

Pacific Tripartite High-Level Dialogue on Decent Work and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

23-26 April 2024 | Suva

Session 2: Tripartism and social dialogue in the Pacific
24 April, 13.00-14.45

This version: 23 April 2024

Speakers

► Government, workers' and employers' representatives:

- Ms Anne Herman, Secretary, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Cook Islands
- Mr Tony Kagovai, National Secretary, Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions
- Ms Florence Willie, Executive Director, Employers' Federation of Papua New Guinea

► Technical experts:

- Ms Sanchir Tugschimeg, Senior Adviser on Asia-Pacific, ILO Bureau for Employers Activities
- Mr Ariel Castro, Desk Officer for Asia-Pacific ILO Bureau for Workers Activities
- Dr Frances Vaka'uta, Team Leader, Culture for Development, SPC

Moderator: Mr Noah Kouback, Programme Adviser Trade, PIFS

Chair: Hon. Wisely Zackhras, Minister of Justice, Immigration and Labor, Government of the Marshall Islands

Background

Decent work is based on a human right driven development vision which aims at advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive employment in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. It is an enabling factor for social justice, economic performance and good governance. It aims at covering all workers and employers without distinction. It gives both workers and employers the right to organise, freedom of expression, and the right to engage in social dialogue, to participate in decisions that affect employment, working conditions, benefits, and industrial relations. It guarantees equal opportunities and equal treatment for all.

Social dialogue is one of four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, including international labour standards, rights at work, and social protection. Social dialogue is a vehicle for solving workplace issues and building constructive relations.

Social dialogue is also a form of governance that provides specific advantages towards realizing sustainable development¹ as envisioned by the [2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent](#). These advantages are linked to the inclusive nature of the social dialogue process and the way interaction is organized; the core principles underpinning social dialogue, of democratic ownership, inclusiveness and accountability; and the beneficial impacts on economic and enterprise growth, investments, productivity and competitiveness. For these reasons social dialogue is a promising vehicle to support the achievement of objectives set out in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Tripartism - a key principle of ILO both in its own functioning as also for its member states – aims at fostering consultations and cooperation between tripartite representatives on issues of common interest related to labour, social and economic matters. Tripartism does not necessarily mean that employers' and workers' organizations and the government should systematically have equal numbers of representatives, but it does require that the views of each side be given equal consideration.

In order to nurture social dialogue and tripartism, social partners should work together to create enable environments. Democratic foundations, strong and independent workers' and employers' organizations representing interest of each party, mutual trust and commitment, respect for freedom of association and collective bargaining, and adequate institutional support with political will are key elements for conducive social dialogue.

ILO members states in the Pacific generally recognize the importance of social dialogue in policy making and in labour relations – but practices vary. Among the reasons for this is varying degrees of compliance with international labour standards, especially in respect of freedom of association (FoA) and the lack of conditions for effective social dialogue. In some countries, the formal institutions for social dialogue either do not exist or when they do so, they do not function effectively. The labour administration, as well as employers' and workers' organizations in Pacific Island countries, often do not have sufficient capacity and resources to fully and effectively play their role in social dialogue. Social partners also convey that Governments are not consistent in involving employers and workers organizations in policy making and when Governments do hold dialogue, it is 'more to inform than to consult and provide opportunity for workers and employers organizations to contribute to the design of public policy. Well-established social dialogue

¹ Experience has shown that there is no centrally determined blueprint for the practical implementation of sustainable development. Both its content and translation into practice will need to be negotiated or planned through some kind of dialogue and collective discussions, embedded in systems of governance. Scholars therefore conclude that participatory governance –with social dialogue as a key example of participatory governance- is central to the definition of sustainable development.

institutions would be needed to convene regular consultation meetings and also follow up to the agreements. It is timing to consider on how to effectively represent the informal, precarious workers, including gig workers, migrant workers and care workers in the social dialogue process.

Both the ILO Centenary Declaration and the [2022 Singapore Statement](#) have called for priority action to strengthen institutional capacities and skills of Government, EBMO and Trade Unions to engage in tripartite social dialogue. And while there are no current Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) in the region, all previous DWCPs have included priority actions to strengthen the tripartite mechanisms, the capacity of social partners and improve the effectiveness of social dialogue.

It is thus important for international and regional institutions such as the Pacific Island Forum to assist Pacific Island countries to address the above-mentioned challenges in order to harness the potential of social dialogue to contribute to meeting the challenges and objectives of sustainable development as envisioned by the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Objectives

The main aim of this session is to reflect on the contribution of social dialogue to social and economic development in Pacific Islands while recognizing that the practice of social dialogue and perceptions of its role and relevance are varied. The session will review the principles underpinning social dialogue (democratic ownership, inclusiveness and accountability), share the experience of constituents across the region and provide space for participants to discuss the challenges and opportunities for advancing social dialogue.

Specifically, the session will cover some of the following topics:

- ▶ The centrality of social dialogue in leading the required changes to achieve the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent;
- ▶ Importance of addressing shortfalls in institutional, organizational and individual capacities for tripartism and social dialogue, including measures to enhance the representation of under-represented groups;
- ▶ Harnessing the strengths and opportunity of traditional forms of social dialogue (Talanoa) in Pacific Island cultures to enhance formal, institutionalized social dialogue processes; and,
- ▶ Strengthening cooperation between public institutions, EBMO and workers' organizations, civil society, faith-based organizations, and private enterprises.

Main questions:

- ▶ When it comes to labour protection, a significant share of workers in the region are not adequately covered by the existing institutional and legal frameworks. How can labour protection mechanisms be strengthened to be increasingly gender-responsive and better adapted to the characteristics of Pacific labour markets, including a large informal economy?
- ▶ Bipartite social dialogue between employers and workers organizations: It is often said that it is the social partners who are in charge of the social dialogue. Tripartism will not be very effective if bipartism does not work (Jean-Claude Juncker, President European Commission)
- ▶ What is the potential of cultural dialogue practices to assist tripartite partners in overcoming some of the challenges related to the development and implementation of labour market institutions and policies?

- ▶ How can social dialogue be strengthened to facilitate consensus-based policies towards delivering the outcomes set out in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, particularly the called for improvement in systems, capacity, and enabling conditions needed to achieve improvements for Pacific People and communities?
- ▶ What lessons has the COVID-19 pandemic taught us about how worker and employer organizations can collaborate to create decent and more sustainable development?
- ▶ What are the challenges and opportunities related to strengthening tripartite social dialogue?

Detailed agenda (draft)

Moderator: Mr Noah Kouback, Programme Adviser Trade, PIFS

Chair: Hon. Wisely Zackhras, Minister of Justice, Immigration and Labor, Government of the Marshall Islands

1300 – 1305

Chair opening

1305 – 1340

Scene setting and observations on regional and global trends:

- Ms Sanchir Tugschimeg, Senior Adviser on Asia-Pacific, ILO Bureau for Employers Activities
- Mr Ariel Castro, Desk Officer for Asia-Pacific, ILO Bureau for Workers Activities
- Dr Frances Vaka'uta, Team Leader, Culture for Development, SPC

1340 – 1440

Moderated panel discussion with identified speakers:

- Ms Anne Herman, Secretary, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Cook Islands
- Mr Tony Kagovai, National Secretary, Solomon Islands Council of Trade Unions
- Ms Florence Willie, Executive Director, Employers' Federation of Papua New Guinea

14:40 – 14:45

Chair closing