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# Corporate Social Responsibility and decent work

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Corporate Social Responsibility has the stated aim of encouraging the positive contribution of business to socio-economic development and reducing the risk of possible negative impact, including along the complex systems of global supply chains, thus becoming an intrinsic part of the way business does its business. This approach recognizes that enterprises have a responsibility to ensure that jobs are decent, workplaces are safe and inclusive, proper wages are being paid and workers have a voice to come up for their rights. At the same time genuine CSR seeks to encourage the positive impact of the private sector as a major player in society creating jobs that provide incomes and learning opportunities. To fully harness the potential of the private sector, the ILO was one of the first international organizations to adopt an instrument that introduces a social dimension to the forces shaping globalization, The Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration). In the 1970s it was ahead of its time and today it is more relevant than ever to engage with business and achieve a fair globalization.

Many commentators agree that in order for markets to deliver generally shared benefits, governments need to assume their role in protecting rights and fostering development. This is of particular importance in the context of emerging markets experiencing rapid economic growth: to achieve inclusive development, governments need to put in place adequate legal frameworks and policies geared towards sustainable enterprise development. And national laws protecting workers' rights need to be enforced through national labour inspection systems.

However, maximizing the benefits of development goes beyond governments alone. Strong social dialogue platforms at the national and sectoral levels provide solid foundations for employers and workers to find sustainable solutions to often systemic issues and engage with the government on adequate legislation and policies. Enterprises themselves have also taken initiatives to address challenges in their operations through the formulation of policies in the areas of human resources, CSR, suppliers' codes of conduct, as well as programmes that look at identifying and possibly addressing compliance issues, especially in global supply chains. Many of these private policies reference ILO standards, especially the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, and the ILO operates a Helpdesk for Business on International Labour Standards.

The ILO runs a number of programmes that involves all these different actors (multinational enterprises, governments, employers and workers) to address workplace challenges especially in developing and emerging markets. These programmes focus on decent work challenges such as elimination of child labour and forced labour, improving working conditions and industrial relations, occupational safety and health, social security, gender equality.

But is this sufficient to ensure a fair globalization? The MNE Declaration brings a unique perspective as governments, employers and workers agreed that policies should not only aim to minimize and resolve difficulties to which operations of multinational enterprises may give rise in the countries of operations but also to encourage their positive contribution. In 2011 the EU defined CSR along these same lines as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" underlying the responsibility of enterprises for their positive and negative impacts, in their own operations and in interaction with other actors. Today's world requires the active participation of businesses to find sustainable solutions to socio-economic challenges, including the high unemployment numbers, especially among young people and women.

The European Commission President recently launched the Investment Plan, a three-year initiative (2015-2017) that aims to leverage the contribution of the private sector to job creation and support skills development. The latter concept is important not only for Europe but all countries and at all development levels; clearly, adequate education and skills increase the ability to innovate and adopt new technologies. This stands to make the difference between "inclusive" growth providing opportunities for all lifting people out of poverty and purely "economic" growth that leaves large segments of the society behind and leads to inequality, another challenge in today's globalized world.

Over the next five years an estimated 213 million people will enter the labour market, and they will need jobs. Many companies are supporting efforts of governments to design and implement more effective policies to promote youth employment, including vocational training, apprenticeship and entrepreneurship programmes. The MNE Declaration advocates exactly such an engagement where enterprises, governments and workers address issues of mutual concern and identify how enterprises can make meaningful contributions to national development priorities.

Today's responsible businesses need a comprehensive rights-based approach responding to national development priorities. In concrete terms, it means that responsible and sustainable businesses obey laws and respect internationally agreed principles, and seek to contribute to national development priorities, as outlined in the five areas of the MNE Declaration (general policies, employment, training, conditions of work and life, and industrial relations). This is part of a fair globalization where all women and men can find decent and productive employment opportunities and children have access to education.

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The sustainable development goals being proposed for post-2015 include promoting “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. Recognizing that enterprises hold the potential for more and better jobs, the private sector will be increasingly seen as a critical partner in reaching these new sustainable development goals. The MNE Declaration sets out the role of enterprises and government in fostering greater synergies between public and private action on decent work and inclusive growth while affirming the essential roles of employers’ and workers’ organizations.

I see the private sector as an important partner for the ILO to achieve decent work and address many of the developmental challenges our globalized world faces today. And the ILO stands ready to engage with the private sector. ■



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