data collected suggested that farmers used this knowledge (that most of the farmworkers are not educated) as an incentive to make the conditions of work flexible and informal on sugarcane farms. This is because an educated workforce will be more expressive and conscious about their rights to bargain in the workplace. Farmworkers will want to negotiate for better wages and conditions of employment. Farmers' incentive is to increase productivity while maintaining production costs as low as possible. This conflict of interest proposes a problem for farmers.

This can explain why there were no occupational health, safety and labour inspections on the sugarcane farms. The small- and medium-sized farms I visited for this study did not have occupational and safety labour inspections. Regular inspections are key to combating some of the decent work deficits on sugarcane farms. Labour inspectors help supervise and enforce labour legislation and standards of work – working closely with trade unions. In conclusion, the above discussions examined market and institutional pressures that contribute towards decent work deficits in Eswatini's sugarcane production network, which in turn, transmit to selected farmworkers. The following chapter will go on to analyse the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms, as well as their challenges in realising good conditions of work.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DECENT WORK ON ESWATINI'S OUTGROWER SUGARCANE FARMS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Decent Work Agenda comprises of four strategic pillars to ensure decent and productive work: namely, full and productive employment, workers' rights, social protection, and social dialogue (Webster *et al.*, 2015: 125). The Agenda confronts identified decent work deficits in countries worldwide. However, the above-mentioned pillars cannot be used to measure decent work for an individual worker or at an industry level (Webster *et al.*, 2015: 126). Therefore, maintaining some comparability with the ILO's decent work pillars, Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) proposed nine indicators to measure decent work at an industry level (Webster *et al.*, 2015: 123). These indicators include employment opportunities; stability and security at work; adequate earnings and productive work; decent hours of work; combining work, family, and personal life; equal opportunity and treatment; safe work environment; social security; and promotion of social dialogue.

For this study, I used the following seven indicators: employment opportunities, stability and social security at work, adequate earnings and productive work, conditions of work, treatment of and opportunities for men and women, safe work environment, and promotion of social dialogue. The only indicator from Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) that did not seem feasible for this study was 'combining work, family and personal life', which requires a focus on the livelihoods of farmworkers outside the workplace. Although this will be briefly discussed in section 4.3, I focus on decent work on sugarcane farms, by studying farmworkers working conditions on outgrower farms. As an alternative, I modified the above indicator and combined it with Webster's *et al.* (2015:126) fourth indicator – 'decent hours of work' – to create what I termed 'conditions of work'. Moreover, I treated 'stability and security at work' and 'social security' as one indicator (stability and social security at work) instead of two separate measures as Webster *et al.* (2015: 126) did. These modifications made it possible to create a research schedule with questions that an individual farmworker can answer. For example, it would be challenging to ask farmworkers if

they experience ‘full and productive employment’ in the workplace. It would be difficult to explain what ‘full employment’ entails. To capsulise this ILO indicator to apply to an individual farmworker or industry level, I asked them about the employment opportunities available to them on the farm and if they get adequate earnings and productive work. Each decent work indicator was used as a theme, where I asked each farmworker question that related to each theme. Using these themes helped me formulate suitable question that were easy to explain and breakdown to farmworkers.

In this chapter I address the main and the (second) secondary objectives of this study: (a) to examine the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini’s small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms, and (b) to examine how farmworkers’ embeddedness in the production node of the network shapes the possibilities for, and limits to their actions. In this chapter, I present a discussion under each indicator; analysing literature studied on decent work in the workplace and the farmworkers’ responses.

4.2 EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The first indicator that I use to analyse decent work on outgrower farms was the *employment opportunities* indicator. There is no particular way of defining employment opportunities; rather, this concept can be understood by looking at the employment relationship between sugarcane farmers/farming companies and farmworkers, and how this can ensure opportunity for skills development through promotion and training in the workplace. According to ILO (2018: 54) labour standards, creating employment opportunities and decent work in the workplace creates an “environment conducive to ensuring effective application of fundamental principles and rights at work.” However, responses from farmworkers suggested that there were limited promotion and training opportunities for farmworkers in the sector. Farmworkers improve and acquire their skills in farm work through years of experience from working on sugarcane farms. None of the farmworkers I interviewed went through a training processes before getting hired on the farm, instead they were hired based on their physical strength, previous farm experience and/or the ability to learn quickly.

4.2.1 Opportunities for Skills Development on Sugarcane Farms

Opportunities for skill development on sugarcane farms can be realised through training, where employers communicate and explain information and acceptable practices to employees, or through years of experience. The latter is true in Eswatini. All the farmworkers I interviewed did not go through any formal training process before being hired. Evidently, Muzi (17/11/2020) said:

I do not have any training, maybe the farmworkers that went through an interviewing process have had training. Having an interview before getting the job is a new thing. Just like I mentioned before, I learn from those that have been here longer than me and have years of experience. I also learn from my own personal experiences of working with the sugarcane ... They look at how well you do your job and your strength as a farmworker. This is why I come back every season.

Growing and harvesting sugarcane requires experience and physical strength. This is what Swazi farmers look for when hiring farmworkers. Farmers did not hire farmworkers based in their level of education, in fact, all the farmworkers I interviewed did not finish or go to school. They were all general workers. According to Section 5 of the Government Gazette of 2000, a general worker refers to an employee engaged in unskilled work.

If the above description refers to a ‘skilled’ worker as one with some level of education, then farmworkers do not require an education to perform their job well. For example, Sithole (17/11/2020) has no form of education and has developed his skill by working on the same sugarcane farm for over 20 years. The years Sithole (17/11/2020) has spent working on the farm have allowed to develop his skill, as well as learn more about growing sugarcane. As a result, he could work as both an irrigator and cane grower. This has made him an asset to the company. For instance, Sithole (17/11/2020) said:

I never went to school ... My education level is not related to my work in any way ... I am an irrigator. I fix any pipes that have leakages and change the sprinklers [watering the sugarcane]. If I am not doing irrigation work, I will join every other farmworker doing work like weeding and adding manure to the sugarcane.

In Eswatini, farmworkers develop their skill by practicing and working on sugarcane farms. A lot of what farmworkers know was learnt on the job, and this is how they got promoted. Through years of experience and his ability to adapt and learn quickly, Muzi (17/11/2020) has worked on the farm for two years and has been promoted to work on other sections of the sugarcane network. As Muzi (17/11/2020) noted: “Yes, there are opportunities for promotion for farmworkers. I started off with weeding the sugarcane and I slowly progressed to changing the sprinklers and plumbing.” Promotion in the sugarcane farms I visited meant ‘added responsibility’. As noted above, Muzi (17/11/2020) and Sithole (17/11/2020) work as irrigators and cane growers. They can move along the production network (working in different levels of the production process), depending on where the farmer needs them to be. Experience in working with sugarcane is more important to farmers than a worker’s gender and educational level. For instance, Thembi (07/11/2020) said:

I do not think there is a distinction made between women and men when it comes to job allocations. It really depends on how much knowledge you have on that job. It may look like that job belongs to a man, but if I, as a woman have much knowledge on it, they will put me in that position.

Opportunities for skills development for farmworkers working on sugarcane farms, therefore, can be realised through years of practical experience of working with sugarcane. For example, a cane grower cannot learn how to weed or add fertilizer by simply reading about it in a training session, instead he/she would need to work on the farm to know how to do their job. Moreover, farmers have no incentive to provide farmworkers with more skills than their jobs require. Farmers are not incentivised to spend money (from their profits) on training programmes or material for workers. Experience and physical strength are key for farmers looking for employees. Data collected show that there is no decent work deficit in this regard. Farmworkers are able to upgrade along the production network and work in different sections of the chain based on merit (how well they do their current job and physical strength).

4.3 STABILITY AND SOCIAL SECURITY AT WORK

The second indicator used to analyse decent work is the *stability and social security at work* indicator. According to ILO labour standards, social security is the protection that employers offer their employees through a series of measures such as, medical aid care, sickness and maternity leave and benefits, family benefits, unemployment benefits, injury insurance, invalidity and survivors' benefits, and old-age benefits (ILO, 2007: 40). However, the farmworkers interviewed for this study have been excluded from some types of comprehensive social security protection or coverage in the workplace. My data show that a farmworker's form or type of employment – namely, permanent, seasonal, casual or temporary – largely determines whether they have access to social security and benefits, or not. In Eswatini, seasonal farmworkers are not entitled to social security benefits, and so farmers are not incentivised to provide benefits such as, medical aid, pension fund or workmen's compensation. Some permanent farmworkers in the sector are treated like seasonal employees, where they are excluded from some social security protection or coverage in the workplace. Evidently, Thembi (07/11/2020) is a permanent farmworker and is still excluded from some comprehensive social security benefits. As an example, Thembi (07/11/2020) said:

No, we do not have any other benefits besides healthcare ... they help us in that regard. When you are sick, they help you and take you to hospital and pay for all the costs. We are not part of any pension schemes. Maybe now that we are part of the Union, we will.

In this section, the data show how contracts of employment and farmworkers on and off housing and living conditions influence worker's stability in the workplace. Farmworkers need decent housing and living conditions, but this had been an issue in many outgrower farms in the country. Moreover, the data reveals how access to social security benefits help ensure that farmworkers have decent working conditions in the workplace.

4.3.1 Contracts of Employment

Contracts of employment create a level of stability for workers in the workplace. Employment contracts stipulate the terms and conditions of employment which both employer and employee adhere to. Having a formal agreement between both parties should cease unilateral decision-making in the workplace, where employers alter the terms and conditions of employment in their favour. However, during my interviews with the farmworkers, I noted that employment contracts

in small- and medium-sized outgrower sugarcane farms have been declining. In fact, contracts of employment between farmers and farming companies and farmworkers were mostly verbal. However, this poses a problem as it can lead to ‘flexible’ work and employment, of which farmers benefit from.

Of the ten farmworkers interviewed, seven of them did not have formally written contracts of employment. Those that had contracts had verbal contracts, where the farmworkers learned about the terms and conditions of employment by word of mouth. As an example, Sithole (17/11/2020) said:

I went looking for a job years ago with a few men who were farmworkers, and they helped me get a job on this farm by talking to the manager/boss at that time. And I have been here ever since. I started with weeding then I progressed to watering the sugarcane [irrigation].

In Eswatini, permanent farmworkers are meant to possess formal, written contracts of employment, while, seasonal, temporary and casual farmworkers, do not (ITUC, 2016: 8). However, farmers do not practice this in reality. The data collected show that being a permanent employee does not guarantee farmworkers a contract of employment. Four permanent farmworkers were interviewed and three of them did not possess contracts. Themba (07/11/2020) has been a permanent farmworker for six years and he said: “No, I do not have an employment contract.”

Thembi (07/11/2020) and Hloniphile (07/11/2020) are also permanent farmworkers working on the same small-scale farm as Themba (07/11/2020) for 22 and 7 years, respectively – and they had not been given an employment contract. However, Sithole (07/11/2020) who has been a permanent farmworker on a different farm (medium-sized farm) for over 20 years possesses a contract of employment. The data show the different employer-employee relationships that exist on outgrower farms, and the ways in which farmers treat their farmworkers.

All seasonal farmworkers interviewed for this study have never been issued employment contracts, and those that did, have a verbal agreement with their employer. This also means that they were not entitled to the social security benefits enjoyed by permanently employed farmworkers. Contracts of employment stipulate workers benefits, as well as adhere to workers’ rights in the sector. Farmers that do not issue contracts of employment to their permanent employees often

follow informal processes and make unilateral decisions. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) enjoys some of the benefits that come with being a permanent employee on the farm.

As a permanent employee, Thembi (07/11/2020) enjoys employee benefits such as on-farm housing, but has no medical allowance, pension fund, workmen's compensation – and she is not paid for working overtime. In the absence of a contract, work on the farm can be flexible because of the lack of a properly written agreement and union representation.

4.3.2 Social Security Schemes and Benefits

Broadly defined, social security is the “protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to healthcare and to guarantee income security, particularly in cases of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of a breadwinner” (ILO, 2010: 46). Social security can be extended to employment in agriculture to ensure income security for farmworkers and retired farmworkers through pension fund schemes, maternity, work injury and access to healthcare insurance (ILO, 2010: 46).

Social security benefits and schemes offer more than just stability at work, but a better livelihood for farmworkers. For example, a permanent farmworker like Menzi (17/11/2020) was able to build a better home for his family because of the loan he got from work. For example, Menzi (17/11/2020) said:

As a permanent worker, I have benefits like medical aid, and I am a member of a pension fund scheme. However, you are free to choose whether to join a medical aid scheme or not; that is up to you. On the other hand, being a member of a pension fund scheme is compulsory and this gets deducted from your monthly salary. Another thing that the company helps us with is to loan us money to build a house. They loan farmworkers [who want to build a house] 15 per cent of the money they need to start or complete their building project.

Farmworkers have some level of income security, but this may not be sufficient to make long-term plans for themselves and their families and “to prevent them from becoming trapped in a poverty

cycle” (ILO, 2006: 5). Farmworkers like Menzi (17/11/2020) from rural areas travelled to find work on sugarcane farms, hoping to improve their quality of life.

Most of the farmers, who employed the sugarcane workers I interviewed gave employment benefits to their permanent farmworkers. These benefits included access to medical aid, pension fund (in case of old age), work injury allowance, and maternity leave with pay. As Sithole (17/11/2020) noted:

As a permanent worker, I do have benefits such as medical allowances/aid, and I am a member of a pension fund scheme. However, you are free to choose whether to join a medical aid scheme or not, this is up to you. On the other hand, being a member of a pension fund scheme is compulsory and this gets deducted from your monthly salary ... Yes, I do find these benefits helpful.

Permanent farmworkers were free to choose which benefits they wanted to subscribe for, depending on how helpful they found them in addition to their salary. However, on one of the sugarcane farms I visited, permanent farmworkers were not provided with the social security benefits mentioned above. The only assistance offered to farmworkers was access to healthcare in the event they fell sick or got injured while working on the farm, and on-farm housing. As Hloniphile (07/11/2020) asserted: “We do not have the benefits you have mentioned. Therefore, there are no deductions on our salary...Yes, the company provides housing for all permanent farmworkers.”

In Eswatini, it is seasonal, temporary and casual farmworkers that are not entitled to social benefits that are enjoyed by permanently employed farmworkers (ITUC, 2016: 8). They have no pension benefits, no medical aid, no allowances and no on-farm housing (ITUC, 2016: 8). For instance, Muzi (17/11/2020) is a seasonal farmworker and he said:

No, I do not enjoy such benefits as a seasonal farmworker ... I have not gotten to a level where I can say I have employment benefits. For example, I have not had any injuries nor fallen sick to see how the company deals with such matters.

However, on the sugarcane farm that Hloniphile (07/11/2020) works on, both seasonal and permanent workers have no social security benefits. Farmers are not incentivised to provide

workers with benefits because it would increase the cost of labour, which will transmit to additional production costs. Furthermore, Hloniphile's (07/11/2020) employer can get away with not giving his/her employees employment benefits because there was no contract of employment. An employment contract gives workers certain rights or benefits, and it is legally binding. Consequently, farmers will avoid giving farmworker contracts of employment because they would have to comply with the terms and conditions stipulated in the contract.

The data show that farmworkers' access to social security benefits or schemes on small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms is largely dependent on their employers. Permanent workers who are entitled to employment benefits may not get them because of their employer. Moreover, the absence of an employment contract seems to give employers an incentive to avoid giving farmworkers employment benefits. Without an employment contract, farmers are not liable for breach of contract, and farmworkers, according to the Government, are not permanent employees, and therefore, are not entitled to any benefits. Essentially, Hloniphile's (07/11/2020) employer treated her like a seasonal employee for the past seven years, with no benefits.

In addition, the data show that all permanent farmworkers as part of their employment benefits were offered on-farm housing, whereas seasonal farmworkers had to find their own accommodation close to the sugarcane farm. Housing close to the farm was more convenient for farmworkers because they could cut travelling costs. All farmworkers took less than 30 minutes to travel to work by foot. For the farmers, having their permanent employees worked to their advantage. For example, Zandi (16/11/2020) pointed out: "If there is anything that needs to be fixed or work needs to be done, and you stay on company property, you are the first person that the boss will approach."

In this section, I treat on-farm housing in outgrower schemes as an employment benefit. This is because all the farmworkers identified it as a benefit from their employment. All four permanently employed farmworkers live on company property, whereas the remaining (six) seasonal farmworker live in housing off the farm. Interviews with both permanent and seasonal farmworkers highlighted that on- and off-farm housing and living conditions can be inadequate and overcrowded with poor sanitary and water facilities. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020), is a permanent employees and lives on company property, said:

I live in a house that has single bedrooms, where each farmworker has their own small room. The house belongs to the company we work for ... We do not have electricity where we live, so we rely on candles or paraffin for light. We collect the water from something like a well that we created ourselves. We fill it up with water collected from a nearby river.

As mentioned above, living condition for seasonal farmworkers living off the farm can be similar that of permanent farmworkers. Evidently, the seasonal farmworkers I interviewed lived in small and crowded housing near the sugarcane farm. As Zandi (16/11/2020) noted:

I live on a complex with many small houses; there is no structure in how they were built. I am not sure how many people live here ... I buy my own electricity and I collect my water by the shop, which is close to the complex. Everyone gets their water from there ... Our toilet facility is a bit far from the houses. I do not have a toilet in my house.

Farmworkers generally need housing due to their low wages and the unstable nature of their work. Permanent farmworkers like Thembi (07/11/2020) were provided with housing as an employment ‘benefit’. They did not pay rent for on-farm housing; the company provides it at no cost. They were, however, responsible for their own food and other essentials. The finding, as we will see in the following section show that farmworkers’ earnings cannot afford them decent off-farm housing as well as all their basic needs.

4.4 EARNINGS AND PRODUCTIVE WORK

In order to promote decent working conditions on sugarcane farms/plantations, farm work needs to be productive, which means that farmworkers can yield sufficient returns to their labour to permit him/her and their dependents with a level of consumption above the poverty line (ILO, 2017: 1). The third indicator I used to analyse decent work was the *earnings and productive work* indicator. Earnings should include “direct wages and salaries, remuneration for time not worked (excluding severance and termination pay), bonuses and gratuities and housing and family allowances paid by the employer directly to this employee” (ILO, 2013: 66). An adequate earning would be an income that can sustain a workers’ living standards and afford them a life above the nationally defined poverty line. To ensure that farmworkers are paid a decent salary or wage, they

would need to earn an income equivalent to or above the minimum wage rate in the agriculture sector.

4.4.1 Decent Wages for Sugarcane Workers

According to the ILO (2007: 25), the enforcement of minimum wage in rural areas is almost impossible. More so, farmers and farming companies in Eswatini seem to “preclude the possibility of enforcing a non-market determined minimum wage” (ILO, 2007: 25). It is not that sugarcane farmers pay their workers a salary/wages below the national minimum wage, rather the stipulated minimum wage is so low that one could not afford their basic needs such as education and housing. The data show that farmers in the sugarcane sector are paying their workers’ salaries/wages above the national minimum wage, which is 420.00 Swazi Emalangeni (E) for unskilled workers. Farmworkers were general workers, which makes them unskilled employees according to the law. As noted by Zandi (16/11/2020):

Last year I heard that they were being paid E50.00 per day, this year I am not sure what the rate is. I have tried to ask but no one knows, so I will see when I get paid at the end of the month.

If Zandi (16/11/2020) earns about E50.00 per day, and assuming that there are about 23 working days in a 31-day month, her total monthly salary would be E1 150.00. However, during her interview Zandi (16/11/2020) said that she did not earn enough to sustain a decent standard of living, especially as the breadwinner in her family. She had multiple streams of income to keep her going for the months she was not working on the farm. For instance, Zandi (16/11/2020) said:

No, farming is not my only source of income. I am a small businesswoman. I sell beer from my home. I have a fridge for my stock. I am also a money lender. I loan people money with interest.

The data collected from interviews show that the farmworkers (permanent and seasonal) did not know what a ‘minimum wage’ is at all, or they did not know what it was now. How can farmworkers know what an insufficient income is when they have little to no knowledge of what decent earnings are in the sector? Employers will not counsel workers on laws about earnings to

ensure continued flexible and casual working conditions. If farmworkers do not understand or know what a minimum wage is, they will not be able to negotiate for better salaries.

By contrast, farmworkers like Thembi (07/11/2020) had some knowledge of what the minimum wage was in the sector. She got this knowledge from having read the Government Gazette, which she purchased herself. Unlike most the other farmworkers interviewed, Thembi (07/11/2020) had some level of formal education (secondary schooling) which has helped her to understand labour laws better than the other farmworkers. This shows that there is a link between a farmworker's level of education and their knowledge of labour laws. For instance, Sithole (07/11/2020) who has worked as a farmworker for over 20 years did not know what I was referring to when I asked him if he knew anything about the minimum wage in the sector. His lack of knowledge of labour laws may be a result of his level of education – rather the lack there of.

4.5 CONDITIONS OF WORK

The fourth indicator – *conditions of work* – was used to examine farmworkers working conditions on sugarcane farms. I did this by asking farmworkers questions related to their working hours on the farm, as well as overtime. The data collected from workers' responses show the conditions in which they work in as they explained the work they did, from the time they go to work until they retired to their homes. It is the workers' description of these events that I examine. I also rely on the discussions in the previous sections to examine the conditions of work on sugarcane farms. This is because conditions of work do not only refer to workers' working hours, rather it covers various matters such as, how work is organised on the farm and the activities involved; training and skills development; and occupational health and safety.

The farmworkers interviewed for this research had limited access to decent working conditions because they were employed in insecure and unprotected jobs as a result of market pressures, little to no access to social security, farmers' lack of respect for labour laws and farmworkers' lack of knowledge of mandatory earnings, conditions of work and their rights at work. Although farmworkers interviewed worked for different small- and medium-sized farms and farming companies, there were many similarities in their conditions of work. The nature of work in the

lower tiers of the sugarcane production network is labour-intensive and done manually, which contributed to long working hours and poor conditions of work on the farms and plantations.

4.5.1 Working Hours

Hours of work for sugarcane farmworkers tend to be long compared to hours in other industries. All ten farmworkers interviewed said that they work about 45 hours or more per week, and their conditions of work remain casual and unregulated (ILO, 2007: 31). According to the ILO (2007: 31), hours of work on sugarcane farms vary because most of their work is influenced by changing weather conditions, peak periods of sowing and harvesting. This is also the case in Eswatini, where sugarcane farmworkers are asked to work on weekends or longer hours in the week, depending on weather conditions. For example, the irrigators I interviewed said that they worked longer hours (overtime) on very hot days to monitor the cane and make sure that it does not get burnt. The sprinklers used to water the cane were changed/rotated manually, so workers remained at work to rotate them as many times as they can before leaving for the night. As noted by Muzi (17/11/2020):

The weather determines whether we work overtime or not ... Most of the work done today consists of changing the sprinklers and making sure that the sugarcane does not burn. That is what I do all day; monitoring and rotating the sprinklers ... When it is very hot and it does not rain for an extended period of time, we have to work overtime; stay behind to rotate/change the sprinklers.

As noted before, factors such as climate change can influence conditions of work; whether farmworkers work overtime or not. Under normal circumstances, longer hours usually mean more pay. So, farmworkers may also be in favour of working overtime as a means to supplement their wages. However, how overtime is compensated on each farm varied, because three of the permanent workers that I interviewed did not get paid for overtime, instead they were paid in hours. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) said:

Our boss would be the one to ask us to continue working after 15:30pm ... We are not paid for working overtime, in fact we are paid in hours not money. The hours worked overtime are deducted in one of the working days, which means that you will knock off earlier than 15:30pm.

According to Eswatini's Government Gazette, hours of work should not be more than 48 hours, and if workers work overtime, they should be paid at once and a half time of the basic hourly wage. Evidently, Thembi's (07/11/2020) employee does not follow the law, and he/she is not incentivised to pay workers for working overtime, because they do not possess contracts of employment. Working overtime in Eswatini is not against the law, but the Government has made provision; that those workers get paid for their labour. So, not paying workers for hours worked overtime is a violation of their rights. On another sugarcane farm, the farmworkers I interviewed said that they worked approximately 60 hours per week, including overtime. Muzi (17/11/2020) mentioned that:

On a normal day I work 9 hours per day. However, I work 12 hours per day when working overtime ... When we are changing the sprinklers, we start work at 06:00am ... We end work at 18:00pm. However, if we are not changing the sprinklers [watering the sugarcane], I leave work at 15:00pm.

Muzi (17/11/2020) and all the other farmworkers on this farm are paid for working overtime. Evidently, how farmers compensate overtime may be different. Also, it is important to mention that all farmworkers, including Muzi (17/11/2020) who is a seasonal worker, possess employment contracts. As mentioned in section 4.3.1, contracts of employment are important, because they help regulate the employment relationship between an employer and employee. Without a formal agreement between the two parties, employers are free to alter the terms and conditions of employment without consulting farmworkers and informal processes predominate in the workplace. In addition, some of the farmworkers I interviewed that work on the same farm as Muzi (17/11/2020) were represented by a trade union. So, they were able to bargain for better wages or lay complaints if they were to work overtime without pay. However, the farmworkers I interviewed that work on the same farm as Thembi (07/11/2020) were not represented by a trade union. It is only now (in 2020) that Thembi (07/11/2020) and the other workers were allowed to be members of a trade union. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) said: "I recently signed up for a trade union this year. It is something new, and not much has been done though."

Evidently, union representation and employment contracts are important to have in the workplace to regulate employment and working conditions. With trade union representation farmworkers are able to bargain for better working conditions and better pay, and an employment contract helps regulate employment on the farm in a formal manner, thus, avoiding unilateral decision-making

among outgrower farmers. In the following section I present an analysis of the role that gender may play on employment in outgrower sugarcane farms.

4.6 TREATMENT OF, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR, MEN AND WOMEN

The fifth indicator I used was the *treatment of, and opportunities for, men and women*, which helped to examine the role that gender plays on small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms. Farmworkers' responses show that women provide a large proportion of labour on sugarcane farms. However, only three women were interviewed for this study. The women I interviewed did work that includes fertilizing, planting and treating, hand weeding and bundling the cane for transportation. On the other hand, I interviewed seven male workers, and their farm work includes duties that were more 'labour-intensive' like irrigation and manual harvesting. My data show that gender does influence how farmers allocate jobs, tasks and duties on the farm. Each task is associated with a level of difficulty, which is why there were clear job allocations on the farm. The women on the sugarcane farm did most of the weeding, fertilizing, planting and bundling of cane after it has been cut down by the men. These jobs are viewed as less difficult. Whereas the men were given the responsibility of cutting the cane during harvesting seasons and all irrigation on the farm. These jobs were said to be very difficult. For example, Vusi (17/11/2020) said:

There are more female than male farmworkers on this farm ... I think it does because women are usually responsible for weeding and planting, and men change the sprinklers and take care of the plumbing and piping.

However, on one of the sugarcane farms where I interviewed three of the farmworkers in this study, the men and women were treated equally and were offered the same opportunities when hired. This is because, the farmer focused more on the farmworkers' previous experience and physical strength. For instance, Hloniphile (07/11/2020) said: "I don't think there is a distinction made between women and men when it comes to job allocations. It really depends on how much knowledge you have on that job." Therefore, an individual's knowledge and understanding of their job and what needs to be done may determine whether they get the job or not. As mentioned in section 4.2.1, there is no training offered to farmworkers, so it is imperative for employers to employ farmworkers that know what they are doing.

Despite fair opportunities for work for both men and women in the production network, social security benefits for women are often compromised. Most responses in this section were on maternity leave. Some of the men I interviewed did not want to comment on issues of maternity leave, while the rest said that they did not know what procedures were followed in the workplace regarding maternity leave. Data collected from the three women I interviewed gave me an idea of how issues of maternity leave and pay are dealt with on small-scale sugarcane farms. This is not to suggest that all the data collected are a representation of all sugarcane farms in Eswatini's sugar industry – rather the farms where farmworkers interviewed worked.

4.6.1 Maternity Leave

According to ILO (2006: 305) standards, maternity protection in the workplace comprises of access to free or subsidised healthcare for women in the workplace, paid maternity leave, maternity grants and/or nursing allowances to cover expenses and employment protection. However, the women interviewed for this study find themselves in compromising conditions of work where they are concerned about losing their employment while on maternity leave. Small-scale farmers do not guarantee workers that need to go on maternity leave a paid leave or employment security.

Eswatini's labour law states that “women are entitled to 12 weeks of maternity leave – six before birth and six after birth” (ITUC, 2016: 9). However, seasonal, casual and temporary farmworkers are not covered by this law in practice (ITUC, 2016: 9). Some of these laws are not practiced on sugarcane farms and plantations. There is little to no social protection and security for women farmworkers on farms and plantations. As Thembi (07/11/2020) noted:

Issues regarding maternity leave are not so clear. Perhaps now that there is a trade union representing us, things of this nature will be addressed. For example, if a farmworker falls pregnant while working on the farm, she can take maternity leave, which should last about 12 weeks. However, as a permanent worker, she is only paid for five of those 12 weeks and sits with no pay for the remaining seven weeks. The company then finds a replacement for the time she is away. When her leave is over, she can come back to work. There was a woman who went on maternity leave, and they only paid her for seven days.

Thembi's (07/11/2020) response highlights two issues: first, that maternity leave is not dealt with in accordance with labour laws, and decisions on the farm concerning pay, leave and working conditions are made unilaterally. In the absence of a labour inspector, labour broker or active trade union, farmworkers have no representation and employers are not held accountable to the law. Second, farmworkers are not fully paid while on maternity leave. They also cannot complain or bargain on these matters in fear of losing their jobs. For example, Zandi (16/11/2020) said:

Most seasonal farmworkers keep silent about their pregnancies, we [the other farmworkers] end up noticing that she is pregnant. The seasonal employment only lasts three months so it is possible to work and hide the pregnancy from our employer. Once you feel like you cannot continue working, you can leave and not finish the three months ... If you are able to hide her pregnancy for three months [your seasonal employment], you will. If we have a headman present, then she must go to him and ask to leave once she feels like the work is too much. It is really up to her to decide whether to stay and continue working till we get paid or leave.

In Eswatini, taking maternity leave is a right that women have in the agricultural sector and should be paid during this period. However, farm work in the lower tiers on the sugarcane production network seem to be informal and casual, because small- and medium-sized farmers do not always follow labour laws, which affects the quality of work. As a result, women prefer to keep their pregnancy a secret because they do not want to lose their jobs or risk not being hired.

This is an unsafe practice because of the risky nature of the job. A woman could have a stillbirth because work on sugarcane farms is hazardous and labour-intensive. Farmworkers spend long hours working in high temperatures with minimal breaks. Zandi (16/11/2020) and Thembi (07/11/2020) work on different small-scale outgrower sugarcane farms, and on both farms the safety of pregnant farmworkers is compromised. Zandi (16/11/2020) worked on a farm where majority of the employees were seasonal farmworkers, and there were only two permanently employed farmworkers. Whereas Thembi (07/11/2020) worked on a farm where majority farmworkers were permanent employees. However, the conditions for women are similar despite the nature of employment. Again, the lack of representation and contracts of employment continue to impact workers conditions of work, as well as their safety in the workplace. In the following

section, I discuss examine whether farmworkers are provided with a safe work environment on outgrower sugarcane farms.

4.7 SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

A safe work environment is an important part of decent work. The sixth indicator I used to assess decent work on sugarcane farms was the *safe work environment* indicator. During interviews, farmworkers were asked whether they were provided with adequate protective clothing and equipment and are offered medical support when injured or fall sick on the farm. Their responses are what I used to assess decent work (or deficit) on the farms. Sugarcane farming is hazardous and high-risk work and workers need to take protective measures to ensure their safety on a daily basis. This includes wearing appropriate clothing while working with sugarcane and using equipment with caution.

Employers are also responsible for putting protective measures in place to ensure their workers' safety like providing them with adequate and appropriate protective clothing and equipment. Protective clothing would include safety boots, pants and a shirt, or overall, a sunhat. Farm work can be hazardous, so farmworkers need to have access to medical support in the event of an occupational injury. An occupational injury can be any accident that has taken place in the workplace (ILO, 2013: 154). With no adequate clothing and equipment and medical support, farmworkers' occupational safety is compromised. Of the 10 interviewees, nine farmworkers were provided with protective clothing like pants and a jacket or an overall, and safety boots. The following discussions will examine their responses, which have highlighted the different protective measures taken by small- and medium-sized farmers and farming companies to ensure the safety of their workers.

4.7.1 Access to Adequate Protective Clothing and Equipment

According to Eswatini labour law, all workers have the right to “adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment free of charge” (ITUC, 2016: 9). The ITUC (2016: 9) stated that most seasonal farmworkers working on sugarcane farms are not provided with equipment or clothing

and are required to purchase safety clothing with their money. Contrary to this, both seasonal and permanent farmworkers employed on small- and medium-sized farming companies are provided with medical support and adequate clothing. This contradicts the generalisation made in the above argument by the ITUC (2016: 9).

All six permanent farmworkers said that their employer provided them with adequate and protective personal clothing and equipment, which is replaced twice a year. However, three workers complained that their clothing was not strong enough to last them six months, so they would have to apply for new uniforms if they got torn or end up using their income to purchase new clothing. As Thembi (07/11/2020) explained:

We wear boots, a blue jacket and pair of pants only. We also get raincoats, but they are not that strong enough to last us the whole year because you will only wear it a couple of times and then it gets torn. Then you must see what to do for the rest of the year, especially when it is raining.

Getting new uniforms or replacing the old and torn uniforms used to be a challenge for farmworkers. For example, Hloniphile (07/11/2020) worked on the same farm as Thembi (07/11/2020), and she asserted:

We were responsible for replacing our uniforms at first, but things are different now. We report these things to our headman, who will then take the issue to the authorities. Now, the company is responsible for replacing our uniforms when they get torn. It takes some time to get it, but I am sure things will be different now that there is a trade union.

Each section of the sugarcane production network requires different protective measures and safety wear. Cane cutters have their own protective equipment and clothing because of the work that they do. This shows that there are safe working conditions for all farmworkers at each stage of the production network. The safety of farmworkers is a priority to most farmers in this study. It was only one sugarcane farm where a farmworker experienced unsafe working conditions.

Zandi's (16/11/2020) employer did not give her and the other farmworkers protective clothing to wear while working on the farm. They all have to purchase their own safety clothing and equipment. However, farmworkers do not earn enough money to buy adequate and appropriate

protective clothing, so most of them go to work with their everyday clothing. As Zandi (16/11/2020) noted:

We are not given any uniforms – everything that I wear on the farm is mine. I buy my own clothes; boots, hat and every other protective clothing that I need. For example, the lady that I work with does not have boots, so she uses normal shoes.

You know, the problem with Swazi's is that we do not put up a fight or argue with the employer, instead we are more focused on getting the job, and we tell ourselves that the rest will sort itself out. You know, on some plantations, farmworkers are also required to bring their own hoes to work. The farmworker will go around knocking and asking for a hoe ... The focus is on getting the job.

Farmworkers are one of the most important actors in the sugarcane production network. They grow and harvest the cane – work that requires proper health and occupational safety measures in place. The data suggested that the type of employment relationship can have a significant impact on the safety practices on sugarcane farms and plantations. Some employment relationships are more casual than others, which has made it difficult to address health and safety problems in the country's sugar industry. It is the absence of employment contracts that has contributed to casual employment relationships between farmers and farmworkers. Without a formal contract stipulating workers' rights in the workplace, employers will feel free to alter terms and conditions like not providing workers with protective clothing and equipment. In addition to providing farmworkers with protective clothing and equipment, access to medical support is important to ensure occupational health and safety at work. The following section will discuss the medical support offered to farmworkers when they get injured or fall sick while working on the farm. Medical support is different from a medical aid benefit or allowance. It is the support that farmers offer workers when they get injured while working on the farm at company or farmer's own cost. It is usually useful in times of emergencies, like a farmworker injures themselves while cutting cane.

4.7.2 Medical Support

Weather conditions can affect the safety and health of farmworkers working on sugarcane farms. High temperatures can cause dizziness and fainting on the farm, and farmworkers can get injured if it rains while handling chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers. This is why it is important for farmers to provide workers with medical assistance because farmworkers may not be able to fend for their own bills. In an interview with Zandi (16/11/2020) she said:

Once it rains and we just added or are adding manure to the sugarcane this can affect us. The manure could burn us ... There was an incident that happened a year ago, where farmworkers, including myself, were burnt by manure because it was raining. Our boss knew that we should not be working [while adding manure to the sugarcane] when it is raining, but he did not really care, what was important was that we work. We had to take ourselves to hospital. No medical support or allowance was provided.

However, Zandi's (16/11/2020) response does not suggest that all sugarcane farmers treat their workers in a similar manner, and that work on the farms is in unsafe for all farmworkers. There are decent work practices in place in other small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms. For instance, nine out of the ten farmworkers' experiences on the farm contradicted Zandi's (16/11/2020) experience. Hloniphile (07/11/2020) being one of these farmworkers said:

Cane cutters have their own uniforms. They are safe ... If a farmworker is injured, he/she is taken to hospital immediately. The farmworker is also allowed to rest when they come back from the hospital. They would just have to say how long they will be off so that the boss finds a temporary replacement.

It is an employer's responsibility to make sure that farmworkers are wearing appropriate protective clothing and to make sure that they promote a safe working environment. Access to medical aid is one way to promote a safe working environment for farmworkers. With farm work being hazardous, farmworkers need medical support should anything happen to them at while at work. The data collected show that majority farmers take care of their workers' safety. In the following section, I discuss workers' ability to bargain collectively in the workplace, freedom of association, as well as trade union activity in the workplace.

4.8 PROMOTION OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The *promotion of social dialogue* is the seventh and final indicator I used to assess decent work on sugarcane farms. According to the ILO (2007: 26), many workers in global agriculture industries are poorly protected by national labour laws, especially because majority are from rural areas where there are challenges with enforcing labour laws. This is because workers in these areas are less familiar with the details of the laws and compliance may be considered ‘impractical’, particularly in small- and medium-scale farms (ILO, 2007: 27). The enforcement of legislation in the workplace is weak, and farmworkers cannot fully participate in social dialogue. Data collected for this study show similar patterns in Eswatini’s sugar industry, particularly the country’s outgrower sugarcane schemes.

The ILO (2013: 190) contends that social dialogue is important in the workplace because it encourages good governance in the production network, where all parties; workers’ organisations, employers’ organisations and trade unions negotiate and consult on the terms and conditions of employment. Moreover, social dialogue in the workplace “plays a key role in achieving the ILO’s objective of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity” (ILO, 2013: 190). However, Eswatini ratified ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and ILO Convention No. 98 on Collective Bargaining (ITUC, 2016: 8). Social dialogue in the sugar industry is minimal, especially in the lower tiers of the sugarcane production network. For example, all the farmworkers I interviewed were not members of a trade union. Of the ten, two permanent farmworkers, Menzi (17/11/2020) and Sithole (17/11/2020) had union membership, but later ended their membership. An analysis on their responses will be presented in the following discussions.

Eswatini practices social dialogue in both public and private enterprises, but it is only recently that the efforts of trade unions have been formalised and active in the workplace. Formalising trade union activity in the country has been a challenge because of the restrictions associated with the country being an absolute monarchy. As mentioned in section 3.4.1, King Mswati III exercises significant authority over the government, where political power remains largely vested in him. Some of his decisions have violated international labour standards as well as workers’ rights. Eswatini is considered to have one of the worst industrial relations records of any country, and the

decision to ban trade unions and employer federations was a violation of ILO Convention 87, which “guarantees freedom of association for workers and employers” (ITUC, 2014: 1). This decision severely affected union gatherings and their functioning in the workplace.

Eswatini’s Industrial Relations Act of 2000 (as amended in 2014) provides for “the right to freedom of association and assembly, with limitations” (ITUC, 2016: 9). In theory, farmworkers are free to join a trade union, but not in practice. I sensed an unwavering reluctance that affected farmworkers’ responses when I asked question about trade union representation in the workplace. Six of the farmworkers I interviewed were uncomfortable with disclosing whether they were members of a union or not. Farmworkers’ reactions to the questions were evidence to the stigma attached to being a member of a trade union among workers. Employers on the other two sugarcane farms suppress trade union representation on the farms. In the following section, I discuss trade union representation in the sugarcane sector, specifically on small- and medium-sized outgrower farms, as well as farmworkers’ perceptions of unions.

4.8.1 Lack of Trade Union Activity and Collective Bargaining on Sugarcane Farms

The Swaziland Agriculture and Plantation Workers’ Union (SAPWU) is the main trade union in Eswatini’s sugar industry (ITUC, 2016: 9). Trade union activity is important in the workplace; to represent workers and bargain for improved health, better working conditions and higher wages in the workplace. Although efforts have been made to formalise trade union representation in the workplace, the farmworkers I interviewed do not enjoy the right to bargain collectively and of freedom of association. Seasonal, casual and temporary farmworkers do not have trade union membership, and those that “choose to be active in union activities find themselves not being engaged the following season” (ITUC, 2016: 9).

Asking farmworkers about social dialogue in the workplace was challenging. Some of the farmworkers have recently joined a trade union, so they did not have enough knowledge about social dialogue in the workplace. For example, Thembi (07/11/2020) did not understand the meaning of the terms ‘collective bargaining’ and ‘freedom of association’. It is only after I explained what these meant and a general description of what bargaining activities may look like in the workplace, that she said these rights were not practiced on the farm. Without trade union

representation, workers cannot successfully bargain for better working and living conditions, or better still, understand what bargaining or freedom of association is. As noted by Thembi (07/11/2020):

I really do not know what collective bargaining or freedom of association is ... Maybe I will learn about these rights now, now that there is a trade union...I recently signed up for a trade union this year [2020]. It is something new, and not much has been done yet.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of collective bargaining and freedom of association shows that these are not practiced on sugarcane farm. For example, farmworkers were very hesitant and uncomfortable when asked questions on trade union membership. Eswatini has a long history of trade union suppression, with members either getting threatened or killed during strikes (ITUC, 2019:1). For example, Muzi (17/11/2020) asserted:

I am not part of a trade union ... It is difficult for a farmworker to say whether they have joined a trade union or not. No worker wants everyone to know that they are part of a trade union. Therefore, answering this question is difficult ... I do not think I need to be a member of a trade union just yet. I think it is for other farmworkers who have been here for longer. For example, permanent farmworkers, and not me. Even when trade union representatives come to the farm, we [seasonal farmworkers] are not called to join these meetings. This is why I feel like you need to be a permanent farmworker to be a member of a trade union.

Seasonal farmworkers like Muzi (17/11/2020) feared joining a trade union because “in order to obtain employment with a contractor, workers must disassociate themselves with trade unions” (ITUC, 2016: 8). Workers are often left with no choice but to deny requests to join a union. The opportunity cost of being a member of a trade union is too high, where many workers running the risk of losing their employment because of their membership.

Trade union membership is not just an issue for seasonal farmworkers, but also among permanent farmworkers. The few permanent farmworkers who were previously members of the trade union were given ‘false hope’, which resulted in them leaving the union. They argued that employers were difficult to negotiate with, which did not yield the results that farmworkers were expecting. The relationship between employers and trade unions can affect how farmworkers view the

benefits of being a member of a union. Farmworkers are not aware of the negotiation processes that take place between employers and the union. All they see besides the meetings that they are called to, is the money deducted from their salaries at the end of the month. Now, if a farmworker felt like they were not benefiting from being a member of a union, yet they still paid the monthly subscription fees, they would be unhappy and leave the organisation. For instance, Menzi (17/11/2020), a permanent worker said:

There is no worker that can openly say that they like being a member of a trade union ... I am not a member of a trade union. I once joined it, and then I left. When I joined it, we were promised that we would gain certain benefits and that things would change by being a member, but all these things never happened. However, the union membership fee would still get deducted from my salary when it was not helping me in any way. This literally felt like I was giving my money away.

The data show the challenges faced by farmworkers in trying to attain decent work in the workplace. Moreover, farmworkers' responses also show the difficulties confronting a trade union that is trying to organise in such a hostile sector and country, but they show the problematic perception of unions held by workers. Unions are not supposed to make 'things' happen for workers, rather it is a joint effort between employers, employees and unions that can help improve standards of work on sugarcane farms.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter evaluated each decent work indicator and assessed whether there is decent work (or deficit) on small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms in Eswatini's outgrower schemes that were included in this study. In this chapter, I addressed two of the objectives of this study: (a) to examine the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms, and (b) to examine how farmworkers' embeddedness in the production node of the network shapes the possibilities for, and limits to their action. Evaluating farmworkers' responses on outgrower sugarcane farms against the ILO's prescriptions shows the challenges that workers are faced with trying to realise decent work in the workplace.

Discussions on the first indicator – ‘*employment opportunities*’ – show no decent work concerns, because farmworkers were able to upgrade in the production network through their years of experience working on sugarcane farms; their ability to learn and adapt quickly; and physical strength. Farmers did not require farmworkers to have an educational background to hire them for the job, which worked in their favour. This may be beneficial in one way, but it worked against the workers in other ways. For instance, their lack of education confined them to the lowest paid and least desirable jobs in the labour market and has contributed to their lack of knowledge and understanding about labour law and their rights at work.

I found that there were decent work deficits on some of the farms in terms of ‘*stability and social security at work*’. The data show that there were permanent workers that did not possess contracts of employment and did not enjoy social security benefits. The absence of an employment contract between employers and employees has led to casual and flexible labour practices on sugarcane farms because farmers were free to alter terms and conditions of employment in their favour. However, this was not transmitted to farmworkers ‘*earnings and productive work*’. According to Eswatini’s labour laws, farmers paid farmworkers decent salaries/wages.

Furthermore, discussions on the fourth indicator – ‘*conditions of work*’ – show that there were decent working hours on one of the farms that employed six of the farmworkers interviewed for this study. The other farmworkers (three working on the same farm and the other on a different farm) worked longer hours. Farmworkers were not able to negotiate for better working hours because they had no trade union representation and contracts of employment. This was because trade union activity was suppressed on these sugarcane farms, and many workers feared being associated with one. With that said, the data suggested that there was a decent work deficit in the ‘*promotion of social dialogue*’ indicator.

There was a clear decent work deficit in the ‘*treatment of, and opportunities for, men and women*’ indicator. Although women and men farmworkers had equal employment opportunities and income on sugarcane farms, the women farmworkers that were interviewed indicated that issues of maternal leave were not handled in accordance with the law. In this chapter, I discussed some of the poor conditions that women farmworkers experienced on small-scale sugarcane farms. The

data show that women farmworkers at the very bottom of the production network were marginalised and less protected than men.

Lastly, I found that there were decent work practices on sugarcane farms in terms of the '*safe work environment*' indicator. Both seasonal and permanent farmworkers were provided with adequate and appropriate clothing and equipment by their employers. Moreover, workers were offered medical support when injured. Based on the data collected, outgrower farmers had protective measures in place for all workers employed in the production node of the sugar production network (cane growers, harvesters and irrigators).

In conclusion, there were some indications of decent work practices on Eswatini's small- and medium-sized outgrower sugarcane farms. However, it also had few indicators of decent work deficits, particularly in the stability and social security at work; conditions of work; treatment of, and opportunities for, women and men and the promotion of social dialogue indicators. This analysis addresses the main research objective, which is to examine the working conditions for farmworkers employed on Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms against the standards of decent work. Farmworkers may not know what the concept of decent work means, but they have an idea of what 'decent' or 'good' conditions of work look (or should) like on sugarcane farms, and what they deserve as workers. This information is exchanged through conversations with farmworkers working on other sugarcane farms and information from the media (mostly radio and newspapers). However, some of the challenges faced by farmworkers on sugarcane farms highlighted in this chapter include: the suppression of union activity and informalities between farmers and farmworkers employment relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The imperative of this study is to examine the working conditions of farmworkers employed in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms that participate in global sugarcane production network. Eswatini's participation in GPNs promises employment creation, decent working standards and a reduction in poverty, especially in rural areas (Das, 2012: 1). The GPN framework was useful for this study because it helped me understand workers' conditions in the context of local embeddedness. The GPN framework enabled a deeper analysis of the role of labour and the value workers add to the production process while highlighting the conditions in which they work. As Rainnie (2013: 180) explains: "GPN approach has a deeper spatial awareness concerning workers' lives...GPN analysis takes more seriously how workers' embeddedness in place shapes the possibilities for their action."

This dissertation is not about the GPN itself (because I did not interview people elsewhere in the network) but rather about the ways in which market and institutional pressures of the network contribute towards and/or influence decent work deficits in sugarcane production networks. Examining the impact that market and institutional pressures have on selected farmworkers on Eswatini's sugarcane farms is a secondary objective. Furthermore, this study showed how the specific conditions at the production node of the network (farms) were embedded in a particular historical, institutional, and regulatory context, which includes non-firm actors (in particular, the Eswatini's government) who, in combination, shaped the dynamics of the sugar industry.

Chapters three and four outlined the conditions of the farmworkers, as well as how their embeddedness in network shaped the possibilities for and limits to their actions. In these chapters I examined the challenges faced by farmworkers in trying to realise decent work on sugarcane farms. To address the research objectives, I studied the views and responses of sugarcane farmworkers to see whether there were decent working conditions at the production 'node' of the sugarcane production network. Decent work deficits in the sugarcane sector were evaluated through the key indicators of decent work which included access to employment opportunities, stability and social security at work, earnings and productive work, conditions of work, treatment

of, and opportunities for men and women, safe work environment, and promotion of social dialogue.

The study concludes that decent work concerns included employer-employee relations between farmers and farmworkers; the treatment of women farmworkers on small-scale sugarcane farms; Eswatini's political climate and its impact on trade union representation on farms; and the effects of climate change on farmworkers' conditions of work.

Farmworkers conditions of work vary across sugarcane farms, with most characterised by decent work deficits. This is because employment relationships between farmers and their workers gave rise to informality of work and job security concerns. The absence of formal agreements or contracts of employment between farmers and farmworkers has made work flexible and informal for sugarcane farmworkers. For example, data analysed in chapter four showed how permanent employees worked without contracts for many years and did not enjoy employment benefits such as pension fund, educational allowances and medical aid like permanent farmworkers on other sugarcane farms. Being a permanent employee did not guarantee farmworkers a contract of employment. Farmers wanted to maintain a level of autonomy in the employment relationship, where decisions about workers' protective clothing, working hours, salaries and wages, maternity leave and trade union activities in the workplace were made unilaterally. Without a contract, there were no terms and conditions governing the employment relationship, and to ensure that farmworkers had decent working conditions on the farm. Moreover, the absence of employment contracts fostered insecurity and low power among farmworkers. For example, farmworkers had no access to collective bargaining on the farms and therefore could not negotiate for better living (on-farm housing) and working conditions. Permanently employed farmworkers should have been issued a contract of employment to ensure access to social security benefits and negotiated conditions of work. Also, the terms 'seasonal' should not determine whether farmworkers were issued contracts or not. There must be a formal agreement between farmers and seasonal workers properly stating the terms and conditions of the seasonal employment.

In creating employment opportunities, most farms had cultural constructs with gendered task allocations. Sugarcane production in Eswatini is not an exception to gendered task allocation. Men on the farms were allocated labour-intensive jobs that require physical strength, whereas women

farmworkers were allocated less intense jobs like weeding and adding fertilizer to the sugarcane. These task allocations represented a situation of unequal employment on sugarcane farms. My analysis does not suggest that there was a decent work deficit when it came to employment opportunities for men and women on the farm, because they are paid the same income, rather that women and men farmworkers were treated differently when it came to assigning tasks and duties on the farm.

There was a decent work deficit in the treatment of men and women on sugarcane farms. Issues such as maternity were not handled well. Discussions in section 4.6.1 highlighted how farmers did not adhere to labour laws regarding maternity leave in the workplace. Women were not paid for most of the weeks that they were away on maternity leave. As a result, they came back to work a few weeks earlier because they needed an income sustain their living standards, and rather keep quiet about their pregnancy during seasonal employment in the fear of losing their jobs. Women should not be concerned about losing their employment while on maternity leave. There ought to be some level of employment security for women farmworkers that need to go on maternity leave. Employment security can ensure income security for farmworkers. Moreover, women farmworkers should be paid while on maternity leave to sustain their living standards.

External factors like climate change and water availability in Eswatini's sugar industry affected small- and medium-sized sugarcane farmers. The effects that these factors had on farmers were, in turn, transmitted to farmworkers – and gave rise to decent work deficits sugarcane farms. Although there were no decent work concerns in terms of safety at work for sugarcane farmworkers because they were provided with protective clothing, but climate changes had an impact on workers' productivity, health and safety in the workplace. Weather fluctuations, as mentioned in chapter three, had an impact on working hours as well as the health and safety of farmworkers.

Weather patterns were uncertain and could not be controlled, but poor conditions of work on farms because of these phenomena gave rise to decent work deficits. Achieving decent work on sugarcane farms has been a challenge for farmworkers because of the absence of labour inspectors on the farms. Having regular labour inspectors on the farms is vital to securing decent working conditions for farmworkers. Occupational health, safety and labour inspections could address

issues such as hours of work and conditions of work. There could be room for improvement in occupational health and safety in the sugarcane sector. This can be achieved through occupational health and safety inspections and campaigns targeting farmworkers at the bottom of the production network to prevent and reduce the incidents of injuries, contracting diseases and fatalities.

Moreover, having labour inspectors could improve farmworkers knowledge and understanding of their rights and encourage the presence trade unions on farms. Inspectors could sensitize and educate farmworkers on relevant rights in the workplace. This will challenge and eventually eliminated poor labour policy implementation and working conditions on farms. In additions, this can also minimize risks and improve safety on farms by systematically putting measures in place to address issues on how to deal with the prevalence of diseases and reduce injury infections among workers; prevent and assist with labour disputes and conflicts in the workplace; and challenge unfair treatment of farmworkers. This way, decent working conditions can be realised.

In creating social dialogue on sugarcane farms, the data show the infringement of labour rights such as the freedom of association and access to collective bargaining. Most of the decent work deficits in Eswatini's sugarcane sector could potentially be addressed through social dialogue. The poor working conditions on the farms show the effects of a buyer-driven GPN, the ineffectiveness of corporate codes of conduct developed by the large sugar corporations, and the importance of making the decent work agenda enforceable in international trade relations as a means to improve farmworkers' conditions and providing them with the opportunities to organise and bargain collectively

The purpose of this study was to contextualise and explore the issues of labour and working conditions of farmworkers in Eswatini's small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms. The study drew on the insights gained from reviewing literature on global sugarcane production networks and industries, as well as the nature of work in the lower tiers of the production network (i.e., sugarcane farms). I conclude that decent working conditions can be conceived and realised within Eswatini's sugarcane production network by considering the role that employers, employees and the state play to achieve a good quality working life for farmworkers.

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APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section A: Respondent details

A.1	First name	
A.2	Surname	

A.3	Work telephone number	
A.4	Household telephone number	
A.5	Cell phone number	

Section B: Basic demographic questions

B.1 How old are you? Are you above the minimum age (15 years, and 18 for hazardous work)?

B.2 What is your gender identity? (male, female, or other)

B.3 What population group do you belong to? (Black Africa, Coloured, Indian or Asian, White, or other)

B.4 What is your country of origin?

B.5 Which languages do you speak most at home?

B.6 What is your current marital status?

Section C: Education

C.1 Tell me about your educational background: your formal education and any informal or continuing education.

C.2 How does your education relate to your work now? (Explain)

Section D: Place of accommodation

D.1 Where do you live?

D.2 How long does it take you to travel to work each day?

D.3 What form of transport do you use to get to work? (e.g walk, bicycle, or car)

D.4 In what kind of dwelling do you live, and how many people live in your dwelling?

D.5 What is your dwelling's main source of water and electricity? (Describe and give examples)

D.6 What is the main type of toilet facility used by those who live in your dwelling? (Give example)

Section E: Household members

E.1 How many people are part of your household?

E.2 How would you describe your role in your family? (i.e 'breadwinner')

E.3 What role do your family members play in farming? Is everyone a farmworker or did people have off farm employment? (Explain and give examples)

Section F: Household income and expenditure

F.1 How much do you earn per day/month as a farmworker?

F.2 What are the main items of expenditure by your household? (Give examples)

F.3 Which aspects of household expenditure (from what you mention above) are covered by your salary? (Give examples)

F.4 Is farming your only source of income?

F.5 How many people earn an income in your household besides you?

F.6 Would you say your earnings are able to sustain your standard of living? (Give examples and explain)

Section G: Current employment

G.1 Are you seasonal, permanent, or casual farmworker? And for how long have you been in this position?

G.2 If you are a seasonal or casual farmworker, how many hours do you work per week?

G.4 What is your job title?

G.5 Which sugar company do you work for in Eswatini? And where is the estate?

Section H: Eswatini's Sugar Production Network

H.1 How many sugar estates does the company you work for have? And which region are these in?

H.2 How many acres is this farm/estate you work on? (Give examples)

H.3 How did you come to work on the estate that you are in now? (Explain)

H.4 Who made the decision, and were you involved in the decision-making process? (Explain and give examples)

H.5 As a farmworker, which part of the chain are you responsible for: growing, harvesting, cane transport, mill processing or sugar transport? (Explain)

H.6 How much cane do you harvest per hectare, per year? How do you make sure that this is?

H.7 If sugar production (per hectare) is not constant, describe the factors that contribute to these changes? (Explain and give examples)

consistent? (Explain and give examples)

H.8 How then do farmworkers manage these changes, or make sure that you meet the daily sugarcane threshold? (Explain and give examples)

H.9 What other crops are produced by the company your work for and why that one? (Give examples)

H.10 What has been the most consistent crop in terms of making a good profit? And why do you think that is? (Give examples)

H.11 How often is the sugarcane harvested, and is this done manually (hand cutting) or mechanical harvesting? (Explain and give examples)

H.12 Does the farm/estate you work on have a sugar mill? If not, explain how and where the harvested cane is transported and produced into sugar/ (Give examples)

H.13 How are sugarcane stalks transported to mills? Is it by road or rail transport system? Who controls this and why? (Give examples)

H.14 How do the changes in sugar prices affect your work as a farmworker? (Give examples)

Section I: Labour Laws in Eswatini

I.1 How familiar are you with the Eswatini's Employment Act of 1980 and the Industrial Relations Act? What do you know about it?

I.2 How do you get access to such information? (Give examples and explain)

I.3 What processes were followed to get a job as a farmworker? Was it through a labour broker? (Explain)

I.4 Describe the relationship you and your labour broker have?

I.5 What role does he/she play in the workplace (e.g your interviews, recruitment, HR, admin, payroll, and transport).

I.5 Did you sign an employment contract for your job? If yes, with whom was the contract signed?

I.7 How are the actual terms and conditions of your job consistent with those that are described in the employment contract? If they are different, please explain and describe these differences.

I.8 Under what conditions can the contract be renewed as a permanent or seasonal farmworker? (Explain and give examples)

I.9 How familiar are you with the Eswatini Government Gazette? This is where minimum wages and condition of work in the agricultural sector are published.

I.10 Are you able to gain access to such information? If yes, how? (Give examples and explain)

I.11 Are you educated, advised, and counselled on labour laws in the industry? (Explain and give examples)

I.12 If so, how often does this happen, and where? (Give examples)

I.13 Who is responsible for educating farmworkers on the labour laws and how ought to be applied? (Explain and give examples)

I.14 Is there routine, complaint and labour inspections on the farm? Who is responsible for this? (Give examples)

I.15 If labour inspectors encounter working conditions that do not comply with labour laws, do they conduct follow up inspections?

I.16 Do you get regular occupational safety and health inspections? (Give examples)

I.17 How do farmworkers benefit from Tibiyo Fund (or sugarcane business)?

Section J: Decent Work:

Employment Opportunities

J.1 Do you go through training before being employed as a farmworker? Describe what happens during training.

J.2 Do farmworkers have opportunities for promotion at each level of the network? (Give reasons and examples)

J.3 Do you have access to information on job vacancies in the company? Who communicates with the workers about this? (Explain and give examples)

Stability and Social Security at Work

J.4 If casual or seasonal employee, are you entitled to the same benefits that are enjoyed by permanently employed workers? (Explain what these benefits are)

J.5 How do seasonal changes affect your employability? (Explain and give examples)

J.6 Once your contract ends as a seasonal worker, how difficult or easy is it for you to find another job? (Explain and give examples)

J.7 Does the company help you get new work on another farm by referring you, or is this now your responsibility?

J.8 Has the company adopted and designed a social security policy? (e.g access to health care and income security)

J.9 Do you enjoy employment benefits such as education allowance, medical allowance, bonuses, and pension schemes? (Explain and give examples)

J.10 Do you find these helpful as an addition to your salary? Are these benefits deducted from your salary? If so, how is this done? (e.g what percentage of your salary is deducted)

J.11 Does the company provide housing for farmworkers? Do you have to pay rent? (Give examples)

Earnings and Productive Work

J.12 What do you understand about the term ‘minimum wage’? (Explain and give examples)

J.13 What is the minimum wage in your sector?

J.14 How are farmworkers paid (e.g. hourly, daily or piece rate; in cash, check or direct deposit), and are they paid at the same rate as seasonal farmworkers?

J.15 Do workers receive their pay on time? Have wage payments, or any portion of wages, ever been delayed or withheld? If yes, what were the circumstances of this?

J.16 Are any deductions made from the worker’s salary? If yes, how much is deducted and what for (e.g. meals, transportation, lodging, utilities, uniform, tools, other)?

J.17 Are these deductions made with the worker’s knowledge and consent? Are workers requested to sign a document to authorize the deduction(s)?

Conditions of Work

J.18 How many hours do you work each day?

J.19 What time do you start work each day?

J.20 What time do you end work each day?

J.21 Who decides on working hours, and how is this done?

J.22 Do you have resting hours during working hours? If so, when do you take these?

J.23 Describe your day's work from the time you clock in to when you leave work. (Explain and give examples)

J.24 Do you work overtime?

J.25 How often do workers have to work overtime, and for what reasons?

J.26 Is overtime always voluntary? If no, what are the circumstances involving involuntary overtime?

J.27 Are workers free to refuse overtime without threat or fear of punishment? What happens if a worker refuses to work overtime?

Treatment of, and Opportunities for Men and Women

J.28 Does one's gender play a role on whether they are employed by the company or not? Why do you think this is so? (Give examples)

J.29 How does your gender determine your job description?

J.30 Describe how your gender impacts the challenges experienced in finding employment as a

J.31 Do you receive the same pay as your female or male colleagues? If not, why do you think this is the case? (Explain and give examples)

J.32 Do you experience gender stereotypes (e.g men doing most of the manual harvesting and women transporting cane to mills or working in factory) as a farmworker? (Give examples)

J.33 How are issues of maternity leave dealt with in the company? And how long is your leave? (Explain)

J.34 Are female workers paid during maternity leave?

J.35 Is there a contractual agreement on this matter? Who handles this? (i.e labour broker or employer)

J.36 If you are a casual or seasonal employee, how are issues of maternity leave handled (Explain and give examples)

J.37 Do you have workmen's compensation insurance? (Explain and give examples)

Safe Work Environment

J.38 Are you provided with adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment? (Give examples of what you wear)

J.39 How is this uniform/gear distributed, and how often? (Explain and give examples)

J.40 Is your employer, or are you responsible for replacing or renewing old uniforms?

J.41 How often are the machines serviced? (Explain and give examples)

J.42 What protective measures are taken when harvesting the sugarcane? (Give examples)

J.43 What protective measures are taken when transporting the sugarcane to the sugar mills? (Explain and give examples)

J.44 What support are you offered when injured?

Promotion of Social Dialogue

J.45 What is your understanding of Collective Bargaining or Freedom of Association in the workplace? and do you think you are able to practice these as a farmworker? (Explain)

J.46 Why do you think that employers do not encourage Collective Bargaining or Freedom of Association in the workplace? (Explain and give examples)

J.47 How do you go about negotiating for better/ higher wages, improved working conditions?

J.48 Are you a member of a trade union or a workers' organisation? If not, why are you not a member?

J.49 Name the trade unions or workers' organisations in the agriculture sector? Which one are you a member of?

J.50 How free are you to choose the trade union or workers' organisation you want to represent you? What restrictions (if any) exist in this regard? (Explain)

J.51 Are you able to voluntarily leave and join a trade union or workers' organisation? (Explain)

J.52 Are you allowed to engage in peaceful demonstrations or strikes? How are these regulated (Explain and give examples)

J.53 Have you been in a peaceful protest/demonstration?

J.54 Under what circumstances did you resort to striking or demonstrating? (Explain and give examples)

J.55 How did management respond to your strike or demonstration? (Give examples and explain)

How do you know this information?

J.56 How free are you to participate in meetings held by your workers' organisation or trade union? (Explain and give examples)

J.57 Do you think that trade union federations in Eswatini are perceived as a political threat? (Explain)

APPENDIX B:

CONCENT FORM

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(Participant)

Project Title:

DECENT WORK IN GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS: A STUDY OF ESWATINI'S
SUGARCANE OUTGROWER SCHEMES

Wezizwe Ginindza from the Department of Sociology, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to examine working conditions for farmworkers working on small- and medium-sized sugarcane outgrower farms in Eswatini.
2. That Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project and I have seen/ may request to see the clearance certificate.
3. By participating in this research project, I will be contributing towards the growing literature on current labour conditions in Eswatini's sugar industry.

4. I will participate in the project by sharing my experiences on the following:

employment opportunities available to me as a farmworker employed in one of the small- and medium-sized sugarcane farms; stability and security at work; earnings and productive work; conditions of work; treatment of, and opportunities for men and women; safe work environment; and promotion of social dialogue.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but my out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed.
7. The researcher intends publishing the research results in the form of a dissertation. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained and that my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conduct of the research.
8. The researcher will record the telephonic interview.
9. If requested, I will receive feedback in the form of an email/phone call regarding the results obtained during the study.
10. Any further questions that I might have concerning the research, or my participation will be answered by Miss Wezizwe Ginindza, with email and cell phone number: g16g6050@campus.ru.ac.za, +268 79186781.
11. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.
12. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record.
13. Request to take pictures, video and voice recording for this study

I,, have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language

that I understand, and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the abovementioned project.

.....

Participant's signature

Witness

Date