



12th African Regional Meeting

Johannesburg, South Africa, 11–14 October 2011

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Conclusions of the 12th African Regional Meeting

Accelerating the Decent Work Agenda in Africa

1. Ministers and representatives of governments and leaders of employers' and workers' organizations participating in the 12th African Regional Meeting thank the Government of South Africa for hosting the event. The country's hospitality and very efficient organization have contributed greatly to the success of the Meeting.
2. The Regional Meeting was honoured by the presence of H.E. President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma of the Republic of South Africa and H.E. Gilbert Foussou Houngbo, Prime Minister of the Republic of Togo. In addition, Ms Christina Mwelwa Kaseba-Sata, First Lady of Zambia, addressed the special focus session on women's economic and social empowerment and gender equality.
3. Delegates paid a special tribute to the ILO Director-General, Juan Somavia, who was attending the last African Regional Meeting during his tenure, and stressed his unwavering support for Africa's development and his tremendous contribution to the advancement of the Decent Work Agenda on the continent and worldwide.
4. The Meeting commended the Director-General for his Report entitled *Empowering Africa's peoples with decent work*, and the additional Reports, namely *Efficient growth, employment and decent work in Africa: Time for a new vision* and *Success Africa III: Realising a new era of social justice through decent work: Success stories from Africa*.
5. The Meeting stressed the continued importance of the Declaration, the Plan of Action, and follow-up mechanism adopted by the Extraordinary Summit of the African Union on Employment and Poverty Reduction in Africa (September 2004, Ouagadougou); they recalled the conclusions of the First African Decent Work Symposium (Recovering from the crisis: The implementation of the Global Jobs Pact in Africa, Ouagadougou, December 2009), of the Second African Social Partners' Forum (Ouagadougou, December 2009), and of the Second African Decent Work Symposium (Building a Social Protection Floor with the Global Jobs Pact, Yaoundé, October 2010). Furthermore, the Meeting took note of the conclusions adopted by the Meeting of the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers in September 2011 in Paris.
6. The Meeting expressed its deep concern about the fact that the African continent, despite significant economic growth, continued to be affected by crises such as rising youth unemployment, persistent poverty, growing inequality, widespread informality and precarious work. Moreover, Africa's economic growth was largely dependent on the performance of extractive industries and primary commodity exports and thus vulnerable

to external shocks. The Meeting reaffirmed the conviction that the Decent Work Agenda provided an appropriate and comprehensive policy framework to address these crises.

7. The Meeting urged all African member States to ratify the 1986 Amendment to the ILO Constitution which would give African member states a more equitable presence in the ILO Governing Body.
8. The Meeting recognized that progress had been achieved in implementing the Decent Work Agenda in Africa (2007–15) while acknowledging that some of the targets lagged behind, in particular those related to gender equality, youth employment, migration, forced labour, HIV and AIDS at the workplace, social protection and implementation of international labour standards. Delegates stressed the importance of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) as the vehicle to identify and implement national priorities related to the Decent Work Agenda. They noted that good progress had been made in adopting DWCPs in Africa; so far, 31 DWCPs were being implemented while a further 22 were under elaboration. However, it was recognized that some of the first generation DWCPs were not sufficiently aligned with national policies and that the social partners had not been adequately involved in their formulation and implementation; moreover, there was a need for more effective tripartite DWCP formulation, implementation, monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms, as well as for joint resource mobilization strategies.
9. Many elements of a common vision for Africa are shared by ILO constituents across the continent; those areas are dealt with in the subsequent paragraphs.

Efficient growth, employment and decent work in Africa

10. The Meeting noted that economic growth alone was not sufficient to create employment. There was an urgent need to embark upon inclusive growth paths that create jobs and therefore reduce poverty. Government had a paramount role to play in this process by: (i) designing policies that accelerate economic growth and transform the quality of that growth; (ii) promoting regional cooperation; (iii) ensuring that jobs are not treated as the residual outcome of economic policy but they are rather its purpose; and (iv) harnessing local markets and local resources. This required the adoption of a pro-employment macroeconomic framework, the setting of explicit and quantitative employment targets in national and international policies, as well as a better coordination of, and greater coherence between, economic, financial, social and employment policies at the national level.
11. Employment policies needed to be designed taking into account the patterns of growth in each country, and should focus on specific, employment-intensive sectors, value chains and economic clusters. African countries needed to adopt active industrialization strategies to reverse past policies that led to de-industrialization; moreover, they should shift their attention towards labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing and agro-processing, and take measures to harness the job creation opportunities emerging from the “green economy”.
12. The Meeting recognised the importance of infrastructure investments, including in roads, rail, energy and communications, for private sector development, quality public service delivery, employment growth and regional integration, and pointed out that the development of infrastructure lends itself to more employment-intensive techniques which create opportunities for local job creation. The Meeting further stressed the importance of education, skills development and lifelong learning, and called for a better alignment of technical and vocational training and research with the characteristics and requirements of the national labour markets.

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13. The Meeting stressed the importance of regional integration as an engine of growth in Africa. As the continent lagged far behind other regions in boosting regional trade, the Meeting welcomed the decision by the recent tripartite COMESA–ECA–SADC Summit to form a common free trade zone comprising 26 countries and 600 million citizens. Regional integration should encompass not only trade but also cooperation in the fields of agriculture, health and education, among others.
 14. The Meeting urged governments to take steps to gradually formalize work and business in the informal economy, including in rural areas. This should include the adoption at the national level of the social protection floor, and called for stronger labour market institutions and local capacities.
 15. Governments should also create an enabling environment for sustainable private sector growth, investment, access to finance and the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises, all of which have an enormous job creation potential. At the same time governments should pay attention to the public sector as an important source of decent employment.

Promoting youth employment

16. The Meeting expressed grave concern about the high rates of youth unemployment and underemployment. This problem was compounded by high population growth. Thirty-two African countries now prioritized employment in general and youth employment, in particular, in their national development frameworks. The urgency of addressing the youth employment crisis, and the need for integrated action and multiple pathways, was reiterated.
17. The Meeting welcomed the joint initiative by the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the ILO on youth employment, and called for its translation into concrete action on the ground.
18. The promotion of youth employment must address both the supply and demand sides of the national labour markets. Measures aimed at improving the qualifications of young people were likely to improve the alignment of labour supply with the requirements of the labour markets, while measures such as pro-employment macroeconomic policies, private and public sector development, the provision of finance and venture capital and public works schemes were likely to increase the demand for labour. Active labour market policies and institutions were key to facilitate school-to-work transition. Furthermore, investing in quality jobs promotes employment growth and generates new opportunities that meet youth aspirations and qualifications.
19. Recent events in parts of Africa had shown that youth demand not only decent jobs, but also rights, justice, equity and participation. It was therefore essential to work towards further integration of youth in the societal decision-making process. The Meeting stressed the need for a more proactive role of social partners in the promotion of youth employment, as well as in the governance of youth employment institutions and the implementation of youth employment programmes.

National ownership of labour standards

20. The Meeting recognized that African countries had made impressive progress in ratifying the ILO's eight core Conventions, although problems persisted with implementation. However, the rate of ratification of the other Conventions, including those considered priority instruments, was less satisfactory. In addition, in a number of countries there was

still a gap between ratification and implementation of Conventions, in particular with regard to rural, migrant and informal economy workers.

21. In order to enhance the national ownership of international labour standards it was deemed absolutely essential that workers' and employers' organizations take an active part in the standard-setting process and its follow-up at the national level. Therefore, more resources should be devoted to capacity building for constituents and other relevant target groups such as judges and labour inspectors so as to accelerate the ratification process and enforce the effective application of ratified Conventions. Constituents should set up effective social dialogue institutions and mechanisms at the national level to discuss standard-related matters.
22. The ILO should be attentive to the need to ensure that its body of standards is up to date, comprehensive and effective, and to provide technical assistance necessary for member States to meet their reporting requirements.

Investing in skills and sustainable enterprises

23. Skills development and improved employability are a cornerstone for achieving the Decent Work Agenda in Africa. However, there was a need to do better than what was reported in the ILO's midterm progress review. The lack of attention to skills development was a key obstacle to Africa's broader progress. As was set out in the 2008 ILC conclusions on skills, productivity, growth and development, skills must be coordinated with social and economic policies, including the policies around education, and integrated into national development frameworks. Government has an important role in ensuring coherence and effectiveness; moreover, it should facilitate replication of successful pilot projects and good practices to provide greater impact. The need for stronger alliances with social partners was emphasized.
24. To further address skills mismatches, which continue to be a recurrent problem, and to better anticipate future needs a number of proposals were made:
 - (a) A more prominent involvement of the private sector and workers' organizations in the design, planning, monitoring of training – including curriculum development – was needed to ensure that the human resource capacity adequately responded to the current and future needs of enterprises and workers.
 - (b) There was a need to improve the quality and relevance of training.
 - (c) Lifelong learning and re-skilling approaches were required to ensure that the workforce can adapt to newly emerging labour market needs and opportunities. It has proven particularly important as part of the crisis response.
 - (d) Young people needed support to facilitate a smooth transition to the world of work, through among others, career counselling, mentoring, and improving access to information.

Rural employment, industrial development and structural transformation

25. With almost three quarters of the African population living and working in rural areas, there was renewed attention to rural employment among governments and social partners. Comprehensive national programmes, providing integrated packages of services that address the multi-dimensional aspects involved – from storage to market access, to access to finance, to overall infrastructure development and access to social services – were called

for. These should focus simultaneously on improving productivity, living standards of rural workers and their rights, and decent working conditions. Improved social dialogue and involvement of the social partners could greatly enhance policy coherence in this area and would ensure that the needs of workers as well as business were addressed. The mandate for the ILO on rural employment which was spelled out in detail in the ILC conclusions of 2008 on rural employment remained very relevant to the needs of member States in Africa.

26. The agricultural sector should evidently be the focus – as it is here that one finds the highest labour absorption – giving due attention to food security. At the same time, the Meeting requested governments to take necessary measures to create an enabling environment for small and medium-sized enterprise development which also goes beyond the agricultural sector, involving industrialization policies and broader structural transformation. Many jobs could be created and youth could be motivated to stay in rural areas instead of migrating to cities. This required attention to a number of additional areas than those mentioned above, such as investment in infrastructure including roads, schools and health services, and the active promotion of rural areas as an environment where decent work becomes a reality.

Moving out of informality – The role of the social economy

27. The Meeting recognized that in Africa, about two-thirds of all job opportunities and livelihoods have been created by the informal economy. However, the Meeting deplored that workers and operators in the informal economy were affected by severe decent work deficits in terms of rights, incomes and working conditions, protection and voice and representation.
28. It was also emphasized that priority must be given to the process of formalization.
29. The Meeting expressed the view that because of their nature, values, principles and characteristics, social economy organizations and enterprises were well suited to build a bridge between the informal and formal economies, and to reduce the aforementioned decent work deficits.
30. Governments should take the following measures to promote the social economy: (i) create a conducive legal and institutional environment; (ii) establish a framework for consultation and exchange of knowledge; (iii) build the capacity of social economy leaders, promoters and regulators; (iv) fight discrimination of any form in the social economy; and (v) apply the values and principles of the social economy to public policy.

Achieving women's economic and social empowerment and gender equality

31. The Meeting expressed concern that, in spite of progress being made, there was still much gender inequality and widespread discrimination. Women were largely confined to low income and low-quality jobs. The gender pay gap had not yet been closed. Governments should continue to give priority to gender equality in education as this was a primary condition for women's empowerment. There were already a number of commitments on gender equality which should be respected and implemented as a matter of urgency.
32. The Meeting called for increased ratification of Convention No. 183 on maternity protection, and a better observation of its principles, which are essential conditions for realizing the Decent Work Agenda. African countries should also aim at ratification of Convention No. 189 on domestic workers, which was widely applicable to the most

vulnerable of workers, involving mainly women. Also important was the need for better implementation of the widely ratified Conventions Nos 100 and 111. To avoid a discriminatory crisis response, governments should pay due attention to gender issues when designing recovery packages, and take measures that ensure that it was not only the “male dominated” sectors that benefited.

Social dialogue as a key governance mechanism

33. The Meeting noted that there was now recognition across the continent that social dialogue was a key governance mechanism and there was better institutionalization and availability of frameworks for social dialogue. Several good practices were emerging. Still, all partners were to engage in better articulation of tripartism as a tool for governance, and ensure its effective operationalization. Continued efforts were needed to improve the representativeness of workers and employers in existing bodies, especially for workers and operators in the informal economy. Active participation of social partners in peace building and recovery was seen as essential.
34. The Meeting also expressed concern about the limited application of existing important labour standards, including Conventions Nos 87, 98, 144 and 151. They emphasized the important role of training, exchange of experiences and other knowledge-building and sharing measures. The Meeting reaffirmed the value of invoking the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) to expand social dialogue to include MNEs and their influence in global value chains.

Building a social protection floor in Africa

35. The Meeting recognized that the social protection floor (SPF) concept, that had been developed by the ILO and the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative, and that was first adopted through the Yaoundé Declaration on the Implementation of the Social Protection Floor in October 2010, had been widely accepted by ILO constituents in Africa. The Meeting noted the need for widespread support for the progressive development of national social protection systems.
36. Considerable progress towards higher levels of social protection coverage had been achieved in a number of countries which showed that even in situations of tight budgetary constraints some investment in social protection can be made. The Meeting noted that social protection was a mutually reinforcing policy tool to achieve social cohesion, combat poverty and social exclusion, and achieve economic progress.
37. The Meeting identified a number of principles for the implementation of national social protection policies along the two-dimensional approach that was developed by the Yaoundé Declaration and the International Labour Conference in June 2011. Those are:
- (a) a minimum level of nationally defined and guaranteed social outcomes should be ascertained;
 - (b) guarantees should be rights based;
 - (c) the participation of social partners in the planning and management of social protection schemes in order to ensure good governance and national consensus was deemed indispensable.
38. Mobilization of domestic resources remained the central challenge for the implementation of national SPF policies. Domestic resource mobilization required investments in good governance, which was one of the key tools to accelerate the progressive formalization of

the informal economy. In turn, formalization is a necessary condition for the long-term sustainability and improvement of national social protection schemes.

- 39.** The Meeting requested the International Labour Office to assist in improving governance and supporting the formulation of national policies through intensified capacity-building programmes; the ILO might consider approaching donors to mobilize funding for innovative programmes.