



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

Project title: Worker-Driven Social Accountability in Global Value Chains: An African–European Collaboration

Acronym: WOSA

Name and Department of the UNIBO scientific coordinator: Timothy Raeymaekers - Department of History and Cultures

Project objectives

The project investigates how sustainability standards, social accountability initiatives and regulations (SSR) in global value chains fall down on informal workers in agri-food and extractive sectors supplying European markets.

While SAM frameworks aim to improve accountability, the project critically examines how they may also reinforce power asymmetries and shift social and ecological costs upstream, disproportionately affecting already marginalized workers.

Adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary and worker-oriented perspective, the project seeks to:

- analyse how SAM reshape power relations between states, firms and workers;
- assess the impacts of compliance and formalisation on informal labour across different commodities and countries;
- develop innovative methodological approaches that better capture inequality, precarity and workers' lived experiences.

A key objective is also to consolidate a strong research partnership within UNA Europa, creating the conceptual and methodological foundations for a future large-scale collaborative research proposal.

Activities

The project has a duration of 18 months and is structured around three core activities:

- Two international project meetings
 - A first *meeting* dedicated to aligning research perspectives, sharing ongoing work, defining comparative research questions and discussing qualitative and quantitative methodologies.
 - A second *consolidatory meeting*, following a field visit, focused on integrating methodological insights and structuring joint work packages for a future competitive research proposal.
- Field visit to Ghana

A one-week field visit involving selected partners to test preliminary research designs in real research settings, engage with worker and producer organisations, and assess the feasibility of a joint transdisciplinary research programme focused on labour in extractive and agri-food value chains.

Partnership

The project brings together five UNA Europa partners with complementary expertise, coordinated by the University of Bologna: Universität Zürich, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Freie Universität Berlin and KU Leuven.

The partnership is further strengthened by collaborations with African academic institutions and worker and producer organisations, particularly in Ghana, Burkina Faso, DRC, Ethiopia and Senegal, and across commodities such as cocoa, coffee, gold, cobalt and agricultural products.

Expected impact

In the short term, the project will strengthen UNIBO's and UNA Europa's research capacity on sustainability, labour and global value chains, while deepening Europe–Africa research collaboration.

In the medium term, it will support the development of competitive joint research proposals (e.g. Horizon Europe and/or national funding schemes) and contribute to more inclusive, worker-centred approaches to sustainability governance and policy design in global value chains.