



**Tripartite Technical Meeting on Decent Work: Pacific Island Countries
Nadi, Fiji: 26-28 November 2007**

Common themes and directions for action

Labour market scenarios in the Pacific region: Looking ahead to 2015

The session set the scene for the meeting with presenting projections on economic growth, labour supply, employment structure, and identified economic sectors with the greatest potential for growth and job creation. It also considered policy areas that deserve the most attention and the needs for improved labour market information.

Common themes

- Labour supply pressure and uncertain economic growth continues to pose major employment challenges. Tourism, agriculture and resource-based industries, the informal economy, infrastructural development, and small and medium sized-enterprises are critical areas for both economic growth and job creation;
- All countries identified youth unemployment and underemployment as a major challenge that must be addressed at both the national and regional level. Emphasis was placed on the need for appropriate skills upgrading and training programmes;
- Pacific's human resources are the most important asset and could be better developed and utilized. Complementarities between foreign and national labour markets with reference to labour mobility noted;
- Need for well-functioning labour market and labour legislation to support economic growth as well as a need to balance enterprise flexibility with worker protection. Labour markets should function better in matching skills to jobs;
- Importance of investment climate, a balanced public sector reform, and modernization of labour laws and employment policies.

Directions for action

- Supporting ongoing labour law and employment policy reforms through capacity building for governments, employers' and workers' organizations and within the overall framework of national economic and development strategies;
- Improving the quality and relevance of vocational and technical training through upgrading existing training institutions and setting up new ones to fill gaps and create an effective training market were also considered in the discussion. Promoting a regional approach to meet the training needs of small countries and "niche" markets;
- The importance of improving labour market information, including better measurement of productivity and enterprise performance, through regional cooperation was identified as important. The possibility of setting up a regional labour market information system under the auspices of the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat was also discussed. ILO will make use of existing data, particularly data compiled by SPC;

Lessons learned from recent Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs)

This session reviewed lessons drawn from a recent extensive evaluation of National Plans of Action for Decent Work. Drawing on this, participants discussed the results of the programme as well as the remaining gaps and existing opportunities. Participants noted that whilst technical papers were of excellent quality they need more time to review and reflect on them and that the discussions were premised on the outcomes being a preliminary listing only.

Common themes

- Identification of priority areas in draft strategic framework:
 - Labour Market Governance: effective labour market institutions and improved labour market information are needed to improve labour market governance;
 - Employment creation for poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods with a focus youth: this is of particular importance given the youth bulge, high levels of youth unemployment and emerging issues of child labour;
 - Capacity building of the social partners with a view to increasing tripartism and social dialogue;
- While this regional framework will be used as a general frame of reference to guide the formulation of DWCPs at the national level, national priorities will not be overshadowed or diluted by “common regional priorities”. The national context for each country needs to be taken into account because each country has specific requirements. A comprehensive needs assessment is therefore required for each country. DWCPs will be formulated for all Pacific member countries by mid-2009 and to be discussed and reviewed at a ministerial meeting in late 2009;
- It is noted that successful implementation of DWCPs is dependent on the extent resources are available or can be mobilised;
- Dialogue amongst the constituents and with other key stakeholders was seen as critical to the successful development and implementation of decent work outcomes and country programmes;
- Strengthening of the capacities of the constituents was identified as an important prerequisite for effective dialogue as well as building sustainable mechanisms for tripartite social dialogue to take place;
- While the cost of doing business in the formal sector is much higher than in the informal sector, extension of social protection in the informal economy was identified as important;
- Various pre-conditions were considered important including political stability and political will, not only of governments but also social partners. Other pre-conditions included the availability of funding, technical capacity, economic growth and good governance;
- Support for policies and strategies that address the transformation of enterprises in the informal economy into working enterprises in the formal economy, and especially in relation to youth entrepreneurship were highlighted.

Directions for Action

- ILO will assist Pacific Island member States to undertake further review and consultation in country of ‘*DWCP Implementation in the Pacific Island Countries 2006 – 2007: Issues and Challenges*’ and the priority areas will be identified for the draft framework for 2008 – 2015;
- Pursue a bottom-up approach where national policies and priorities are defined in country through the development of Decent Work Country Programmes and then put together into a regional framework for the Pacific Island member States• Focus on tangible technical cooperation projects which respond to country needs in order to translate decent work outcomes into reality on the ground;
- Support to local resource mobilization efforts to implement programmes under DWCPs;
- The importance of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of DWCPs was highlighted in the context of ensuring that DWCPs are strategic and effective.

Creating an enabling environment for growth and decent work and seizing the opportunities in expanding sectors

The session focused on various aspects of economic and social environment to enable growth and decent work. It covered wide spectrum of issues ranging from policy coherence, enabling business climate, migration and skills development.

Common themes

- Effective and meaningful dialogue, underpinned by capacitated partners, is instrumental to create conducive business environment. More needs to be done to promote enabling conditions for small and medium enterprise development and women-run enterprises. Promoting and sustaining investments in capital, people and infrastructure is critical for business growth and decent work;
- Identifying policy priorities and ensuring coherence between economic and social policies are critical in achieving development outcomes;
- Support for entrepreneurship development is one of the preconditions for business growth, particularly among youth. Well-researched and documented good practices of business incubators including for youth, exist in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) for adaptation and replication. Use of free land resources can provide opportunities for entrepreneurship development, including schemes targeting youth;
- While a mix of regional and national approaches can help address education deficits considering the absorption capacity of small labour markets, national strategic priorities and domestic economic concerns need to be taken into account;
- Effective migration management underpinned by respect for fundamental labour standards and adequate protection can significantly contribute to unemployment reduction, financial and social investments through remittances and skills;
- Trade is potentially a conduit for fair globalization to deliver benefits to people in the Pacific.

Directions for Action

- Support tripartite dialogue and strategic partnerships towards effective and coherent policy formulation on key priority areas (e.g. labour market governance, youth employment);
- Promote knowledge development and sharing on good practices and lessons learned to address employment-related opportunities and challenges;
- Assist PICs' efforts to promote skills and training policies to maximize employment opportunities in local and foreign labour markets;
- Address skills mismatch through Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) with emphasis on mechanisms that have worked in the past including apprenticeships, sandwich courses, internships, etc. linked to industry needs. Support integration of life skills to reach vulnerable groups in formal and informal sectors;
- Assist PICs in promoting an entrepreneurial mindset and culture and introduce entrepreneurship education in secondary education and vocational training curriculum;
- Support sound labour migration management that ensures rights and protection in host countries and local employment promotion in sending countries.

Promoting inclusive development

This session identified and explored the most pressing issues to be addressed in the Pacific in order to ensure that poverty reduction contributes to the four pillars of decent work: rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue.

Common themes

- Fair trade versus free trade and decent work for all and not for a few. Globalization has brought growth but has fallen short of delivering decent work to all. Social partners have responsibility to address decent work deficits in the context of globalization;
- Whilst recognising the constraints that governments face it was determined that governments must play a pivotal role in promoting decent work, with the social partners playing a more proactive supporting role;
- Environmental protection towards sustainable development; ILO Green Jobs Initiative;
- Emerging problem of child labour alongside high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. Need to adopt life cycle perspective and the promotion of intergenerational solidarity in the achievement of Decent Work for all;
- Young workers and the protection of migrant workers' rights need due consideration by the trade unions. While labour migration provides greater opportunities for employment still important to promote employment opportunities locally;
- The rights of people with disabilities as well as gender equality concerns need to be address in the Pacific.

Directions for Action

- Explore models of effective and sustainable social dialogue at national and regional level;
- Ensure tripartite active involvement in the UN reform process and through regional bodies such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Build on models for tripartite driven technical cooperation in the Pacific;
- Launch technical cooperation programmes on youth employment and child labour with the aim of promoting more inclusive development. Promote the ratification and implementation of the child labour conventions and the enforcement of nine years basic compulsory education;
- Need to support women in the leadership in the Pacific;
- Use social dialogue to help manage Provident Funds and avoid mis-use of funds (i.e. ILO has assisted Provident fund reforms in Fiji);
- Short and long term issues, and the achievement of strategic, time-bound outcomes was highlighted as being of key importance.

Building institutions and supporting dialogue

This session reviewed both key challenges and good examples, including the modernization of labour laws, the promotion of social dialogue and the capacity of social partners, and respect for fundamental principles and rights at work. There was a strong consensus among the participants on the need to develop an effective tripartite social dialogue institution at national level to realize decent work outcomes

Common themes

- Development of effective systems for labour market governance and tripartite social dialogue is a key instrument for realizing Decent Work in the Pacific;
- Strong commitment and leadership initiative of governments are crucial preconditions for successful development of such systems;
- Capacity building of social partners, as well as of the officials of Ministry of Labour and other relevant Government agencies, is critical to give real effect to the tripartite social dialogue institutions;
- ILO's International Labour Standards, in particular Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining and other Fundamental Rights, are key instruments for the Pacific constituents to create an enabling environment for effective labour market governance;

- The importance of growing long term effective tripartite relationships were considered important as a contributor to, and alongside the need for, sustainable economic growth and employment.

Directions for Action

- Labour laws need to be reviewed and reformed, through genuine tripartite consultation mechanisms and processes, so as to ensure compliance with the ILO's Core Conventions and other ratified Conventions and to create sustainable institutional arrangements for good labour market governance in the era of globalizing economy;
- ILO provide sufficient and timely technical assistance to the Pacific member states on labour law reforms so that new labour legislations will not only maintain conformity with the ILO's Core Conventions and other ratified Conventions, but also offer effective mechanisms for labour market governance;
- Support the Pacific constituents to build their capacities in the technical areas of their national needs, including in particular labour law reforms and effective enforcement mechanisms;
- Offer good examples of labour market institutions and social dialogue mechanisms to help the Pacific constituents to develop their own institutional model;
- Coordinate with other UN agencies and international, regional and national development cooperation bodies to ensure rights-based, tripartite approach to promotion of Decent Work.

Working together: Regional cooperation

This session focused on regional cooperation and the requirements and potential for interaction amongst the various key regional organizations in the Pacific.

Common Themes

- *Pacific Plan* provides the overarching regional framework for cooperation and the priorities distilled prior to and during this technical meeting are clearly identified within the four pillars of the Plan. The Forum Leaders Meeting and Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM) have endorsed these priorities. The *Pacific Plan Action Committee* provides the mechanism for advocacy and policy dialogue with Forum leaders;
- The Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation and the South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Unions are recognised as key umbrella bodies of employers' and workers' active in the region;
- Strategic partnering of technical and donor agencies such as the ILO, UNDP, UNESCAP, AusAID, NZAID, etc., with national and regional institutions, is critical in providing the resources necessary to support the development and achievement of concrete, results based initiatives. Cooperation and clarity of purpose among a diverse group of institutions is seen as being critical to the success of these; partnerships
- Mechanisms for Labour Ministers to highlight issues and increase the visibility of issues within the regional development cooperation framework need enhancement;
- Need for greater visibility and profile of the ILO in the regional arena through enhanced representation in the appropriate regional institutions;
- Priorities reiterated as being relevant in the regional debate include labour mobility and the protection of migrant workers through effective legislation, regulations and mechanisms linked closely to international labour standards and other relevant instruments. Other key areas include labour legislative reform and experience and knowledge sharing through national and regional networks;
- Strengthening tripartite dialogue and partnerships at the national level and through all stages of the process is recognized as underpinning the success of regional interactions. This has been endorsed at the highest levels of governance through the *Pacific Plan*.

Directions for Action

- ILO will continue to develop relationships with donor agencies in the Pacific region, including the two major donor agencies AusAID and NZAID. ILO will also aim at achieving greater visibility at the national and regional levels including advocating for obtaining an observer status in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat;
- Development of concrete programmes of action to mobilize resources, especially in areas that are recognized as being critical but which may not, at this point in time be attracting the necessary resources;
- Regional cooperation should take into consideration national conditions/priorities;
Build capacity of tripartite partners through training and sharing of good practices and lessons learned. Develop and strengthen formal systems for sustained social dialogue;
- Identify and put together roster of local experts to assist in these efforts.

Next steps in formulating DWCPs and developing a Pacific decent work strategy

The session pulled together in plenary the results of the discussions and group work that have taken place in an effort to determine remaining steps required in completing DWCPs for participating countries and developing a framework for a Pacific decent work strategy. The need for a high-level Pacific meeting to gain political commitment and strengthen partnership for the implementation of the DWCPs and the subregional decent work strategy was also discussed. Closing statements were delivered by representatives of the government, worker and employer groups.

Common themes

- Continue labour law reform with a view to improving labour market governance and the legal and institutional framework as well as to enable ratification and compliance with ILO Conventions on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- Encourage national ownership of the labour law reform process while benefiting from ILO technical assistance and drawing on experiences of the other PICs. Build the capacity of new member states with ILO Constitutional obligations and International Labour Standards in general and the Fundamental Conventions;
- Establish or strengthen, with renewed commitment, tripartite structures so that they can effectively address labour issues;
- Strengthen social dialogue and processes of negotiation among social partners through capacity building at country level;
- Address youth unemployment and underemployment taking into account the large rural and informal economies through skills development and recognition;
- Improve labour market information for PICs and develop regional mechanism to facilitate process along with technical assistance by the ILO;
- On labour mobility, protect migrant labour and better manage labour migration;
- Formulate clear DWCPs for coherent and targeted technical assistance delivery and projects that are not ad-hoc and better enable resource mobilization;
- Demonstrate where the ILO can show its comparative advantage vis-à-vis the proposed regional Strategic Programme Framework and fill a niche within existing regional frameworks including the Pacific Plan and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework;
- Develop consultations, coordination and partnerships with other UN agencies, international, regional, national development bodies to work together on issues of common concern discussed at the sessions and ensure rights-based, tripartite approach to the promotion of Decent Work.

Directions for Action

- Organize tripartite consultations at country level with other relevant partners to discuss the results of this technical meeting and to outline specific priorities and concrete country outcomes as well as strategies to ensure implementation (2008 – 2009);
- ILO through its office in Suva, sub-regional office in Manila and the regional office in Bangkok ready to provide input into such processes as required. Once the priorities and outcomes are identified more concrete DWCP programmes/frameworks can be developed (2008 – 2009);
- Other options for follow-up were raised including a high level political meeting to ensure political commitment and buy-in. This could be considered in conjunction with a donor conference to mobilize necessary resources (2008 – 2009);
- A Web site has been created by the Regional Office of all related documents to ensure forum for continued dialogue. This dialogue can be further supported through the development of the Asia-Pacific Knowledge Network on Decent Work. The site features a “Feedback Corner” to which participants can send further comments/suggestions in relation to this report and the draft Strategy Programme Framework for Decent Work in PICs (2008).