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Environment & Climate Change in the post-2015 framework

Introduction: There will be no jobs in a dead planet

Our societies face an alarming set of environmental challenges which include climate change, biodiversity loss, chemical risks, water scarcity and pollution and deforestation, to name only some. Beyond these challenges another unfortunate reality, which the general public doesn't often recognize, exists. That is the employment side of these environmental challenges where jobs, livelihoods and lives are at stake.

The past thirty years have made something clear: there is no such a thing as a "purely environmental" problem, but myriad environmental hazards which directly and indirectly affect people, aggravating poverty, inequality and exclusion, and condemning future generations to worsening living conditions.

For trade unions, the challenge is clear: we will not succeed in securing decent work for all workers unless we are able as humanity to preserve our natural resource endowment and stop the dangerous trends of pollution. Can we build together an agenda where social progress and environmental protection are mutually reinforced? This must be the objective of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Environment & Jobs: stop the confrontation!

All workers, especially those in the agricultural, fisheries, forestry, and tourism sectors, are directly or indirectly dependent upon the natural environment. Industrial activities depend on raw materials for producing goods, while the service sector uses energy, infrastructure and goods that all have an impact on the environment. The planet's natural resources continue to be squandered at a perilous rate, which should concern anyone who wishes to ensure that future generations can live on a healthier and fairer planet. If we want to guarantee the viability and sustainability of all economic sectors, we need to transform them, while also upholding traditional union demands for decent working conditions. It is an absolute imperative that these economic sectors reduce their environmental impacts to levels that can secure our planet's future.

In this respect, we need a much more proactive link between employment and environmental policies. Research shows the positive record of several environmentally-friendly sectors in creating jobs under difficult economic conditions and their potential to deliver even more if the right policy framework is put in place (i.e. renewable energy, clean and energy efficient technology, building retrofits, public transport). Studies of twelve developed and developing countries show that up to 48 million jobs could be created every year if 2% of GDP was invested in these sectors, which would revitalise the manufacturing and services sector. There is a need to scale up investments for realising this potential, accompanying them with decent work policies, and also developing new industrial and sectoral strategies which will in the long lead to a different economic model, socially fair and less dependent upon natural resources.

There is no mistake however that the transition to a fully environmentally-sound production system will be challenging, especially for workers. Inevitably, the transformation will be hard for workers in some of the "to-be-transformed" sectors. This is the rationale for a ["Just Transition" strategy](#): a policy package which would help win working people's support for ambitious environmental policy. Just Transition includes sustainable investments and decent work promotion, social protection, assessment and anticipation of employment impacts, local economic diversification, skills' development support and tripartite negotiations.

Dealing with Environmental challenges in the post-2015 framework: a two-prong approach

Environmental protection has long been on the international agenda. Despite this lengthy international history, global trends continue in the wrong direction and have had profound impacts on economic and social development—with a forecasted 5-20% GDP loss as a consequence of climate change alone! This is why the Post-2015 Framework must have a strong and fully integrated environmental component.

Trade unions are of the view that environmental protection requires progress in two directions: on the one hand, environmental sustainability should be mainstreamed across all goals. On the other, a specific goal on the environment should be agreed, along with targets addressing different environmental challenges and guided by the Planetary Boundaries approach (see Table I).

Ensure environmental sustainability is enshrined in all goals

Mainstreaming is always difficult, but it is key that we take care of environmental sustainability in all goals we truly aim to provide a decent future to current and future generations. In this regard, at least one target in each goal should bring in the environmental dimension.

When it comes to employment, and the proposed goal of "Full and productive employment and Decent Work", we might suggest a target promoting green job creation. This would provide the necessary momentum for investments in job creation in sectors that reduce the environmental impact of production.

Similarly, the proposed goal for "Universal Social protection" could benefit for mainstreaming environment. For example, a target aimed the development of social protection schemes which bring together social benefits along with virtuous environmental behaviour (such as the Bolsa Verde in Brazil) could do just this.

A Goal for all countries: "Securing a Healthy and Clean Environment for this and future generations"

A specific goal for environmental protection, applicable to all countries, and including targets for at least some areas where humanity is already reaching tipping points would contribute to the ongoing parallel efforts and international negotiations. Some environmental issues may already be on the radar of different UN processes while other challenges have either little public attention or lack a multilateral process to regulate them. In either case the SDG framework will play a major role in either reaffirming the role of existing processes or providing a space for new commitments.

Another negotiation must reach agreement in 2015

2015 will also be an important year for climate negotiations. With scientists expressing deeper concerns on the potential impacts of growing Greenhouse Gas emissions in our climate system, governments must mobilise and reach an ambitious agreement in Paris, in 2015. By no means should Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda be seen as a distraction. On the contrary trade unions expect governments to respond with ambition and responsibility in both of these processes.

Table 1

Planetary Boundaries	Status in the international community
Stratospheric ozone layer	UN process taking care of it – reminder of commitment
Biodiversity	UN process taking care of it – reminder of commitment
Chemicals dispersion	UN process lacking momentum – New targets needed
Climate Change	UN process taking care of it – reminder of commitment
Ocean acidification	No Process – Targets needed
Freshwater consumption and global hydrological cycle	No Process – Targets needed
Land system change	No Process – Targets needed
Nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the biosphere and oceans	No Process – Targets needed
Atmospheric aerosol loading	No Process – Targets needed

A new binding framework, including its accountability mechanisms, should be agreed at global level. This framework should reaffirm the spirit of the 1986 Declaration and grant three fundamental principles: “mutual accountability (donors and partners are accountable for development results), alignment of policies among partner countries (donor countries align behind policy objectives set by developing countries), and inclusive partnerships (full participation of State and non-State actors)”¹⁵.

Eventually, this would also mean providing concrete mechanisms to ensure policy coherence for development.

About the ITUC

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is the main international trade union organisation, representing the interests of working people worldwide. Our primary mission is the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions.

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 161 countries.

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