

**MAKING DECENT WORK A GLOBAL GOAL  
AND A NATIONAL REALITY**  
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**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS AND DECENT WORK COUNTRY  
PROGRAMMES**

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The world of work has never experienced such rapid and profound changes as in recent times, globally as well as locally. Adjusting to these changes and coping with the new challenges has become a major preoccupation for all actors involved: social partners, governments, transnational companies, SMEs, NGOs. To face globalization, they are turning for advice and assistance to international organizations that have means to forge collective responses and consistent policies to shape a fair globalization. They are increasingly turning to the ILO because it has the convincing strategy to achieve this objective – the Decent Work Agenda and the reliable means to strengthen the Members' capacity to implement it – Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP). In recent years, the Decent Work Agenda has been universally endorsed at the highest political level and the DWCPs have become the main instrument for ILO's cooperation with member States and its specific contribution to international development frameworks.

So far some 70 DWCPs have been developed or are in an advanced stage of development. These country programmes mobilize more consistently the wide range of means of action (standards, technical assistance, research, advocacy, etc.) at the disposal of the ILO to fulfill the national priorities and set in motion a new momentum for a dynamic and constructive tripartism. They reflect the new "integrated approach" which empowers each Member to determine not only the amount and the mix of appropriate means of action and inputs but also the pace at which each priority is implemented. Each Member adapts the inputs that constitute Decent Work in accordance with its specificities and the preferences of those concerned. Finding the right dosage of ingredients which make up Decent Work in a given country and prescribing the right pace of their administration is ultimately a matter of better governance and tripartite leadership in adopting an integrated approach to development. So the question is how much and what standards that should be added to the Decent Work country mixture or, to put it in terms of the title of my intervention, of the role and place of international labour standards (ILS) in the DWCPs.

If the impact of ILS is to be sustainable, DWCPs must be firmly anchored in the realities of each country and the tripartite dialogue between the social partners. In this way, ILS become perceived not so much as defining a static level playing field but rather as "enabling rights" setting benchmarks and encouraging countries to maintain a dynamic of progress which translates economic gains into decent living standards for all those concerned. ILS thus serve as instruments of social development and their

impact is amplified and sustained through combined impact of all other inputs in the DWCP. ILS are not posing themselves as a stand-alone item of the DWCPs, rather they are aspiring to become part and parcel of the corresponding national priorities and strategies included in them. From this point of view, three features become particularly important to which I would like now to draw your attention.

First, the integrated approach to the design of DWCP should be extended to ILS by systematically integrating normative elements with policy and operational dimensions of the DWCPs, thus ensuring greater coordination at the country level and elaboration of more comprehensive development strategies. Speaking of strategies, one has to consider ILS not one by one but in groups or families of standards, which cover a given area and permit a holistic approach and its integrated management.

For instance, DWCP must embed the four sets of fundamental Conventions: Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87); Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). Freedom from forced labour – Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29); Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105). Child labour – Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Non-discrimination – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

Another example, is the family of occupational safety and health (OSH) standards which count over 40 instruments, including 14 Conventions and 16 Recommendations which are modern and up-to-date. Integrated management of this web of instruments is ensured through the Global Strategy on OSH adopted by the ILO in 2003 and the new Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 187) and Recommendation (No. 197) adopted in 2006. These instruments focus on a systems approach to OSH calling for development of a national strategy, policy and programme in OSH. Integrating normative and operational elements of an OSH system, this Convention is particularly well suited for promotion in context of future DWCPs, where OSH is a targeted area of action in many countries. In Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Armenia modernization of the OSH system is listed among the very first priorities. It is an important component in the DWCP for China. Urgent actions in this field have been included in the DWCPs in other regions of the world, which would require better integrative thinking for future planning.

Second, promotion of ILS should be result oriented, ensuring steady progress in practice supported by time-bound technical assistance projects in DWCPs with clearly defined benchmarks. This goes hand-in-hand with the application of results-based management techniques in DWCP planning and management, whereas the impact of the resources deployed is assessed against the results achieved.

In conditions of globalization and accelerated change, securing results as quickly as possible becomes the new *modus operandi* not only of business companies, but also of public administrations and international donors. A singular feature of ILS adopted in recent years consists in that they link time and responsibility as never before to the point of requiring urgent action for their implementation. While the previous generation of promotional Conventions adopted before the venue of the era of globalization favored gradual and progressive approach in implementing their provisions, the new generation of standards appear to be less patient in achieving results. In fact, we may be witnessing a rapid transition from the mere obligation to endeavor to promote certain national policies to a much more pointed obligation to achieve results in the shortest time possible. An obligation of getting urgent results backed by the earmarked technical assistance formed the essence of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted in 1998. Since the adoption in the same year of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention No. 182, time-bound action programmes have become a new mechanism of implementation of standards. Convention No. 184 on the Safety and Health in Agriculture, 2001, included an obligation to designate the precise authority, which could be held responsible for the effective implementation of the policy. To achieve better results, the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 introduced a mechanism of “continuous monitoring of application” by all stakeholders from the national level all the way up to the international level backed by a certification system for labour compliance. Finally, Convention No. 187 establishing Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health propped up the obligation of result by supplementing a national policy with an operational programme fixing concrete objectives to be achieved in a predetermined time frame. Needless to say that DWCPs are also result oriented and could be well guided by standards whose implementation is defined in terms of time-bound objectives.

Third, to make a difference, implementation of ILS through DWCPs should be accompanied by enhanced enforcement measures. Only a strong labour inspection system can ensure that Decent Work standards are effectively implemented and maintained at the enterprise level. It is through inspection and enforcement that workers and their communities are protected, employment prospects are enhanced and social and economic development made sustainable. The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, has added a strong enforcement arm – certification and flag and port state control to deliver a level playing field for seafarers’ rights and Decent Work for them.

The ILO Committee of Experts in its General Survey of 2006 on Labour Inspection emphasized the role of labour inspection in promoting decent work and greater enterprise productivity. In November 2006, the ILO Governing Body decided to strengthen labour inspection as a key component of Decent Work and DWCPs, emphasizing the links between labour inspection, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Future DWCPs will have to recognise the central role that labour inspection has to play in promoting Decent Work at the enterprise level and to integrate labour inspection more effectively within other ILO programmes, such as those on general working conditions, wages and industrial relations, HIV/AIDS, social security, forced and child labour, and informal economy.

In this respect the ILO Programme and Budget for 2008-09 provides for the promotion of modern inspection practices, establishment of an Internet-based labour inspection portal and development of the Integrated Labour Inspection Training System.

Combining integrated management of standards and social policies, result oriented approach and enhanced enforcement will no doubt ensure that ILS and DWCPs will help ILO constituents and the international community at large find more effective responses to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.