

**ILO/Japan/Germany Tripartite Regional Meeting
on Social Dialogue in Asia
Bangkok, 21-23 February 2001**

Key Points Identified in Discussions

1. Introduction

The ILO/Japan/German Regional Tripartite Meeting on Social Dialogue in Asia (21 – 23 February 2001) recognized the important role of social dialogue as a means to promote and achieve *decent work*. In particular, social dialogue is essential for achieving fundamental principles and rights at work as enshrined in the 1998 ILO Declaration, for promoting better employment opportunities for women and men, social protection and the alleviation of poverty and elimination of inequalities. Furthermore, social dialogue is an important mechanism for achieving competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises. The participants also recognized the importance of social dialogue as an instrument to reinforce democracy in the region.

The participants shared the view that there are certain underlying principles for successful social dialogue, which are as follows:

- Respect for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining
- Existence of strong, representative and independent employers' and workers' organizations
- Acceptance of interdependence of the parties
- High levels of trust and commitment
- Willingness to share power and influence
- Commitment to achieving a wider consensus based on a shared vision and agreed goals.

It was emphasized that the utmost attention should be paid to the parties, institutions and processes of social dialogue and these should reflect the diversity of national circumstances.

2. Diagnosis of Problems

Participants identified the parties, institutions and agenda of social dialogue as the most important factors influencing the development of effective social dialogue in the region.

2.1 Parties to Social Dialogue

The key issues identified in relation to the parties to social dialogue (government, employers' and workers' organizations) were:

- Representativeness of the parties
- Capacity to engage in dialogue and deliver on outcomes
- Multiplicity of parties
- Social dialogue skills
- Resource constraints

- Need for long-term strategic approaches
- Vulnerability of the parties to changes brought about by globalization

2.2 Institutions

Participants identified the need for appropriate institutional mechanisms and arrangements to enable the parties to engage in effective social dialogue. The following were common problems identified:

- Inflexibility of institutional arrangements
- Lack of transparency
- Inadequate quantity and quality of information
- Poor communication mechanisms
- Lack of resources and facilities
- Ambiguous status and role
- Inadequate government commitment and support
- Inappropriate levels of and linkages between social dialogue institutions.

2.3 Agenda for Social Dialogue

Participants emphasized the value of social dialogue as a mechanism for enhancing the quality of life. It was also emphasized that the agenda for social dialogue should be determined by the parties bearing in mind that both macro and micro issues need to be addressed. The following issues were identified:

- Tendency to be a ‘talk shop’ rather than a forum for problem solving through substantive discussion
- Narrow scope of the agenda
- Lack of clarity and focus
- Over-ambitious and unrealistic expectations.

3. Policy Options for Way Forward

Participants focused on practical responses to the above range of challenges to social dialogue in the region.

3.1 Parties

There was a consensus at the meeting that strong parties are a prerequisite for effective social dialogue. Therefore the parties to social dialogue should be strengthened through:

- Measures which respect freedom of association and independence of employers’ and workers’ organizations
- Joint training programmes to develop social dialogue skills, such as listening and problem-solving, strategic leadership, communication, and research and analytical skills
- Coordinating mechanisms where there is a multiplicity of representative employers’ and workers’ organizations

- Identification of opportunities to work together to build trust and a common vision
- Fostering environment for managing change
- Strengthening the capacity of all the parties to deliver on commitments
- Enhancing the quality of social dialogue by improved gender participation within all the parties
- Improving representation through wider participation reflecting the diverse constituencies of the parties
- Providing timely and relevant information.

3.2 Institutions

Institutions of social dialogue should be strengthened through:

- Increased government involvement, commitment and support
- Greater transparency
- Strengthening collective bargaining
- Enhanced capacity to collect and analyze reliable data
- Improving flexibility and responsiveness of social dialogue to changing environment
- Creating appropriate mechanisms for review and monitoring of implementation of outcomes
- Increasing resources to service social dialogue infrastructures
- Creating and strengthening linkages between social dialogue mechanisms at different levels and with other social and economic consultative bodies
- Ensuring and respecting autonomy and sustainability of social dialogue
- Building alliances and reaching out to new partners, as appropriate
- Developing appropriate regional social dialogue fora.

3.3 Agenda

To ensure that the objectives of social dialogue are practical, specific, achievable and measurable, the following measures were suggested:

- Substantive and timely agenda
- Prioritization and clear focus
- Organization of preparatory workshops for agenda setting
- Adoption of consensus building approach.

3.4 Role of the ILO

According to the report of the Director-General of the ILO to the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference (1999):

The role of the ILO is to foster balanced social dialogue. This can be achieved by first, serving as effective advocate of social dialogue; second, strengthening the social partners; third, forging alliance with groups in civil society; fourth, showcasing examples of successful social dialogue and sound industrial relations practices. (Decent Work)

Within this framework, participants proposed that the ILO should:

- Enhance its technical support for strengthening social dialogue in the region
- Develop training materials to promote social dialogue skills
- Organize joint training, where appropriate, to the parties to social dialogue
- Disseminate best practices and success stories
- Act as an instrument and facilitator of social dialogue
- Promote ratification and implementation of ILO Convention No. 144 and Recommendation No. 152 concerning Tripartite Consultations and Recommendation No.113 concerning Consultations at the Industrial and National Levels.

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