

**Keynote Speech by Mr. George Okutho,
Director ILO Country Office, Addis Ababa,
at Session 2 of the 17th Regional Seminar
for Labour-Based Practitioners**

Addis Ababa, 13th November 2017

Your Excellency, *Ato Ahmed Shide, Minister of Transport of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,*

Honorable Ministers,

Dear participants,

Thank you for inviting me to share some thoughts and insights on Key Policies, Strategic Planning and Action Plans towards achieving the SDGs.

Before I do this, allow me, however to thank the Government of Ethiopia for hosting this important event.

Allow me also to convey to you the regards and best wishes of the ILO Director General Guy Ryder.

This is the seventeenth regional seminar for labour-based practitioners. It is a remarkable development from a small seminar in 1990 in Tanzania focusing only on road construction and maintenance, to its current multi-thematic format and high-level attendance (with a Ministerial segment) is testimony to the fact that the issues we will discuss here are really at the heart of sustainable development in Africa and beyond.

Africa is rising and indeed we see many countries in Africa on right path to economic transformation – in which infrastructure development is playing a key role. We cannot talk about development in Africa without making reference to the Ethiopian miracles. And thank you for being such a wonderful example.

His Excellency, Honorable Ministers, dear participants,

Against this background, international cooperation and policy coherence for sustainable development and poverty reduction becomes ever more important. The ILO as an organization has long recognized this. Indeed already the

Philadelphia Declaration of 1944 states unequivocally that *poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere*.

More recently the adoption of the *Resolution on "Advancing Social Justice through Decent Work"* by the 2016 International Labour Conference calls upon the ILO to play a convening role around the UN follow-up and review of the decent work dimension of the new 2030 Agenda, *inter alia*, through increased collaboration with international and regional organizations and strategic partnerships and alliances. The resolution also calls upon Member States to mainstream the Decent Work Agenda in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in national and regional strategies for sustainable development.

At the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2017 a revision of R.71 *Employment (Transition from War to Peace)* was adopted. It is a new Recommendation 205 providing guidance on promoting Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience. This is a unique normative instrument in support of ILO constituents (i.e. governments, workers' and employers' organisations) in the development of local, regional and national strategies and measures providing guidance on the world of work in the context of crisis prevention and response, also through invigorated cooperation and joint initiatives among international and regional organisations.

So we have a responsibility to make the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals work through decent work and employment intensive investment approaches in the creation of sustainable public goods, including sustainable and environmentally friendly infrastructure. I would suggest that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs offer ample opportunities for us to do so.

His Excellency, Honorable Ministers, dear participants,

Let me therefore dwell some moments on the interrelationship between the 2030 Agenda and Decent Work.

We believe that by putting full and productive employment and decent work for all in SDG8 at the center of the 2030 Agenda, the international community has acknowledged what the ILO has been advocating for close to a century: that

without full and productive decent employment, inclusive and sustainable growth will not be realized.

Now I want to highlight some key characteristics underlying the 2030 Agenda.

The first is that this agenda was the result of the most inclusive process of multilateral negotiation that one can imagine. The very act of involving all member States in such negotiations means, I believe, that this agenda has legitimacy and it is based on national ownership. And indeed, trade unions and employers' organizations were very central to its negotiation.

The second feature of the 2030 Agenda is that it is universal. Action is needed at home as well as collectively to address globalization and in solidarity with others to address inequality and social injustice. All countries have shared responsibility for it.

The third characteristic is its rights-based approach. One of the most important elements of the 2030 Agenda is that human rights including rights at work, the rule of law, and basic notions of social justice are explicitly addressed. This gives a very strong moral compass to this agenda.

Fourth, the SDGs, are an integrated framework. They reflect the recognition that many development challenges and consequently also their solutions are interdependent and – if acted on correctly – could be mutually supportive. Improved market access through roads (SDG9) for example will have poverty reduction effects (SDG1), but also impact on SDG 3 on health, SDG 4 on education, and indeed will serve the achievement of SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive growth.

Finally, and this is very pertinent for our discussions today, the employment-intensive investment approach which will be discussed extensively at this Seminar fits well with and is in full support of the Agenda 2030.

The Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) is indeed one of the ILO's key means of linking public investment with employment and increasing the impact of public investment on employment and promoting an integrated

approach to inclusive, environmentally friendly and sustainable growth and “leaving no one behind”.

If well designed, employment-intensive investment programmes can contribute simultaneously to multiple development priorities: improving basic services; developing social and economic infrastructure, creating employment and providing income security, addressing climate change adaptation; improving working conditions; promoting gender equality and social inclusion; stimulating private sector growth and promoting local development; all contributing to the sustainable development goals.

The current backlog of infrastructure in Sub Saharan Africa reduces the potential for economic growth, limits access to social and productive resources and reduces business productivity. We encourage government and political decision makers at all levels to engage and to adapt approaches and develop local institutional capacity that enable their nations to achieve the SDGs. Strong leadership is indeed required to achieve the SDGs. To emphasize again that the Employment-Intensive Investment Approaches may contribute to these achievements.

We, the practitioners, have an important role to play in this process, particularly in designing efficient investment programmes linking job creation, infrastructure and social and environmental development in order to reach the ambitious SDG goals. Equally in leveraging and strengthening the capacity of local government, private sector, civil society, communities and different target groups such as women, youth and indigenous people. Programmes and projects we design need to guarantee the quality of jobs, increase employability and secure the quality of assets and services. With such programmes we can address the root causes of poverty and fragility, turn around environmental degradation, and reduce inequality and contribute to the objective of “leaving no one behind”.

The employment intensive investment programmes have always been well appreciated and have established a broad collaboration with different development partners, both nationally and internationally. In many countries in Africa and beyond, the EII approaches have been recognized at policy level by sectorial, planning and finance ministries.

We are grateful for the support from development partners already working side by side advocating the EII approaches and for their commitment to support national EII government priorities.

For the ILO, the Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) are our main instruments in supporting member States. I am pleased to note that the ILO EII approaches have been included as priorities in a large number of these DWCPs. The ILO will therefore continue its engagement with other international development partners including the World Bank, the European Union, the African Development Bank and Regional Economic Communities to mainstream these approaches promoting employment and decent work in infrastructure and other sectors of development and continue to provide support to our partnerships with your countries.

We will continue to pursue our support on best practices, capacity building, and knowledge sharing with an emphasis on EII technology options, advocacy and employment impact assessments. This “17th Regional Seminar for Labour-based Practitioners” here in Addis Ababa is of course an excellent example of this.

I look very much forward to the discussions and the future work ahead of us on the EII approaches for sustainable development to contribute to fair and just societies in the African region and beyond.

Thank You.
