



## CLIMATE CHANGE, DECENT WORK AND THE RURAL SECTOR

Workshop held in Buenos Aires from 22 to 26 September 2014

### BACKGROUND

Given the important trade union activity being carried out by the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) and the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) in the Region, and based on the support process being developed by the ILO/ACTRAV, this activity was designed in the context of the COP 20<sup>1</sup> and CMP 10<sup>2</sup> to be held in Lima this December, since the mainstreaming of the integrated focus of Decent Work in the search for responses to the challenge of climate change is of vital importance.

### CONCLUSIONS

The scientific community, the United Nations organisms, the States and trade union organizations agree that climate change is a fact. The main factor responsible for this process is greenhouse gas emissions. These emissions are caused by the irrational exploitation and use of natural resources – in particular fossil fuels – and an irresponsible and excessive use of energy and water.

The expansion of industrial and monocultural agricultural models requires ever-increasing amounts of toxic pesticides and herbicides that have a direct impact on imbalances in ecosystems and climate change, jeopardizing firstly the health of workers and, subsequently, the health of the present and future world population as a whole, as well as reducing biodiversity. Deforestation resulting from advancing agricultural frontiers is one of the main causes of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the Region. These factors have contributed to profound changes in the flows and cycles of the natural world that must be remedied.

There are clearly strong links, therefore, between climate change and the production model.

The current hegemonic production model in the rural sector shows a growing tendency to increasing investment in capital and inputs, reducing the opportunities for Decent Work, driving workers and communities from their lands, and generating more poverty and forced migration.

It is essential to understand that climate change affects all dimensions of Decent Work. It also affects public health, infrastructures, food sovereignty and other key factors that directly impact people's quality of life. It has been demonstrated that Decent Work will become a mere chimera if climate change is not dealt with; similarly, climate change cannot be tackled without the existence of Decent Work.

Consequently, the fair transition towards a production and consumption model that allows for a sustainable rural economy in the service of sustainable development is an urgent matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

<sup>2</sup> Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP).

## GENERAL PROPOSALS FOR ACTION PLANS

- 1.** There is a pressing need to adopt public policies designed to change and increase investment in sustainable, green sectors such as renewable energy, public transport, ecological agriculture, afforestation and reforestation.
- 2.** Evaluating the impacts of a transition process towards a sustainable model is essential to guaranteeing a fair transition process; that is to say, reconversion to create decent jobs in sustainable occupations and sectors. It is essential to establish a system of comprehensive, universal protection that covers the different needs of men and women and particularly vulnerable collectives, with a central role given to tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining.
- 3.** The role of the ILO in promoting social dialogue in this area must be strengthened, given the clear link between production models, unemployment, decent work deficits and environmental degradation. In general, the predation of the environment and deterioration in working conditions go hand-in-hand, and the responses to such issues should be interlinked in the same way.
- 4.** It must be recognized that sustainable agriculture does not have components that can be achieved only in part. Without environmental justice there can be no social justice or democracy. It is clear that the development focus embodied by the Development Platform of the Americas (Plataforma de Desarrollo de las Américas, PLADA) in terms of sustainable development necessarily implies a simultaneous focus on the four dimensions of such development.<sup>3</sup> The way to promote this development model is to generate impact through local actions backed up by international standards employed in trade union strategies at continental and global levels.
- 5.** It is vitally important that political commitments are achieved concerning the definition and implementation of national development strategies that allow a transformation of the productive model to ensure that it is at the service of human beings, characterized by respect for cultures and a central focus on Decent Work as an essential element of inclusive development.
- 6.** The challenge of transforming this model involves a transition from a model of accumulation that preys on nature and does not respect human beings to a sustainable model of production and consumption that does not jeopardize future generations. At the same time, decent work, social protection and participation must be guaranteed during this process via a rights-based focus; in other words, there must be a fair transition.
- 7.** Genuine social dialogue is fundamental to mitigating tensions and achieving a fair distribution of the costs of the transition. The workers and communities affected need adequate social protection and access to new opportunities. A fair transition must be based on active labour market policies, income protection, retraining, awareness-raising, and strengthening of the capacities of employers and trade unions as well as investment in the local area aimed at diversifying the economy and creating alternative income opportunities.
- 8.** Freedom of association and collective bargaining are essential conditions to guaranteeing the participation of agricultural workers. International speculation on the prices of agricultural products and the prioritization of biofuels over the food

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<sup>3</sup> Social, economic, environmental and political.

sovereignty of populations transform and jeopardize the possibility for people to enjoy free determination.

- 9.** The production model created by large transnational enterprises with oligopolistic characteristics necessarily implies an unfair distribution of profits throughout the production chain. Small producers exist alongside large transnationals whose quest for limitless profits conditions the environment and quality of living and working conditions. This is exemplified by the way these accumulations of power impose the unnecessary consumption of genetically modified seeds.
- 10.** The high levels of labour informality present in rural activity are incompatible with Decent Work, both due to the lack of protection afforded to workers and an absence of rights, as well as invisibility and, above all, the fact that such working conditions allow a greater concentration of power for the largest enterprises in the sector. All of this together with democratic and institutional deficits in agricultural areas means that the promotion of freedom of association and collective bargaining is essential when designing inclusion strategies targeting these workers.
- 11.** The use of genetically modified seeds, apart from generating negative impacts on health, stamps out diversity in nature and the wealth it represents. The indiscriminate use of toxic pesticides and herbicides damages worker and consumer health and jeopardizes the future of natural resources. States should protect native and landrace seeds, guaranteeing the production of organic fertilizers in order to re-establish the natural balance in crops and preserve the environment. States must promote public policies aimed at supporting the change of model, accelerating the transition towards more sustainable agricultural activity.
- 12.** Until such green production is achieved, workers should be provided with training on the risks associated with the substances they work with. The use of personal protective equipment should be a last resort following the elimination or reduction to the minimum levels possible of substances and working procedures that pose health risks.
- 13.** Nanotechnology generates profound changes in the physical and chemical properties of the substances used in agriculture, making it necessary to perform prior analyses of the consequences these have on water, soil, air, and people's health. The principle of precaution should always be applied, preventing the commercialization and use in agriculture of these products until they have been proven to be harmless.
- 14.** It is necessary to tackle violence in rural areas by increasing education and improving legislation and labour codes. Worker and civil society initiatives should be supported through better trade union organization, full rights to freedom of association, and penal responsibility for main enterprises and subsidiaries, while working conditions, the elimination of sexual and workplace harassment and all forms of violence against women should be incorporated into collective bargaining. We consider non-compliance with basic labour standards to be violence, as in the case of those who do not comply with the provisions of employment contracts or collective agreements. Veiled or explicit threats of dismissal and other forms of breaches of labour justice also constitute violence. All of the following practices can be classified as workplace harassment: victimization, instilling fear or terror or intimidating workers into breaching standards or agreements, and the violation of the right to strike. Decent Work cannot exist while violence goes unpunished.
- 15.** Threats, torture, and the assassination of trade union leaders and activists, ecologists and members of native communities are also serious acts of violence in rural areas, acts which in some cases are met with a certain level of passiveness on the part of States.

- 16.** The ILO regulatory instruments constitute the bases on which agricultural workers can formulate their trade union demands for the full exercise of trade union freedom (Convention No. 87, Convention No. 141), collective bargaining (Convention No. 98), occupational health and safety (Convention No. 155, Convention No. 184), the use of chemical substances (Convention No. 170), training (Convention No. 142) and support for labour inspections (Convention No. 129) and full respect for indigenous and tribal peoples (Convention No. 169).

**Trade union participants in the regional workshop held in Buenos Aires, from 22 to 26 September 2014.**

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