



International
Labour
Organization

► ILO Regional Webinar on Union Engagement for Achieving the SDGs

Discussion on the road map to achieve the SDGs

23 September 2021 | 8:00 CET/13:00 BKK | Zoom
ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

► Speakers and resource persons

Speakers

Maria Helena André	Director, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, Geneva
Riccardo Mesiano	Sustainable Development Officer, Office of the Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok
Joy Quitain Hernandez	Communications and Advocacy Officer, International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific, Singapore
Huma Khan	Senior Human Rights Adviser to United Nations Country Team, Bangladesh
Khalid Hassan	Director, ILO Philippines
Neil Buhne	Regional Director, UN Development Coordination Office Asia-Pacific
Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa	Regional Director, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Moderator

Ariel Castro	Desk Officer for Asia-Pacific, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, Geneva
Pong-Sul Ahn	Regional Specialist in Workers Education, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

► Introduction

Pong-Sul Ahn greeted all participants and introduced himself as the moderator for the first half of the webinar. Participation in the webinar, he said, demonstrates commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in building a network and solidarity to accelerate their implementation. In April 2021, Mr Ahn noted, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) launched the *United Nations Cooperation Framework Referral Manual*, which introduced the role of trade unions in the SDG processes. The webinar is part of ACTRAV's ongoing effort to build up capacity of trade unions related to the SDGs and the implementation. Included in those efforts:

1. Discuss SDG implementation and understand the areas where trade unions need to make more effort to accelerate their actions.
2. Assess trade unions' involvement in the monitoring of SDGs at different levels, and identify challenges behind the lack of their involvement in the SDG processes.
3. Encourage trade unions to discuss and build a regional road map for achieving the SDGs.

ACTRAV has worked to make the webinar dynamic, participatory and interactive between resource persons and participants, Mr Ahn said. The first part involves presentations from experts from different institutions who are reviewing the SDG progress and engagement of trade unions in the SDG processes. The second part involves participants sharing their experiences with the SDGs and followed by discussion on the regional road map to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

► Opening remarks

Maria Helena André

Director, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, Geneva

Maria Helena André welcomed the participants from different countries in the Asia-Pacific region. She expressed appreciation for the trade unions for having the time and interest, and she thanked the ACTRAV colleagues in the

Asia-Pacific region and in Geneva for organizing the webinar and the great work in countries. She stressed the need to continue the efforts. Ms André acknowledged the attendance of and continuous support from the Director of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa, for the activities to build up the capacities of trade unions so that they can influence and take action on the SDGs. She acknowledged that participation in the webinar is an expression of the real importance of this topic for trade unions, contrary to the belief of many. Trade unions need to continue to claim their right to sit at the table with the UN Resident Coordinators and to make sure that their representation is seen as separate from that of the non-government organizations. With their members and vast extensive networks, trade unions are one of the actors of the real economy and development.

Ms André emphasized the following points that trade unions need to be aware of and to strengthen their position on:

1. Recalling the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, Ms André highlighted the importance of multilateralism in dealing with challenges and assuring a future of work that mirrors workers' hopes. She stressed the need for the ILO and its constituents, workers, governments and employers to take on active roles towards ensuring policy coherence within the multilateral system.
2. The pandemic has brought new challenges in the world of work. It has disrupted economic and social development and there are tremendous challenges for achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, which has affected their livelihoods. According to the ILO, in the Asia-Pacific region alone, around 62 million jobs were lost in 2020, keeping the unemployment rate at 5.2–5.7 per cent in the year. The pandemic has triggered an increase in economic inequality, not just between countries but within them also. Vulnerable workers, such as informal workers, women workers, young jobseekers, migrant workers and self-employed persons, have been severely affected by the pandemic, including many who have been pushed into poverty or deeper into it.
3. In September 2019, the UN General-Secretary declared during the General Assembly, the Decade of Action for Accelerating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will require more resources and smarter solutions; more local actions that lead to a transition in the policies, budgets and institutions; and more people actions that require multistakeholder involvement and their unstoppable movement. In March 2021, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development concluded that the pandemic had reversed the region's socio-economic development, and none of the SDGs is likely to be achieved by 2030. Thus, the challenges ahead for SDG 8 (on sustainable development and decent work for all) is a critical concern for the trade unions in the region. But all SDGs must be pursued as an entire programme.

The post-pandemic period may bring more hardship, Ms André recognized. Workers' engagement in the pursuit of the SDGs has become more crucial, and building up the capacity of workers' organizations is urgently needed. For bettering workers' engagement in the SDG processes, ACTRAV is providing support to trade unions at the national and regional levels. They are using the ACTRAV publication, *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation and the Decent Work Agenda: A Trade Union Reference Manual*. Even though much work has been done, everyone needs to be clearly aware that there is now greater effort required to build stronger policy coherence.

What specific effort is needed to achieve the SDGs and decent work?, Ms André asked in conclusion. It's a question the webinar is expected to answer, she said.

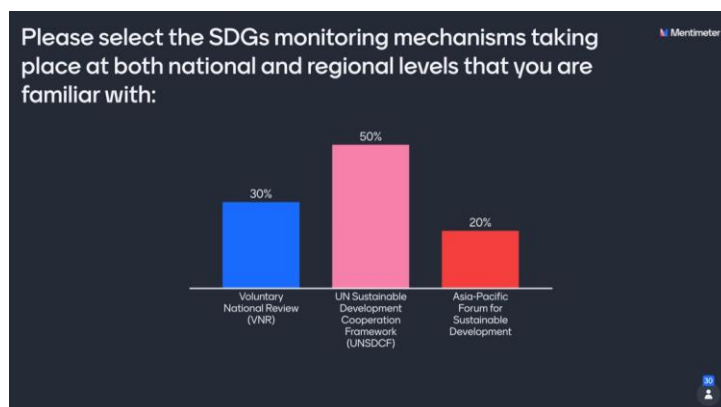
Mr Ahn thanked Ms André for setting the tone for the agenda of the webinar discussion. He reiterated her points of increasing unemployment in the region due to the pandemic situation; trade unions' positive contribution to the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development; the importance of accelerating implementation of SDG 8; trade unions engaging in the SDG processes; and ACTRAV's continued endeavour to support trade union involvement in the SDGs.

► Assessing and preparing for the Decade Action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In introducing the technical session, Mr Ahn noted that the pandemic has increased the level of global uncertainty and insecurity in terms of human, economic and environmental development. Thus, an inclusive, sustainable and resilient COVID-19 recovery is critical to support the global transition towards creating decent jobs, reducing inequalities and improving safety and security. The 2021 UN General Assembly emphasized the great urgency and ambition to end the pandemic and accelerate the SDGs to give hope to millions of people. The theme of the discussion thus echoes those aspirations of the United Nations and its Member States.

The technical session looked at the progress, the challenges and lessons learned from the implementation of the SDGs and the engagement of three trade unions in three processes: Voluntary National Reviews, the UN Cooperation Framework and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

First, Mr Ahn first asked participants to reply to the following question to check their understanding of the SDG processes.



In introducing the first speaker, Mr Ahn noted that the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) annually organizes the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. Riccardo Mesiano was asked to talk about the UNESCAP evaluation of progress of the 17 SDGs and indicators along with the strategy and policy that UNESCAP uses in its work with multistakeholders, including trade unions, to accelerate the progress on the SDGs.

Riccardo Mesiano

**Sustainable Development Officer, Office of the Executive Secretary,
United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the
Pacific, Bangkok**

**Presentation: Reality, challenges and the decade action of SDG implementation across
the Asia-Pacific region**

Riccardo Mesiano thanked the ILO for the invitation, and after greeting the participants outlined his presentation:

1. Update of the goals and in relation to the pandemic situation.
2. Suggest how trade unions can involve with stakeholders and governments in SDG implementation.
3. Announce the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

SDG progress in Asia and the Pacific in 2020

The Asia-Pacific region has been doing a little bit better on some of the goals, compared to other regions, Mr Mesiano began. With the following graphic, he highlighted the UNESCAP evaluation, with the thick blue lines indicating progress. The red lines indicate where the region has regressed, such as SDG 13 on climate action. The striped bars indicate insufficient data are available. The reality is that:

- The region is not doing the best in implementation of the goals.
- For some goals, such as SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), there is not enough data available.



Mr Mesiano next showed the list of SDGs targets and the region's progress of achievement expected by 2030.



The green spots indicate where the region should maintain the pace of the progress to achieve the goals. The green spots are very limited, which means the region is doing well on only a few targets. Special attention should be paid to the red spots, Mr Mesiano emphasized, for example, on target 8.4 (material resource efficiency) and target 8.5 (full employment and decent work), which show that the region needs to reverse the trend to achieve the targets. As illustrated in the graphic, there are big parts in yellow that mean that the region needs to accelerate the progress to achieve the targets. The grey spots indicate not enough available data.

Compared to where the region started in 2017, the region has more data available. In 2017, the region had no data for 106 indicators. In 2020, the region has no data for only 38 indicators.

Some subregions are on track, such as East and North-East Asia for goals 1 and 6; North and Central Asia for goals 10 and 16; and South-East Asia for goal 9. All subregions are stagnant on many of the goals and regressing on many, such as on goals 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16. Goal 14 (life below water) and goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) are regressing in many subregions.

To track the progress on the SDGs, there is a tool called the National SDG Tracker. Mr Mesiano encouraged the participants to access it through their mobile phones.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Asia-Pacific region in so many aspects and adversely affected the SDG progress. On jobs and the informal sector, nearly 829 million informal workers were impacted, and unemployment increased by 15 million persons. As much as 7.1 per cent of labour income has been lost, when compared to 2019. This means that the targets and indicators that refer to this goal are really regressing. In terms of health, under-5

mortality has increased by at least half a million children. As for social protection and basic services, there are 71 million more children impacted by poverty; multidimensional poverty could double; at least 850 million students have lost almost half of the academic year; and 6.7 million learners are at risk of dropping out of school.

The role of trade unions

To reach the targets, Mr Mesiano stressed, “we need partners and stakeholders to take part in the effort.” Who are the stakeholders? Trade unions are major stakeholders, and they have been doing considerable work with UNESCAP to accelerate the SDG progress.

To strengthen the engagement with the 2030 Agenda with different stakeholders, there are things that need to be done, such as creating awareness and political commitment as well as building up capacities. It is also necessary to create effective multistakeholder involvement with traditional processes or bodies. When it comes to the stakeholder engagement based on the ladder of participation, the expectation is not only to inform or consult but to collaborate and empower stakeholders because they are the agents of change. Without them, it is not possible to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Mr Mesiano announced that the ninth Forum, on Building Back Better from COVID-19 While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, will be 28–31 March 2022. Five goals will be reviewed: SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). But there will be a chance to discuss all of the progress on the different goals. There will also be a thematic review, a session on the Voluntary National Reviews and a chance for side events and roundtable discussions. Mr Mesiano highlighted that trade unions and the ILO are invited as partners to the event. Mr Ahn thanked Mr Mesiano for the presentation and his support for the engagement of the trade unions in the Forum. He reiterated that the stakeholders are the actors and agencies who bring the changes in the world. Thus, partnership is very important in accelerating the SDGs, and engagement of trade unions is necessary. In the Asia-Pacific region, there are challenges, especially in the informal economy, which is about 55–60 per cent of the region's total workforce. How can the living and working standards for the informal workers be improved? That is a key challenge, along with tackling the impact of pandemic.

The International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP) actively promotes SDG progress, especially SDG 8 on decent work and sustainable economic growth, Mr Ahn said in reference to the next speaker. SDG 8 is integral to the goals on employment, labour rights and social dimensions, he added. ITUC-AP has reached out to its affiliated unions to realize a new social contract as the centre of its SDG implementation. The new social contract includes five demands concerning jobs, rights, social protection, equality and inclusion. This is significant for ensuring that the economic recovery and renewed resilience from the pandemic also addresses the widening inequalities. Joy Quitain Hernandez was invited to the webinar to present the ITUC-AP's role in realizing the new social contract in the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region.

Joy Quitain Hernandez

Communications and Advocacy Officer, International Trade Union Confederation - Asia Pacific, Singapore

Presentation: Towards a trade union road map for SDG achievement in the Asia-Pacific region

Joy Quitain Hernandez thanked the ILO for the opportunity to share the trade union road map for SDG achievement in the region. She explained that in terms of achieving the SDGs, the road has become a steeper hill since the world began struggling with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the SDG 8 monitoring by ITUC-AP, the world was already in sustainability debt even before the pandemic. Especially in the world of work, there has been serious SDG underperformance, which exposed the most vulnerable workers to the impacts of the

multiple pandemic-related crises. She noted that the developing and emerging Asia-Pacific economies had achieved more than 5 per cent annual growth in the decade prior to the pandemic. Now the target related to economic growth is a little bit on track. However, what economic growth there has been has not created decent work or uplifted the lives of working people. And the pandemic has reversed the progress made on the SDGs. The impact of the pandemic is devastating, but there is also a crucial opportunity to push a new social contract for human-centred recovery and resilience. Ms Hernandez recalled a UN session on the SDGs in action, social protection and jobs. The ILO Director-General compared the pandemic to an x-ray that has revealed the real structural injustice and inequality. The prolonged crises makes a strong case to rethink existing policies and development models, to do things differently and to discontinue what is currently being done. Instead, the world must build back better and make transformative changes that address the social and economic vulnerabilities, inequalities, exclusions and the destruction of the planet in the name of profit.

It is imperative to focus on a human-centred recovery, she stressed. To achieve this, SDG 8 is particularly crucial. Through its targets on workers' protection, decent work, social protection and environmental preservation, SDG 8 will have a strong effect on the other SDGs. It has an important role in the trade union call for a new social contract.

The new social contract for human-centred recovery and resilience that the trade unions have been demanding includes:

- **Jobs**
Climate-friendly jobs with a just transition and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. SDG 13 has not been on track. If it is possible to focus on economic growth without environmental extraction and environmental degradation, the issues for SDG 13 could be resolved.
- **Rights**
The promise of the ILO Centenary Declaration to respect the rights of all workers, irrespective of employment arrangement.
- **Universal protection**
Social protection for all, with the fight for a Global Social Protection Fund for the poorest countries. A study released by the Financial Transparency Coalition, which only covered eight countries, has interesting findings. The ITUC-AP survey showed that 63 per cent of COVID-19 relief funds actually went to large corporations, and only 22.4 per cent went to social protection. Other indications placed it as high as 99 per cent of COVID-19-related funds going to large corporations or companies rather than to the social protection measures.
- **Equality**
Ending all forms of discrimination, such as by race or gender, to make sure that all people can share in prosperity. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few must expand to the many. In some countries, these issues have been experiencing setbacks due to the pandemic.
- **Inclusion**
Working people want a peaceful world and a just, rights-based development model with a promise of the SDGs.

ITUC-AP believes that social dialogue should be at the heart of the new social contract and as a governance tool of the 2030 Agenda. In the trade union road map towards SDGs achievement, trade unions want to:

- reinforce the role of social dialogue as a key means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its strategies to build resilience from COVID-19;
- support dialogue with social partners in the context of the Voluntary National Reviews and on the SDGs at the country level;
- uphold social dialogue at the country level in the context of United Nations reform (with the UN Resident Coordinators);
- support a renewed inclusive multilateralism that guarantees the engagement of social partners in global policy-making spaces;
- uphold ILO engagement in assuming a more central role in promoting policy coherence for human-centred crisis recovery and beyond.

In some countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, trade unions have met with the UN Resident Coordinator to discuss the United Nations' response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also contributed towards SDG 8

through the Voluntary National Reviews. With Indonesia hosting the G20 in 2022, the ITUC-AP affiliate, Confederation of Prosperous Indonesian Labor Unions (KSBSI), is working with the Government to push for the new social contract as a political priority for the G20.

Ms Hernandez also highlighted that social dialogue can only flourish in a well-functioning democracy that upholds the fundamental rights and freedom of workers. The Asia-Pacific region has one of the worst records for the protection of workers. Of the 26 ILO Member States in the region, only 19 have ratified ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and only 23 who have ratified ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). This is much lower than the rates in Africa, the Americas and Europe. Recent events demonstrate that democracy in the region is crumbling fast. For almost eight months, people in Myanmar have been struggling for the restoration of democracy. A week before the webinar, trade unions and civil society organizations in Hong Kong, China started the process of resolution due to intensifying threats under the National Security Law. The road towards achieving the SDGs should be inclusive. But how can this road be navigated when the democratic space is shrinking? This is why solidarity among international institutions is important, especially when the democratic space nationally closes down entirely so that pressure can be asserted by autocratic regimes that basically tear down the fundamental rights and freedom of workers.

In countries where the SDGs are possible, the tools that can be used to promote social dialogue in relation to the goals are:

- Country reports and research on social dialogue and the SDGs.
 - ITUC-AP developed a country report based on research that was used by the trade unions for advocacy with the labour ministries but also with other ministries that are directly in charge of the 2030 Agenda. The ITUC-AP also does alliance-building with civil society groups and awareness-raising within trade unions concerning the SDGs.
 - The ITUC-AP produced research papers that link social dialogue and the SDGs.
- SDG 8 Global Monitor
 - Show the centrality of the social and labour dimensions within the 2030 Agenda and how SDG 8 influences other SDGs.
 - Use the findings as a basis to develop policy responses to enhance progress on SDG 8 and the whole 2030 Agenda.

From the SDG 8 Global Monitor, policy recommendations for SDG 8-driven recovery and resilience include:

- investments in climate-friendly jobs with a just transition negotiated with social partners;
- universal social protection;
- equality by creating jobs for women and youth, investments in care, equal pay for work of equal value, minimum living wages and eliminating gender-based violence in the world of work;
- financing these policies through strengthened development cooperation, debt relief and progressive taxation;
- a new model of inclusive multilateralism with social partners on board. Right now, the moral imperative is to ensure universal access to vaccines.

Ms Hernandez explained that ITUC-AP has been active in #Timefor8 Campaign. Its objectives:

- Influence the High-Level Political Forum's ministerial declaration. Trade unions from more than 40 countries contacted their governments before the forum to influence the content of the declaration so that it can represent the demands for the unions.
- Expose workers' struggles. Participants at the High-Level Political Forum were confronted with strong testimonies from workers from around the world, which ITUC-AP disseminated through its social media channels.

Ms Hernandez appreciated the ITUC-AP's collaboration with ACTRAV, especially in supporting dialogue on the SDGs. She hoped that the collaboration would be continued to enforce their work and common agenda to achieve the SDGs. The road to achieve SDGs may have many barriers, but trade unions will remain committed in building workers' power to influence relevant spaces for the SDGs nationally, regionally and globally.

Mr Ahn noted that ACTRAV is happy for the cordial collaboration with the ITUC-AP in promoting and accelerating the SDGs. He reiterated Ms Hernandez's introduction of the new social contract, which has been included in the common agenda that was presented by the Secretary-General in the 2021 UN General Assembly. He noted that Ms Hernandez highlighted the backslide of the SDGs in the region in terms of democracy, freedom of association and the right for collective bargaining. The informal economy and the extension of social security are also major issues. Mr Ahn stressed the importance of multistakeholder engagement, especially with trade unions, in achieving the SDGs. He emphasized that the ITUC-AP is a front-line actor, together with its affiliates, in the acceleration of SDG progress. The ITUC-AP can mobilize a majority of workers in the formal and informal sectors, migrant workers and marginalized groups of workers.

In turning to the next speaker, Mr Ahn introduced Huma Khan as speaking on partnerships, especially in her native Bangladesh, and accelerating the SDG progress. In particular, she discussed how the partnership with a trade union became strong enough to help engage in the Voluntary National Review and in addressing their own issues in the UN Cooperation Framework. The SDGs can only be achieved if all stakeholders work together, Mr Ahn reminded, noting they were designed and adopted through inclusive and participatory national, regional and global consultations in 2015 to build the better world and bright future that people want. All parties – governments, employers' and workers' organizations, civil society organizations, academia and development agencies – need to be supportive, passionate and cooperative to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Huma Khan

Senior Human Rights Adviser to the UN Country Team, Bangladesh

Presentation: Emerging lessons of engaging workers' organizations and leaving no one behind

Huma Khan noted that Bangladesh accepted 178 recommendations in the third Universal Periodic Review and is in the process of implementing them. Several of them relate to human rights and labour rights. Three periodic reviews have been completed, with some tangible progress. The United Nations has a human rights working group, and the ILO is an active member, especially to promote efforts that speak to human and labour rights.

Every year in Bangladesh, 2 million young people join the labour market. Job growth and youth employment continue to be big challenges. Lagging women's participation in the labour market is a concern. Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job losses and the lack of addressing occupational safety and health and social protection have added new challenges.

The United Nations does not consider trade unions as civil society organizations but recognizes them and other labour rights organizations with an individual identity. The UN Country Team in Bangladesh has singled out working with trade unions to establish labour rights in the country. They were involved in the process of developing the Immediate Socio-Economic Recovery Framework (ISERF) as well as the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

Based on the formal request of trade unions, the ILO (on behalf of the United Nations) organized an exclusive meeting with national as well as sectoral trade unions. The UN Resident Coordinator participated in the meeting and discussed the ISERF process on immediate responses to the COVID-19 impact. She stayed until the closing of the meeting and carefully listened to the voices and concerns of trade unions. She also expressed the importance of trade unions' engagement in achieving the SDG goals in Bangladesh, in particular SDG 8. Another exclusive meeting was organized with the trade unions on the formulation of the UNSDCF. The relevant UN agencies presented a draft UNSDCF to the trade union representatives and exchanged views before finalizing it.

Trade unions had an integral role in the stakeholders' consultation on formulating the ISERF and the UNSDCF and raised their views and concerns. The United Nations highly values the importance of trade unions' meaningful involvement, contributions, engagement, participation and support in the various United Nations' processes. The trade unions have an active role in the five pillars of the UNSDCF: (i) inclusive and sustainable economic development; (ii) equitable human development and well-being; (iii) a sustainable, healthy and resilient

environment; (iv) transformative, participatory and inclusive governance; and (v) gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence.

The ILO contributions broadly reflect the voice of the trade unions in UNSDCF as an equal partner of the ILO's tripartite constituents. Ms Khan said that the ILO will work closely with the trade unions in the process of effective implementation of the UNSDCF. The United Nations recognizes that the role of trade unions in protecting workers' rights and interest is critical. However, one of the greatest difficulties that trade unions are facing is to support workers in the informal economy (at almost 85 per cent of the total workers in Bangladesh). Currently, workers in the informal economy do not fall under the scope of Bangladesh Labour Act.

Ms Khan explained that in March 2021 the Government of Bangladesh submitted a comprehensive time-bound road map to the ILO Governing Body, in response to the workers' group concerns on violations of labour rights raised at the 2019 International Labour Conference. The Government has considered the ILO's independent Committee of Experts observations in finalizing the road map. In addition, the Government developed a comprehensive and time-bound national action plan for the European Union to continue to retain trade preferences (Everything But Arms) after Bangladesh graduates from its least developed country status. The issues on the ILO road map and the National Action Plan are similar. The trade unions are encouraged to take an active role in the effective implementation of both the road map and the action plan.

Ms Khan highlighted how the ILO contributes to achieving the SDG goals in Bangladesh. Trade unions are engaged in achieving the SDG goals as an equally important tripartite partner of the ILO. The ILO celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019 and adopted the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work promoting decent work and advancing social dialogue. It will help forge a human-centred recovery on COVID-19. The ILO work has focused on SDG 8 along with SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 16 and 17. She briefly explained the decent work indicators in the SDG Global Indicator Framework that the ILO is a custodian of, summarized in the following table.

Indicator	Tier	Custodian agency
1.1.1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban and rural) <i>ILO involvement in this indicator is limited to the working poor, or the poverty rate (the proportion of employed population living with their families on income below the poverty line)</i>	Tier I	World Bank ILO
1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors or systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable	Tier II	ILO World Bank
5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions	Tier I	ILO
8.2.1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person	Tier I	ILO World Bank United Nations Statistics Division
8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex	Tier II	ILO
8.5.1 Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities	Tier II	ILO
8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities	Tier I	ILO
8.6.1 Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training	Tier I	ILO
8.7.1 Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age	Tier II	ILO UNICEF

8.8.1 Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status	Tier II	ILO
8.8.2 Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on ILO textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status	Tier II	ILO
8.b.1 Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy	Tier II	ILO World Bank Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
10.4.1 Labour share of GDP, comprising wages and social protection transfers	Tier II	ILO International Monetary Fund
10.7.1 Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of monthly income earned in country of destination	Tier II	ILO World Bank

The ILO emphasized these indicators when formulating its Decent Work Country Programme. The new-generation UN Cooperation Framework and the Decent Work Country Programme will have strong links to achieving the SDG indicators. Of the 232 indicators, Bangladesh has prioritized 39, but importantly added one of its own: Leaving no one behind. The Government set up a 104 Development Results Framework for the eighth Five-Year Plan. SDG 8 is prioritized in an outcome, stating, “Increased productive and decent employment opportunities for sustainable and inclusive growth” prioritizing employment creation. The ILO is the lead agency of UN Cooperation Framework Pillar 1 on employment generation while also actively involved in the other pillars.

Ms Khan proudly mentioned that going forward, the new-generation UN Cooperation Framework would create a stronger joint platform among the UN agencies in supporting the people of Bangladesh. The ILO social partners will also have a strong role in the UN system to ensure the successful implementation of the UN Cooperation Framework.

Mr Ahn thanked Ms Khan for highlighting the crucial role that trade unions in Bangladesh had in the UN Cooperation Framework process. In introducing the next speaker, Mr Ahn explained that the ILO country office in Manila has continued to support the engagement of trade unions in the SDG processes (the Voluntary National Review and the UN Cooperation Framework). Trade unions are also proactive in monitoring SDG implementation. Trade unions have developed policy papers and presented them to the Government and the UN Resident Coordinator incorporated their proposals into the previous Voluntary National Reviews and joint action planning. In May 2021, trade unions also discussed with the UN Resident Coordinator about their engagement in the UN Cooperation Framework. Khalid Hassan was invited to the webinar to share what the ILO has learned from its collaboration with trade unions in the SDG processes as well as tips for the unions’ campaign for accelerating SDG progress.

Khalid Hassan

ILO Director, Philippines

Presentation: Emerging lessons of engaging workers’ organizations and leaving no one behind

Khalid Hassan started with the background and the context for the UN Socio-economic and Peace Framework (SEPF), which is basically a cooperative framework for the United Nations on sustainable development. The Philippines had previously developed a Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development as the first generation of the UN Development Assistance Framework and then moved to the Cooperation Framework. During this process, COVID-19 came in, and but the ILO needed to produce the SEPF. Therefore, the ILO revised the Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development into the Cooperation Framework. The COVID-19 response

plan was added and it became the SEPF, which has four pillars: people, peace, planet and prosperity. Once the SEPF was produced, the ILO needed to engage workers' organizations in the process. The ILO encouraged the unions to produce a joint position paper for UN dialogue, with the objective to produce recommendations and analysis.

There were 39 recommendations from the workers' organizations presented to the United Nations, with four primary aims:

- provide inputs to UN analysis based on workers' point of view;
- promote involvement of trade unions in UN processes;
- push the labour agenda in the SDGs and the SEPF;
- promote the Decent Work Agenda.

With a joint paper in hand, a UN Country Team dialogue was arranged. The ILO organized a meeting in which all trade unions, the UN Country Team and UN agencies participated to understand the perspective of workers' organizations as well as other agencies' feedback. Thus, it was a system-wide approach to building a partnership for implementation of the SEPF.

The consultation aimed to:

- listen to the feedback and recommendations on the SEPF;
- identify potential areas of collaboration in the implementation of the SEPF and the 2030 Agenda;
- strengthen relationships and forge more systematic engagement.

The meeting participants agreed:

- The ILO will support the UN Resident Coordinator's Office on joint workplans and implementation and discuss core issues with relevant agencies.
- The presentation of the labour sector will be shared with the outcome pillars to bring in the technical lens.
- A proposal will be developed for monthly meetings to review the progress of the recommendations by the unions with the UN agencies and how they can be put into action.
- The UN Country Team will establish a suitable mechanism for continued engagement. The coordination system will be further defined for improving the process.

Background and context: Voluntary National Review

There are two processes: one is the UN Coordination Framework and the other is the Voluntary National Review. In the Philippines, two Reviews have been produced:

1. Voluntary National Review 2016 focused on the Philippine efforts to promote the SDGs and to determine indicators. At that time, there was no Decent Work Country Programme.
2. Voluntary National Review 2019 improved on the strategy to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality.

Workers were involved in the tripartite discussion on the draft government report, which was organized by the Department of Labor and Employment with the ILO. The workers drafted and submitted a joint union position paper that aimed to:

- serve as inputs to the Philippines' Voluntary National Review 2019 as well as to the UN Resident Coordinator for reference;
- provide analysis and insights on the implementation of the SDGs from workers' perspectives, using statistical data that supplemented the nationally adopted SDG indicators;
- use labour-oriented studies so that the workers' points of view would be reflected;
- reference the 2017 Decent Work Country Diagnostics and the ITUC 2018 template for SDG country reports by trade unions.

The joint report, Mr Hassan explained, became an independent and dynamic tool for workers' organizations and trade unions. It can be used for advocacy and policy development on the 2030 Agenda. The UN Resident Coordinator was provided a copy of the report for reference. This was later used as a reference for the joint trade union position on the SEPF.

Challenges to the process

Challenges with trade union engagement in the Voluntary National Review and with the Government in general:

1. In terms of process, tripartism and social dialogue are not common practices in the Government outside the Department of Labor and Employment. Trade unions generally are lumped together with other NGOs or civil society groups. Trade unions advocated for the institutionalization of social dialogue in their joint position papers in both the Voluntary National Review and the SEPF, which was not a standard.
2. There is limited engagement of unions by the Government beyond the Department of Labor and Employment. Trade unions have always had to demand that their voices be heard.
3. Planning agencies usually engage economists as consultants but do not involve labour relations and human rights experts. The same is true for the UN Common Country Assessment. In the joint paper, labour relations and human rights experts were not involved.

Challenges with union engagement with UN agencies:

1. There is a lack of experience in the United Nations in dealing with trade unions because such agencies generally engaged with the private sector. Trade unions are lumped as NGOs or civil society. Thus, the ILO has a role to connect trade unions with other agencies and facilitate engagement. The position paper provides opportunity for UN agencies to engage more with the unions.
2. There is a need to strengthen labour rights as human rights in the UN system.
3. There is need for deeper understanding of the decent work framework and its four pillars by other UN agencies.
4. Trade unions and the ILO need to better understand the country programmes and frameworks of other UN agencies.

Facilitating factors, recommendations and opportunities

To achieve good engagement with trade unions in UN processes, Mr Hassan recommended the following facilitating factors:

- ACTRAVE should promote awareness of its role and its specialists who are available for support.
- The availability of tools, guides, data and analysis that have been made accessible to workers is crucial. They should be provided at the right time.
- Briefings among workers on UN processes and reforms should be conducted regularly.
- The ILO should work at all levels, which will help workers' organizations that need to connect with other UN agencies primarily working with governments.
- The UN reforms, together with revised job descriptions of the UN Resident Coordinator, should include cooperation with trade unions and employers' organizations.

Regarding the opportunities, Mr Hassan noted:

- The 2021 Voluntary National Review report and the UN Call to Action for human rights both open up a chance for trade unions to address their issues
- The Philippines has officially expressed interest to present a Voluntary National Review 2022, in line with its commitment to conduct one every three years. The UN Resident Coordinator is positioning One UN to support this process. The theme of the report will be Building Back Better from COVID-19 While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which would cover SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land) and SDG 17 (partnership for the goals).
- The voice of the Philippine unions has been strong on labour rights, focusing on freedom of association and right to collective bargaining as human rights. The unions and the ILO can work with the UN Resident Coordinator adviser and the UN Country Team on human rights.

In recapping, Mr Ahn remarked on the process of ILO support and the engagement of trade unions in the implementation of SDGs and with the Voluntary National Review process. He reiterated Mr Hassan's explanation of the partnership-building coordination mechanism with the trade unions to introduce the process and the engagement of trade unions in the Voluntary National Review. The ILO supported trade unions to develop their own joint paper that was incorporated into the government report. Regarding the number of challenges presented

by Mr Hassan, Mr Ahn recognized that they are indeed relevant to the context of union engagement in the SDG processes. Mr Hassan's presentation also highlighted the lack of understanding of UN agencies on union organizations and their roles in general, the need to strengthen human rights and labour rights and then to incorporate those rights into the work agenda of the UN Cooperation Framework. ACTRAV has supported trade unions with tools, guidelines and advocacy activities, said Mr Ahn.

Before closing the session, Mr Ahn asked the participants to write one word in Slido.com as a takeaway from the technical session regarding the three presentations. The following word cloud reflects their replies.



► Roundtable discussion for building a (national and regional) plan of action for the achievement of the SDGs

For the roundtable discussion for building a (national and regional) plan of action for the achievement of the SDGs, the participants were divided into three groups. ACTRAVE specialists facilitated each group's 35-minute discussion:

- Group 1, Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed
- Group 2, Yuki Otsuji
- Group 3, Ravindra Chanaka Samithadasa

The participants discussed the following questions in accordance with their respective country situation:

- Which steps have you taken already?
- Which steps do you want to achieve by when?

Regarding the steps to take, there were four classifications:

- Step 0 → Understanding the SDGs, their implementation and reporting processes.
- Step 1 → Understanding the role of unions and how to engage in the SDG processes.
- Step 2 → Making a position paper.
- Step 3 → Engaging with the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN Country Team and other relevant stakeholders.

After the break-out session, group presentations were made, with Ariel Castro facilitating.

Group 1: Presented by Vidya Sagar Giri, National Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress, India

According to the group discussion, there are two basic issues highlighted regarding the role of trade unions in evaluating the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region or in the respective countries: As stated in the remarks, the COVID-19 pandemic has created vulnerable conditions in the world and particularly in India. But even before the pandemic, the condition of labour in India was vulnerable. Because the country has not ratified ILO Conventions No. 87 and No. 98, workers are still fighting for those ratification. The pandemic has greatly affected the SDG progress and increased the vulnerability of workers. Regardless of the fact that trade unions and workers have been fighting for labour rights for decades, labour rights have remained a concerning issue in India. To this day, workers are still fighting to establish trade unions and for their labour rights. A number of appeals have been delivered to the ILO regarding the Indian situation. Mr Giri highlighted the following points:

- Trade unions of India would like to make a real evaluation of the SDG progress in the country, along with labour rights and even democratic rights, which are also in danger. Thus, trade unions need to continuously fight for the evaluation of the labour code, which has been passed but which bulldozed all labour rights in the country.
- As for the awareness regarding the SDGs and the Decent Work Country Programme, they are not even the government officials nor the bureaucrats. In India, the governmental NITI Aayog public policy think tank engaged in evaluating the SDGs, although it was acting against the principles of the SDGs. The Government has ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), but before ratification, India had amended the Child Labour Act and actually regulates child labour activities in the country under the name of traditional work.

Due to those highlighted situations, Mr Giri suggested that UN agencies, particularly the ILO, should take the initiative on the complaint letter of trade unions in India concerning the lack of union engagement in the SDG process. The Decent Work Country Programme and labour rights violations need to be evaluated by UN agencies. In regards to awareness raising, the publications on the SDGs and the Decent Work Country Programme should be disseminated continuously. Even the Minister of Manpower and bureaucrats do not know about either instrument. Awareness-raising programmes should be a priority, even for government officials. In conclusion, Mr Giri said that trade unions' fight on the SDGs has been ignored but needs to be restored.

Group 2: Presented by Patcharawat, State Enterprise Workers' Relations Confederation, Thailand

The group consisted of participants from Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand. They discussed what each union has done so far in regard to the SDGs. The three countries have tried to push female and young workers to participate in trade unions. There's a certain proportion of female and young workers who work to create the agenda relevant to them directly. The three countries have also tried to drive their attention to the SDGs by providing training to union members and young workers. However, they are still struggling to accomplish the targets of the SDGs. This issue has been brought to the trade unions. The three countries' representatives admitted that they still need knowledge about the SDGs to set up a better plan for implementing them.

Group 3: Presented by Ravindra Chanaka, Indian National Trade Union Congress, India

The group consisted of participants from Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, and they discussed the following:

- There is a need to contextualize the SDG processes as an internal process of unions on how to move forward (India).
- There is a need to accommodate the changing realities of labour as to what is happening, such as the greater use of digital tools among workers and how it creates new dynamics. Young people are moving towards a new form of coordinating themselves by social networks. How can they be engaged better in trade unions in the future (Malaysia)?
- There is a need to establish various levels of an introduction of the topic and for better integration of the SDG processes to create ownership among the trade unions (Bangladesh).
- The ILO can engage many agencies in the joint programme. The ILO is the one agency with the chance of engaging unions in the process of integrating them into the UN processes (Fiji).
- There is a need to establish a democratic situation (Myanmar and India).
- There is a need to enhance social dialogue to engage trade unions in the SDGs (Philippines).

In summary, Mr Castro highlighted the strong demand for awareness-raising regarding the SDGs and to make sure that unions and members engage in the processes. This should be integrated into the unions' way of thinking, planning and operations. There's also the need to harness digital tools to make sure that within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is able to reach the unreached by creating awareness as well as ensuring the need to engage. There is also the demand for paying attention to the primacy of labour rights and the Decent Work Country Programme process as well as to young people and women in the unions.

Before ending the session, Mr Castro asked the participants look at the following graphic and comment on how to improve union engagement in the SDG processes.

What action needs to be taken to improve the engagement of the trade unions in accelerating the SDG implementation?

Mentimeter



24

► Closing remarks

Mr Ahn moved to the closing session by inviting the Regional Director of the UN Development Coordination Office Asia-Pacific and the Regional Director of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for their closing remarks.

Neil Buhne Regional Director, UN Development Coordination Office Asia-Pacific

Neil Buhne noted the fresh perspectives he picked up from the reports of the group work activities. What captured his attention the most in the discussions and presentations was that, despite the COVID-19 crisis, the world is committing to the SDGs. Its implementation was already bad and has grown worse due to the pandemic and its impacts on economies, the society and people's lives. Any talk of "modern slavery" now includes individuals suddenly in debt who are so much more vulnerable. Indeed, around 825 million informal workers are said to be affected as well as 6 per cent or 8 per cent of regionwide unemployment or even higher, which has been formally measured. This reminded him of a speech the UN Secretary-General delivered at the UN General Assembly. The speech began with the him saying, "I am here to sound the alarm. The world must wake up. We are on the edge of an abyss, and we are moving in the wrong direction." The Secretary-General also talked about the world deeply threatened and more divided. Mr Buhne said it struck him that the approach by the ILO working with the unions, employers and governments is one way to bridge these divides. The Secretary-General talked about the peace divide in the world, the climate divide, the income divide (which probably comes closest to the topic of the webinar), the gender divide and even the generational divide between youth's perspectives and elder's perspectives. His worry is that everything is going to be worse because of the COVID-19 crisis. Mr Buhne returned to the words of the UN Secretary-General, "Solidarity is missing in action just when we need it the most."

Mr Buhne emphasized that the union movement is much about solidarity. There's also a phrase: "We passed the science test because we found vaccines, but we get a failure in ethics. Instead of seeing humility, we see a pride. Instead of solidarity, we ended in destruction." Mr Buhne then quoted from the Director-General of ILO, saying,

“The pandemic has shown us an x-ray on ourselves and it’s a bit of an ugly picture.” The ugly picture is not only in the sense of the economic effect on employment, but also the civil space that is shrinking in many countries. In all these situations, some countries are finding opportunity and possibilities of recovery that actually deal with these issues because of the chance to rebuild. Hence, the United Nations has the responsibility to bring those voices into dialogue to accelerate the recovery and to reduce the vulnerabilities. When we put an x-ray again on us in 15 years, the picture will not be as ugly as the one at this time.

History, he said, has shown that when there is a crisis like this, good things can come from it, especially if workers and employers can get together. For instance, in Europe, they managed to get labour, governments and employers together. Germany perhaps is the best example. The question is how. Mr Buhne noted there is an encouraging thing out of this whole pandemic experience: There is stronger investment being made in social protection systems. Another question that emerged in the webinar discussion is how trade unions can actually get their voice heard better and how they can contribute more to the SDGs. He is very encouraged to hear the example and feedback from his colleague, about how the UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh, has dialogued more with the union movement. That is one of the ways to get the voices into whether the SDGs can be a tool to build this new approach that’s needed. UN Resident Coordinators should be engaged. Additionally, he recalled that a participant had mentioned the role of the ILO as important because the ILO knows the unions the best.

Under the UN reform process, the UN Cooperation Framework was developed as a sort of five-year plan for the United Nations. It is not necessarily the solution for all issues, but by having a much stronger integrated plan for the system as a whole at the country level may leverage the different strengths of the UN agencies to support social partners in the COVID-19 recovery and climate change and overcome inequalities as key elements of action.

These are the lessons to take from the discussions on how to get the trade unions more involved with SDGs. The UN Resident Coordinator must be educated about what is happening, he said. More progress than ever before must be made now. As the UN Secretary-General said, “Unfortunately, the pandemic over the last year has shown how far we are behind on so many things and shown weaknesses.” Mr Buhne concluded with the hope of taking advantage of the opportunities.

Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa **Regional Director, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific**

Chihoko Asada-Miyakawa expressed her pleasure to conclude the discussions that had produced good ideas that can and must be transformed into action. She recognized the excellent contributions of the resource persons as well as the participants in the webinar. She singled out with appreciation for their “excellent contributions” Riccardo Mesiano, the Sustainable Development Officer and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, Joy Hernandez, the Communication and Advocacy Officer for ITUC-AP as well as Khalid Hassan, the ILO Director in the Philippines. She also thanked all participants in the break-out session. She was confident that the road map developed will provide a foundation upon which trade unions can be a basis for important future steps and collaboration with counterparts from employers’ organizations and government at various levels. She also appreciated the presence of Neil Buhne, the Regional Director of UN Development Coordination Office Asia-Pacific. Mr Buhne has been taking part in many SDG-related events and is a well-known supporter of trade union engagement in the SDG processes. The ILO is looking forward to continuing the close collaboration with Mr Buhne to create more space for workers’ organizations so that they can take on a more prominent role in the SDG implementation, she said.

There are fewer than ten years remaining until 2030. As the clock counts down, it is important to consider how to collectively and effectively accelerate the actions to accomplish the SDGs. Building strong partnerships among stakeholders, including workers’ organizations, is essential to synchronize policies and actions at the different levels. Ms Asada-Miyakawa highlighted the Decade of Action that the UN Secretary-General called for in September 2019 to accelerate efforts to achieve the SDGs. The Decade of Action calls for engagement at the global, local and individual levels. Trade unions have a vital role in this regard. Trade unions’ actions support the Secretary-General’s call at every level. This ranges from bottom-up people-oriented activities to ensuring that the voices of workers are heard and that they can influence decisions and directions at the local and global levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge challenge for everyone and brought a great change to the world of work. It has exposed the existing inequalities while exaggerating many of them further. The impact on the SDG indicators has been worrying. However, at the same time, the pandemic has led to unity and solidarity as well as a search for collective actions among actors seeking to respond to the global threat. No single nation, organization or individual can fight the impact of COVID-19 alone. The need for collective action, cooperation and solidarity has never been more apparent than now, with people seeking to rebuild a better, more resilient world that can deliver social justice, human rights and prosperity for billions of working people.

The ILO and ACTRAV remain strongly committed to supporting trade union engagement in the SDG processes. The ILO will support dialogue and action at all levels to better integrate workers' voices into the planning, implementation and evaluation of the SDGs. Ms Asada-Miyakawa asked everyone to work together towards stronger partnerships and greater solidarity. It is only by standing together that the creation of a better future for workers and their families around the world can be realized, she stressed.

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