

Seminar on Green Jobs in China  
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Opening remarks

Constance Thomas  
Director of the ILO Office for China and Mongolia

Salutations to Government officials, representatives from ACFTU and CEC, experts on international and national experts on labour and the environment, ILO colleagues from Geneva, Bangkok, India, Bangladesh and Beijing.

It brings me great pleasure this morning to welcome you all to the first China Green Jobs Experience Sharing Meeting. At the outset, I wish to thank the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security for its close cooperation in the preparation of this event which brings together a large array of policy makers, practitioners and specialists from government agencies, academia, workers' and employers' organizations, businesses as well as regional and international organizations.

This meeting is part of the ILO Green Jobs Initiative which at the global level is being piloted in a number of countries – in Asia this includes China, India and Bangladesh. These pilot activities aim to create a knowledge base on green jobs potential in the country, identify possible policy approaches, and demonstrate innovative measures for job creation and enterprise upgrading. These activities and complementary ILO and MOHRSS cooperation under the UN China Climate Change Partnership Framework (MDG Achievement Fund programme) and other workplace and training initiatives aim together at bringing environmental sustainability into employment promotion strategy and workplace practices in China. In this context, this meeting will 1) introduce the main issues related to green jobs; 2) review assessed opportunities and challenges on the basis of the experience acquired in foreign countries in different economic sectors; and 3) discuss green jobs promotion in China.

The 'Green Jobs Initiative' was launched in 2007 by the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers. You will hear more about this from my colleagues over the next two days. But allow me now to say a few words on the fundamental principles upon which this initiative was launched, on its potential significance, in particular for China, and, its relevance in the context of the existing international crisis.

For some years now the UN system has been promoting more effective ways of implementing a well-balanced approach to sustainable development, within which social, economic and environmental pillars are fully integrated. The ILO Decent Work Agenda and our new framework for social justice support this integrated development strategy. The ILO and most of our constituents – ministries of labour, trade unions and employers organizations – have been concentrating efforts on balancing economic and social development. In the environmental field, our activities have included our robust emphasis on promoting safe and healthy working environment, sector specific labour intensive and poverty reducing projects, promoting sustainable, competitive and

productive enterprises and through social dialogue at national and enterprise levels among labour related stakeholders on a range of issues including environmental protection.

It is with the 'Green Jobs' initiative that we all together launched a direct and visible contribution to the broad-based concern to address environmental issues, including, but not limited to, climate change. The time was considered right to bring the employment considerations into the development of a green economy and to promote policy coherence and greater balance among the three pillars of sustainable development. To do this, the labour market institutions, in other words, the ILO constituents need to be involved and playing active roles. The challenge is to determine the content of these roles and how best to play them.

There is no longer any question on the urgent need to sustain and preserve the environmental quality. We have solid scientific findings on the downward evolution of the climate and the contribution of the green house gasses to this drastic evolution. There are widespread reports on the mismanagement and shortage of freshwaters, degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity. All this scientific based evidence has led to the emergence of an international consciousness that today's production and consumption paradigm is not sustainable.

Moreover, in today's globalized economy, companies are becoming increasingly aware of the need to develop credible policies to reduce their environmental footprint. Consumers are playing an important role in demanding this reduction and are increasingly influencing global market trends. The Global Compact and other CSR initiatives, including those in China, have demonstrated the good business side, including cost savings, of taking such measures.

Moving towards a more sustainable development path will mean major changes in the production and consumption patterns of all countries. It's a global challenge that will happen in enterprises and work places all over the world. In fact, that transition has already started as is demonstrated, for instance, by the emerging role of the renewable energy sector in China. Other areas already demonstrated in employment creation include in the construction industry with a transition to energy efficient buildings, alternative energy, recycling, waste management and environmental preservation.

Nevertheless, in responding to the environmental challenges that the world community is facing, major shifts in employment patterns and skill profiles are to be expected. These will probably occur on a scale and within a time frame to which labour markets will not be able to adjust automatically. New jobs will be created, others will disappear, be substituted or transformed.

Addressing climate change is a huge medium-term global challenge and opportunity and one to which China has committed. In addition to developing a strategy that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, it should be politically sustainable too. That means finding an approach that is equitable within and between nations.

In this context, ILO seeks to promote employment which is productive and equitable, ensures fundamental rights, advances the representation of and voices of workers, and provides safe working conditions for all. ILO's approach on Green Jobs is grounded fully in the Decent Work Agenda. Our work here in China is grounded in the national DWCP.

As introduced by the Director General of the ILO at the occasion of the 2008 G8 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting, a focused policy framework is essential to sustain global and national efforts in adapting to major structural changes in production and employment. The environmental challenges are structural. He noted the role of ILO constituents and others in the following areas:

- firstly, be preventive and improve our understanding of the impact of environmental policies on the labour market. Monitor and anticipate with better accuracy than what is the practice today future shifts in employment.
- secondly, use active labour market policies to not only create jobs but to assure workers that a green environment for society does not mean unemployment or no future employment prospect. Skills development in particular will play an essential role in making green growth possible. (There are already shortages of professionals and skilled workers in many countries resulting in energy efficiency standards not being met, in a slowing down of improvements in energy efficiency and the deployment of renewable energy and other high-performance technologies);
- thirdly, ensure and expand social protection to facilitate the transition and soften the blow for both entrepreneurs and workers;
- finally, allow social dialogue, locally, nationally and internationally to help us find the most viable, effective and fair policy solutions in each specific context.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I think it fair to say that the existing crisis that we are experiencing will have a decisive impact on the way the Green Job initiative will be conducted. Since the launch of this initiative at a time of strong worldwide economic growth, the world has entered into the worst financial and economic crisis in generations. The financial and economic crisis is turning into a very severe employment and social crisis whereby in 2009, the number of the world's unemployed could rise up, according to our (ILO) own calculations, to 50 million over the 2007 level. The psychological impact of the economic and financial crisis on the perceived need to pursue the route towards low-carbon prosperity and justice is naturally tremendous.

Some governments are now launching massive stimulus packages to restore economic growth – China is one of them. It is vital that these stimulate wide scale employment creation and decent work prospects in order to promote increases in national consumption and maintain social stability. Pursuit of the Green Jobs initiative provides a win win win response to meet the different crises and pressures described

above. It combines to produce job rich, environmentally friendly growth. Indeed it is a very pragmatic response.

In support of this opportunistic approach, some research indicate that there is enough evidence that green sectors such as building retrofits and renewable energy can play a leading job creation role if policies promote this. Many green sectors have higher employment leverage per unit or investments than less green alternatives. There are also very significant opportunities to create employment and labour intensive schemes in green sectors as part of short-term stimulus packages.

Some of these options in the developing world which provide for very significant socio-economic benefits include public and private investments in sustainable water management, sanitation and agricultural productivity. Adaptation to climate related activities are considered employment intensive in particular when they rely on local technologies and techniques.

From a global perspective, it would be wise to take the opportunity to ensure that the 'post-crisis' economy follows a more sustainable model than the 'pre-crisis' one. Of course the special circumstances of emerging economies, countries with economies in transition and least developed countries must be recognized.

So assistance, cooperation policies – aid – and the promotion of appropriate technology development which also maximizes decent work opportunities will be a very important contribution to coherent and common policies for sustainability.

For these reasons, I am convinced that the Green Jobs initiative, with the full involvement of ILO constituents and all stakeholders, in the context of the promotion of decent work, is even more relevant now than it was before the crisis. The Green Jobs Initiative contributes to the promotion of environmentally sustainable labour market policies and in this context, should be considered part of the necessary answer to today's combined financial, economic, social, climatic and ecological crises.

To conclude,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to invite the many policy-makers, experts, representatives of unions and employers' organizations and other experts present here to engage into a very fruitful exchange of views and I would like to express the wish that they will be able to help bring this challenging agenda and dialogue forward. We stand ready to work with you and support the promotion of the Green Jobs as adapted to national and local contexts here in China as in other countries of the world.

Thank –you. Xie-Xie ni men.