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2026 Cecchini Institute Working Papers

Decent Work from Canopy to Kitchen: Challenges, opportunities, and prospects
Edition 1, Autumn 2026

The Cecchini Institute connects people, science and practice to advance sustainable, resilient and regenerative food systems. We acquire funding, develop and manage projects across developing and transition contexts, and work from canopy to kitchen: across landscapes, forestry, soil and water, livestock, agriculture and food processing for consumers.

Our work focuses on helping managers, practitioners and decision-makers understand interdependencies, market barriers and local conditions to translate knowledge into stronger decisions, innovation, investments and action.

The Cecchini Institute Working Papers capture and extend the conversations emerging from our Annual Event. Drawing on breakout discussions, expert inputs and participant perspectives, the series brings together practical insights, open questions and lessons from across research and practice. Together, they preserve the value of these exchanges and make them useful to a wider audience beyond the event itself. As evidence-informed reflections rather than peer-reviewed original studies, they are intended to stimulate discussion and further inquiry. Dr Ingrid Fromm, an event panelist, contributed the editorial while each of the four papers is co-authored by the relevant breakout session leader and session assistant.

A “Hanger” captured the key idea worth carrying forward, while a “Clanger” identified the tension, challenge or unanswered question that still needs attention.

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Op-ed: Decent work from Canopy to Kitchen



Dr Ingrid Fromm is a Senior Researcher and Lecturer at BFH-HAFL and a development economist specialising in global agri-food value chains, trade and sustainable development. Her work combines applied research, policy analysis and field engagement across commodities including cocoa and coffee.

Who does the work behind our food, under what conditions, and what would it take to make that work decent, valued and sustainable?

Global agrifood systems stand at a pivotal moment, facing profound changes that will shape how food is sustainably produced given current challenges, who produces it, and under what conditions. Labor is central to this transformation. Yet labor in agriculture is an issue that has been trapped in the battleground of politics in the last decades. Although there's clear political dimension with a particular set of worker safety regulations, immigration laws, wage and fair pay discussion, human rights, labor relations and union mobilization, there is a plethora of other issues that warrant a deeper discussion. Beyond these debates, there are interconnected economic, demographic, technological, and environmental pressures that demand far greater attention than they currently receive. These issues encompass a broader set of challenges that are equally consequential for the sustainability and future of our agrifood systems. These include:
1. Socioeconomic and Operational Issues 2. Health and Environmental Issues and 3. Technological (and Digital) Transformation.

A key theme explored during the institute event was the challenge of ensuring decent employment in global food systems. Prof. Dr. Eva-Marie Meemken (ETH Zurich) highlighted the often-precarious conditions faced by agricultural workers worldwide, particularly migrants and informal laborers, who are disproportionately exposed to long working hours, poor housing, health risks, discrimination, violence, trafficking, and low pay. Let's illustrate with examples from the coffee sector in Honduras, where labor issues extend beyond workplace conditions alone. Decades of migration from rural Central America to the United States have reshaped agricultural labor markets, as many former farmworkers leave coffee-growing regions while continuing to work in agriculture abroad. An often-overlooked consequence of this movement is the growing labor shortage facing coffee-producing countries across the region. In recent harvest seasons, producers have struggled to find enough workers to pick coffee, threatening a sector that remains a cornerstone of the economies of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. In countries such as Costa Rica, coffee harvesting now relies almost entirely on seasonal migrant workers from Nicaragua, underscoring how labor mobility, working conditions, and rural livelihoods are deeply interconnected challenges that demand greater attention from policymakers and industry leaders alike.

Labor mobility and its unintended effects on local economies seem to be missing from most policy discussions. In countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, remittances sent from family members abroad have become a vital source of income for many households. Yet these financial inflows can also create new challenges for the agricultural sector. As rural families become increasingly dependent on remittances, agricultural work, which is often physically demanding and poorly paid, becomes less attractive, reducing the local labor supply. The result is a paradox: even as migration is driven by limited opportunities at home, it can further weaken agricultural labor markets, contributing to severe worker shortages in key export sectors such as

coffee. Addressing employment challenges in global food systems therefore requires looking beyond working conditions alone and recognizing how migration, remittances, rural livelihoods, and labor availability are deeply interconnected across borders.

Many fear that within the next decade, labor shortages could become one of the most significant threats to coffee production in Central America. These concerns are compounded by climate change, volatile markets, and persistently low farm-gate prices. When farming households struggle to earn a decent income, their ability to offer fair wages to day laborers diminishes, creating a vicious cycle in which poor profitability undermines labor conditions and makes agricultural employment even less attractive.

Agriculture labor under pressure

In Europe, these challenges are equally important, especially because food systems rely heavily on migrant labor, both directly and through global supply chains. Prof. Dr. Meemken noted that an estimated 82% of Switzerland's imports are linked to migrant workers, illustrating how deeply labor mobility is embedded in the products consumers purchase every day[1]. Legal pathways for migrant workers are often unclear or inadequate, while debates around minimum wages and labor standards in agriculture remain politically contentious. Migrant agricultural workers have limited political representation and few opportunities to advocate for their rights, leaving them vulnerable to poor working conditions and exploitation. Although there have been growing calls for stronger protections and fairer labor standards, progress is often slow, with key reforms on labor and migration becoming caught in a never-ending cycle of political debates with no real policy change. These challenges underscore the need to view labor not as a peripheral issue but as a central pillar of sustainable food systems. From coffee farms in Central America to agricultural supply chains serving European markets, the intertwined challenges of migration, labor shortages, fair wages, and worker protection emphasize the urgent need for policies that safeguard both livelihoods and the long-term resilience of agrifood systems.

The discussion on climate change places a particular focus on how these impacts can severely affect crop yields, but often the discussion and even the empirical evidence generated on how climate change and environmental issues affect agricultural labor is limited. Are climate change impacts such as rising temperatures, more frequent heatwaves, prolonged droughts, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events making agricultural work increasingly difficult and hazardous? Farm workers, many of whom already operate under precarious conditions, face heightened risks of heat stress, dehydration, occupational injuries, and reduced productivity. In many regions, climate-related crop failures and declining yields also reduce farm incomes, limiting producers' ability to pay decent wages and invest in better working conditions. These pressures can accelerate rural outmigration, particularly among young people who see fewer opportunities in agriculture, thereby exacerbating labor shortages in key farming sectors. At the same time, climate change is reshaping labor demand as farmers are forced to adapt production systems, alter cropping calendars, or relocate agricultural activities. As a result, climate change is not only an environmental challenge but also a labor challenge, with profound implications for worker welfare, rural livelihoods, and their resilience.

Another important topic addressed was the uncertainties around the technological and digital transformation of agriculture and how these changes may affect agricultural labor. Digitalization and technological innovation are widely seen as a promising solution for increasing agricultural productivity and addressing labor shortages, but its long-term implications for workers remain unclear. Advances such as automation, artificial intelligence, precision agriculture, and digital management systems have the potential to reduce physically demanding tasks, improve efficiency, and create new opportunities for skilled employment. At the same time, they may also displace certain categories of workers who lack these skills, therefore exacerbating inequalities between those with and without access to technology, and creating new barriers for low-skilled laborers. A key question is whether these innovations will lead to more inclusive and better-quality jobs, particularly in developing countries, or whether they will deepen existing vulnerabilities among agricultural workers. As agrifood systems continue to evolve, ensuring that technological progress benefits workers as well as productivity will remain a critical challenge for policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders.

Key Takeaways

Investing in decent work means investing in people: Women-led agricultural SMEs have significant potential to create local value, jobs, and more equitable food systems, but they remain underserved by conventional finance because investment criteria often overlook the realities of smaller, relationship-based enterprises

Decent work requires a systems approach: Creating safe and decent agricultural work requires more than technical solutions or additional funding; it demands addressing the structural inequalities, power imbalances, and forms of insecurity that shape workers' daily realities.

[1] Eva-Marie Meemken, "No Labor, No Food: Tackling Employment Challenges in Global Food Systems," keynote address, Cecchini Institute Annual Event, BFH-HAFL, Zollikofen, Switzerland, 8 July 2026.

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Capital that can wait



Malte Reshöft works with HEKS/EPER on food systems, transformation and international development. His work connects regenerative values, local food systems and practical approaches to sustainable change. He brings experience across development cooperation, facilitation and systems thinking.



Meret Walz recently completed a master's degree in Agricultural Science on Sustainable Production Systems. Her thesis included a two-month internship, with Helvetas Mozambique, conducting a gender-sensitive assessment of a non-formal agricultural training programme. She holds a bachelor's degree in Geography.

What Women-Led Food Enterprises Actually Need to Thrive

A small food processor may buy from local farmers, create jobs and sell products that consumers want, yet still struggle to borrow. The breakout session "She feeds the system: can the system finance her back?", explored the core tension of investment gaps in agricultural finance, using Goldenpot as the case study, and why businesses rooted in marginal lands can remain almost invisible to formal finance.[1]

Goldenpot works with women smallholder farmers buying their maize and turning it into higher-value products such as instant porridge and breakfast cereals to create additional value. Whether farmers and workers benefit depends on selling prices, operating costs, wages and the terms on which the processor buys crops. Led by founder and managing director Haika Mtei, Goldenpot shows what becomes possible when women-led enterprises turn raw crops into higher-value food products on a local level. The Goldenpot example invites a practical question: what makes an enterprise attractive to customers but difficult for lenders to finance?

Yet many agricultural SMEs struggle to access finance because they lack the level of formality, size or capacity to grow, which investors want.[2]

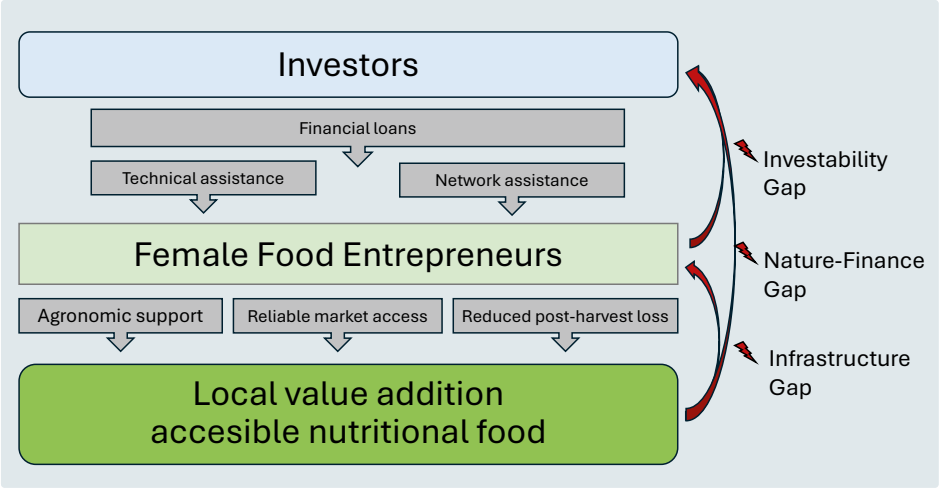
Three tensions were named, which pose gaps between the needs of local women-led SMEs and global investors:

- An **Investability Gap** prices out many of the businesses with promising local impact that most need finance. A small loan may cost a lender almost as much to assess and monitor as a larger one. Seasonal sales also make fixed monthly repayments difficult. This can leave a viable business without a suitable loan product.

- A **Systems Gap** creates barriers. Finance helps, yet capital alone cannot solve weak infrastructure, limited training, unreliable energy access, unclear policy environments or demanding sanitary standards. These enabling conditions depend on several actors: governments set policy and regulatory frameworks, financial institutions design suitable products, development organisations support capacity building, and private-sector buyers shape market access and quality requirements. Policy matters, but it only becomes useful when it is backed by investment, implementation capacity and incentives that reach producers. Finance will have limited effect if electricity interruptions spoil production, transport delays deliveries or food-safety requirements cannot be met. These constraints can reduce sales and make repayment harder.

Session Question: What does it take to get finance to agricultural SMEs that create decent work? Goldenpot in Tanzania shows how agricultural SMEs can strengthen food systems by supporting women farmers, reducing post-harvest losses, and creating decent work.

Session Methodology: Small group mapping helps participants turn discussion into a shared visual map. In small teams, they identify key issues, links and tensions, then use the map to compare perspectives and surface practical next steps.



Opportunities and Tensions of Investment

- A **Nature-Finance Gap** exists for processors who need reliable supplies of crops, water and energy. Environmental damage can raise costs or interrupt production. Financing decisions should consider these risks, but the case does not yet show which environmental investments would pay for themselves.

Women-led SME's may seem to need "finance" as a technical solution, but the breakout session discussion showed that finance is connected to bigger questions around creating decent work:

- Who takes the risk?
  If harvests fail, prices fall, or buyers pay late, who absorbs the loss: the farmer, the processor, the lender or the buyer? Loan and purchasing terms help determine the answer.

- Who captures the value?
  Higher-value products do not automatically mean higher earnings for everyone. The share retained by farmers, processors, workers and retailers depends on prices, costs and bargaining power.

- Who decides what counts as investable?
  Formal investors may value collateral, accounts and reporting systems. But local enterprises may rely on trust, reputation, farmer relationships and community networks. Records of repeat purchases, buyer contracts and payment histories may help lenders assess a small business. They can complement, rather than replace, formal financial information

Sustainable investment in local SME's generates profit and equally facilitates resilient producer associations that strengthen entire systems. A commercially viable enterprise is better placed to maintain jobs and meet labor standards. Whether those jobs are decent still depends on pay, safety, working hours, and workers' ability to raise concerns.

Hanger
Finance works better when its size, repayment terms and risk-sharing arrangements fit the way the enterprise earns money.

Clanger
Can lenders offer smaller and more flexible loans at a price that businesses can afford and lenders can sustain?

[1] Ahmadzai, H., Tutundjian, S., Dale, D., Brathwaite, R., Lidderr, P., Selvaraju, R., Malhotra, A., Boerger, V. & Elouafi, I. 2022. Marginal lands: potential for agricultural development, food security and poverty reduction. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2838en

[2] Malte Reshöft: "She feeds the System – Can the System finance her back?". Breakout Session. Cecchini Institute Annual Event 2026. Bern, Switzerland. 08.07.2026

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Decent Work Under Pressure



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Tension Points in Agricultural Labour

How can agricultural labour be safe and healthy when systems shaped by insecurity, climate stress and value-chain pressure?

Agriculture is essential for food production, worker livelihoods and the economies of many countries. Agriculture employs nearly 26% of the global workforce[1] and yet is still one of the most hazardous work environments[2]. Farmers and agricultural workers face risks ranging from accidents, chemical exposure and musculoskeletal problems, to heat stress, infectious diseases and mental health challenges. Climate change and economic insecurity can further increase these pressures[3]. Farm work can be dangerous even when the risks are known. A farmer may know that protective equipment is needed but lack the money to buy it. A worker may recognize a task as unsafe but fear losing their job by refusing.

These risks and the research addressing them are also not equally distributed. Although 98% of the agricultural workforce lives in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC), 52% of the studies mapped in a recent global review originated from high-income countries (HICs)[4]. The research focus also differs mental health receives considerably more research attention in HICs, while issues such as pesticide poisoning and heat-related illness are more prominent in LMIC research[5].

Participants looked beyond single workplace hazards to wider conditions: low wages, insecure contracts, migration status, language barriers, gender inequality and limited worker voice. These factors interact differently across contexts, making safety a question of power, rights and vulnerability as well as physical risk.

Tension 1: Agricultural labour is far from uniform.

A family farmer, a permanent employee and a seasonal migrant may perform similar tasks but face very different risks. Their income security, rights and ability to refuse unsafe work differ.

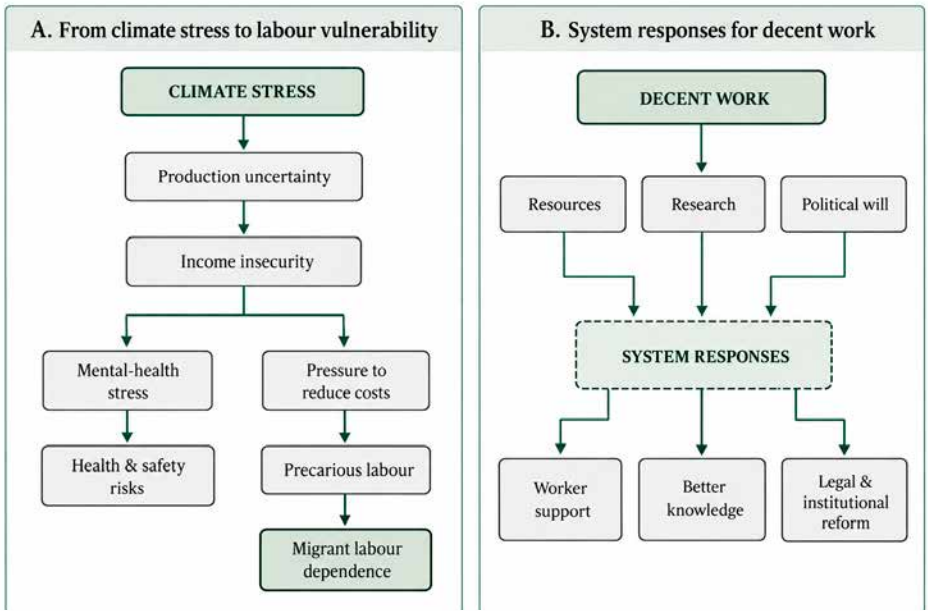
Farmers may value time savings and work-life balance, while some seasonal workers may accept longer hours in insecure, short-term jobs. Others face low wages, weak rights and precarious migration status. Decent work in agriculture needs income, autonomy, security, working hours, recognition, legal protection and the ability to plan a future.

Tension 2: Migrants face more complicated risks.

Safety instructions are less useful if workers cannot understand them. Reporting hazards is harder when a worker depends on one employer for income, housing and/or legal status.

Session Question: How can agricultural labour be safe and healthy when workers operate in systems shaped by insecurity, climate stress, and value-chain pressure?

Session Methodology: Pair and Share Pyramid is a discussion method where participants start in pairs, then join larger groups to compare ideas, build shared understanding and identify common priorities.



Decent work as a systems challenge

Tension 3: Safe work includes mental health.

Many agriculture workers live and work in one country to support their family elsewhere. Farmers live under constant economic pressure, climate uncertainty and long working hours. Women often combine farm work with household responsibilities while having less access to land, finance or decision-making power. Long hours, uncertain earnings and worries about family can add to stress. Practical responses may include safer schedules, clear information on rights and access to appropriate support.

Tension 4: Production change needs consumption change.

Buyers influence what farmers produce and the prices they receive. When farm margins are tight, investment in safer equipment and employment conditions may be harder. Consumer choices matter, but procurement terms and policy also shape the room for change.

The tension whether production can shift towards environmental limits, local conditions and seasonality rests on whether this would also change consumption and improve working conditions. The core questions are what are food systems designed to achieve and for whom?

Tension 5: Broken for whom?

Some businesses remain competitive partly because health and employment risks are borne by workers or small producers. The key question is which rules and commercial practices allow those costs to remain with the least powerful actor. Land rights, migrant protection, weak regulation, corruption, buyer pressure and limited worker voice all shape who has bargaining power and who absorbs the costs of production.

This is why agricultural health and safety cannot be treated solely as technical. Heat, insecure contracts, low prices and dependence on migrant labour often place the greatest pressure on workers with the least room to negotiate. New technologies and greener production methods will improve decent work only if they also change the conditions under which people operate.

Tension 6: Women's labour, limited rights.

Legal rights to land and property matter only when women can exercise them. Information, affordable procedures and local enforcement can be as important as the law itself. In many low- and middle-income countries, women contribute substantially to agricultural production while having less access to land, property, finance and decision-making power.

This makes legislation central to decent work. Property and inheritance rights, and their effective implementation, shape who can access resources, make decisions and build long-term security through agricultural work. Addressing this requires investment, legal reform, education and collective advocacy.

Hanger
Improving safety means asking what workers need, who controls the decisions and who can afford to act.

Clanger
Who pays for safer work when buyers demand low prices and workers have little power to negotiate?

[1–5] Jäggi, L., Falgas Bague, I., Wey, H., Rüfli, D., Viglietti, P.G. and Fuhrimann, S. (2026). Unequal harvests: AI-assisted evidence map of trends and gaps in global farmer health research along SDG 3 priorities. BMJ Open, [online] 16(6), p.e110537. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2025-110537.

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Food for thought



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Building an Inclusive and Welcoming Agricultural Sector

Agriculture depends on migrant workers in many places. Yet some of these workers struggle to use their skills or experience, change jobs or build a secure future. Why does a sector that needs labor make inclusion so difficult?

Breakout session participants identified four gaps to achieve the goal of inclusive migrant work.

1. Unequal access reinforces inequalities

For wage workers, the immediate barriers may be understandable contracts, information about rights, access to services and opportunities to learn or use skills. For migrants who farm independently, land and finance may also matter.

Research shows that migrant agricultural workers may face further constraints when their employment, housing and legal status are tied to a single employer. If losing a job also means losing housing or the right to stay, a worker may hesitate to report unsafe conditions. This makes the terms of employment central to inclusion.

Addressing these inequalities requires both structural and social change: stronger political recognition, fairer access to resources, improved legal frameworks and better access to education. Social networks, worker organisations and grassroots initiatives can reduce further isolation and strengthen collective voice.

2. Racism and Prejudice

Prejudice and racism were identified as the "key ingredients" preventing inclusion as they go beyond the individual. Contemporary exclusion of migrant workers is often expressed through structural inequalities such as housing, employment arrangements, legal status, access to services and the recognition of skills.

Migrant workers frequently have limited political representation, restricted participation in decision-making processes, and unequal access to labor rights and social protection. These conditions can increase their exposure to insecure employment, exploitation, and barriers to essential public services. While discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, or language still occurs, many of the challenges faced by migrant workers stem from their social and institutional marginalization. Temporary residence permits, dependence on employers, language barriers, and limited representation in trade unions or political institutions often reduce their bargaining power.

Session Question: Building a profession that welcomes immigrant workers through personal stories. How can agriculture become a profession where immigrant workers feel valued, included, and able to build a future?

Session Methodology: Working with stories uses participants' real experiences as a starting point to identify patterns, surface different perspectives and draw out practical lessons together.



Sharing real experiences as a starting point to identify patterns

Consequently, migrant workers are disproportionately represented in precarious forms of employment and may face difficulties accessing legal remedies, healthcare, and other services, highlighting the broader structural inequalities that constrain their ability to exercise rights and participate fully in society.

Participants also highlighted how racism can become embedded in institutional and employment structures. One participant noted that foreign qualifications are often undervalued or not recognised, limiting opportunities for people with professional experience gained elsewhere.

The group agreed that personal engagement, media coverage and neutral information would help to change the situation of perceived racism and colonialized thinking. Academia plays an important role here producing evidence and making issues visible to agrifood value chain stakeholders[3].

3. Skill recognition

A worker may have relevant training or years of experience but still be hired for work that does not use or recognise those skills. Employers may also lose access to expertise they need. This reflects wider findings, which show that recognition systems can support inclusion but remain uneven across countries, professions and legal statuses.

Different countries use formal qualification recognition, practical skills assessment and employer-based pathways. Their usefulness in agriculture depends on the occupation and national rules.

4. Inclusive learning pathways and collective advocacy

Training helps when there is a genuine skills gap, and workers can use the new skills. Training does less when the main obstacle is legal status, discriminatory hiring or failure to recognize existing experience.

Academia can support this by working with communities, NGOs, farmers, development organisations and other actors to identify existing good practice and share knowledge across contexts. Participants emphasised “we are not starting from a blank slate”: useful models already exist, even within unequal systems.

Worker associations, trusted advisers and accessible complaint channels may help people understand and exercise their rights. These options work only if workers can use them without undue risk.

Hanger
To improve inclusion, first identify blockages: recruitment, recognition of skills, employment rules or access to support.

Clanger
What is the value of more training if workers are still prevented from using the skills they already have?

[1] Adam Perry J (2022). Situated Learning and Transnational Labor Migration: The Case of Canada’s Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. Adult Education Quarterly,Sage Journal, 72 (4), accessed on 24.08.2026

[2] Tibajev A, Hellgren C (2019). The Effects of Recognition of Foreign Education for Newly Arrived Immigrants. European Sociological Review, 2019. 35, (4). P506–521, accessed on 24.08.2026; Pecoraro M, Tani M (2023). Does Certifying Foreign Qualifications Lead to Better Immigrant Skills Recognition? Social Indicators Research, 170, accessed on 24.08.2026; Souto-Otero M and Willalba-Garcia E (2015). Migration and validation of non-formal and informal learning in Europe: Inclusion, exclusion or polarisation in the recognition of skills? International Review of Education, 61 (5), accessed on 24.08.2026

[3] Wagner and Childs (2006)

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Beyond the grant



Boris Orlowsky is Program Director for Central Asia at Caritas Switzerland, where he oversees projects in agriculture, natural resource management, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. His background combines climate science, international cooperation, data analysis and applied technology.



Quentin Theiva à Hauariki is an agricultural scientist specialising in sustainable food systems and international development. His work combines applied research, socio-economic analysis, consulting, and evaluation, with professional experience across Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia.

What happens after a project phases out?

Caritas Switzerland has worked with rural communities in Tajikistan since 1996 to strengthen livelihoods and climate resilience. The need is clear: only around 10% of the country's land is cultivable and about 70% of the population lives in rural areas. Deforestation after the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by more frequent droughts, floods and extreme temperatures, has made farming increasingly difficult.

Weather information can help farmers decide when to irrigate, plant, or protect crops. For many projects that come with weather stations and weather-based support to farmers, the harder question comes after the equipment is installed: who will pay to keep the information accurate and available?

From climate risk to an economically valuable service

Caritas Switzerland completed a project to install a national network of hydrometeorological stations in Tajikistan. With almost 300+ stations[1] installed, the system supports farmers with local weather information. From the outset, the design of the project addressed questions such as: What happens when the project funding ends? How can donor-funded development projects become long-lasting services in partner countries? Who should pay for the value it creates?

The project system offered two advantages over tools introduced in earlier initiatives by other actors in Tajikistan. First, the stations provide accurate measurements at significantly lower cost than alternative imported systems, making the network more affordable to expand and support. Furthermore, the open-source design of the entire systems avoids licensing costs and vendor lockin. Second, forecasting services can generate benefits beyond individual farms. More accurate irrigation recommendations, in addition to improving yield and crop quality, can reduce unnecessary pumping and lower both energy and water use. Monetizing these profits and cost savings to support continuous operation and maintenance of the system will be the critical next step.

Can farmers afford the service?

Following from a simple cost-benefit analysis, one proposed business model would charge farmers around CHF 65 per hectare for access to the forecasting service. Participants questioned whether a flat pricing model could work across very different farming contexts. In commercial areas, such as cotton-producing regions, farmers have the necessary economic reasoning to pay for such a service. For very small farms in mountainous areas areas, even though the return on investment is equally compelling, a lack of habit and limited resources to invest restricts broad uptake.

The discussion shifted from individual payment to shared value at village, cooperative or community level. If several farmers within the same area could share access to the information and distribute the costs among themselves, a collective payment model could spread the cost and make the service more affordable.

Session Question: How can Caritas Switzerland ensure that technological innovations that support decent work, sustainable livelihoods, and economic opportunities through weather-informed agriculture be applied and continue beyond time-bound funding?

Session Methodology: A fishbowl is a facilitated discussion in which a small group talks in the centre while the larger group listens, with participants able to rotate into the conversation priorities.



Caritas Switzerland / Reto Albertalli

The key questions are:
- who benefits
- how much value the information creates
- which payment model can sustain the service while keeping it accessible to the farmers who may need it most.

This raised a broader question that remained central throughout the workshop: Should farmers really be the main group paying for the system?

Should the government contribute?

Seeing value generation beyond agriculture changed the financing question. If the system helps conserve water, reduce energy demand and support better resource management, then its benefits are partly public. Participants therefore questioned whether public authorities should contribute to the system, especially where the value extends beyond what individual farmers can pay for directly.

Beyond agriculture, beyond project

An important shift occurred when participants broadened the revenue question beyond agriculture. A network lasts only when someone is responsible for the service, and where there is money to keep it running.

This change reframed the business model around shared benefit: a diversified financing model could spread costs across agriculture, transport, energy, tourism, disaster risk management and public authorities, strengthening the service's long-term viability.

Sustaining a successful development project requires more than replacing donor funding. It means recognizing the wider value the project creates and defining who should help finance, maintain and own it over time.

Breaking News!

Caritas Switzerland has established a spin off to further broaden the institutional support base for the systems and approaches developed within this project.

The non-for-profit liability company will work to support setup, operation and expansion of locally owned, decentralized, open-source and low-cost systems that generate and distribute the weather intelligence required for sustainable livelihoods.

Read more and support their work here: **www.ownweather.org**

Hanger
Without clear finance, governance and ownership, the 300+ stations already in place risk remaining a successful project rather than becoming a lasting service.

Clanger
Who will pay regularly for weather information, and what proof of value will persuade them?

[1] Boris Orlowsky: "Beyond the grant?" Breakout Session. Cecchini Institute Annual Event 2026. Bern, Switzerland. 08.07.2026