

Knowledge Management Network

**Providing implementation support to
The Asian Decent Work Decade**

**Asian Employment Forum: Growth, Employment and
Decent Work
Beijing, People's Republic of China
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1. Introduction

As a follow-up to the 14th Asian Regional Meeting (ARM) in 2006, and on the occasion of the Asian Employment Forum on Growth, Employment and Decent Work, this paper aims at providing delegates with an overview of the various options and modalities available to share knowledge in a manner which can support their tripartite initiatives to promote decent work. This initiative falls within the wider imperative of the Office to strengthen its capacity to respond to constituents' demands for an improved knowledge base for promoting patterns of inclusive growth that generates more and better jobs in the region.

Policy-makers increasingly recognize that full and productive employment and decent work for all is indispensable for alleviating poverty and achieving sustainable development. But the knowledge of how to achieve these goals is widely dispersed, with many different actors having different 'parts of the puzzle' that are applicable in specific economic, social and developmental contexts. Member States of the International Labour Organization have recognized this by calling for greater knowledge sharing and, as one of the conclusions of the 14th Asian Regional Meeting in September 2006, agreeing **“to cooperate on specific initiatives at the regional level where joint action and sharing of knowledge and expertise will contribute to make decent work a reality by 2015”**.

This paper aims to assist delegates in providing guidance to the Office on the objectives, scope and organization of an Asian Decent Work Knowledge Network.

2. Proposed objective of the network

The proposed general objective of the Knowledge Network is to:

ensure that tripartite constituents, partners, stakeholders and other significant actors have easy access to the knowledge products, expertise, services and tools they need to effectively contribute to the implementation of the Asian Decent Work Decade.

It is therefore paramount that the design and operation of this Network be driven by the priorities and needs of the member States and the constituents in the context of the Asian Decent Work Decade generally and in connection with the implementation of the Decent Work Country Programmes in particular. Identification of priority needs, therefore, will be a core issue for discussion at the Forum, both in the plenary sessions as well as in the parallel working sessions.

3. Benefits of improved knowledge sharing

Anticipated **benefits** of sharing knowledge through Networks are:

- An effective way of providing and sharing the information, skills, expert advice and tools that constituents and other actors need to succeed in their efforts to promote decent work is provided.

- Workable tools, approaches and expertise are identified based on what works on the ground, documented and transferred or adapted more efficiently and effectively to those who need them.
- New and improved tools and approaches are developed and tested.

The **added value** of setting up a **regional** Network for Decent Work consists of the following:

- Large amounts of information from within and outside ILO are **organized along regional priorities**.
- Knowledge is regionally and **locally contextualized**.
- Improved **mapping of expertise** in the region (institutions and individuals) in areas that are key to the promotion of decent work.
- Useful knowledge for tripartite decision makers, policy-makers and field practitioners is made easily **accessible along thematic user groups**.
- **A one-stop portal¹, gateway and e-community platform** is linked to relevant institutions and resources in the region and available to a variety of users.

4. Features of knowledge networks

Four important questions arise when considering a regional Decent Work Knowledge Network:

- What are the key *principles* of an effective knowledge network?
- What are the *issues or themes* that constituents will most likely be looking for examples and support on through a knowledge network?
- What *means* will be the most effective for supporting a network?
- What kind of *products and services* will be of most use?

Each of the points will be looked at briefly below.

Principles

Sharing of knowledge can take many forms but usually takes place through networking of knowledge sources, or “knowledge networks”. To be effective, knowledge networks need to meet a number of key principles:

- They provide products and services that are relevant to meet the needs of their members;

¹ A web portal, or simply a “portal”, is a website that acts as a single, organized point of access to information from ILO and non-ILO sources or other websites.

- They add value to practices of knowledge sharing, development and learning;
- They facilitate members' willingness to offer information and good practices to other members;
- They recognize that the bearers of knowledge are primarily individual persons including the technical staff and personnel of institutions (such as governments, employers' and workers' organizations, academics and others).

Issues

The issues or themes that constituents might be expected to seek knowledge on correspond to the four areas of the Decent Work Agenda i.e. rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue, thus providing a logical overall structure for the network. The 2006 ARM identified a number of issues as critical to achieving Decent Work in Asia-Pacific by 2015. These included:

Rights at work

- Ratification of core labour standards
- Combating all forms of child labour

Employment

- Sustainable productivity growth and competitive economies
- Job creation and sustainable enterprise
- Promoting decent and productive work for youth
- Promoting decent work opportunities in the informal economy
- Access to education and skills for all
- Improving labour market governance

Social protection

- Extending social protection coverage for all
- Improving occupational safety and health
- Improving the management of labour migration

Social dialogue

- Strengthening the capacity of the social partners and labour administration
- Promoting gender equality and addressing the needs of vulnerable workers

This list of issues, some of which will be discussed further at the Asian Employment Forum, provides a good starting point for the discussion of possible priorities of issues for the Knowledge Network. In response to priorities identified during the ARM, the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) has already started work on an Asian Decent Work

Decade Resource Kit². Since not all issues can be initiated and dealt with at the same time, it will be important for the Forum to seek to identify priorities as a basis for a phased approach to the establishment of the Network.

Means

The means for creating networks and sharing knowledge vary, with two main potentially complementary strategies. Some agencies focus on compiling knowledge in publications and (increasingly) in on-line sites. Others focus on establishing connections between people who are working in a similar field or face common challenges and who are willing to exchange knowledge. Various forms of information and communication technology can be used to enhance either approach:

- “Knowledge compiling” strategies may use regular publications of journals, or online subscriptions to alert members to new information. Websites may provide for all users to add new information or links. Websites may act as “portals” providing access to a wide number of other websites and networks.
- “Community building” approaches may use meetings or seminars to connect people, create “virtual communities” with internet facilities, or combine the two, for example through training courses which then create online alumni groups.

Products and services

As part of the preparation of this paper, a survey of a sample of constituents was conducted to ascertain their perceived needs. The initial results show that the services many respondents want are:

- Access to good practices, success stories, work templates and useful tools in their area of work;
- Capacity building in their area of practice through training and other services;
- Assistance in linking with policy-makers, decision-makers and tripartite leaders in the region; and
- Assistance in linking/networking and information exchange with those performing similar work in the region.

In support of these needs, the following services products could be considered:

- **Knowledge products** including toolkits, directories, manuals and good practice compendiums, project templates, assessment tools.
- **Directories**, mappings and sign-posting of expertise and experiences in the region in specific decent work areas to:

² This kit will provide background information, the strategic framework, good practices, lessons learned, recommendations for partnerships and resource mobilization as well as tools to assist Member States to achieve progress on each regional priority area.

- Facilitate information exchange, intra-regional consultancies, secondments and other exchange mechanisms;
 - Link decent work actors to funding agencies, technical departments in the ILO, other UN agencies and regional centres (e.g. ASEAN, SAARC, APEC) and other actors (e.g. APO);
 - Coordinate among research institutions working on areas related to decent work in the region.
- **Labour data, statistics and decent work indicators** useful for policy-makers. This will include linking and coordinating with existing initiatives on regional and national labour databases and labour market information and analysis systems.
 - A **Regional Decent Work Help Desk** which acts as a virtual counterpart of the traditional reference librarian and also provides clues on demand-supply gaps of knowledge.
 - **Gateway** to Asian networks, organizations, programmes and databases that can be thematically arranged including along the regional priority areas for action.
 - A **feedback mechanism** (e.g. information audit, satisfaction survey) in order to ensure that the knowledge provided responds to the demand of the constituents.
 - **Translation** of available knowledge products into other Asian languages in order to multiply the audience and impact.
 - **Conferences, technical meetings** among peers, specialized training courses and on-line e-learning modules can be offered by Network members.
 - **Platform for e-communities** organized along thematic lines to find their own virtual space for discussions, knowledge sharing, on-line queries, co-authoring and work collaboration.

During the Asian Employment Forum, delegates will be encouraged to identify the most important services to be provided by the Network.

5. Building on ILO experience in networking in the region

There are various examples of existing knowledge networks, inside and outside the ILO (see list in Appendix). Building on such regional and global experience, certain defined areas of improvement should be considered in any initiative to improve knowledge sharing in the region. Analysis of existing networks suggests that:

- Many existing knowledge networks are conceived as basically top-down, “knowledge push” Internet portals without provisions for demand-driven “knowledge pull” from users. Feedbacks are often through “Contact Us” functionality; “Help Desk” functionality is rare.
- A formal policy or guideline to give priority to knowledge over other forms of information is often lacking. The presence of a programmatic repository of good

practices, manuals or work templates and other forms of actionable information for users is not apparent from many existing networks.

- Many web-based information resource centres are project-based and therefore time-bound and donor-dependent.
- Coordination amongst the various – sometimes fragmented – networks is necessary.

Section 4 of the paper identified “knowledge compiling” and “community building” as the two basic strategic means to promote knowledge networking. The ILO already uses both strategies in a variety of ways. Its websites, publications and resource materials are all examples of knowledge compiling. Often the ILO acts as a knowledge broker: collecting, assessing, comparing and sharing information from a wide variety of sources and contexts, adapted to a form that is relevant and useable. This knowledge translation function goes beyond simply producing materials in a new language: it is often the process of turning “information” about a particular country or workplace into more generalized knowledge that can be used and applied elsewhere. The ILO’s community building strategies include its many training and capacity building activities, as well as technical meetings and networks of national specialists or constituent peers. A number of ILO programmes include online communities or expert networks that link practitioners around the world. Community building approaches can produce useful directories or maps of expertise on a particular subject across a wide area.

ILO’s experience and on-going activities in these areas will be carefully reviewed and taken into account in the detailed design and implementation of the proposed Asian Decent Work Knowledge Network.

6. Organization

The organizational design for the Network would be the result of a comprehensive process which would closely involve the constituents and is proposed to take place over a five-month period following the Asian Employment Forum. Among the issues to be considered would be:

- Membership, which might include:
 - Individuals who possess particular knowledge and expertise in one or more thematic area covered by the Network. Individual members may participate in range of activities such as research, advisory services among members, development of resource materials and tools etc.
 - Institutional members:
 - Government organizations and social partners in member States would be able to become members – institutional membership might be organized by thematic area and would imply readiness to exchange knowledge, experience and resources;
 - Other regional or sub-regional organizations that are active in key decent work related areas such as industrial relations, productivity and competitiveness etc. could also be considered for (associate) membership.

- Roles. While a secretariat function would be based at the ILO, members including constituents could play the following roles:
 - Taking leading technical roles in themes in which they have strong programmes and expertise;
 - Sponsoring workshops, seminars and other events which form part of the Network's services;
 - Supporting or offering advisory services and human resource exchanges between countries or institutions in a particular thematic area covered by the Network.

7. Suggested key questions

The Asian Employment Forum provides a crucially important opportunity to reflect upon the objectives, services and organization of the Asian Decent Work Knowledge Network. In particular the following questions are proposed for discussion:

1. Do you agree with the overall objective for the Network set out in Section 2 of the present report?
2. Within each of the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, in your view:
 - (a) Which are the most important sub-themes to be developed?
 - (b) Should the network start by developing the themes covered by the Asian Employment Forum?
3. Which services are likely to be most useful to support implementation of the Decent Work Agenda in your country?
4. Which role would you propose for your own organization in the Network? Are there specific thematic areas to which you would like to contribute?
5. What issues and principles do you think should be taken into account in defining a structure that would be appropriate for the governance of the Network?

Appendix

The East Asian Industrial Relations Network, or East Asia IR Net, is a network of national researchers, academics and experts working in Asia that started with a consultative workshop among national industrial relations experts. The Network combines available web-based information along with knowledge-sharing events for field practitioners. For more information, please see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/japanmb/ir.htm>.

ASEAN-OSHNET is a network of the safety and health departments of the government of ten ASEAN countries. The network regularly discusses emerging safety and health issues and develops regional policy and strategies. More experienced countries in the network send their specialists to less experienced countries to help implement policies and strategies. For more information, please see <http://www.asean-oshnet.net/>.

The ILO's Regional Skills Network in Asia and the Pacific brings together more than 160 institutions and agencies in the region. Through a regional tripartite meeting, the Network has established objectives for ILO's cooperation and a Framework for Cooperation which assists members to provide assistance and support to each other. The Network operates mainly through technical meetings and distribution of materials and information through a website and on paper. Please see <http://www2.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/skills-ap/skills/index.htm>.

The ILO ROAP has developed five Product Lines, bringing together relevant knowledge, tools and expertise on key issues, as a response to constituents' requests for information on the priority issues identified at the 14th Asian Regional Meeting in 2006. These product lines include Competitiveness, Productivity and Jobs; Labour Market Governance; Youth Employment; Labour Migration; and Local Economic Development and are a means to organize the knowledge and services of the ILO to make them more accessible to constituents.

The ILO-UN-World Bank's Youth Employment Network (YEN) is a global Network established as an initiative of then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to address global challenges related to youth employment. The Network is supported by a secretariat that includes dedicated focal points in all three organizations and a group of volunteer lead countries that include Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Sri Lanka in Asia and the Pacific. The Network focuses on the exchange of information and ideas, with a website that includes a common calendar of events, records of ongoing projects and a best practices database. For more information, please see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/>.

The Work Improvement Network is a partner Network of occupational safety and health and work improvement institutions in the Asia-Pacific region that collaborate on action programmes, particularly training in practical work improvement in small enterprises and agriculture. Network partners use Work Improvements in Small Enterprises (WISE), Work Improvements in Neighbourhood Development (WIND) and other methodologies developed by ILO, as well as other tools developed by Network partners. The Network is linked through a website that is maintained by one of the partner organizations, the Center for Occupational Health and Environment, Can Tho Health Department, Vietnam. For more information, please see <http://www.win-asia.org/Content/intro.htm>.

The World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES) was established in 1988 by six public employment services, and voluntary membership has now grown to include over 90 countries. The purpose of WAPES is to: encourage contacts between the various member

bodies; promote exchange of experiences and information of the activities of the members; encourage co-operation between members, especially between the more developed bodies and the less developed ones; provide services of common interest such as surveys, studies, data bank management, training and upgrading; organise congresses, conferences, meetings, workshops, and seminars dealing with themes of common interest. WAPES supports a secretariat and maintains a website through the contribution of member organizations. For more information, please see <http://www.wapes.org/>.

The Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) is a regional inter-governmental organization with 20 member Countries across Asia and the Pacific. With its mission to contribute to socio-economic development and enhance productivity in the region, the APO facilitates the sharing of experiences and lessons learned through thematic study meetings, workshops and international forums by inviting leading experts and experienced practitioners to deliberate on contemporary productivity issues with participants from member Countries who share their own country experiences. The APO programmes capitalize on the diversity of experiences through face-to-face interaction among peers who, in turn, disseminate their newly acquired knowledge in their home countries. In the future, the APO will be working to ensure that its programming is up to date with changing global trends in productivity and labour markets as well as strengthening its international networking in the field. For more information, please see <http://www.apo-tokyo.org/>.

The FAO Knowledge Forum is a user-oriented multi-lingual website that features a help desk called “Ask FAO” which allows users to seek answers to their queries and interact with technical experts in particular problem areas. It is not cluttered with information that is not actionable and offers only three knowledge products/services: Ask FAO, a searchable Best Practices Database along a few thematic areas, and a Knowledge Networks section that is a thematically-organised directory of links to existing networks, discussion forums, email distribution lists and databases within and outside FAO. For more information, please see http://www.fao.org/KnowledgeForum/index_en.htm.