

11th African Regional Meeting
Addis Ababa

Information Note

Parallel Session IV: Governance and Social Dialogue

Thursday, 26 April

14.00-16.00

*Reinforcing the strength – the voice – the organization – the potential
of tripartism to guide the way in Africa.*

If the world is committed to national ownership of poverty reduction strategies, then we have to be serious about reinforcing the social and economic arm of governments and helping African social partners to organize and exercise their voice as the real actors of the economy. This is integral to good governance and making decent work a national reality.

Eleventh African Regional Meeting - Addis Ababa, April 2007 - Report of the Director-General

Introduction

As more and more African countries hold free and fair elections, efforts are also ongoing in a number of countries in the region to revitalize or to create effective institutions for social dialogue that will facilitate participation by tripartite partners in decision-making processes and to establish effective conflict prevention and resolution mechanism, however much still remains to be done. Adopting these measures could form an important basis for improved governance.

Social dialogue and governance also have an important role to play at sub-regional and continental levels. The challenge is for African tripartite constituents to fully explore the scope for working with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and groupings such as the Organization for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) from the perspective of promoting social dialogue and strengthening the social dimensions of Africa's engagement in the global economy. Efforts in this direction have already been made in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), the Central Africa Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the East African Community (EAC).

Objectives

This session will discuss in concrete terms, progress as well as remaining challenges to address the promotion of strengthened tripartite institutions and more effective social dialogue at national and regional levels that can ensure that the Decent Work Agenda for African development is fully articulated and included in national development strategies for the achievement of the MDGs. This session will also identify a limited number of priorities/indicators against which progress could be measured at the next regional meeting and will shape future ILO work in this area.

Key issues and challenges

Several governance and social dialogue challenges arise in relation to promoting a decent work agenda in Africa.

First, an important, but often neglected, aspect concerns the role of public policies and institutions in promoting decent work. The earlier distinction between the private and public sectors or between “markets” and “the state” has turned out to be a false dichotomy. The most successful countries are those where the public and the private sectors have joined forces to maintain effective demand, to stimulate investment, to improve productivity and to distribute the benefits widely. Public policies are also necessary to create an enabling environment for the private sector and stimulate pro-poor economic growth. What is required is not less government, but better government. Unfortunately, the important role of labour administration, labour courts, social dialogue and dispute settlement bodies is often neglected as is the role of international and national labour laws. Constructive social dialogue is based on respect for democratic principles, workers’ rights, and the independence of employers’ and workers’ organizations. The legal framework is thus founded on the principles of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and is reinforced by ratification and effective implementation of the Labour Administration Convention, 1978 (No. 150), the Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No. 151), the Workers’ Representatives Convention, 1971 (No. 135), the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144), and the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154). Also, although almost all countries in Africa have ratified the fundamental Conventions – the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No.29), the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105), the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No.87), the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No.98), the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951(No.100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention 1958 (No.111), the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182) – their full implementation has not yet been achieved. In some countries, large groups of workers, in particular public service employees and agricultural workers, are denied the right to meet and organize (in many cases by law). This exclusion of such a large proportion of workers has contributed to narrowing the coverage of social dialogue.

Second, despite some encouraging progress, the weak institutional and human resource capacity of the social partners constitutes a major hindrance to their effective engagement in collective bargaining, prevention and settlement of industrial disputes and social dialogue on broader policy issues. It is crucial to focus on enhancing the capacity of trade unions to negotiate collective agreements, to analyse labour market information, to better understand international labour standards and national labour legislation, to apply dispute prevention and resolution procedures, and to use socio-economic data to support collective bargaining skills. Concomitantly, it is also essential that attention be paid to the strengthening of the capacity of independent employers’ organizations to enable them to articulate the legitimate interests of large and small businesses.

A *third* challenge when it comes to strengthening democratic governance is to involve all stakeholders in national decision-making processes and in managing labour policy. Tripartite consultations should be broadened to eventually cover the whole range of labour, employment and macroeconomic policies. To date, social dialogue in most African countries has focused mainly on workplace concerns so far rather than trying to influence national economic and development policies. As a result, in most countries, ILO constituents have had only a limited

role in the design and formulation of national development policies and strategies. Most of the critical decisions that could contribute to greater policy coherence and achieving decent work are made by institutions outside the labour sphere, such as ministries of finance, economic affairs, planning and trade, as well as central banks. All these actors need to be made aware of DWCP priorities and the way in which their achievement can contribute to broader national development goals and economic growth.

Possible questions for debate

- Concrete ways and means to support positive steps to be taken by African countries to promote three closely linked public policy areas (effective participation through social dialogue, an equitable legal framework and stronger labour administration) that are crucial for promoting social dialogue and good social and economic governance in Africa
- Concrete ways and means to promote tripartism and social dialogue in the traditional ILO context of industrial relations. The social partners should also discuss the setting up socio-economic councils or similar mechanisms that can discuss and advise on broader social issues and promote inter-ministerial cooperation on issues that go beyond the competence of labour ministries
- Concrete ways and means to support positive steps taken by Employers' and workers' organizations to adopt strategic planning methods to enable them to make their activities more coherent and bring consistency to their contributions to national policy formulation
- Concrete ways and means to encourage social dialogue within Regional Economic Communities.