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**Development through Global Value Chains and
the Achievement of *Decent Work*:
Challenges to Work and Representational Processes**

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	4
1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 LABOUR CONDITIONS, VALUE CHAIN PROBLEMATICS AND A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING REPRESENTATIONAL PROCESSES	6
2.1 Labour outcomes in value chains	6
2.2 Analysing representational processes in value chains	8
3 THE CASE STUDIES	12
3.1 Background	12
3.2 Work outcomes	14
3.3 Organisational identity and chain insertion issues	20
4 REPRESENTATIONAL CHALLENGES IN VALUE CHAINS	21
4.1 Production under pressure—establishing an interest base and agenda	21
4.2 Production under pressure—methods of participation and representation	27
5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS—TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF REPRESENTATION OPTIONS FOR OPTIMISTIC VALUE CHAIN INSERTION AND UPGRADING	31
REFERENCES	32

Abstract

The co-ordination of global production and trade within value chains has amplified debates concerning the impact of globalisation on labour, especially for developing countries. Whilst many development agencies argue for value chain insertion and upgrading as optimistic development pathways, many studies suggest a nuanced, conditional evaluation of the potential impacts on labour. One fundamental aspect of labour rights and conditions concerns representation and representational processes: that is, as encapsulated by the social dialogue component of *Decent Work*, whether representation is both effective and autonomous.

This paper uses a model of organisational identity to deepen our understanding of the impacts of value chain insertion and upgrading on labour. It uses three studies of labour conditions in value chains in one country (Brazil) to evaluate the effectiveness and challenges to representation at the local level. These studies come from the food production (tomatoes), fruit collection/processing (passion fruit) and metals (refrigeration/washer) sectors and encompass industrial unions, rural unions and cooperatives.

Whilst further work is required on the local, national and international contexts surrounding these studies, the analysis does suggest amplified and new complications for organisational identity as a result of value chain engagement. This adds another component to recent (but general) conceptual-empirical considerations of labour in value chains (Knorringa & Pegler, 2006). Responding to this, and the re-juvenation of representation, requires not only well linked strategies at local and international levels (thus substantial resources) but that representative organisations confront many developments which, potentially, also hold out promising opportunities for labour (e.g. Corporate Social Responsibility and Human Resource Management strategies).

Keywords

Development; global value chains; worker representation & participation; upgrading; decent work; corporate social responsibility (CSR); human resource management (HRM); Brazil; unions; cooperatives.

Development through Global Value Chains and the Achievement of Decent Work ¹

Challenges to Work and Representational Processes

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is driven by an empirically based observation and by a question. The observation is that many studies of labour conditions in developing countries, in sectors linked to global value chains, suggest overwhelmingly negative outcomes for workers. The question derives from this same body of evidence and from the more prescriptive policy platforms of labour agencies and civil society. What forms of participation & representation might act to promote a greater chance of labour benefits when a developing country firm is included in a global value chain?

These considerations of work – of job quality and participation - are at the heart of the *Decent Work* objective and strategy. Work, as an objective and subjective experience, is an outcome of decisions about production. Yet participation is both a result of these decisions and a process which can have a significant impact on prospects for growth and development. Thus the importance of *social dialogue* within the *Decent Work* framework. For these reasons the representational process is used as the main focus of analysis in this paper.

Accordingly, in an attempt to provide some tentative answers to this question, the study uses evidence on work outcomes (in three case studies) to reflect on the representational difficulties and prospects in each situation. Empirically, the cases bring a certain level of comparability as they all come from one country – Brazil. Yet the three examples provide sector variety and a diverse panorama of the value chain situations facing firms, workers and “their” representatives in this country.

Conceptually, the paper aims to provide a “reality check” on recent work which has attempted to typologise those combinations of conditions which might promote both upgrading and labour rights improvements (Knorringa & Pegler, 2006; p477). Within this schema, such optimistic cases are limited, but they are also quite generalized and in need of elaboration. In response, this study provides greater detail from a one country, multiple sector level, from the perspective of the representational process and its prospects along these various value chains.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2.0 serves two main purposes. It first (2.1) gives an overview of literature on labour impacts in value chains, highlighting also various ideas about the importance of representation and

¹ An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the Annual National Post Graduate Social Sciences & Research Association of Brazil (*Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais* - ANPOCS), in Caxambu, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 27-31/10/2008 - Dr Lee Pegler, Lecturer, Work Organisation and Labour Rights, WEG Programme – pegler@iss.nl / International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague, The Netherlands / www.iss.nl

social dialogue to the improvement of these labour conditions. It then (2.2) presents an interactive construct (Organisational Identity) for analysing representational processes. Section 3.0 summarises the background, value chain features and work outcomes within each value chain case study. The final part of section 3.0 underlines how “good” initial value chain insertion conditions may offer workers and their organisations greater bargaining power and rights, at least in the first instance. The case studies differ significantly on this level. This point provides a useful contextual perspective for the analytical part of the paper, and in respect to studies of labour, value chains and industrial relations in general.

Section 4.0 provides an analysis of representation in each case study. The first subsection (4.1) compares the depth and breadth of organisational interests and agendas at the firm and local level. Subsection 4.2 then looks at how participatory processes work primarily at the level of the organization but also with other organizations. With these comparative perspectives on representation, the conclusion (Section 5.0) summarises how these cases may help to refine a (albeit limited) typology of the representational conditions within which value chain insertion and upgrading may stand a better chance of improving the work of developing country “value chain labourers”.

2 LABOUR CONDITIONS, VALUE CHAIN PROBLEMATIC AN A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING REPRESENTATIONAL PROCESSES

2.1 Labour outcomes in value chains

Value chain developments may have created many new jobs. They have certainly led to many changes in the distribution of employment across the globe (Gereffi, 2005). Alongside continuing changes in product technologies, communications and logistics, these chains of value have shown both greater complexity but also enhanced corporate coordination in recent years. The more problematic concern is what these developments mean, on balance, for labour rights and their governance, especially in developing regions? What factors may determine whether this balance is positive or negative?

Only recently has the academic literature started to more adequately combine structural, political or organizational perspectives of value chains with more detailed analyses of labour conditions and managerial strategy (e.g. Barrientos, 2007). This may not be a coincidence as these types of studies enter a difficult evaluative terrain. In some respects (e.g. tasks or training), case studies of Trans-National Corporation (TNC) implants in developing countries have noted that TNCs often provide better conditions than those in competing domestic firms (e.g. Elgar et al, 1994; Morris and Wilkinson, 1995; Baldoz et al, 2001). In addition, recent sector level studies of wages and employment in sectors deeply affected by value chain developments suggest that net gains can occur as a result of value chain insertion (Nadvi et al; 2004). Yet, these observations are by no means as clear as they may seem.

A more detailed consideration of labour outcomes provides a far less positive picture for labour and its governance. For example, one argument which continues to be used to highlight the productive potential of new forms of production and labour management (i.e. Human Resource Management - HRM) within firms and across chains is that labour and their skills can be employed more flexibly (Palpacuer, 2000). The more contentious link in this vision of work is that (certain /core) workers will respond with optimism and initiative to new opportunities. Yet many studies continue to argue that flexible production environments may have an overwhelmingly negative impact on trust, allegiance and security (Wood, 1989; Graham, 1994; Pegler, 2001/2; Dolan, 2004). Despite the apparent democracy and transparency of many new management methods, working harder in less secure conditions may be the norm for the majority of workers in such firms. In addition, if there is any such flexible, high skilled group of core workers this is often observed as being a minority in decline, one who is increasingly segmented from the bulk of the workforce (Knorringa and Pegler, 2006). This scenario may be even tougher and more prevalent in buyer driven chains, where production and employment is more footloose, less organized and less “visible”.

When we add to this the observation that most developing country firms are inserted in lower level positions in hierarchical value chains within which opportunities for production and labour rights upgrading are more limited (Humphrey and Schmitz, 2002), then this scenario looks even more negative. While it is hard to argue against the view that *a* job may be better than none at all, when production is based on continuing cut-throat competition using low labour costs and skills it is hard not to see this as a negative outcome of globalisation. Within this perspective, the suggestion that competition will lead to positive motivational responses from employers and their workers may be too optimistic and over generalized (cf Palpacuer, 2000). Employers often react to the prospect of further competition and their greater dependence on workers (in the context of HRM change) with some combination of outsourcing, skill standardization, workforce truncation or new, more subtle, forms of control (Graham, 1994; Pegler, 2001/2). On the other hand, the low skilled, unequal power environments, more characteristic in many developing country situations, may not even require such detailed responses.

Yet there is an increasing body of evidence that, in other areas, employer policy is becoming more profound and responsible, both to workers and communities (Kolk and van Tulder, 2006). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has clearly moved beyond a superficial and defensive employer strategy, in more developed but also in many developing countries such as Brazil. Examples in which social, community and environmentally sustainable policies are evident could be seen as examples, or “islands”, of *responsible production* (Knorringa, 2007). Moreover, some raise the hypothesis that further examples of CSR, especially involving a range of social actors, may lead to a ratcheting upwards of norms of behaviour by firms (Sabel, O’Rourke & Fung, 2000). The implication of this line of argument is that it might be possible to replicate and amplify such “islands” of employer practice.

The ILO’s *Decent Work* strategy (Vosko, 2002) – of applying its four pillars of *good jobs, social security, non-discrimination and social dialogue* in different

environments - echoes a similar intent, for workers, in its desire to promote a floor of good labour practice. The security of work, jobs and livelihood stands out as a particularly important underlying factor in this respect. These two views, on CSR and *Decent Work*, therefore stand out as polemic normative standpoints concerning labour and development. The connecting point (or hypothesis) for these optimistic views of employer intent and labour outcomes would therefore seem to be that, there can be situations where both employers are efficient and responsible and where workers are in stable and secure jobs in which they have adequate representation. Some studies suggest that this is both quite possible and most efficient (Kucera, 2001).

However, in addition to questions about the impact of the strategies of China and Chinese firms on the possible spread of *decent* social and labour practices (Altenberg et al, 2008), important earlier doubts remain as to the maturation of CSR practice. These include the arguments that mainly well known exporters seem most open and under pressure to undertake such strategies and, that weaker firms may be forced to cut conditions further to compete as a result (Jenkins et al, 2002). A consequence of this would be that the gap between those firms offering *good jobs* and those who do not will grow. Continuing suggestions that CSR may also be a (another) means of avoiding unions and independent representation act to underline uncertainties about the potential of responsible production becoming a norm (Justice in Jenkins et al, 2002).

In view of these possible negative and ambiguous outcomes for work and industrial relations, the question of this paper can be elaborated in various ways. For example, how might organizations representing workers (unions / cooperatives) respond to global processes and the needs of workers? Moreover, what might case studies tell us about the efficiency of these organisations actions at the firm, value chain, country and global level? Finally, how might representatives of labour put pressure on other agencies so that *Decent Work* and *Responsible Production* do in fact become more probable?

Section 3.0 of this paper provides a brief expose of the background and work outcomes within the three case studies used in this paper. It also places each case in its local, company and value chain context. This provides the platform for the analysis (Section 4.0) of the representational situations, their problems and the potential solutions (to the difficulties that workers face) in each case. In preparation for this analysis, the concluding part (2.2) of this section outlines the identity model used for this analysis of representational processes and outcomes.

2.2 Analysing representational processes in value chains

Whilst unions continue to be the organisation formally recognized for the representation of workers interests in most countries of the world and at an international level, they clearly continue to be under pressure. Over the last 25 years the level of unionization has fallen dramatically in most (but not all) countries. Pressures appear to emanate from the most micro level and in terms of macro structures. Suggested causes range from those related to demographic and gender shifts in the workforce, a new more individual focus by increasingly

aware worker-consumers, structural and technological changes in industry, “overly” political unions, new HRM policies and their affects on worker allegiance, and so on (Ackers, Smith & Smith, 1996; Harrod and O’Brien, 2001). Moreover, questions have increasingly been raised in respect to the ability of unions to coordinate action between the micro and the international level (Herod, 2001). The debate about unions, and representation generally, is thus not just about structural determinants of decline but about the relevance of existing structures and policies to what workers “want” and “need”, issues which a vast labour history literature reminds us can and may change and, which are open to a variety of interpretations.

Recent years have also seen a growth in activity and discussion about alternatives for the articulation of “worker’s interests”. For example, at the international and national levels the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) movement has expanded dramatically in size, scale and scope (DeMars, 2005). Their policies and approach now sometimes go beyond “blaming and shaming” firms, and even the development of alternative ideas, to the actual negotiation of new value chain processes and coalitions of representation (Anner, 2007). Nevertheless, while there is evidence of more effective union-NGO interaction (especially on global capital issues) the niggling point about “who identifies vs. who represents” has not gone away (Eade & Leather, 2005).

Corporate responses to such questions concerning employee organization and participation have only served to further complicate this representational picture, especially within value chain structures. For instance, within formal and producer driven situations the use of new HRM models (employing various training, incentive and involvement schemes) have raised difficulties for the orientation, focus and strategies of local unions and for their higher level structures (Pegler, 2003). Within buyer driven situations, while external CSR initiatives (especially when deep and inclusive of the workforce base) may act to register the company as a responsible and inclusive corporate citizen, it is less certain what effect these policies have on union representation (Justice in Jenkins, 2002). Many such CSR initiatives do, however, include NGOs as local and international partners (Zanden et al., 2006). At the macro level on the other hand, global and national unions and their vertical representational structures are being continuously challenged by the varied and changing ways in which firms are adding value (e.g. via logistics; in ports) to products and services (Stavis & Boswell, 2007; Jacobs, 2007).

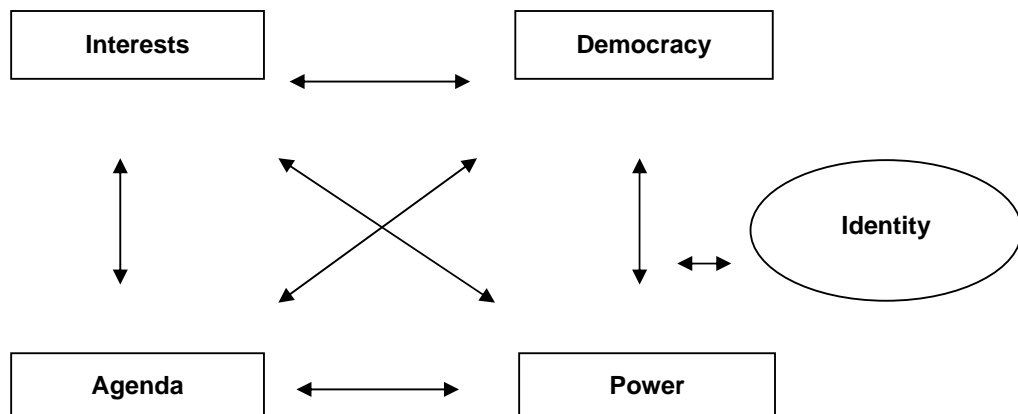
From an alternative representational perspective, cooperatives have seen something of a revival in recent years. At the international level, cooperatives have again been recognized as a potential mechanism from which to address *decent work deficits*, small scale producer-worker interests and even in terms of their possible (aggregated) contribution to fundamental participation and poverty objectives (e.g. the MDGs – Birchald, 2004). Taking a more micro perspective, there are those who continue to claim that, by nature of their internal processes and structures, cooperatives offer a more grounded possibility of worker and small scale producer *voice* and inclusion.

Looking up from this level, there are also those within the labour, cooperative and “helper” movement who argue that horizontal clusters of

cooperatives may not only be a natural extension of this idea but that these clusters may offer new labour rights, grower inclusion and value chain upgrading possibilities for developing regions (FBB, 2003). On the other hand, suggestions to build on the cooperative organizational model (to the cluster and value chain levels) may simply accentuate problems - of collective action, in terms of the division of labour and in respect to capital-labour decisions - which already exist for cooperatives. These are therefore courageous hypotheses. However, as the value chain examples of this study involve not just unions but cooperatives, these issues are important to the organizational and network perspectives of this paper, and to further analysis of this theme.

In summary, questions about union relevance and effectiveness have been accentuated by the powerful impact of value chain strategies on local union capacity and by the impacts of fluid and horizontal value formation on traditional vertical union structures at a national and international level. On the other hand, while cooperatives appear to open up a more participative type of labour rights situation, they face serious questions in terms of internal viability and sustainability at the micro level and are both weaker and less institutionalized at macro levels. How then to analyse and compare these different forms of organization, both as internal models of representation but also in terms of their relation to higher level structures, parallel organizations (e.g. NGOs), broader value chain strategies and the policies of individual firms (e.g. CSR/HRM) within these chains? Moreover, underneath this analysis of structures and context lies the more difficult question concerning workers' views and their relation to these structures and contextual changes.

FIGURE 1
The Organisational Identity Model



Source: Hyman, 'Union Identities', p 120.

A modified version (Figure 1) of a model of (*Union*) *Identity*, originally proposed by Hyman², seems quite useful for analysing the organizational features noted above as well as the external factors and difficulties brought about by corporate strategies and the involvement of other actors. Most importantly, it appears to offer a more dynamic way (i.e. than political models of unions) of dealing with the interaction of workers' views' with these structures and processes. This model, now referred to as *The Organizational Identity Model*, is applied in this paper. It has a number of important components. They are – organizational interests, agenda and democracy and the relation of these features to the context (thus, organizational power). Each of these components is outlined below.

i) Organisational Interests: an organisation's interests relate to whom and what types of issues it is interested. Challenges common to unions and cooperatives are whether they can expand their interest base (e.g. to women's issues; to non-members or the unemployed; to other workers in the chain/sector) and still be representative.

ii) Organisational Agenda: an organisation's agenda is evident not only from its formal policies and constitution but from the priorities evident from its day to day actions – its real/revealed agenda. More broadly, the organization could be very insular and narrow or broad in focus. It could also take either a very collaborative approach to (other) employers or a fairly competitive or combative one to other parties.

iii) Organisational Democracy: following earlier critiques of static and more electoral type models of democracy (Pegler, 2003); this paper makes more extensive use of a concept of participant representation as its key indicator of organizational democracy. What is important in this more dynamic construct is whether there is evidence that the organization engages in actions that - seek member's views, tries to interpret their demands, proposes new strategies etc. That is, is there an open, iterative, two way process in the exchange of views and responses.

iv) Organisational Power: resource availability, governmental regulations, governmental-societal relations, opportunities to form coalitions and coalition depth in the region (e.g. the context) will help to define the power the organization has to effectively represent its members.

Together these factors act to define an organisation's actual (vs. desired) identity. They are contextually specific and can be used to integrate the impact of the policies and strategies of related organisations into the primary analysis of the organisation. For example, how will their agendas and interests be strained as due to the increasingly large and complex web of value chain strategies at the local and international level? What the analysis (section 4.0) thus tries to do is to use the model to describe and learn from the process by which each organization has attempted to adapt to these global and local

² R. Hyman "Changing Trade Union Identity and Strategies", in *New Frontiers in European Industrial Relations*, eds R. Hyman and A.Ferner (London, 1994) and taken further/ applied by L. Pegler (2003) "Factory Modernisation and Union Identity: New Challenges for Unions – Reflections from Brazilian Cases", Working Paper Series, nr. 377, ISS, The Hague, June.

pressures. Accordingly, it is divided into a discussion of the organisations' interests and agendas (ss4.1) and a subsection on the organisations' methods for participation and representation (ss4.2). In preparation for this analysis, the next part of this paper briefly outlines the background and work features and concerns for each of the case studies to which the model is applied.

3 THE CASE STUDIES

3.1 Background

As summarised in Table 1 below, the three case studies display considerable variety as examples of local inclusion in global value chains. Case study one, in the South-East, involves metal products production. Case study two (in the Central-West) is concerned with a TNC who produces (amongst other things) food products such as packaged processed tomatoes whereas case study three is located in the Amazon and involves the cultivation and supply of (concentrated) fruit as an input to the beverage sector. Further details pertinent

TABLE 1
Value chain characteristics of the case studies

	Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3
PRODUCT (S)	a) Washers b) Refrigeration	Processed tomatoes	Fruit blocks
LOCATION	South-East	Central –West	Amazon
CHAIN TYPE	Producer driven	Producer/buyer driven	Buyer driven
CHAIN DRIVER	a)Final Product TNC b)Compressor TNC	Food Products TNC	International Buyer(s)
GOVERNANCE	a)Quasi-hierarchy b) Inverted hierarchy	Quasi-hierarchy globally / local hierarchy	Hierarchical
CLUSTER DYNAMIC	Various outsourcing changes – often <i>follow sourcing</i>	Farms increasingly linked to factory, R&D and suppliers	Attempted by case study but fragmented
CHAIN DRIVER'S CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP TO LABOUR	Strong internal HRM; some external, community CSR	Internal HRM; well developed external worker & community programmes	Some supply ethics in overall buyer policy but none to specific suppliers
UPGRADING & MARKETS	a) minor – product/process upgrade & exports b) major - functional upgrade and exports	Quality & price imperatives; regional markets	Case study plan to make/supply juice independently of value chain leader(s) and buyer/driver

to the description of work themes and later representational analysis are noted below.³

Case Study 1 (white goods) is a fairly typical example of a producer driven chain.⁴ The (international) chain driver is the brand name and they have made considerable investments to produce the product(s) in Brazil. The final products (e.g. refrigeration and washers) are moderately complex and involve large numbers of formal labour working in factories. However, the connection of this chain with Brazil is not as hierarchical as many due to the existence of a key input producer (for compressors) in the same company group. This compressor producer plays a key role in production internationally and in functional decisions affecting the global refrigeration chain. This gives it an unusual (dominant) position within the Brazilian refrigeration cluster – above that of the final product producer and, then, more dependent parts suppliers. The cluster hierarchy for washers is more traditional with the final product maker “directing” production related decisions more clearly.

Case study 2, on the other hand, encompasses a quite unusual mix of producer/buyer driven structures.⁵ The TNC is very dominant internationally and Brazil is one of the production centres in this hierarchy. Yet, the end product of this study (tomato food products) was never intended to have an international presence outside of Latin America. The importance of the operation is thus its ability to generate rents in this more regional market – through control of the cluster and suppliers and vis à vis its competitors. Within these Brazilian operations there is thus an example more typical of a producer driven chain – the tomato processing plant - whereas more fluid and informal buyer type relations are evident between pickers of the input (tomatoes) and this factory. In comparison to the factory workers, however, the formal relationship between these pickers and the TNC is ambiguous.

While the dynamic for change in terms of case study one (white goods) appears to be in terms of compressors, the dynamic of this tomato chain is evident in changing relations between the TNC and farmers. Securing the market has involved a two pronged strategy. First, state of the art seeds, irrigation and cultivation techniques have been established in the region (by the TNC) and these efficiencies and their supply are “available” to supplying farms. Secondly, in an effort to ensure regular, quality, reliable supply the TNC has sought to form increasingly exclusive relations with selected farms. Prices – stable and above the average – are promised in exchange for this increasingly closed contractual production relation. Buses of informal workers are brought in to pick tomatoes when the farmer tells the company that the product

³ Case study 1 has been the subject of regular analysis by the author since 1992. Case study 2 was researched at a primary and secondary level between 2004-2006 (along with the Instituto Observatorio Social in Brasil) and Case study 3 was studied at a secondary level from 2001-2003 and then researched at a primary level in 2003 and 2008.

⁴ Unless otherwise specified the information on this case study comes from – Pegler, 2000; Pegler, 2001; Pegler, 2003 and from fieldwork between 2004-8.

⁵ The analysis of this case study is based on research conducted in conjunction the IOS in Brazil in 2004 and from various unpublished documents on the sector, region and firm.

(tomatoes) looks ready and final input costs are simply deducted, by the TNC, from the farmer's gross income.

Yet neither case of dynamism in these two chains offers any guarantees of improvements in worker conditions or in opportunities for representation. In terms of this second case study, following its mixed chain form, there are also two broad types of employer policy in respect to workers. Those formal workers in the factory are now being given a more elaborate and involved model of HRM. On the other hand, informal farm workers "encounter" new types of social and employment relations via the impact of the TNC's extensive range of community CSR policies and services (in those communities supplying casual labour to the company's supplying farms, that is).

In further contrast, case study 3 provides a vivid illustration of a very hierarchical buyer driven chain.⁶ One of the international buyers, purchases(ed) from this facility in the Brazilian Amazon as well as from suppliers in Ecuador and the Philippines. What is important to the buyer is the quality and reliability of supply of the fruit (passion fruit) for its logistical movement and sale for mixing by fabricants and final distribution and sale by fruit juice brands. Over the years, various forms of industrial organization and ownership have been attempted at this Brazilian site. The most recent one involved cooperative structures (Nova Amafrutas – NAF; see Pegler, 2004). As detailed in section 4.0, this experience highlights the difficulties for labour within buyer driven chains and that, while alternative representative models may challenge these hierarchies, higher level value chain involvement brings further complications and ambiguities for labour and their "representatives".

The strategy of these cooperatives, their managers and their international "helpers" was to build better, more regular and more participative livelihoods for the factory workers and the 2-3,000 families supplying the small factory (and from it the global buyer in The Netherlands). A key driving force for this was to be an upgrading (i.e. fruit juice production & multiple fruit concentrate supply) plan which linked the enterprise to both to a supportive cluster and to a higher and more direct position within the global fruit juice chain. Some of this came about and various social and technical programmes were instigated within the supplying family networks. However, cluster plans and representational structures encountered difficulties and the enterprise's organizational and financial situation was always fragile.

3.2 Work outcomes⁷

This subsection summarises the kinds of work and work concerns which exist (ed.) within the value chain contexts outlined above. In this respect the cases show diversity. As the discussion illustrates, some of this is due to the local

⁶ The description of this case study is partly based on various secondary and unpublished documents – these and the results of secondary analysis are contained in (Pegler, 2004). More recent data and interview materials were obtained during fieldwork in the region in 2003 and, after this, from further secondary documents and reports and from discussions with NAF employees.

⁷ Sources for these comments/observations - see footnotes 4-6.

labour market and socio-economic circumstances in each region. It should also be noted that there are significant qualitative differences in the tasks performed in these different work contexts. These called for different types of indicators. However, there are also some striking similarities within views of what people want from their work. The most important and consistent of these is the desire by workers for greater certainty or security in their daily lives. This sits as a central issue underlying the subsequent analysis of representation and participation.

Case study 1 displays a relatively complex employment structure compared to the other two cases.⁸ As noted in Table 2 below, white goods producers employ skilled, semiskilled and unskilled manual workers and these work in metals and plastic work, assembly line and associated activities. The proportions of these broad skill groups have changed over time along with new work and human resource schemes, with conceptual and evaluative tasks increasing (especially within the work day expectations of “semiskilled” workers). Outsourcing developments, particularly in terms of tooling and

TABLE 2
Value chain characteristics of the case studies

	Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3
TYPES OF WORKERS	Skilled, semiskilled & unskilled factory workers for each product	a) semi skilled factory labour; b) formal farm workers c) informal pickers	a) unskilled factory workers b) cultivators/family plot workers
EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS / LIVELIHOODS	High = compressor workers; Medium = product assemblers; Low = parts suppliers	a) formal & moderate b) some formal & in-kind c) uncertain, low & informal	a) low, formal and subsidized b) low, subsistence, informal & some via coop programs
KEY WORK CONCERNS	Further career progression Pay & career Security & conditions in suppl. firms	a) progress/pay b) pay c) security & work regularity	a) pay/security b) security and consistency
REPRESENTATION	Metals union & employer created internal union	Factory union & rural workers union	Three linked cooperatives
NETWORK TIES	National and international union structures	Occasional ties to national and international unions/NGOs	Local NGOs & companies/ foreign development agencies

⁸ See footnote 4.

informally and formally many skills have risen and, with career schemes and quality registrations, worker expectations of further work and employment opportunities have increasingly outstripped factory vacancies.

Across Case Study one's clusters of input and final product producers there are two main hierarchies in terms of employment conditions. First, in general, the final assemblers/brand names provide higher paid and more agreeable working conditions and opportunities than parts suppliers. These part suppliers are often characterized by a small number of specialist heavy metal workshops populated mainly by men or, the many very fordist, light weight input making firms, where mainly women are employed. Secondly, in the case of refrigeration, the level of pay, conditions and prospects is higher for compressor workers than for workers at the final product assembler (brand name company).

Over time, a number of very interesting attitudes to work and industrial relations have been noted amongst the workforces of these firms in Brazil (Pegler, 2001).⁹ First, with new management systems, something of an "implicit bargain" or trade-off of pay for other benefits (such as career opportunities) has been evident within the key firms involved. Secondly, this trade-off is, however, dependent on further benefits arising (for which there has been and still is considerable skepticism)¹⁰. For example, those less skilled members of the workforce appear to put considerably more priority to immediate pay and employment security. The more highly skilled, on the other hand, are often left wondering when their (promised/further) career expectations might be fulfilled.

Thirdly, even in the most advanced white goods firms, it has taken some time for structural and systemic differences in opportunity by gender (and other characteristics) to be tackled as key issues. Fourthly, since the beginning, the HRM models of these firms have clearly not included a desire to engage with unions of an independent and/or combative character. Their model of industrial relations, whilst more open at an individual level, is still essentially unitarist, as is evident from the continuing isolation of the originally elected union at, what is now, the group's key international location (in Joinville, Santa Caterina).

Fifthly, over time and with other large employers offering similar employment packages, these white goods majors are having to be more explicit and open about the training – pay – progression packages on offer. Yet the irony arises when they feel the "need" to adjust these benefit structures. This is now less easy to do than in the past. Workers, now more accustomed to HRM, appear to exhibit more strongly felt responses to such changes to their expectations (at least in a stronger labour market). Managers have been heard to say that such attitudes represent "paternalistic dependency upon the employer"¹¹, despite the firm's clear earlier emphasis on the "family of the firm" within its "new" approach. Yet whether the local unions in the washer or refrigeration locations (let alone their national or international structures) have

⁹ Supplemented by fieldwork in 2003, 2005 and 2008.

¹⁰ Re-confirmed in worker interviews (2005) and management discussions (2008).

¹¹ Ibid – management interview (2008).

been or are now able to tap into these attitudinal developments is another story.

In contrast, within the producer driven side of the “tomato chain” example (case study two) there are few skilled but many unskilled and semiskilled factory workers.¹² Tasks involved include helping and observing the sorting/cleaning process or testing and operating machines in the cooking, sanitizing and concentration processes. Many production line and quality control stages are also involved up to final product labelling and packaging. The installation of new training, work process, health and safety and relational ways of working since 2003 have clearly had impacts in terms of overall assessments of attitudes, productivity and work accidents.¹³ Once again, starting from a (locationally specific) low base of expectations, it appears that small changes in employer policy can have significant impacts on industrial attitudes¹⁴.

On the other hand, for those working in the fields – tasks, needs and expectations are different again. These workers fall in two groups – formal and informal farm workers. Based on interviews in a number of locations¹⁵, formal farm workers seem somewhat better off than informal pickers. Their tasks range from final tidying of fields in preparation for planting, to machinery use, irrigation maintenance, moving machinery maintenance to workforce coordination when the farmer is absent. Some of the younger of these workers seemed quite unattached and quite prepared to quit if they heard about better paid jobs in other locations and sectors. However, while the actual proportion of farm workers who are formal is a minority, a fair proportion of them seem quite attached to rural work and their job. In many ways they are given quite good conditions – this often extending to accommodation on site, time off for training, a certain degree of autonomy and (at least partially) signed work cards (thus giving some future state benefits). Yet the fact that they work and seek further employment progress in an environment where patron-client relations are strong makes it difficult to complain openly about the fact that they are not being properly accredited for their work.

The workers “at the bottom of this chain” appear to experience quite a different reality to the above two groups.¹⁶ These landless labourers wait at very early hours of the morning on street corners for trucks for possible selection to work in the fields that day. Once there they either carry out field cleaning or pick tomatoes at piece rates. While there is talk of this work being replaced further by mechanization, this remains to be seen as current rates (20-25 cents per crate) and surplus labour supply keep costs down. Many seem to work in pairs or small subgroups and most note the physical difficulty of the work plus the fact that work hours and low pay puts enormous strains on their ability to care for their (many, usually) young children or ensure that others go

¹² Based on factory tour, 2004, Goais

¹³ As noted in UNILEVER factory briefing, 2004, Goais.

¹⁴ As discussed for metal workers, especially in certain regions, - Pegler, 2001.

¹⁵ Following observations based on interviews in 5 locations in Goias and Piricacaba regions in 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid.

to school. Besides the uncertainty that they will get daily work, tomato picking only offers seasonal employment at best, something that is only partially compensated for by the seasons of other crop picking and agricultural work options.

Based on interviews in a number of locations, the types of (non–fruit picking) jobs previously carried out by these casual workers ranged from bar work to rubbish collection to hotel services.¹⁷ Women were often of the impression that men gain higher piece rates and it was very interesting to note that, while this low paid piece rate work generated a daily wage significantly higher than hotel services, many (women generally) stated a preference for hotel work due to the fact that it often provides accommodation, health coverage and signed service cards¹⁸. As with many other comments from these workers, a desire for greater clarity and security appears to come through these statements. Finally, as with the tomato factory workers, there is a union available to these workers yet its viability is highly curtailed and uncertain.

Work, employment and social relations for “suppliers” to the fruit juice chain (case study three) show similarities and differences to the case of tomato pickers.¹⁹ One of the similarities is that there are both informal fruit pickers and formal factory workers involved. The work conditions of these two groups are discussed below.

Prior to the more recent cooperative experiment, work in the pulping and concentrate making factory was not only low skilled and low paid, it was seasonal. Part of the upgrading and inclusion plan was to regularize the incomes of those working within the local passion fruit chain, including those at the factory. Thus along side developments for a new juice factory and proposals to use the existing factory for many (14) different types of concentrates, work at this old factory began to change. For instance, during periods of few deliveries core (cooperative) workers were maintained in work and with a basic wage. In preparation for factory changes, some evidence of training, new skills development and rising work expectations were also noted in interviews. However, this was still not enough to deter these workers from their continuing involvement in alternative income earning activities such as carpentry, fruit cultivation, chicken rearing and hair dressing²⁰. In terms of representative structures, these workers and clerical/technical staff were covered by one of the three cooperatives of the enterprise.

On the other hand, work processes and income opportunities for the vast bulk of those affected by this connection to the global fruit chain illustrate particular patterns and insecurities. For example, many cultivators were not landless nor did they appear as disenfranchised as did many informal tomato pickers. In fact many growers appeared to own or be in control of substantial land assets and cultivated acreage of fruit(s)²¹.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Field interview – 2 women pickers, 2004

¹⁹ Following observations based on 5 weeks fieldwork, 2003 and (Pegler, 2004).

²⁰ As noted by a large proportion of factory worker interviews, 2003 – Benevidis.

²¹ As noted, for example, from site observation and interviews with sub cooperative members and farmers with plots closest to the Benevidis factory - 2003

However, the majority of these families lived in the short term and in precarious situations – not only did crop quality vary but its market price was highly variable. Moreover, even if there was a known and stable price, they have never had any certainty about collection (they live in quite disperse jungle locations) and thus sale, at any one point in time. Hence, the promise of a cooperative wherein they would have more of a say and be helped with crop quality, social conditions, income growth and stability was a very welcome one but one for which they would “wait and see what happened”²². After all, most had already seen a number of waves of good intentioned religious groups and NGOs come...and go²³.

In terms of actual survival strategies this led to a number of responses by cultivators and other actors. In terms of growers, many families continued to do what they had done for some time – to provide various types of fruit, livestock and home made foodstuffs to the local market and to try to ensure a (residual/additional) quantity of passion fruit for the local (closest i.e. Nova Amafrutas) factory. These cycles of family production, work and non-work routines are generally decided by the female head of the family, whether or not a partner existed. Within this regime, male partners seemed to take a more specialized role looking after one particular activity (e.g. pig rearing or papaya cultivation).

In contrast, what the NAF enterprise (and the buyer, ultimately) wanted was that supply to NAF not be a residual to family decision making but that it be more predictable and certain²⁴. However, one of the complications and uncertainties in this arrangement (for both growers and the cooperative) was that despite offers of a particular price by NAF, independent truckers (middlemen) gave certainty of pick up and delivery – that is, they give a certain (but lower) immediate return. NAF could not offer this.

Consequently, while many had hopes and expectations concerning the enterprise and its upgrading plan, income variability meant that existing alternative income (crops/products) and expenditure reducing (e.g. child labour vs. school) responses, and sales to truckers, remained the norm. The NAF connection, as a social, economic and representational reference point, would need further solidification and clarity. For these reasons, early efforts to engage with these growers and build a participative model for future social and production relations were encapsulated in the establishment of a social/technical centre (Escola Densa) and two further cooperatives within the NAF enterprise – one cooperative for existing growers and the other for (hoped for) new suppliers²⁵.

In summary, despite very different product and work environments, there are some important underlying issues concerning workers needs that emerged from the above discussion of the case studies. What one gets paid – reward for effort – is clearly basic and fundamental in terms of reproduction. However,

²² As highlighted in discussions with local cultivators – *America* region, (an hour or so from Benevidis) – 2003.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Interview, manager/coop leader, NAF factory - 2003

²⁵ As noted in Pegler, 2004.

beyond this, many workers hope for signs of greater security and possible future opportunity. Even in the more highly paid case of metal workers, efforts to mould the effort bargain towards commitment and the “family of the firm” often come up against expectations of greater security and advancement, amongst its workers. While the next subsection (3.3) elaborates how the level of chain insertion affects identity considerations, these issues of security and certainty (or insecurity and uncertainty), and how to adequately address them, remain as key underlying themes in all these situations.

3.3 Organisational identity and chain insertion issues

The above discussion also underlined the vast differences in the connections between these global value chains and their local contexts in Brazil. The most striking point which seems to emerge is that labour conditions (and the profundity of local development) are more likely to be higher when a firm or region is “inserted” at a higher level within the value chain. The case of white goods appears to demonstrate this quite clearly.²⁶ While there is variety amongst the workforce, skills are high, pay levels are good and many workers experience career opportunities (and formal schemes for such) to a level not often seen for manual workers, in any country. The existence of the compressor producer has helped to give this process of labour conditions and local development an upwards push. Within the ambit of more typical discussions about value chains and developing countries, this situation is something akin to “the tail wagging the dog”.

However, as with doubts concerning the labour rights-upgrading connection, the important question is, what is required to maintain this *high road* labour rights (and local development) trajectory? Is initial insertion a sufficient condition to ensure this? Various developments at the enterprise, locality, macro and value chain levels for this same study would suggest that a continued high road trajectory is quite conditional.

For example, when it appeared clear that Brazil could take on a key role in the refrigeration value chain, there were progressive moves by the US TNC to both bring this “heart of gold” more within the group and, to establish a local industrial relations situation without combative unions. As a result, union influence at the washing products context is hampered by “greenfields” conditions, a large coverage area and highly developed internal HRM policies. On the other hand, the independent union at the all-important refrigeration and compressor location was sidelined and replaced by a “company” union²⁷. While evidence suggests that the “company” union continues to have few followers, the original union continues to be isolated from these important employers of labour.

At the value chain level it is also relevant to note that this same compressor producer has developed its “own” value chain strategy and network, with plants now in China, Slovenia, Italy, the US and Brazil. The

²⁶ Most recent observations based on plant interviews, 2004 and 2008. Earlier references from – Pegler, 2000, 2001, 2003.

²⁷ As discussed in detail in – Pegler, 2003.

Brazilian plant (with its US partner) is now clearly governing the chain in terms of the development of production, HRM and industrial relations strategies in these locations²⁸. Yet what this means in terms of the level of employment conditions and relations in these plants, and their impact on production levels in Brazil, is a complex question requiring further analysis.

What this example serves to demonstrate for this study, is that, even in the most optimistic of value chain situations, insertion at a high level is not enough to guarantee the process of local endogenous industrial development nor does it necessarily infer continuing labour rights improvements (such as in relation to independent representation) in the sector. The existence of countervailing, representative agencies for labour interests is one of those factors that appear to be required for the promotion of “islands” of *responsible production* and *Decent Work*. Other factors relate to the governmental legislative and policy context and the depth of social support for such distributional and participative objectives. These issues would require further analysis. Yet, what this example also illustrates is that optimistic value chain insertion and labour rights outcomes face even greater challenges at the other two case studies. The next section attempts to unravel the representational and participative dynamics behind these situations, at each of the case studies.

4 REPRESENTATIONAL CHALLENGES IN VALUE CHAINS

Whilst the three examples are in different sectors and varying positions within their respective value chains, there are common pressures and themes which underlie their situations. The first one, as noted, is that security and uncertainty are key concerns of almost all workers. The second striking theme cutting across all of these cases is the impact of CSR on worker participation and representation. Value chain insertion has only complicated this representational situation. These pressures are evident (in different ways) within and outside the organisation and at varying points along the chain. This section looks at these issues in two parts – first, in terms of the organisations’ ability to establish an effective interest base and agenda in this context (4.1) and, secondly, via a consideration of the new solutions for participation and engagement that these organisations have found at the micro and macro levels (4.2).

4.1 Production under pressure—establishing an interest base and agenda

The unions representing workers at the white goods factories (Case Study one) have encountered the biggest challenge to their identities from the internal labour management policies of the companies in their localities (Pegler, 2003).²⁹ Whilst the application of policy has changed from the US parent and differs slightly between the Brazilian plants, the “arrival” of Human Resource

²⁸ Discussed in some depth in interviews with company technical staff, Joinville, 2008.

²⁹ Following discussion in this and section 4.2 based on this reference but also fieldwork in 2004 and 2008.

Management (HRM) was something of a *sea change* relative to traditional Brazilian employer attitudes at the time. Each union's interest base and agenda has undergone pressure to change in response to the impact of the TNC's presence and the progressive transfer of HRM policies to these production locations.

At the washer factory, the union decided it needed to find a way to position itself as an organisation which offered an alternative to the company's new "family of the firm". Emerging from a protracted struggle for control of the union and a quite radical, outward political agenda, the union came to describe itself as the "body and soul" of workers interests, an independent reference point relative to pressures for "quality and productivity at all costs".³⁰ Acting against considerable differences of opinion, they progressively regularized an effective agenda on issues (e.g. pay; health and safety) of more practical importance to workers. Yet their interests also came to broaden – with women's concerns, Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) and a more holistic approach to workers broader (e.g. family/sporting) environment coming more to the fore.

In terms of specific aspects of the employers HRM model, there were other good reasons why an agenda and interests based on pay rounds and solely political protests would no longer work. For example, while pay rates seem low, employees work fewer hours than in many other firms and in cleaner conditions. Moreover, how could the union really criticize the installation of a structured career scheme for manual workers? Their eventual response was to confront micro aspects of career plans (such as delays or inequities in the career scheme or the psychological content of company training) but also to keep to a broader agenda within (quite clever) generic community campaigns. A number of these, for instance, criticised HRM/Total Quality Management (TQM) schemes that ignored the quality of work life and linked local level practical issues with political conscious raising (s4.2).

The union's most recent proposal has been to build on their interpretation of (desirable) career schemes and to promote these for other groups of workers in the region.³¹ In terms of outcomes, a very nuanced and clever combination of industrial and social interests and a workplace linked political agenda has had positive effects on unionization rates at local metals firms and on the image of this union. The irony was and is that, at the one firm with a very consistent internal CSR/HRM model (this white goods firm), unionization is very low.³² Recent disputes at the factory and the surrounding region seem to be playing on this ambiguity in respect to workers' representational "needs" and "wants".

On the other hand, at the other location where the white goods TNC installed a sophisticated CSR/HRM scheme, the impact on the (original/elected) union was more definitive (Pegler, 2003). The decision to remove the once popular, elected, radical metals union has held for nearly 20

³⁰ As noted in one of their cartoon booklets – "Fabrica do Futuro"

³¹ As seen in http://www.sindimetalmeira.org.br/materias/mat_86.htm – last viewed sept, 17, 2008.

³² Less than 10%.

years. The axis of power within the global refrigeration value chain has thus remained in Brazil alongside a union (the company promoted one) with a narrow service agenda and for whom internal workplace interests either play little role or for which the (new internal) union has taken quite a company friendly line. Over the years many flexibilities and changes to work processes (e.g. outsourcing; on overtime; on hours averaging; in terms of training) have come about without that union putting forward any credible alternatives.

The original union reacted strongly and took an articulate critique of the “company” union and process from the local level to the highest legal courts. Yet their own agenda and interests changed very slowly and only marginally³³. Despite their more geographically concentrated area of action (a quite wealthy industrial environment compared to the struggling, regionally dispersed union at the washing location), little real engagement with the language and implications of HRM have ever emerged. This metals union’s agenda continues to be focused on external political change and traditional industrial concerns such as pay and condition adjustment dates. Even if they get the chance to represent final product (refrigeration) workers again, many conditions have changed and they may have lost too much contact with both workers and the issues there to be very effective, at least in the short term.

Workers in Case Study two are also represented by two different unions – one for factory workers and the other for rural workers. The factory union also has to deal with internal factory change & HRM and in this respect their response seems quite cautious and supportive. The rural workers union, on the other hand, represents two fairly different types of workers and, like the white goods unions, has to try and put forward an effective agenda and interests within a very difficult context.³⁴ The more recent move toward stronger contractual relations between the TNC and farmers and the development of external CSR programmes (but just in key localities to the company) are two value chain related developments which may further complicate the ability of rural union’s to represent workers.

On the basis of observation and interviews, it is clear that many such unions are actively concerned with key issues such as poverty, pay rates and child labour in agriculture. Yet the regional context is defined by large scale agricultural interests and an overriding conservative, patriarchal culture. Agricultural workers often have little education and, as noted, pay rates are very low. Combined with a large coverage area, a “moving” clientele and seasonal work patterns, the union is both resource poor and is faced with a very small population of active members. Thus aside from continuing to talk about pay rates, these unions’ identities are often defined by broader, political, citizenship agendas. The fairly common, and quite understandable, party participatory outcome of this strategy is dealt with later (in s4.2). However, what is important to note here is that when (as often occurs in such environments) many local unionists also take on political positions this may further complicate their identities. For instance, as they are then held “accountable” for social situations in the electorate, their responses may now

³³ Pegler, 2003 for most detail.

³⁴ Following discussion in section 4.0 based on fieldwork in 2005.

conflict with their union agenda of denouncing certain behaviours, such as in the case of the employment of child labour in the fields³⁵.

In terms of more recent developments, the stronger contractual relations that have developed between (certain) farmers and the TNC are also of relevance to union strategy. If the company is to invest in intensive research and development for plants, irrigation, seeds and the like, they clearly expect that this will be reflected in quality and productivity in the product. Hence farmers are brought into the relation and offered above average, stable prices in exchange for exclusive, quality supply. Yet, if farmers wish to further maximize returns, then one of the few avenues left (especially if good rates depend on quality evaluations on delivery) within such a contractual situation is in terms of labour costs. Unions may then be even less able to push for rate rises, especially if they now represent the interests of the broader region, rather than simply a worker electorate. The prospect of field mechanization (vs. field workers) only serves to further complicate a union's position in this regard.

However, an even greater challenge to rural unions' representative abilities comes from the extensive range of external CSR programmes being launched in the region. As alluded to above, in Brazil this TNC decided to complement its developing contractual relationship with farmers with various CSR programmes. These are social and external to the firm but also have direct impacts on the livelihoods of farm workers. For instance, a number of years ago the TNC employed researchers to carry out base level social surveys of regions in which their key farm suppliers were located.³⁶ After these intensive evaluations of literacy, school attendance and social conditions, the company launched further programmes for education and local services³⁷. One of these programmes provides snacks, drinks and basic safety and sanitary equipment for workers travelling to "their" fields. Other assistance includes crèche, sporting and leisure facilities at the street corners where prospective field workers are accustomed to waiting for buses to go to the fields.³⁸

Consequently, in the face of such competition for worker allegiance, unions already strapped by few resources are hard pressed to effectively demonstrate their commitment to rural workers' conditions. In fact, in other places some unions do still try to provide (in conjunction with local government workers) bread and milk sustenance packages at worker bus stops³⁹. However, as with the potential implications of a few union officers serving such a large area and number of farms, the impact of these efforts is at best modest.

³⁵ Noted in Goiania local union interview and as evidenced by union officials removal of children during filming of field visit, 2005.

³⁶ Interviews at Company Headquarters, Sao Paulo, 2005.

³⁷ One of these is entitled – *Rural Responsavel/ Rural Responsible*, and is executed by *Instituto Unilever*.

³⁸ Viewed during Company Visit, Goias, 2005.

³⁹ Observation was made of various meetings of this type and of attempted contacts by union and local government officials with workers before they boarded buses to go to the fields.

At Case Study three, a key difference is that the entity set up to represent workers was also the one charged with managing the enterprise.⁴⁰ The fact that the cooperative structure therefore existed as an agent of corporate social responsibility (CSR), whilst also being involved in the promotion of economic stability and growth, held its own inherent difficulties and challenges. These difficulties were accentuated by developments at the buyer end of the chain and by new ambiguities brought about by upgrading requirements.

From the beginning (2000), Nova Amafrutas (NAF) promoters established a very broad and ambitious agenda⁴¹. Their ultimate objective related to poverty reduction in this poor part of northern Brazil. Brazilian unionists and social activists saw that the site represented a classic case of intermittent fruit supply to an old factory, but one whose continuing links to a global buyer might offer an initial lifeline for local, endogenous development. By promoting cooperatives and a set of interlinked programmes they felt that they might help to promote an enterprise which could fulfil various objectives within this overall poverty focus.

Consequently, the alleviation of poverty first had an economic side. This would be tackled, in the short term, by improvements to the existing factory, stabilised buyer relations and a process of temporary income equalization for workers and growers across the year. More lasting plans for greater income stability and growth via the processing of many more fruits (supplied by grower members) and a companion factory for the production of higher value added fruit juices were developed subsequently.

The social side of their agenda included a desire to persuade families of the need to reduce child labour and to increase school participation, but they also felt that this would only evolve alongside income stabilization and social provision improvements. Thus other initiatives included technical support for crops and growing and social programmes for families. The role of women in the family and society were also dealt with using specific pedagogic techniques and materials.

Whilst participative dynamics and difficulties are discussed below (s4.2), a number of the constraints to the achievement of these objectives and agenda must be noted here. First, the position of middlemen/*traviseiros* (i.e truckers) complicated the NAF plan to establish an income stabilization system linked to more guaranteed product supply to the factory. The entity did not have the resources (or desire) to finance transport and, while truckers did not pay what NAF thought was correct, they (the truckers) could not be put offside as they offered the main avenue for regular fruit supply to the factory. Secondly, distances, topography and the culture of communication added to challenges to the development and articulation of these objectives.

Thirdly, NAF encountered a buyer who sources many fruit products from numerous locations. The main product of this study, passion fruit, like many other fruits, can be sourced from many places and the price often oscillates

⁴⁰ The following description based on fieldwork in Benevides, 2003 and from interviews with Passina (LA) Management in Rio de Janeiro, 2003.

⁴¹ See Pegler, 2004, case study 2 for the early background on this example described below.

wildly along with crop planting and harvesting cycles. Thus the buyer presents both a lifeline but also a hierarchically dependent relation to them and the fortunes of the workers and cultivators. Consequently, NAF had to be very careful to assure the buyer that quality and quantities of passion fruit would continue and even improve within a cooperative structure.

Negotiating this relationship became even more complicated when it came to the plan to expand fruit types and to start a fruit juice factory.⁴² Initially the buyer took quite a friendly and sympathetic approach to this courageous attempt to create an economic entity which may also help to alleviate poverty. However, while the buyer did not over-emphasise the fact that the factory might compete with the fruit juice marketing plans of their clients (the brands), they insisted on a continued base line of quality and quantities of passion fruit (and, in the future, the other fruits). Nevertheless, even though a very high technology plant did get established for fruit juices, its fundamental character (nearly no workers; near 50% ownership by foreign capital) created ambiguities for participative principles. Moreover, even if the plan to produce fruit juices worked, the extreme dominance of national and international fruit juice markets by very large TNCs means that there is already a very clear ceiling on the market potential of such an upgrading plan.

In summary, what then do these cases suggest in terms of the potential of organisations to establish effective interest bases and agendas – ones that have some chance of capturing worker interest and support? Moreover, what clues do they give in terms of the types of representational models which might solidify and promote further labour condition improvements when value chain inclusion is involved? First, the two cases which seemed to offer the clearest, most innovative and engaging agendas and interests occurred at the location of the union for washers and in the case of NAF. Political strategies by TNCs and severe resource constraints figure prominently in the cases of the refrigeration union and in that for tomato workers. However, such constraints could hardly be considered minimal in the case of (the now failed) NAF or for the union covering the vast rural area where the washer factory is located.

Secondly, while a clever blend of specifics and general strategy underline both innovative examples, only at the washer site did this really get recognized as useful by (most of) the organisations “clients”. Geography and local labour market considerations may explain part of NAF’s difficulty involving and representing its members, but so too may internal conflicts and contradictions within the cooperative form. Finally, the “stretching” of resources (thus agendas/interests) between the macro and micro levels really seems to test organisations wishing to represent their members. Value chain developments have accentuated this “stretching” of organizational coverage in all cases. The final part of this section brings in various (internal and external) participative and network perspectives to these considerations of organisational identity.

⁴² Interview, Passina Latin America Manager, Rio de Janeiro, 2003, for the buyer related issues noted below.

4.2 Production under pressure—methods of participation and representation

As suggested above, the white goods union at the washing products location adjusted its identity and this involved many new participation initiatives (Pegler, 2003).⁴³ Aside from more assemblies on thematic issues, family reunions and financial incentives, they developed various materials which illustrated, in graphic and simple ways, an alternative way to interpret the impact of new management systems. Most importantly, these illustrated that workers had a choice in how these policies developed and that the union wanted to engage with them on such themes. This process of active engagement and exchange went further in their campaigns. For example, various campaigns have focused on the relation of new factory models to health and safety concerns. From early times these often developed to the point of involving factory medical visits and interviews, local government involvement and even the articulation of these political/workplace concerns within the ILO.

Outside the firm, but still in the local community, the union was part of a movement to develop broader university-union research links and has supported many local community development initiatives, especially those involving poor and excluded workers. Most recently, it appears that they have tried to continue with their thematic workplace-politics links in local campaigns supporting public sector workers.⁴⁴ Their current web site and bulletins demonstrate their maturation as an organization with a mission.⁴⁵ However, earlier observers do not seem to have been wrong about the employer's anti-union intentions for the original movement of washing machine construction from crowded, "brownfields", industrial Sao Bernardo to this country location. Even if the union is well embedded in the local community and has a well developed horizontal (across groups/sectors) and vertical (at workplace levels) identity in the eyes of many local workers, they are clearly continuing to be challenged as a representative of workers. Unionisation levels continue to be (unusually) low at the washing machine plant⁴⁶.

In contrast, the metals union at the refrigeration site has basically just continued to articulate standard wage and condition issues with workers in the small metals firms which remain in its ambit of coverage (Pegler, 2003).⁴⁷ They rightly noted that the "company" union had non-representative policies and practices and an electoral model and process which allowed little opposition and engagement. Their own rules, on the other hand, for policy change and worker involvement (e.g. the unemployed) at assemblies were very open by any unions' standards. Yet these did not help when they would not change their broad, detached, radical, political agenda in such an extremely conservative

⁴³ And from fieldwork, 2005.

⁴⁴ As seen in http://www.sindimetalimeira.org.br/materias/mat_86.htm – last viewed sept, 17, 2008.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ While rising between 2004-2007 they still sit around 20% at best (2008) – interview union legal officer, Limeira, 2008.

⁴⁷ And from fieldwork 2005.

work conscious context. Earlier possible coalitions with local unions (e.g. the plastics union) who were challenging employer modernisation strategies did not continue. Few coalitions have been established at local (or other) levels beyond a curious grouping of them with a number of (too many, officially) metals unions in the region. What this has allowed them to do is to dominate official regional union structures with their Labor Party candidates⁴⁸.

Equally uncertain, from a participative perspective, is the case of the rural union covering tomato pickers.⁴⁹ Despite being faced with few resources and vast areas, they still make regular efforts to visit workers in the fields and in their homes. Bulletins are distributed as widely as possible and the union does use its service (medical/dental) provision capacity to engage with workers. However, seeking or holding local political office often appears to be the most visible and efficient platform, as well the most remunerable option, for effective social dialogue. Externally, such unions are often able to bring in party and union central resources as well as links to external NGOs and international unions interested in labour conditions “at the end” of value chains⁵⁰. Yet the question is whether these links are sufficiently regular or institutionalized.

Within the fruit picking and processing operations of case study three a variety of participative mechanisms were employed or attempted.⁵¹ At a factory and office level, relatively few numbers meant that, in the early days, direct discussions involving every one took place on a regular basis. However, these did not always offer the chance of a vote, just the opportunity to be informed and discuss. Equally, it is important to note that there never was the intention to develop flat, participatory decision making structures at the workplace level. Opportunities to have a say occurred outside of fairly traditional hierarchies for the division of labour within the factory and clerical workplaces. Workers were aware of this.

Within the participative network of the two cooperatives created for growers, various other potential channels of communication and dialogue emerged. For example, subsections of the two cooperatives were established so as to allow more active participation and information flows. Technical advisors and education workers often worked through these structures at a sub-regional level. In particular, local workshops promoting the importance and value of cooperation, as well as the objectives of NAF, were held on a quite regular basis across this grower and community network⁵². Similarly, as the enterprise developed, information technology connections between the enterprise and certain communities were also set up.

In terms of broader networks, strong early indications of support from environmental and social NGOs appeared promising. NAF also developed, perhaps partly due to its strong political connections within the union

⁴⁸ As illustrated by interview with SC Regional Metals Union President, Oct 2008.

⁴⁹ Based on field visits in Goais and Piricacaba Regions, 2005.

⁵⁰ As with the Dutch FNV interest in such issues.

⁵¹ Based on fieldwork 2003, (Pegler 2004) and subsequent discussions/reports.

⁵² The author participated in two of these in the *America* region (an hour or so from Benevidis) in 2003.

movement and the labour government, good relations with local and regional development banks and scientific agencies⁵³. Together with technical help from groups promoting better effluent treatment and the location of a (fruit residual) soap making operation for a prominent Brazilian cosmetics firm on site, the scene looked promising. Much of this process had been driven by the critical role played by a Dutch Development agency (ICCO). They set up the training school, worked on technical, social and CSR planning and helped to broker various financial packages, including those behind the multiple fruit and fruit juice strategies.

However, the whole operation fell apart (in 2005) in the midst of various technical and financial disputes. While these constraints may have marked the end point to this recent experiment, other intrinsic problems were clearly already confusing the viability and representational potential of NAF. For example, the role of truckers and their position as supplier members of one of the cooperatives did not help the building of solid links between the coops and many members and their families. The sheer size of the operation, the addition of a second factory and new production requirements on growers took it from being a simple model to something “a bit big and foreign” to many. In this regard, it moved even further from a direct model to one of representative democracy. This may have helped fuel perceptions that certain resource (land) rich growers had used their prominence to gain positions within cooperative decision making structures and that the enterprise thus offered less to the average poor cultivator than expected and hoped⁵⁴.

Growth, and publicity of its potential, fuelled other traditional cooperative problems such as – disputes over the lack of worker involvement in the new factory, the distribution of gains from the new operation and, in terms of the use of and conditions applying to seasonal (non- coop) workers at the factory. Professional clerical and factory staff also noted the effect of income subsidization on their pay, relative to others in their occupation⁵⁵. However, one of the most striking “conflicts” was that caused by the interaction of the coop substructures and the requirements of the upgrading plan. In brief, while most involved assumed that these new regional structures offered an important conduit for *voice* up to the central level, the upgrading plan seemed to reverse this process and its purpose. Many growers ceased to be involved in NAF and many regional coordinators in the coop structure felt under pressure. Rather than giving them more involvement, these structures appeared to be being used primarily to inform families of their various fruit production obligations (quotas) for coming periods⁵⁶.

⁵³ Discussed in Pegler, 2004.

⁵⁴ The observation that most coop leaders were generally the best resourced and the comments by various local cultivators, as well observation of negotiations between organisers and families, seem to support these suggestions concerning power, hierarchies and perceptions of them.

⁵⁵ This clearly came through from interviews, especially those with scientific staff (2003).

⁵⁶ Thus making coordinators more like production supervisors than “conduits for voice”.

In summary, this consideration of the representation processes in the three case studies has added more depth and weight to the above assessment of these organisations' interests and agendas. Near unassailable power and resource differences between capital and labour have turned the refrigeration and tomato workers unions into very marginal entities. Yet purely political responses to these local-global dynamics, whilst understandable, are clearly not very helpful from a representational perspective.

On the other hand, NAF demonstrated a very ambitious, coordinated plan to confront exclusion and poverty with inclusion and value chain engagement. Yet it also failed. Efforts were made to garner local and international support and to play on organisers links within the Brazilian body politic. These offered up opportunities which unfortunately did not come about for various internal and financial reasons. However, problems of representation (as they started to grow) as well as competition and representative ambiguities (induced by value chain pressures and the existence of multiple objectives) greatly hampered its prospects.

Alternatively, the washing product example gives clues that organisations may have a better chance if they can find a balance between practical local issues, interactive modes for articulating these with workers and an agenda which allows them to link workplace themes with broader political processes. What-is-more, coordination developments along value chains suggest that unions must also respond at a broader level. Unions, and others, need to be more connected between levels for them to stand a better chance of promoting labour gains from value chain inclusion. Yet this implies that national and international union structures may have to change radically to cope with the growing horizontal nature of value chain developments across occupations, sectors and between countries.

Organisations are clearly stretched – multiple objectives and levels of action bring inefficiencies and ambiguities. Moreover, the present application of CSR, even if more profound and involving, appears (on the basis of these examples) to bring nothing but complications for representative processes. What then might be necessary to improve the situations facing each of the organisations analysed in this paper? After all, the examples are clearly drawn from important sectors and many of the firms are the types of household names for which CSR is often claimed to be working!

In the case of the white goods (washing products) union, they may need to continue their focus on the ambiguities of the HRM model and try to illustrate how firms can improve their performance with a union inclusive approach (building on -Kucera, 2001). It would probably also help if the Global Union Federation (GUF) in their sector articulated complementary policies and tackled the union recognition policies of white goods TNCs, head-on at the international level. Of possible help to the tomato union might be their amalgamation and coordination with process unions and a more regular link to international and national agencies promoting labour rights in the agricultural sector. The problems occurring at examples such as NAF may be helped by combined union-cooperative structures (internally), international NGO links (re Anner, 2007) and a clearer division of roles between representative, promotional and local development organisations. Finally, an important

reminder that comes through from all of these examples is that assistance from the national and international levels can be very useful. However, for representation and participation to truly take root requires the process of “ownership” and *voice* to first emerge from the local level.

5 CONCLUDING COMMENTS—TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF REPRESENTATION OPTIONS FOR OPTIMISTIC VALUE CHAIN INSERTION AND UPGRADING

How probable is it that quality (e.g. secure, *decent*) jobs will come about as a result of a developing country’s inclusion in a global value chain? This was the broad question posed by this paper. More specifically, by comparing the work situations within three cases of value chain insertion in Brazil, the analysis asked – what type of representative/participative processes are needed, and at what levels, so that we might have a better chance of seeing labour gains when firms are inserted into global production networks? The cases gave some clues about factors and conditions which might promote such an outcome as well as indications of bottlenecks to this. While further work on the local, national and international context surrounding these outcomes is needed, overall it was not an optimistic assessment.

Earlier work typologised the conditions under which value chain insertion/upgrading and improved labour conditions might go together (Knorringa & Pegler, 2006; p477). That vision, however, only focused on representation and participation as especially important factors at the country and global levels. It quite rightly noted that unions should be representative and inclusive and that global union bodies must play a unifying role but it left a lot of gaps in respect to representation. This analysis has filled in some of the generalities of that vision (for a few cases and mainly at a local level) but it has also raised new, worrying ambiguities for labour rights promotion in a globalising context.

For instance, the study has shown how a focus on firm level knowledge development and quality (a firm level condition for upgrading and skill development⁵⁷) may not be fulfilled if firms see their interests as being best served by maximising flexibilities and divisions within the workforce. Such strategies may only serve to heighten worker insecurities and uncertainties. On the other hand, policies such as HRM and a deeper development of CSR policy by firms within their chains may still act against the prospect of free, effective and independent worker representation. Weakened representative organisations are then even less able to cater to their clients’ concerns and uncertainties.

What seems most important in terms of effective representation (especially in this context) is that organisations are linked to their members in a participative way (irrespective of whether a union or coop is involved) but that these organisations also have the resources to articulate and coordinate their

⁵⁷ Top right hand column of table 1 – Knorringa & Pegler, 2006, p 477.

interests at higher levels. The problem then is that grandiose ideas for national coordination or union internationalism fall prey to inefficiencies, politics and the “illogical” nature of collective action. Thus it is perhaps the specific balance of breadth, depth and micro-macro focus of agendas and interests which is important to whether a local representative organization is also able to respond to global pressures. Yet for this, organisations of representation will still have to rely on structures and institutions.

This last point above thus brings the discussion to a final and very important point for consideration and further integration into future analysis of such situations – that of the role of the state. Global value chains may appear to work around them and some proponents of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) may wish to reduce its role, yet the fortunes (good and bad) of each of the case studies analysed here also rely heavily on state rules and state sanctioned values. More positively, cases where labour rights improvements go hand-in-hand with upgrading, while needing independent representation at all levels, also require the support of the state in terms of the ground rules for basic labour rights. Solid local representational structures, open innovative agendas and interests and macro structures relevant to current capitalist trends all seem necessary for worker representation in a global context. However, without the encapsulation of concepts such as *Decent Work* within national laws, the prospect of value chain upgrading and labour rights improvements may stand much less chance of success. In addition to promoting the very real idea that firm efficiency can coincide with independent representational processes, it is here (i.e. *Decent Work* promotion within national laws) that national union organisations can play an additional, politically important role.

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