

**Joint ILO/UPU Sub-Regional Seminar on Social Dialogue  
in Postal Services in Eastern and Southern Africa, in Cooperation with UNI  
(Bagamoyo, Tanzania, 27-29 November 2006)**

**CONCLUSIONS<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction**

In accordance with a recommendation of the ILO Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in Postal and Telecommunications Services, held in Geneva, 13-17 May 2002, the International Labour Office organized a tripartite seminar in conjunction with the Universal Postal Union and in cooperation with Union Network International, in order to promote social dialogue in the postal sector of the Eastern and Southern African region. The seminar was also a follow-up of Objective 5 of the UPU's Bucharest Postal Strategy (2004) and of the ILO-UPU Joint Regional Seminar on Social Dialogue in Postal Services in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok, 23-26 May 2000, and the Joint Regional Seminar on Social Dialogue in Postal Services in Latin America, Lima, Peru, 18-20 August 2003.

The seminar was opened by Hon. Mr. John Chiligati, Minister of Labour, Employment and Youth, Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, and brought together eight postal administration representatives (from Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), ten worker delegates from nine countries (Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia and Zimbabwe), and representatives of public and private employers from Kenya and Tanzania. Additionally, workers from Tanzania and South Africa as well as postal administration participants from Tanzania attended as observers. The Seminar was supported by a team of experts from the ILO, the UPU and UNI.

**OVERALL CONCLUSIONS**

The seminar participants agree on the following objectives: (a) to promote social dialogue in the postal sector; (b) to offer and maintain the universal postal service; (c) to promote corporate social responsibility and sustainable development of postal services; (d) to modernize and reform the postal service; and (e) to exploit e-commerce opportunities. Representatives from the postal administrations recognize the responsibilities and contributions of the workers and their representatives in achieving higher quality and greater development of postal services. The seminar considers that efforts must be made to pursue these objectives, and that the social dialogue begun at

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<sup>1</sup> Unanimously approved by the participants.

this seminar must be further strengthened. The postal administrations, the employers and the workers' organizations of the region have deepened their mutual understanding during their discussions.

The national reports presented at the seminar indicate differences between the countries of the region, although some characteristics are common to all. There is social dialogue in the postal service, and in the majority of the nine countries it works more or less effectively. Solutions need to be found to improve social dialogue in postal services and to achieve greater satisfaction for workers, employers and governments, in order to better serve the clients. It is important to promote the role of an efficient and modern universal postal service that is able to compete fairly and effectively.

### **Issue 1: Modernizing Postal Services in Africa and Managing Organizational Change**

There is consensus on the urgency and need to modernize and reform postal services. However, modernization, restructuring or creating a postal enterprise does not necessarily mean privatization or granting postal concessions. The postal sector is undergoing change throughout Africa, and the nine countries are at various stages of the process. Whatever stage they have reached, the challenge facing stakeholders is how best to manage the process of diversification – including financial services -- and ensure sustainable, high quality services. The key factor is shaping the active and constructive participation of workers' organizations and the postal administrations, bringing added value to the company's strategy and increasing participation in the decision-making processes. In view of technological and economic change, the modernization of the postal sector has become crucial for the sector's ability to remain relevant for society and serve its customers effectively.

The seminar recognizes the requirement to fulfil the strategic action commitments established at the UPU Congress in Bucharest in 2004, which should be the responsibility of all stakeholders involved, namely governments, postal administrations and workers' organizations. In this effort, the committed participation of all is essential. The stakeholders should recognize and address the concerns of postal workers, share information and consult in good faith before changes are implemented. Account should be taken of legal reforms, the specific conditions of each country, problems with -- or lack of -- sectoral regulation, and excessive politicization of human resources management policies for postal services in the region. Training and information programmes in the postal companies are also needed.

The seminar notes that care should be taken to ensure that structural reforms should be carried out in consultation with workers' organizations. The promotion of the interests of women workers must be ensured. The ILO, UPU and UNI must also encourage greater participation of women in their meetings.

The participants also acknowledge the primary responsibility of governments in terms of facilitating efficient postal services that guarantee universal service and at the same time offering stability and decent working conditions. It is essential to bear in mind the human element when managing change. The companies and workers must develop long-term plans to modernize and improve services for clients, and to institutionalize such plans.

The UPU, PAPU (Pan-African Postal Union) and the ILO should try to provide cooperation and technical assistance for these ends. Governments should promote efforts to provide financing for modernization programmes of public postal entities.

National obligations in terms of universal postal service are based on the fundamental rights enshrined in national Constitutions. They are also based on the international commitments of the Universal Postal Convention, adopted at UPU Congresses. The services considered there refer to the obligation of States to provide at least postal correspondence and package services, which are essential to social communication and economic development.

The Government's responsibility to maintain the universal postal service and comply with their obligations to society must be one of the main goals of postal reform. This crucial responsibility, on the most viable and sustainable way to finance postal services, is an essential element in the measures to be adopted.

The current conditions of postal services in the region require special efforts from the governments to address the challenges and risks that threaten the survival of the services. The reforms have sometimes been slow in the region, and adequate legal frameworks are required in order to develop the sector.

The weaknesses of the sector itself and of the postal services it provides are numerous. Therefore, they require the attention of the interested parties in order to support thoroughgoing reforms that cover legal reforms, the transformation of postal entities into business organizations, further efforts at diversification and market expansion, and the use of technology and investment to modernize and develop their operations.

## **Issue 2: Social Dialogue in the Postal Services**

The administrations and workers' organizations appreciate the organization of this seminar by the ILO, the UPU and UNI to promote social dialogue at the national and regional level.

The ideas contained in the Memorandum of Understanding between the UPU and UNI of 2005, and guidance provided by ILO Conventions and UPU standards should be studied, as they could be useful for further developing social dialogue in postal enterprises.

The various forms of social dialogue, such as collective bargaining, information sharing, formal and informal consultations, must be well designed and used. The postal administrations and the workers' organizations should cooperate so that the postal services develop within this dialogue scheme.

Genuine social dialogue is based on the principles of understanding, mutual benefit, respect, responsibility, transparency and trust. The workers and their representatives must have comprehensive knowledge of the intentions of management, including plans. In order to understand this, relevant and useful information will be provided to enrich the decision-making process.

It was agreed that the principles and rights included in the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up must be promoted in order to encourage social dialogue in the postal sector. Collective bargaining agreements must include a clause urging respect for these fundamental principles and rights.

The ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy of 1977 is also relevant to the sector. The application and implementation of these principles and rights will contribute to promoting decent work in the postal sector.

A basic responsibility of government is to consult the social partners to guarantee the appropriate framework for social dialogue and ensure that they operate within this framework. Hence, governments are urged to create an environment conducive to effective social dialogue. It was recommended that the dialogue bodies meet on a regular basis, with an agenda previously agreed upon, and include representatives freely chosen by the parties. In order to be effective and to guarantee the strengthening of tripartism, these bodies require appropriate administrative support.

### **Issue 3: Corporate Social Responsibility and Postal Services in Africa**

Corporate Social Responsibility, whereby postal administrations integrate social, economic and environmental concerns in their business operations and in interaction with customers and stakeholders on a voluntary basis, can add value to the postal business and strengthen its brand image as a good employer and a participating corporate citizen. The postal sector should establish codes of corporate governance or seek to harmonize and improve existing codes.

The meeting recognizes the need to use the UPU guidelines to benchmark the postal operators' performance in regard to the implementation of the agreed reforms. These would be done in conjunction with the Agreement<sup>2</sup> already signed between UNI and UPU (POST EUROP) regarding social, economical and environmental responsibilities, including governance issues.

#### **Issue 4: The Role of Employers and Workers' Organizations: Towards Better Labour-Management Relations**

The postal administration employers recognize that workers' organizations are an important partner in achieving the objectives of the company, whereby both parties must act with responsibility and commitment. At the same time, workers' organizations trust that postal employers will recognize them as representatives of the workers. The basis of relations between the parties must be founded on dialogue, respect and consultation.

The postal administrations and workers' organizations must consider each other as partners in the task of training workers and resolving the problems that arise between employers and workers, with professionalism and understanding of the enterprise's realities and conditions. Good relations between the management and workers are essential to ensure that the interests of the workers and the employers are addressed.

#### **Issue 5: The Impact of the Growth of Electronic Communications on Postal Services**

Technology, electronic communication and new products offer new areas for growth through which workers and the postal administration could be in a more viable and appropriate position to offer better terms and conditions of employment. The UPU and the postal administrations, in cooperation with workers' organizations, should combine their efforts to establish the best joint strategies for taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by the development of electronic commerce and other technological innovations. With the technological changes in the postal sector, relevant training must be carried out to increase the employment potential of postal workers, improve productivity, and redeploy workers according to their abilities and skills, as appropriate.

The participants agree that the introduction of new technologies is necessary and inevitable and that it must be supported. Nonetheless, it also brings effects that should be mitigated by means of appropriate training and retraining in order to resolve problems with redeployment or to enhance employability for those whose jobs are at

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<sup>2</sup> "Joint statement of the EU social partners in the postal sector on Corporate Social Responsibility," Brussels, 23 Nov. 2005.

risk, for which social dialogue to agree on the introduction of new technologies is essential.

### **Final remarks**

This seminar is a good example of social dialogue at the regional and international level. The participants are grateful that the ILO, the UPU and UNI have launched this discussion, and urge them to adopt other initiatives to institutionalize or formalize a mechanism for social dialogue and to extend it to other regions of the world.

The seminar has highlighted the importance of social dialogue in postal services of Africa. This represents a great challenge for the regulators, employers and workers. Social dialogue to strengthen and modernize postal services must represent a positive sum for governments, companies and the workers. Using as a basis Objective 4 and 5 of the Bucharest Postal Strategy (October 2004) and the conclusions of the Joint Regional Seminar in Bangkok (May 2000) and Lima (August 2003), of the ILO Tripartite Meeting in Geneva (May 2002), and of the UPU Strategic Conference in Geneva (October 2002), the Seminar participants recognize the importance of social dialogue that is adapted to the realities of each country for finding joint solutions.

### **Follow-up<sup>3</sup>**

In accordance with the conclusions of this seminar, the participants propose that:

- The postal administrations and workers' organizations examine ways to organize meetings at national level and a follow-up seminar in the region for postal administrations and workers' organizations, with support and possible assistance from the UPU and the ILO.
- The ILO, the UPU, and UNI-Postal prepare a report based on the discussions held at the seminar between postal administrations, employers and workers' organizations;
- The postal administrations and workers' organizations provide information to the UPU and UNI on ways to promote social responsibility within their operations.

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<sup>3</sup> Discussed in the closing session of the seminar and drafted by consensus on 29 November 2006 by the seminar participants, the ILO, the UPU and UNI-Postal.