
Conclusions of the ILO/UPU/UNI Global Union Subregional Seminar on Social Dialogue in Postal Services in francophone Central and West Africa

(23-25 November 2009, Dakar, Senegal)

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In accordance with a recommendation issued by the ILO Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in the Postal and Telecommunications Services, held in Geneva from 13 to 17 May 2002, the International Labour Office and the Universal Postal Union - in cooperation with Union Network International (currently UNI Global Union) - organized the above Tripartite Seminar with a view to promoting social dialogue in the region's postal sector. The Seminar was also part of the follow-up to the UPU's Nairobi Postal Strategy (2008), the joint ILO/the UPU Subregional Seminar on Social Dialogue in Eastern and Southern Africa (Bagamoyo, Tanzania, November 2006) and the joint ILO/ UPU Regional Seminars on Social Dialogue in Postal Services (Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, May 2000; and Latin America, Lima, August 2003).

The seminar was attended by eight representatives and two advisers of the designated operators and governments (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal), 11 workers' delegates from the above countries and representatives of private employers in Benin, Senegal and Cameroon. One regulator (Mauritania) attended as an observer. The seminar was supported by a team of experts from the ILO, the UPU and UNI Global Union.

General conclusions

The seminar participants agree on the following objectives: (a) to promote social dialogue in the postal sector; (b) to offer and maintain the universal postal service; (c) to promote corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in postal services; (d) to modernize and reform the postal service. Representatives of the designated operators recognize their responsibilities, as well as those of workers and their representatives, in improving the quality and achieving the development of postal services. The seminar considers that efforts must be made to pursue these objectives and that social dialogue in all its forms had to be strengthened further. During their discussions the designated operators and the employers' and workers' organizations of the region deepened their mutual understanding.

The national reports presented at the seminar revealed differences between the countries of the region, even though some characteristics were common to all. Social dialogue does exist in postal services in most of the eight countries, but in some of them it works more effectively than in others. Solutions must thus be found to improve social dialogue and strengthen its impact in the different countries concerned. The objective is to promote partnerships between governments, employers and workers in order to offer high-quality services. It is important to maintain the role of a rational and modern universal postal service which is competitive while being fair and efficient.

Issue 1: Modernizing postal services in Africa and managing structural and cyclical change

There is consensus as to the urgency and necessity to reform the postal services. Nonetheless, the modernization or restructuring of a postal company does not necessarily go hand in hand with privatization. In Africa, the postal sector is going through a period of substantial change and the eight participating countries are at different stages in this process. Regardless of the level of change accomplished, the challenge for stakeholders is to find a better way of managing diversification - including the diversification of financial services, the opening up of markets and liberalization - so as to ensure the excellence and long-term sustainability of services. The main task is to focus on the effective and constructive participation of the workers' organizations and the postal administrations, making the most of corporate strategies and increasing participation in decision-making. Notwithstanding the economic situation, technological change makes it imperative for the postal sector to modernize in order to be able to meet society's needs and serve its customers effectively.

The seminar recognizes that the strategic objectives set at the UPU Conference, held in Geneva in 2008, had to be met by all stakeholders, that is to say governments, designated operators and workers' organizations. The participation of all is essential in this effort. The stakeholders have to acknowledge and address the concerns of postal workers, exchange information and consult in good faith before changes are implemented. Legal reforms, the specific conditions in every country and problems related to regulation - or the absence thereof - in the region's postal services have to be taken into consideration. It is also necessary to draw up training and information programmes for postal services.

The seminar stresses the importance of monitoring that structural and cyclical reforms are carried out in consultation with the workers' organizations. Furthermore, women workers should be encouraged to express their interests, career goals and steps taken in this respect. The ILO, the UPU and UNI Global Union, as well as their partners and members, should encourage the participation of women in their meetings and activities.

The participants further agree that governments and their representatives are essentially responsible for delivering effective postal services which ensure universal services and, in parallel, stability and decent working conditions. In managing change it is of paramount importance that the human factor should be taken into consideration. To modernize and improve the quality of services, businesses and workers have to draw up and implement long-term strategies.

To this end, the UPU and the ILO should commit to providing technical cooperation and support. Governments should encourage any initiatives aimed at financing programmes to modernize postal services.

National obligations with regard to a universal postal service arise from the fundamental rights enshrined in national laws. They are also based on the international commitments set out in the Universal Postal Convention, adopted at the 24th UPU Conference (2008). The services concerned by the Convention are the minimum postal services required for the delivery of letter-post items and postal parcels, which are essential for social communications and a dynamic economy.

Governments' responsibility to maintain universal postal service and to meet their obligations towards society should be one of the main objectives of postal reform. In the search for the most viable and sustainable ways of financing the postal services, this responsibility must be a key element of any measures taken.

The conditions in which the postal services of the region operate at present require governments to make special efforts if they are to meet the challenges and overcome the risks that threaten the survival of postal services. Reforms are slow to be implemented in some parts of the region and appropriate legal frameworks are imperative if the sector is to develop.

Issue 2: Social dialogue in the postal services

The designated operators, private employers and workers' organization welcomed the organization of the seminar by the ILO, the UPU and UNI Global Union to promote social dialogue at the national and regional level.

The concepts contained in the Memorandum of Understanding renewed in 2008 between the UPU and UNI Global Union, and the guiding principles of the ILO Conventions and the decisions of the 24th UPU Conference, should be examined as these instruments might serve to strengthen social dialogue between postal entities.

The different forms of social dialogue, including collective bargaining, the exchange of information and official and informal consultations, must be well designed and on-going. The designated operators and the workers' organizations should cooperate to enable postal services to develop in the course of this dialogue. Social dialogue should also take into account the role of the regulatory authorities.

Real social dialogue is based on a number of principles: understanding, mutual benefit, willingness, respect, responsibility, transparency and trust. Workers and their representatives should have a general understanding of the intentions of management, including any strategic plans. To understand these intentions, appropriate, useful information should be transmitted to enhance and facilitate decision-making.

It was agreed to promote the principles and rights set out in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and its follow-up in order to encourage social dialogue in the postal sector. Collective agreements must include a clause calling for compliance with the above principles and rights. The seminar would like measures to be taken to ensure the long-term survival of the postal sector and the employment it offers. Applying

and putting into practice the above principles will help promote decent work in the postal sector.

It is up to governments to consult with the social partners to guarantee that social dialogue can take place in an appropriate framework and to ensure that dialogue is held within it. Governments are invited to create conditions conducive to effective social dialogue. It is recommended that the bodies taking part in social dialogue should meet regularly on the basis of agendas previously agreed upon by all, and that these meetings should be attended by freely chosen representatives. In order to be effective and strengthen tripartism these bodies should receive adequate administrative support.

Issue 3: The universal postal service in Africa

The participants at the meeting recognize the need to promote universal postal service that takes into account the social, economic and technological environment; to draw up the regulations and criteria for universal postal service; to ensure that the options available for financing universal postal service are set out and understood; and to improve access to universal postal services and to understand the economic and social advantages associated with a viable universal postal service.

The participants recognize the importance of financial services in their region, including the availability of quality, affordable and accessible electronic money transfers for migrant workers.

The participants recognize every person's right to a postal address.

The participants recognize that governments are responsible for financing universal postal service.

Issue 4: Safety and health at work, HIV/AIDS, sustainable development, risk management and safety of postal items

The participants strongly recommend that the designated operators be guided by the 20 priority actions accompanying the definition of sustainable development in the postal sector, notably those relating to social and societal aspects.

The participants recommend that the issue of HIV/AIDS be incorporated into collective agreements to avoid stigmatization and ensure that expenses are fully borne by the employer, as appropriate.

The HIV/AIDS campaign should be continued and expanded and should open the way for other initiatives (malaria, etc.) In view of the example set by Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali and Nigeria, which have been playing a pilot role in this project, the countries participating in the seminar are invited to join the campaign.

The participants recommend that hygiene committees should be established or reactivated, as applicable, and that they should exercise the powers conferred upon them by collective agreements or national legislation.

The participants recognize the importance of collective responsibility in matters of hygiene.

The participants recall that the sub-contracting of mail transport resulted in problems related to the safety of postal items.

Final remarks

The seminar was a good example of social dialogue at the regional and international level. The participants are grateful to the ILO, the UPU and UNI Global Union for launching the debate and invite them to adopt other initiatives aimed at implementing or “officializing” a mechanism of social dialogue and of extending it to other regions.

The seminar insisted on the importance of social dialogue in the postal services of Africa. This represents a major challenge for regulatory bodies, the public authorities, employers and workers. Social dialogue is necessary to strengthen and modernize the postal services. Proceeding from the objectives of the Nairobi Postal Strategy (2008), the conclusions of the joint regional seminars held in 2000, 2003 and 2006, the ILO tripartite meeting (Geneva, May 2002) and the UPU Strategy Conference (Geneva, October 2002), seminar participants recognize the importance of social dialogue adapted to national realities in order to arrive at joint solutions.

Follow-up

In accordance with the conclusions of the seminar, the participants issue the following proposals:

- the ILO, the UPU and UNI Global Union should draw up a report on the basis of the discussions held during the seminar between the designated operators, the employers’ and workers’ organizations and the regulatory authorities.
- the designated operators and the workers’ organizations should examine ways of organizing meetings at the national level as well as a follow-up seminar in the region in order to exchange best practices among the designated operators, the workers’ organizations, the public authorities and the regulatory authorities, possibly with support and assistance from the UPU and the ILO.
- the designated operators and the workers’ organization should inform the UPU, the ILO and UNI Global Union of the efforts made as part of their activities in order to promote sustainable development – including results obtained - social dialogue, safety and health at work, risk management and the safety of postal items.

