



Decent Work and Social Justice for the SIDS

Decent work and social justice are building blocks for sustainable development. Productive employment that provides adequate livelihoods, social protection and respect for worker rights is an essential element of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

While economic, social and labour market circumstances differ markedly, important decent work deficits exist in the majority of SIDS. Common characteristics among the SIDS include:

- High rates of unemployment, including youth unemployment and extensive underemployment;
- Large informal sectors and heavy reliance on subsistence agriculture in many states;
- Limited wage employment that is concentrated in the public sector and subjected to cuts associated with austerity measures;
- Small private formal sector that often provide low quality jobs;
- Labour force that has inadequate formal education and limited resources devoted to training and skills;
- Gender and other forms of labour market discrimination as well as important pockets of child labour and potential problems with forced labour;
- In some States, labour laws are out dated but the bigger problem is inadequate enforcement of existing labour laws due to weak labour inspection and labour courts;
- Weak labour market information systems; and,
- In some States, insufficient support for freedom of association and collective bargaining and often inadequate social dialogue.



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Against this general background generating decent work for all in the SIDS remains a priority development goal. Good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights are a critical foundation for development and growth. A stable, fair and transparent system of governance permeates to all facets of decent work – ensuring a conducive environment for sustainable enterprise that supports economic growth; protecting fundamental rights of workers and improving their income and productivity, facilitating collective bargaining and social dialogue and protecting the most vulnerable workers.

The ILO recognises that the SIDS require additional resources and tailored solutions to address the major geographic, environmental and other special constraints to development that they face. Enhanced resources and assistance must be accompanied by enhanced good governance, civil society accountability and respect for the rule of law. In addition to political commitment through policy documents and national development plans, a renewed drive to implement such goals must be operationalized through such measures as: public administration reforms to incorporate incentive structures that encourage compliance with the law; providing predictable and adequate funding to

labour administrations and labour inspectorates; as well as strengthening independent systems of review and review by representative organizations such as trade unions and employer organizations.

Having stressed the importance of the good governance as an enabler to other strategies on decent work promotion, the following six clusters of recommendations target the reduction of deficit of decent work in the SIDS, namely the formation of:

Policies to foster strong, sustained and balanced economic growth: Even prior to the global economic crisis most of the SIDS lagged behind other developing countries in terms of economic growth and progress towards development goals. As a result employment growth was inadequate to absorb expanding populations. Accelerating economic growth will require the right balance between macroeconomic policies, infrastructure development and a sectoral approach which identifies and supports sectors with potential both for economic development and decent work creation (this might include fisheries, resource extraction, telecommunications, tourism, as well as the care and creative industries).

Policies to create decent jobs through climate change resilience and adaptation: As investment in climate change resilience and adaptation initiatives continues to expand, there is increased opportunity for governments to create local jobs through public projects in this area (such as climate change resilient infrastructure). There is also increase potential for entrepreneurs to start up 'green' enterprises – which can be incentivized by the right mix of government policies.

Policies to enhance human capital: Improvements in the quality of education systems and carefully linking training and skill development to areas of potential job growth is critical for reducing structural unemployment and increasing youth employment. Governments need to do more to support and train people who struggle to find work – targeted training, job counselling, job matching, and business development services all have potential in this regard.

Policies to create an inclusive labour force: Discrimination in the workforce, particularly against women and disabled workers, constrains labour force productivity and leads to emotional distress, social breakdown and rising welfare costs. It is also closely connected to violence and harassment in the workplace. Employers, trade unions and governments need to take a more proactive approach to eliminating the problem of discrimination, based not only on human rights principles, but also a recognition that a workplace free of discrimination and harassment leads to better work performance and higher productivity.

Policies to promote labour protection: In addition to improved and updated legislation, there needs to be a long-term programme of capacity building for labour ministries, labour inspection services and other labour market institutions, as well as activities to support the organisation of workers and employers and their constructive involvement in the development and implementation of public policy.

Policies to foster sustainable labour migration and mobility: More can be done to ensure the development impact of migration from (and within) the various SIDS regions. This

can be achieved through capacity building support to help governments identify new market opportunities, and develop a rigorous legal and regulatory framework to ensure the protection of workers.

The SIDS faces formidable challenges in achieving economic and social development. However, they do have assets and opportunities at their disposal to forge a different path of development and decent job creation to that familiar in other parts of the world. The test will be how well the SIDS can turn their emerging challenges into new opportunities.

For example, whilst climate change presents potentially disastrous consequences for the SIDS, it is also an emerging area of decent job creation, particularly if investment can be concentrated on locally constructed climate-resilient infrastructure.

Similarly, while the large number of youth presents potential security and social issues, with quality education and training young people can stimulate growth through the regeneration of the public sector, entrepreneurship, remittances from increased labour migration and through new ideas in emerging sectors such as telecommunications, tourism or creative industries.