

**ILO/ICA REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON
THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN POVERTY REDUCTION
WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON PRSP AND DECENT WORK
IN ASIA**

Concept note

Justification and objective

The ILO has been actively engaged in supporting PRSP processes in a number of countries in Asia, including Nepal and Cambodia, which were identified as special focus countries for the ILO's initial work on PRSPs. More recently, the ILO has engaged with PRSP processes in Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam amongst others. In all cases the objective has been threefold:

- to empower the social partners to influence the drafting and implementation of poverty reduction strategies through social dialogue;
- to incorporate employment and other aspects of decent work into PRSPs, and
- to influence development organisations and governments involved in designing and implementing poverty reduction strategies to embrace the fundamental principles and rights at work and social protection and to listen to the voices of the social partners and like-minded stakeholders.

The ILO's actual experience of PRSPs in Asia has been variable. Generally, the ILO has sought to give more attention to equity in addition to growth in PRSPs, arguing that more coverage of the policy implications related to redistribution need to be made, through, for example, reform of land rights, development of a fair, efficient and effective fiscal policy, promotion of the core labour standards and so on. We argue that trade unions, employers' organisations, labour ministries and cooperatives need to be more systematically integrated into the participatory process underpinning the design and implementation of PRSPs. Without this, the participation and national ownership principles of the PRSP are seriously undermined. Finally, most PRSPs need to include a more thorough analysis of employment and other aspects of decent work. This should then give rise to a more explicit role for decent work in poverty reduction strategies.

According to the Director-General's report "Working out of Poverty", the largest number of the poorest of the poor (those earning less than 1 Dollar a day) lives in Asia and the Pacific (about 800 million). Most of these poor people are in rural areas where jobs are scarce and basic social services missing. Rural areas are usually out of the domain of the ILO's social partners, employers' and workers' organizations. In these areas, the nearest institutions to the poor are local cooperatives.

The above-mentioned Director-General's report also indicates that "participation and inclusion are central to a new approach to poverty reduction. Cooperatives are an ideal instrument in such a strategy, and the ILO has long drawn on the strength of the movement.. Cooperatives have proved to be a key organizational form in building new models to combat social exclusion and poverty, for example through local development initiatives.."

COOP, INTEGRATION and ROAP have therefore decided to organize a regional workshop in Asia, in partnership with the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), to discuss the role of cooperatives in poverty reduction, in the context of Decent Work and the ILO's involvement in the PRSP process. The ICA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ICA ROAP), one of the development partners of COOP in the region, has agreed to take part in organizing the workshop jointly with the ILO. The objective of the workshop will be to sensitise the representatives of the government and national cooperative organizations about the Decent Work concept and the PRSP process and discuss with them the role of cooperatives in poverty reduction and how to include them in the PRSP process. The workshop will also produce regional and national action plans on poverty reduction through cooperatives which could be used by the ILO to design new projects and/or to link the existing ILO projects with the PRSP process in the countries concerned.

Composition of the participants

From the countries having PRSP, one government and one national cooperative apex representative will be invited to the workshop. These countries are:

Nepal
Indonesia
Cambodia
Laos
Vietnam
Thailand
Bangladesh
Sri Lanka
Pakistan
Mongolia
Timor Leste

(Countries having no cooperative apex organization, like Laos ,Cambodia and Timor Leste, will be requested to send relevant national NGO working in rural areas).

The following regional development partners and donors will also be invited:

Asian Development Bank
The World Bank
DFID
The Netherlands
DANIDA
AUSAID
Government of Japan (and JICA)
CIDA (and CCA)
SIDA (and SCC)
NORAD
...
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ILO participation:

COOP
INTEGRATION
ROAP
SRO Bangkok
SRO Delhi
SRO Manila

Organizational arrangements

The ILO will be technically responsible for the workshop. Its organization will be arranged by the ICA Regional Office in Asia (through its host country national cooperative apex organization), with the help of the ILO Office in the country concerned. This will encourage sense of national ownership and participation.

Venue, duration and date

Bangkok, Thailand, 10-12 November 2003

Workshop programme

The workshop programme will be drafted by COOP before the end of August and sent to INTEGRATION, ROAP and ICA for comments and finalization. The programme will be attached to the invitation letter to be sent to the governments and cooperative apex organizations concerned in September.

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Programme (first draft)

1st day

Morning session

Opening ceremonies:

- ILO Regional Director
- ICA Regional Director

Presentation I: An overview of cooperative movements in Asia (ICA Regional Office)

Presentation II: The Decent Work agenda of the ILO (SRO Bangkok)

Presentation III: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (by World Bank (or ILO))

Afternoon session

Presentation IV: The ILO's involvement in the PRSP: The content, process, weaknesses and constraints of the PRSP (by INTEGRATION)

Presentation V: Cooperatives and poverty reduction: An ILO perspective (COOP)

Country reports on "the role of cooperatives in poverty reduction strategies"
(each country will be given 10 minutes to present a report to be prepared jointly by government and cooperative movement representatives. An outline/TOR for country papers will be prepared by COOP and INTEGRATION and sent to participants before the workshop)

2nd day

Morning session

Country reports (continued)

Afternoon session

Group work: What should governments, cooperatives and development partners do to make the PRSP process more participatory and inclusive?

Group 1: How should cooperatives play a greater role in the PRSP process?
Facilitators: ICA and COOP

Group 2: What should be the role of government in facilitating the contribution of cooperatives to poverty reduction at local and national levels?
Facilitators: INTEGRATION and SRO Bangkok

Group 3: What should donors do to support the contribution of cooperatives to poverty reduction?
Facilitators: SRO New Delhi and SRO Manila

3rd day

Morning session

Group work (cont'd)
Presentation and discussion of group reports

Afternoon session

Panel discussion: Strategies and action plans for mainstreaming of cooperatives in the PRSP process

Summary of conclusions and recommendations for follow-up action

Closing.
