

Regional Seminar on Skills and Employability in Telecommunications Services in selected countries in Africa (Bagamoyo, Tanzania, 4-6 December 2006)

CONCLUSIONS¹

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with a recommendation of the ILO Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in Postal and Telecommunications Services, held in Geneva, 13-17 May 2002, the International Labour Office organized a tripartite African regional seminar, in order to promote social dialogue on Skills and Employability in Telecommunications Services in selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This Seminar is a direct follow-up to the ILO's Tripartite Meeting on Employment, Employability and Equal Opportunities in the Postal and Telecommunications Services, held in Geneva in May 2002. It follows similar Regional Seminars on Social Dialogue in Postal Services -- in Africa, here in Bagamoyo, just one week ago; in Latin America, held in Lima, Peru, in August 2003, and in Asia and the Pacific, held in Bangkok in May 2000.

The seminar was opened by Ms. Rose Teemba, Labour Commissioner, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Youth Development, Government of the United Republic of Tanzania. It brought together Government representatives (from Cameroun, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe) Workers' representatives (from Cameroun, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) and Employers' representatives (from Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zimbabwe). The Seminar was supported by a team of experts from the ILO, the International Organization of Employers (IOE) and Union Network International (UNI).

The seminar participants focused on the following objectives: to

- share experiences,
- discuss challenges facing the telecommunications industry with regard to skills and employability,
- review their roles in improving training and work organization, and
- identify follow-up activities that could be developed and carried out in 2007 within the ILO's already decided Action Programme to promote social dialogue on skills, training, employability and equal opportunities in telecommunications services in Africa, in three countries, to be decided after this meeting.

¹ Unanimously approved by the participants.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Theme 1 -- Skills, training and employability in telecommunications services in Africa

Success in the industry is dependent upon developing significant, future-oriented skills, in which ILO constituents could cooperate in a positive approach towards training for employability and change. This kind of training can help avoid skills shortages, improve job quality and satisfaction, enhance opportunities, meet consumers' requirements and improve quality of service.

Theme 2 -- Recent developments and future trends in telecommunications services in Africa

The development of the Internet and mobile telephony, along with other new technologies, privatization and deregulation, have completely transformed the telecommunications industry in the past decade. Further changes are under way, such as those relating to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), and to new infrastructure being introduced in the African region. All these technologies are coexisting and beginning to converge in Next Generation Networks (NGNs). These developments imply that countries will have to develop new policies and regulations. Telecommunications enterprises will have to adapt rapidly to changes in their market. The workforce will need to enhance current skills and develop new competencies that can ensure their continued employability. Technological change will have a significant impact on employment, work organization and labour relations in telecommunications services in Africa in the next few years, as efforts to bridge the digital divide are helped by the boom in mobile telephony and investment in infrastructure needed for high-speed Internet connections. The telecommunications industry will be crucial for development in Africa. Careful attention needs to be paid to issues relating to casualization of employment and to the role of the informal economy in the sale of prepaid phone cards and the like. Opportunities should be developed within the industry to promote community development, small-scale enterprises and decent work.

Theme 3 -- The ILO Action Programme on skills and employability in telecommunications services in Africa

After this Seminar, the ILO's existing action programme will in 2007 consist of, for example, research; training; advisory services; and/or direct assistance. Follow-up to this regional seminar should be focused on three countries, to be decided by the Governing Body of the ILO (from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Theme 4 -- Social dialogue in telecommunications services

The social partners will continue to engage in social dialogue in general, and specifically on training, commitment by workers to their own skill development, and equal opportunities in access to skills development. Greater efforts need to be made to ensure full representation of the Employers' Group, because some of the invited Employers' delegates did not attend.

Theme 5 -- The role of governments, employers and trade unions in telecommunications training

The ILO will encourage governments, employers and trade unions to promote initiatives to develop public-private partnerships on telecommunications training, and to examine possibilities to share facilities and experience of the remaining telecommunications training centres in the African region. Governments have responsibility for education, while training costs should be shared by government, employers, equipment vendors, and in some cases by current or prospective workers in the industry. Certification of training should be accredited, possibly at the enterprise, sectoral, national and regional levels. Vendor-specific training should ensure that skills are transferred to African countries.

The social partners will work towards greater gender equity in access to training. The role of the International Telecommunication Union and the World Bank in telecommunications is recognized, and greater efforts need to be made to align sectoral initiatives on skills, training and employability.