



## 5. A review of activities and the way forward

### A review of activities in the Asia-Pacific region

#### ***East Asia***

#### **Strategic Objective No. 1: Promote and realize fundamental principles and rights at work**

While the campaign for universal ratification of the ILO core Conventions has had some very positive results in the South-East Asian subregion, significant gaps remain, as pointed out by the Expert-Advisers on the ILO Declaration. Extensive and deep-rooted problems of lack of freedom of association, forced labour, child labour and discrimination persist. The limitations of operational programmes in these areas resulted, at least in part, from a lack of resources. Once funding in support of the Declaration became available, it proved possible to do more, as had been the case earlier with child labour.

Although funds and expert time were devoted throughout the period under review to providing training and support to member States in order to help them comply with their reporting obligations under the ILO Constitution, some governments are still encountering considerable difficulties in this regard. This stems in part from inadequate human resources in labour ministries and frequent transfers of staff, as well as the demands arising from frequent questionnaires and requests for information. Since this is a recurring problem, new and more sustainable strategies need to be devised to allow the labour ministries and the ILO to address it jointly.

Numerous resolutions of the International Labour Conference and decisions of the ILO Governing Body have underlined the importance of linking ILO standards to technical cooperation programmes. During the period under review, efforts continued in this direction, but more remains to be done to follow up systematically the problems and issues identified by the Committee of Experts through operational activities.

**Strategic Objective No. 2:  
Create greater opportunities for women and men  
to secure decent employment and income**

The programmes and projects designed to generate employment, especially in the small business sector, were generally highly successful. They usually applied and adapted the SIYB (Start and Improve your Business) methodology. One weak point to be remedied is the tracking of the employment results after the active project phase. Studies in other regions have shown that, while the programme may create many job opportunities, the sector is very volatile and many jobs disappear as well. It is therefore important to concentrate more attention on the sustainability of the small enterprises and jobs generated. A good example in this connection is the ASIST (Advisory Support, Information Services and Training for Labour-Based Infrastructure Programmes) project for the generation of employment through public works and infrastructural programmes. It has moved from an initial focus on short-term reconstruction-based employment projects to much more extensive and ongoing national infrastructure projects.

During the period under review, considerable efforts were devoted to advising member States on how to establish or improve their labour information systems, especially statistics. With the notable exception of Nepal, there was frequently little concrete follow-up to the recommendations of the ILO experts. The usual reason cited was the lack of resources both internally, as a result of insufficient government budgets, and externally, because of a relative lack of donor interests in this area. As indicated in Chapter 2 above, an adequate information and statistical base is indispensable to understand and remedy deficiencies in the management of the labour market. It is hoped that more priority can be given to this sector in both national and donor budgets.

In relation to employment, more attention needs to be paid to the special problems and issues of those at the extremes of the age scale. On the one hand, youth unemployment, most critically in countries with young populations, has to be given greater priority because of the disproportionate number of young people who are without jobs. On the other, certain large countries in the region are confronting a rapidly ageing workforce and need to develop more appropriate policies for this demographic group.

Some success was achieved in the definition of policies and guidelines to integrate people with disabilities into the labour market,

but there was perhaps too much emphasis on government policies and structures. Over the last five years it has become clear that much more collaboration is to be sought from the private sector and trade unions on this issue.

While a very effective series of activities was carried out in Thailand, in cooperation with the ministries of labour and education, to assist tribal people to generate income and find employment, in many countries such people live in conditions of abject poverty and exclusion. Using extra-budgetary resources, it has been possible to strengthen EASMAT (East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team) expertise and capacity in this regard, thus making it possible to provide more assistance for this vulnerable population group in the future.

Very significant progress has been made on women's employment and conditions of work in the South-East Asian subregion, both through the mainstreaming of gender considerations in projects and programmes of general scope, as well as through targeted operational activities. The sad reality remains, however, that in many countries of the region women's wages and incomes are significantly lower than men's and there are still many obstacles to equality of opportunity in training, employment, business and social protection. It is a demonstrable fact that women's employment is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and thus must be at the centre of any development strategy.

**Strategic Objective No. 3:  
Enhance the coverage and effectiveness  
of social protection for all**

The WISE (Work Improvements in Small Enterprises) programme has had a very positive impact in the subregion and has been welcomed by small businesses, since it combines ergonomic improvements with accident reduction, both of which result in greater productivity and efficiency at the workplace. Given the very large proportion of the workforce engaged in small and micro business, this programme should clearly be expanded.

Tragically, the subregion continues to witness large industrial accidents with major loss of life and often serious environmental consequences. The occupational safety and health specialist and the labour administration specialists are collaborating to help member States to improve their capacity to reduce such risks, along with the cooperation of workers and employers.

During the period under review the ILO embarked on a systematic effort to eradicate preventable occupational diseases, in particular silicosis and related pneumoconiosis. While it does represent a considerable investment of ILO funds, the programme has had a positive impact.

Until the year 2000, the ILO had not participated in the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). It then began to design, in conjunction with the Programme, a structured approach to the problem, based on the ILO's tripartite strengths. This participation has been welcomed by the constituents and the United Nations system alike and will certainly develop rapidly.

A major component of the ILO programme in China, South-East Asia and the ASEAN countries, has been in the field of social security. It has proved difficult for the ILO field structure – even with considerable assistance from headquarters – to respond to the enormous volume of work requested of it in this area. Important progress has been achieved by, for example, the design and implementation of an entirely new social security regime in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The ILO has also been given a central role in the recasting of the social security system in China and several other countries. If the Office is to be able to meet the rapidly growing demands from constituents in this sector, more human and financial resources will have to be found to support these efforts. It is, however, a measure of the ILO's success and credibility in this complex field that so many requests continue to flow in.

The formal schemes which are in place, even those that have been modernized and restructured, tend to be very limited in their coverage. It is a paradox that those most in need of social protection, such as the rural poor and urban informal workers, are precisely those who are least likely to benefit from existing social protection programmes. It is therefore urgent to ensure that adequate social protection arrangements are extended to as much of the population as possible and, most particularly, to those who are in greatest need.

New social insurance schemes, geared to the needs of increasingly complex and globalized labour markets require a sophisticated set of management skills that are not always available, especially if there are decentralized responsibilities and structures, which require a much greater number of staff. Some training materials have been developed by the ILO, but this sector will require much more attention in the future.

The model for measuring the efficiency of social expenditure which was developed by the Social Security Department at headquar-

ters has given rise to considerable interest in the South-East Asian sub-region, not only from national governments but also from international financial institutions and other development partners. Both the concept and the methodology will be tested in the region in the near future and the demand for assistance in setting up such models is expected to rise dramatically.

#### **Strategic Objective No. 4: Strengthen tripartism and social dialogue**

Increasing democratization and the influence of commercial globalization have given rise to much more interest than hitherto in the areas of social dialogue and both bipartite and tripartite mechanisms for consultation and negotiation. During the period under review, most attention was concentrated on collective bargaining processes at various social and economic levels. Recently constituents have been requesting more assistance on broader mechanisms and procedures for social dialogue. Results have been mixed because the success of such initiatives depends on a number of fundamental factors, such as autonomous and strong organizations of employers and workers, transparency, accuracy and accessibility of information, the rule of law, etc., which are not always present but without which social dialogue can only be a sham. Transition processes take time and effort but seldom succeed unless there is the political will on all sides to carry them through. The Office should perhaps be more selective about the contexts in which it offers technical assistance in this sector, favouring those where it is clear that there is a real will to progress.

Precisely in order to support and build the type of autonomous and strong workers' and employers' organizations – as well as to strengthen the governments' structures – programmes and projects in support of this aim have continued to form an important component of the ILO programme during the period under review. Many encouraging results have been seen, especially in the areas of joint consultation and action by trade unions in a number of countries and in strengthening the capacity of employers' organizations to plan their operations and orient them more towards the needs and priorities of their members.

## ***South-East Asia and the Pacific***

### **Strategic Objective No. 1**

The follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, giving fuller effect to the principles and rights relating to freedom of association and collective bargaining, discrimination and child labour, are all issues that merit attention in the subregion. The technical assistance projects on the Declaration being implemented in Indonesia are expected to provide much greater impetus to the activities in this sphere. While technical assistance – by way of awareness raising, advocacy and training activities – has been undertaken to develop the capacities of the social partners to promote the fundamental Conventions, recent changes at higher levels of the civil service in some countries in the subregion make it imperative to pursue these efforts. Technical assistance is also being provided to national authorities in the subregion for the formulation and/or amendment of labour laws, taking into account the provisions of ILO standards. Further advice and training on ILO standards and procedures is, however, clearly needed in some countries in the subregion.

The activities undertaken in the subregion for the progressive elimination of child labour include advocacy, the dissemination of information and the provision of technical assistance targeted at specific groups. The networks developed by the IPEC project in the subregion are an important vehicle for achieving the desired objectives. Greater attention is now being paid to strengthening the national system for collection and analysis of data on child labour. This would also be useful in focusing the interventions more effectively.

### **Strategic Objective No. 2**

Employment promotion and the promotion of decent work are among the priority areas of ILO work in the subregion. The Philippines has been selected for the Decent Work Pilot Programme (DWPP). The social partners in the Philippines continue to be actively involved in consultations in preparation for the launch of the pilot programme.

The development of the informal sector is considered as one of the means of reducing poverty in the countries in the subregion. The ILO technical assistance provided in this area includes enhancing trade union support for the informal sector, strengthening the capacity of the network of homeworkers and providing training programmes

for municipal officials aimed at developing a better appreciation of the informal sector. Considerably more technical advisory input may be required for this sector in the not too distant future.

Skills training is recognized as one of the key elements in promoting employability. The planning and delivery of skills training programmes for the informal sector are now being given greater attention in the countries in the subregion. The related issues concern skills training for women and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of skills training for the information and communication technology (ICT) sector.

The community-based training approach developed by the ILO is viewed as one of the more useful training methodologies for the promotion of self-employment opportunities in poor rural and urban communities in the subregion. The Philippines was one of the earliest countries where this approach was pilot tested. Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Fiji were later supported in applying this methodology. No significant follow-up has, however, been undertaken due to lack of donor interest in this activity.

Considerable work has been done in the subregion to promote entrepreneurship through Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training programmes. With a view to ensuring greater sustainability of the outcome of these programmes, the focus has now shifted to helping the national authorities to create a more conducive enabling environment for the promotion of SMEs, for instance through the review and updating of SME policy. The collaboration of the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank has been secured for some of the phases of these activities.

Youth unemployment and the training of seafarers are two issues of serious concern to the countries in the subregion, including the countries of the Pacific Islands. Given the common concerns relating to these two issues in all the countries in the subregion, it may be useful to explore the feasibility of providing technical assistance on these issues by way of a subregional programme.

### **Strategic Objective No. 3**

There is growing concern with work-related accidents and diseases in the subregion. In this context, the ILO's Work Improvements in Small Enterprises (WISE) programme in the Philippines has proved effective in disseminating relevant guidelines throughout the country. The WISE approach has now become part of the labour inspection system of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).

With support from EASMAT and headquarters, technical assistance has been provided for the review of current forms of social protection in the Philippines and Indonesia. The Social Security System (SSS)/ILO Disability Project implemented in the Philippines has been instrumental in the development of a manual to replace the one currently in use in the SSS for the assessment of disability. While the new manual has been accepted by the SSS Board, the extent of its implementation remains to be seen.

The welfare of migrant workers has received much attention in both the Philippines and Indonesia. Technical assistance provided in this sphere relates to developing more effective strategies to ensure the welfare of migrant workers. It will, however, be necessary to seek collaboration with the labour-receiving countries in the region to ensure sustained impact in this respect.

As elsewhere, there is growing recognition in the countries of the subregion that the official figures may not be an accurate reflection of the numbers affected by HIV/AIDS. In response to this concern, the capacity of the Philippine workers' organizations is being strengthened to address the prevention of HIV/AIDS in the workplace. The social partners in the other countries in the subregion should also engage themselves in such activities.

#### **Strategic Objective No. 4**

ILO activities with the employers' and workers' organizations in the subregion have focused on further strengthening their capacity to address a number of issues including the impact of globalization, the promotion of occupational safety and health, HIV/AIDS, enhanced gender sensitivity, the elimination of child labour, the promotion of harmonious industrial relations, and improved productivity. The nature and scope of activities undertaken with the social partners in the various countries in the subregion have depended, among other things, on their respective absorptive capacity. This situation points to the imperative of added technical support for those organizations which are currently relatively less endowed. Some of the issues that are priority concerns in the countries of the subregion in this context include strengthening tripartism, social dialogue and the labour institutions that underpin them.

#### ***South Asia***

The countries covered by the South Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (SAAT) in the South Asian region have a relatively high

incidence of underemployment and poverty. The region is currently undergoing a process of economic reform and the opening up of its economies. As a consequence, a number of issues, both general and sector-specific, have emerged which are of major concern to the ILO and its social partners. Given their importance, these issues need to be addressed and taken into account in both our current and future activities with a view to helping the tripartite constituents to meet the challenges inherent in economic reforms and structural adjustment measures. A brief description of the major issues, MTD (multidisciplinary advisory team) action and future challenges in each area under the four strategic objectives is given below.

### Strategic Objective No. 1

The Declaration now features prominently in all SAAT activities. The ILO/SAAT brochure on ILO fundamental Conventions has been updated and will include a special flyer on the Declaration. The rate of ratification of fundamental Conventions in South Asia is high compared to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

To the already relatively high number of ratifications of core ILO Conventions have been added ratifications of Convention No. 100 by Bangladesh, Convention No. 111 by Sri Lanka and Convention No. 122 by India. India is currently discussing the ratification of Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 but this may require a special promotional effort. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not ratified Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 either, but the emergence of tripartite consultative machinery at the national level and democratic developments in general make ratification prospects encouraging. Despite IPEC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour) assistance throughout South Asia, Nepal and Sri Lanka remain the only countries in the region to have ratified Convention No. 138 so far. The promotion of Convention No. 182 and Recommendation No. 190, and better coordination between IPEC and promotional efforts, may go some way to redressing the anomaly.

Despite its above-average rate of ratification, there are serious constraints in the region on the application of the fundamental Conventions particularly in the area of freedom of association. This is particularly true of the export processing zones where restrictions on union activity are promoted or tolerated. The bonded labour system continues in some countries in spite of the fact that forced labour is constitutionally prohibited and bonded labour outlawed. The reasons for the limited application of Conventions can be traced to a lack of general awareness of standards, the existence of a large unorganized

sector, the gradual erosion of tripartite consultation, and a rule of law plagued by legislative inertia, inadequate enforcement machinery and an ineffective judicial infrastructure.

In order to deal with these constraints, SAAT is taking a number of practical measures which include organizing a series of awareness-raising seminars on the Declaration in South Asian countries. Training courses have also been held for government officials and civil society organizations in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Publicity materials, such as ILO/SAAT's, "The fundamental human rights Conventions of the ILO – A series of slides on the highlights of the Declaration" – and a regularly updated backgrounder entitled *The International Labour Organization and international labour standards*, have proven to be effective in raising awareness. Technical assistance has also been provided to countries to rationalize and simplify their labour laws.

Assistance to help governments discharge constitutional and reporting obligations has been provided in the form of technical advisory services to Bangladesh and Nepal, and in the form of training courses and fellowships to Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Child labour also remains a formidable challenge in many South Asian countries despite significant efforts to enforce relevant legislation. The elimination of the most intolerable aspects of child labour, namely bondage and child slavery, dangerous and hazardous work, and the exploitation of very young children, must therefore be a priority in South Asian countries. The ILO has been providing technical assistance to member States through IPEC. The rehabilitation of children from hazardous workplaces has been a key strategy that IPEC has been pursuing with the support and cooperation of governmental and non-governmental organizations, trade unions, employers' organizations, United Nations agencies and bilateral donors. It has also been addressing issues such as institution building, the training of enforcement officers, the sensitization of parents of child workers and awareness raising among the social partners and civil society groups. Strengthening this programme and developing additional national initiatives will create conditions for the gradual elimination of child labour. The challenge for the countries is to provide free and compulsory primary education and to change attitudes which encourage the social and political acceptance of child labour. In this context, the role of the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court of India, has been instrumental in transforming such attitudes through its landmark judgements on the issue. It is imperative to carry forward this process with active cooperation between the judiciary, the social partners and civil society groups.

## Strategic Objective No. 2

Declining or slow growth in formal sector employment in many South Asian countries has led to increased pressure to generate employment opportunities in the informal sector. The work of the ILO in this area has focused on building the capacity of employers' organizations in the areas of management and small enterprise development; meeting the challenges of globalization, competition and productivity; the development of women entrepreneurs; and training and support regarding self-employment for redundant workers during the processes of privatization and economic restructuring.

The ILO's national employment strategies, as prepared for Nepal and Pakistan, have proved useful in encouraging these countries to put emphasis on employment in their planning activities. However, such strategies are largely dependent on well-functioning labour market institutions and information systems. India has recognized the need to strengthen such institutions, particularly in view of its bid to undertake labour policy reforms in tandem with its second generation of economic reforms. Besides providing policy advice in India for such labour policy reforms, SAAT has developed technical cooperation projects in order to strengthen the national capacity to formulate labour market policies, conduct labour market analysis and develop labour market information systems.

In the field of labour market policies, the ILO has given direct advice in South Asia on wage policies, the labour market implications of privatization and industrial restructuring, the problems of labour redundancy, and methods of reconciling the need for adequate labour protection with labour market flexibility. A report on economic reforms and labour policies in India, discussed at a national tripartite workshop, attracted considerable attention from policy-makers and other social partners. The recommendations concerning active employment exchanges catering to the needs of both the organized and unorganized sectors were included in the *Approach Paper to India's Ninth Five-Year Plan*.

The countries in the region have placed a great deal of emphasis on job creation through the promotion of self-employment and the improvement of small enterprises. The ILO has provided assistance on strengthening local capacities to use its highly popular SIYB (Start and Improve Your Business) training packages for entrepreneurship development, for example, in Sri Lanka and Nepal, and has been currently carrying out a nationwide exercise in Pakistan to review and assess the impact of policy and regulatory environment on the creation of decent jobs. In the absence of a conducive policy and appro-

appropriate regulatory environment to stimulate the growth of modern small enterprises, the promotion of self-employment may only result in the further expansion of the informal sector.

Developing the skills of the workforce, particularly the youth element, with a view to self-employment, has been a challenge for the ILO. The need to reform the national institutions to respond to the requirements of the workforce and of small enterprises has been recognized. However, the obsolescence of centralized training institutions points to the need for new approaches and, in particular, to decentralized, enterprise-responsive training programmes. The technical assistance programmes for youth self-employment in Sri Lanka and Nepal combine skills development and entrepreneurship development packages (such as SIYB and KAB (Know about Business)). The potential role of industry has not yet been fully explored. ILO initiatives to reform the national training system and establish a youth human resource exchange in Sri Lanka are expected to provide a model for promoting youth employment in other countries in the region.

A major issue arising out of globalization and structural adjustment programmes has to do with the social consequences of public enterprise privatization, which is gaining momentum in South Asia. The ILO has been investigating the social effects of the privatization process in order to address the issues of labour redundancies, retraining, redeployment and social protection. Social dialogue on these issues is being promoted. In India, the Government has set up the National Renewal Fund to meet the needs in terms of compensation, retraining, rehabilitation and redeployment of workers made redundant by public enterprises. The ILO has helped arrange a national-level discussion on how best to utilize the Fund for such purposes.

Given these problems, ILO advisory services will have to focus on three basic areas: macroeconomic policies to increase the employment intensity of growth, labour market reforms to increase flexibility without jeopardizing labour protection and policies to improve productivity and incomes in the informal sector. Technical assistance would need to focus on eliminating child labour and gender-based discrimination, restructuring labour regulation in the organized sector, designing and implementing safety nets for retrenched workers, restructuring labour market institutions (relating to training, social security and job search) and developing an adequate information base to monitor employment and labour market developments.

The major challenge facing the MDT would be to help design labour market institutions and regulations which can best satisfy the twin imperatives of higher employment growth and competitiveness

on the one hand, and employment security and an adequate level of social protection on the other.

### Strategic Objective No. 3

The crucial need in the field of social and labour protection in the countries of South Asia is to develop a sound national policy which fully reflects present-day needs.

As regards social security, the formal schemes based on the traditional pension scheme and provident fund models in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka need to be maintained and strengthened in the light of global trends towards pension reform, and the ILO/SAAT has advised the governments in this regard. However, the proposals which seem likely to offer the most immediate prospects for extending coverage to greater numbers of unorganized sector workers include the relatively straightforward schemes usually described as welfare funds. Such schemes are suited to public sponsorship, especially at the regional or local government level, as seen in the array of such schemes developed in India's State of Kerala. These schemes are nevertheless subject to fairly complex financial dynamics, and the ILO has been working with the state government to review the policies which will be needed if the schemes are to continue to operate effectively. However, other complementary efforts are needed, not least the many and varied initiatives to be found at the grass-roots level, many of which fit the developing concept of micro-insurance. This has developed most strongly, but by no means only, in the field of insured access to health services.

The activities of SAAT in the occupational safety and health (OSH) field have focused on building up the capacities of the ILO member States in South Asia to prevent occupational injuries and diseases successfully. Due to political commitment elicited by SAAT, intensified action in occupational safety and health has been promoted in the region. This is reflected in the ongoing process of the revision of OSH legislation in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and in the activities aimed at establishing national tripartite bodies to address OSH issues in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and a National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in Sri Lanka. Policy advice and technical guidance have been provided to the ILO constituents to enhance their capacities to design and implement protective policies and preventive programmes. A solid basis has been laid down for long-term cooperation with national authorities through the provision of technical advisory services and direct support for institutional development. Technical assistance was provided to the Government

of Nepal through the implementation of technical cooperation activities to strengthen the National Centre for Occupational Safety and Health in the Ministry of Labour.

Direct technical assistance and guidance for priority action in mining safety was provided to India and Pakistan. The training of occupational physicians in the use of the ILO *International Classification of Radiographs of Pneumoconiosis* for early detection of pneumoconiosis and recommendations for establishing efficient systems of workers' health surveillance resulted in improved protection of workers' health in Indian mines.

The guiding principle behind the overall approach is essentially educational, prompted by the need to develop a workplace culture of safety awareness. An industry which has developed rapidly in the region, and which illustrates the issues in a particularly graphic manner, is that of ship-breaking, and a specific programme is currently being implemented which will focus on this industry in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

While there have been significant achievements in the areas of occupational safety and health and social protection, a number of issues remain unresolved which will require greater attention in future programmes. In the light of the downsizing which has been, and will continue to be, a common result of the growing momentum towards the privatization of public sector enterprises, the question being increasingly asked is what role the social security and related institutions can play in relieving the distress of the workers affected. In the first place, it is important to build and – where necessary – develop those labour market institutions, including active employment exchanges, labour market information systems and training institutions, which are needed to support retrenched workers in reskilling and searching for new jobs. In addition, appropriate safety nets need to be established which would provide retrenched workers with at least a minimal income bridge and reasonable time to look for new work.

More broadly, there is an urgent need for a large-scale extension of social protection, beyond the small fraction – less than 10 per cent – of the labour force, almost entirely in the organized sector, who currently enjoy any sort of coverage. To begin with, national federal governments should strengthen the national institutions, and, hopefully, public confidence in them. They should also encourage, and where possible assist, the provincial governments to strengthen locally based institutions. The involvement of civil society groups is essential in order to reach out to far-flung workers in the informal sector and in rural areas.

The special ILO Programme on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work has moved quickly to develop proposals for work in several countries, including an extensive project to be carried out in India over a number of years. An early product of the global programme is a code of practice for the workplace, which provides a first step for ILO constituents to collaborate in a joint effort to mitigate the impact of this infection which – while it has not yet developed to the same scale as in some other parts of the world – has the potential to be devastating and demands a concerted effort in which the ILO intends to participate fully.

#### Strategic Objective No. 4

The promotion of social dialogue has gained considerable ground in South Asia. It is now widely recognized that social dialogue and sound industrial relations can contribute to increased employment opportunities by improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the member States. They also enable employers and workers to achieve an optimal balance between the efficiency of the enterprise and adequate social protection for workers, enabling them to share the benefits of growth.

In India, the promotion of social dialogue has led to the establishment of enterprise-level bipartite bodies in industrial cities like Bangalore and Delhi. In the Indian Punjab, a recent social dialogue seminar resulted in the establishment of people's labour courts. The authorities were able to solve more than 2,300 cases in a single day which had been pending before the labour courts for years. In Pakistan, trade unions and employers' representatives have been appointed to local councils, further strengthening tripartism. Another important development has been the establishment of bipartite councils in major cities by which all matters of concern to workers and employers are discussed and resolved in a spirit of cooperation.

In order to equip trade unions with better negotiating skills and effective bargaining capacity at the enterprise level and also to build up employee-employer relationships by settling disputes amicably, bipartite workshops continue to be organized in the South Asian region. The principal form of assistance provided to employers' organizations, continues to involve encouraging and helping them to develop long-term strategic plans so that their efforts to assist members have some strategic direction and their own capacities are developed. Technical assistance also continues to be provided for better human resource management, productivity improvement and more harmonious industrial relations based on labour-management cooperation.

The ILO has been active, not only in providing technical advice for the prevention and speedy settlement of labour disputes, but also in undertaking training programmes to strengthen labour inspection and conciliation skills, and improve the operation of industrial courts.

But despite significant efforts and achievements, serious problems in the industrial relations sphere persist in the countries of South Asia, including a lack of protection for contract and home-based workers, the non-application of labour laws in export processing zones, and the exclusion of public servants from freedom of association and collective bargaining. One major problem is that economic liberalization policies, privatization and public-sector reforms in South Asian countries have often lacked effective social dialogue, particularly at the national level, which is necessary to ensure their successful implementation. Moreover, social dialogue depends on the strength and effectiveness of tripartite institutions and on the ability of the social partners to analyse complex labour market developments and economic restructuring policies. Tripartite institutions do exist in South Asian countries, but they are weak. Industrial relations systems are still deeply rooted in dispute settlement; they are not supportive of institutions geared to labour-management cooperation at the enterprise, sectoral or national levels. The labour inspection system does not operate properly. There is a fragmentation and multiplicity of trade unions and a low unionization rate. The trade union movement and collective bargaining are becoming increasingly weak due to growing labour casualization. Employers' and workers' organizations generally only cover the organized sector, which involves less than 10 per cent of the total labour force. The influence of labour ministries on major economic decisions that impact on economic and social conditions is usually limited. There is thus a major challenge to strengthen the capacity of ILO constituents to contribute effectively to economic and social policy-making.

To meet some of these challenges, labour laws and industrial relations systems need urgent reforms based on modern concepts and practices. In India, the Government has set up the Second National Commission on Labour. The Commission is expected to review the relevance of existing labour laws and make appropriate recommendations on flexibility and workers' social protection.

An important challenge for trade unions is to organize "unorganized" workers (contract, casual and rural workers) and bring them under the umbrella of the trade union movement, so that they can also enjoy social security benefits, the right to organize and decent wages. Women, who form a substantial portion of such workers, are

often deprived of maternity benefits and protection. If these issues are not addressed properly, there could be an increase in child labour.

### *Challenges facing women workers in South Asia*

The challenges facing women at work in South Asia today are closely related to the marked shift from an organized and protected economy towards an insecure, flexible and highly discriminatory labour market in which women remain deprived of adequate social protection and labour laws. Ensuring an optimum level of social protection and protection from various forms of work-related discrimination is a high priority for women workers in the unorganized sector. Furthermore, a growth-oriented competitive market demands skilled, diversified, creative and market-responsive women workers. Enhanced self-employment skills, entrepreneurship and knowledge of new technologies are also recognized imperatives. Increasing women's participation and representation in decision-making through social dialogue, particularly in labour administration, employers' organizations and trade unions is another challenge that needs to be addressed. All these efforts could be further promoted if the institutional mechanisms to implement and enforce gender-sensitive policies, programmes and legislation could be adequately strengthened in a sustainable manner.

## A review of activities in the Arab States

### **Strategic Objective No. 1**

The InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration aims to increase understanding of and support for the ratification and application of Conventions. Particular emphasis is placed on issues such as freedom of association, collective bargaining and the elimination of forced labour through training activities and technical advisory services.

### *Promotion of application of core Conventions*

A series of training activities and technical advice culminated in the organization of a tripartite regional seminar on the ratification and application of core Conventions. The seminar was designed to examine the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and mechanisms for its follow-up.

Other activities included a tripartite national seminar on international labour standards in the Syrian Arab Republic; a national seminar in Lebanon for labour inspectors on labour inspection and international labour standards; and the provision of technical contribution to the regional seminar on international labour standards and Arab labour standards.

### *Child labour*

Child labour activities focused on raising awareness, policy on the elimination of child labour with special emphasis on its worst forms, and on the implementation of specific action programmes designed to eliminate child labour.

The Office's efforts to promote the ratification of the fundamental Conventions focused on the elimination of child labour, through the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). During the period under review, Jordan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen ratified Convention No. 138, while Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Yemen ratified Convention No. 182.

Within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding, national programmes on the elimination of child labour were formulated in Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon.

### *Women workers*

Within the framework of the ILO's contribution to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations – Beijing +5 – the Regional Office for Arab States undertook two complementary activities aimed at mainstreaming the issue of gender and equality at work for women. The first activity was to conduct a regional study that reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the region in the area of gender equality at work. The second activity was the organization of a special panel on gender equality at work, during the ILO's Regional Tripartite Consultation on Employment which was a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

Yemen's current economic reform programme has unfortunately implied decreasing job opportunities and social protection for women. In this context, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training is attempting to augment its role in both promoting female employment and protecting women workers and has established a specific directorate for working women. An ILO mission to Yemen helped draft the general functions and organizational structure of the directorate.

### *The occupied Palestinian territories*

The Director-General's *Report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories*<sup>1</sup> confirmed that Palestinian workers regularly face obstacles relating to security and to equality of opportunity and treatment, including restricted access to employment in the occupied territories in Israel and the settlements, a lack of clarity in the applicable minimum wage legislation, the frequent non-payment of wages and the need to use intermediaries to obtain work permits.

### **Strategic Objective No. 2**

In supporting national development efforts in the region, particular attention was given to employment promotion and growth, human resource development and the response to globalization, with a view to promoting decent work for all. Globalization and rapidly changing production systems create both new opportunities and problems for employment. Businesses in the Arab region have to respond to rapidly expanding new technology, new competitors and erratic financial flows. This is often to the detriment of employment, especially in large enterprises, as work is reorganized to achieve productivity goals or capital-intensive systems are introduced.

#### *Regional Tripartite Consultation on Employment: Follow-up to the Social Summit*

Within the framework of the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, and in order to enhance the capacity of constituents to contribute to long-term sustainable growth in the region, the Regional Office for Arab States organized a Regional Tripartite Consultation on Employment. The consultation brought together, for the first time, representatives from governments, employers' and workers' organizations of Arab countries in West Asia, resource persons working on employment issues in the region, and representatives of international and regional organizations.

#### *Multidisciplinary mission to the West Bank and Gaza*

Since October 2000, the Palestinian territories have witnessed the most severe crisis since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993. In response to the emerging crisis, a mission was fielded to the West Bank and Gaza in March 2001 with a view to assessing priority needs in

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<sup>1</sup> ILO: *Report of the Director-General: Appendix*, International Labour Conference, 88th Session, Geneva, 2000.

the current situation and exploring prospects for funding project proposals. A programme addressing the pressing needs for employment promotion and income generation is being launched.

In February 2000, the ILO fielded a multidisciplinary mission to the West Bank and Gaza to enhance, upgrade and expand the ILO technical cooperation programme with the Palestinian Authority and the social partners. Under the overarching objective of creating more employment opportunities for men and women and of establishing a conducive socio-economic environment for decent work, the mission aimed to develop a coherent and cohesive programme of ILO activities in consultation with the Organization's tripartite partners to ascertain their views and to identify areas of action.

#### *Multidisciplinary mission to Iraq*

In May 2000, a multidisciplinary mission was sent to Iraq to review short-term needs and actions required in priority areas and to develop a long-term programme of work through the formulation of new technical projects. Ten project proposals relating to vocational rehabilitation, vocational training, occupational safety and health, labour administration, child labour and women workers were formulated.

#### *Post-conflict employment promotion and socio-economic integration in south Lebanon*

Following the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from south Lebanon, the ILO fielded a multidisciplinary mission on employment and social rehabilitation in July 2000 to assess the situation on the ground with a view to developing a coherent programme of ILO response to the identified needs and relevant development challenges. The primary objectives of the mission were to promote job opportunities by maximizing the socio-economic potential of the south and its integration with the rest of Lebanon and to enhance the rehabilitation and socio-economic integration of the various vulnerable crisis-affected groups. The mission produced projects in the fields of employment promotion and labour market monitoring, micro- and small enterprise development, vocational training, occupational safety and health, women workers, child labour, labour administration, and employers' and workers' organizations.

### **Strategic Objective No. 3**

The programme corresponding to this objective was mainly designed to develop capacity building to promote the adoption of new

international labour standards relating to working and employment conditions and the implementation of appropriate policies and programmes to develop occupational safety and health services and prevent occupational hazards. Efforts were intensified to develop measures aimed at protecting agricultural workers from hazards associated with agriculture. It also addressed the need to improve the working and employment conditions of vulnerable groups.

In view of the limited, and sometimes non-existent, social security coverage in the region, the activities were designed to help countries implement social security reforms and strengthen social safety nets for unprotected workers. The programme also covered women workers and their social security rights.

### *Occupational safety and health*

Within the framework of the interregional programme on managing safety in particularly hazardous occupations, work continued on the implementation of a national project on occupational safety and health in agriculture in collaboration with the General Organization for the Exploitation and Development of the Euphrates Basin in the Syrian Arab Republic. The aim of the project is to protect the lives of 25,000 workers and their families from the hazards associated with agriculture, including exposure to pesticides and chemicals, accidents and injuries, biological hazards, and exposure to noise and heat.

Within the framework of the interregional programme to support the design and implementation of tripartite national occupational safety and health policies and measures, a national seminar on safety in the use of chemicals at work was held in Amman. The objective of this seminar was to enable the social partners concerned with occupational safety and health to exchange experiences and technical views and to strengthen the capacities of occupational safety and health personnel in the chemical sector and improve their performance.

### *Social security*

With a view to assisting the countries in the region in developing a strategic approach to the development of national social security systems, the ILO organized an interregional tripartite seminar on social protection strategies for the Arab countries. The objectives of the seminar were to enhance the capacity of governments to deal with pension and social security reform and to identify technical assistance and training needs in the region. As an outcome of the seminar and,

in response to the needs of the countries, a draft regional project document on the development of social security systems was formulated to establish a technical assistance programme to enhance the managerial capacities of social security institutions in the region.

#### **Strategic Objective No. 4**

Under the rapidly changing economic and social conditions in the region, the social partners have been endeavouring to redefine and consolidate their roles in national development efforts. In this context, ILO activities under this strategic objective focused on strengthening the social partners' capacities, in terms of their institutional framework and expertise, on various issues of critical importance in the respective countries. These are mainly related to fundamental principles and rights at work, globalization and new technologies, employment promotion, poverty alleviation and social protection. The ILO also provided opportunities for tripartite consultations on specific technical subjects, as reviewed above, and promoted sustained social dialogue by establishing the appropriate mechanisms and institutions.

##### *Promotion of tripartism and social dialogue*

The ILO Regional Office for Arab States, in collaboration with the InFocus Programme on Social Dialogue, organized the interregional meeting for Arab countries on the promotion of tripartism and social dialogue in Beirut. The seminar was designed to assess the status of social dialogue in view of the current social and economic changes taking place in Arab countries and to identify development prospects. Additionally, the labour law audit carried out in selected countries, e.g. in the United Arab Emirates, with the assistance of the ILO's programme on Government Labour Law and Administration (GLLAD), has helped to identify areas requiring further technical assistance.

##### *Assisting workers' organizations*

Addressing a wide range of issues, advisory services and training were provided to strengthen the capacities of workers' organizations in the region. National seminars and workshops were organized on trade union rights, labour dispute settlement, globalization and its impact on workers, and wage policy.

In Lebanon, a project was designed to strengthen the technical capacities of the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (GCLW) to further improve its effectiveness in social dialogue. Three seminars were organized within the framework of the project: trade

union involvement in social, legislative and economic development; women's issues at work in precarious situations; improvement of administration, function and structure of trade unions. These seminars were particularly geared to young trade unionists as training for their future leadership roles.

### *Assisting employers' organizations*

Technical advisory missions were carried out to Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and the West Bank and Gaza to help employers' organizations identify their needs and to provide advice to enhance existing services or establish new ones.

Seminars and workshops were organized in Bahrain, Oman, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Qatar to develop managerial and entrepreneurial capacity, especially for women, and to identify employers' strategies and policies to accommodate emerging needs.

### The way forward

This overview points to some general conclusions.

First, all countries are facing similar problems in responding to the challenges of the emerging global economy, while coping with specific problems of development, institutional change and structural adjustment. Everywhere, existing institutional structures, including the State, are under challenge to ensure and promote fundamental rights at work, driven by demographic change and instant communications. Economic growth has been shown to be a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition for employment. Persistent problems of poverty, unemployment and exclusion, go hand in hand with greater opportunities and expanding aspirations. In this situation – as was reflected at the last International Labour Conference – there is increasing evidence of a common desire of people everywhere for *decent work*, that is work which respects their individuality and dignity; provides them with sustenance; ensures provision for the uncertainties of employment, health and old age; and which gives their lives personal and social identity.

Second, these common problems manifest themselves in a diversity of situations and through a variety of needs, which reflect the developmental, institutional and cultural specificities of different countries. For example, the above review shows the growth of non-

standard forms of employment everywhere, which takes the form of non-standard wage employment in the more developed economies, and the expansion of the informal sector in others. In some parts of the region, migration plays an important role in labour market outcomes and the development process as a whole.

Third, experience in implementing ILO programmes in the region has demonstrated the necessity of finding integrated responses to the challenge of *decent work*. Without rights at work, there can be no social dialogue. Without social dialogue, there cannot be sustainable employment or development. Without social protection and rights at work, employment can degenerate into exploitation. Furthermore, development goals and gender policies must underpin the *decent work* agenda. Employment and development are essential to improve the quality of people's lives. There can be no *decent work* without work itself. Neither can there be *decent work* without equality of rights and opportunities for women and men. Without gender policies, there can be no stable societies nor contented families.

Finally, the ILO must plan its future activities keeping these lessons in mind. It must promote universal values without prescribing universal solutions. Each country, regardless of the level of development, can define *decent work* within the context of its own realities and aspirations, while respecting the basic fundamental principles. Implementing *decent work* programmes is a dynamic process in which universal values can be tested and realized in the context of national realities. It is necessary for the Office and the tripartite constituents to have an open and systematic dialogue at the national level to put these integrated approaches in place. This Thirteenth Asian Regional Meeting provides an opportunity to take practical action to make *decent work* a living reality for the majority of the population of the world.