

# Green & *made simple* Decent Jobs



*Green jobs are defined as jobs that... “reduce the environmental impact of enterprises and economic sectors, ultimately to levels which are sustainable. They contribute to reducing the need for energy and raw material, to avoiding greenhouse gas emissions, to minimising waste and pollution, and to restoring ecosystem services like clean water, flood protection and biodiversity.”*

“Green Jobs: Towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon future,”  
UNEP, ILO, ITUC, IOE, 2007.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) believes this definition should include stronger social standards. Green Jobs should both reduce the environmental impacts of enterprises and economic sectors, while providing decent working and living conditions for all workers and ensure that workers’ rights are respected.

## *Green & decent jobs for all!*

If green jobs are to herald a more sustainable future, then they must also ensure better working conditions and real environmental improvements. Green jobs must equal decent work and employment and must seriously address issues such as poverty alleviation and the protection of the environment.

## **Why should trade unions promote green & decent jobs?**

All workers, especially those in the agricultural, fisheries, forestry, and tourism sectors, are directly and 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 with a desire to ensure that future generations can live on a healthy and fairer planet. If we want to ensure the viability and sustainability of all economic sectors, we need to transform them, while ensuring that traditional union demands for decent working conditions are respected. We need to act now to ensure that these economic sectors reduce their environmental impacts to levels that can secure our planet’s future.

## **Green and Decent Jobs at the Rio + 20 Conference?**

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) -called Rio +20 will take place in Rio de Janeiro, 20 – 22 June 2012. Rio+20 is aimed at re-energising the sustainable

development agenda, bringing new commitments to the table. It is also about challenging the ‘silos’ between environmental protection and social progress. This is why actions on Green & Decent jobs are a key demand of trade unions for Rio +20, as they bring the hope for a win-win solution to both the environment and the unemployment crisis.

Ensuring that debates in Rio+20 around the concept of green economy acknowledge the importance of Decent Work and in particular the need for a Just Transition that transforms all jobs into greener ones is a key priority for trade unions. In addition, we want something concrete coming out of the meeting. We want our youth, our women, everyone in the world of work to see these new job opportunities arising! For this to happen, governments must commit to investing serious resources in sectors that both reduce our societies’ environmental footprint and create decent work. We will be asking governments to pledge for an aspirational number of green & decent job creation in the five years following the Conference.

This will ensure Green & Decent Jobs serve as an essential part of the solution by contributing to:

- ▶▶ The struggle against climate change and the further deterioration of our natural resources.
- ▶▶ Economic recovery from the current crisis by providing a coherent strategy for the creation of new employment and development opportunities.
- ▶▶ Social development and ensuring decent work for all. 1.4 billion people are currently living in extreme poverty, struggling to survive on less than US\$ 1.25 a day, approximately 84 million more than before the global financial crisis struck. 205 million people are currently unemployed. 75% of the world's people have insufficient or no access to social security. One billion slum-dwellers have no access to clean water and sanitation.

Many jobs remain “dirty, dangerous and difficult” with workers in industries such as recycling, waste management, biomass energy and construction facing hazardous working conditions and substandard wages. In other words, green does not necessarily mean decent or union friendly. That is why unions need to organise workers in emerging economic sectors to ensure decent working conditions.

Investing in “green” measures during these times of economic crisis may deliver a “double-dividend” by providing jobs and revitalising the economy, while also contributing to the improvement of the environment.

Investments in the following areas could go a long way toward creating or transforming jobs while simultaneously reducing their environmental impact:



### Promoting green jobs or greener jobs?

Both. As trade unions, we need to promote new “green” sectors, which can serve as a source of opportunity for employment creation. Our task must include reduction of the environmental impact of our workplaces and the overall system of production. In other words, we each must seek “to green” our jobs. We should not underestimate the capacity of industry to become greener. Making production ever more sustainable can itself become an increased source of decent jobs, improved livelihoods and social welfare. However, this will not happen automatically and without struggle and negotiation. This means that the introduction of new regulations and the involvement of trade unions in dialogue with employers, investors, governments and others will be crucial in ensuring a “just transition” to a new sustainable economic system.

### Green but not decent?

Many jobs may be touted as “green”, while, in practice they may contribute very little to the improvement of our environment. Moreover, a green job does not necessarily mean decent work.

- ▶▶ Energy and material efficiency
- ▶▶ Renewable energy promotion
- ▶▶ Public transportation
- ▶▶ Cleaner production methods
- ▶▶ Anti-deforestation policies.

Investments in these areas may generate jobs growth while also improving existing jobs, the livelihoods of marginalised communities in rural areas and informal settlements, for instance, and redirect public funding to produce a more equitable development model.

However, current investments earmarked for sustainable employment remain too low. One reinvestment option would promote improved coordination of current environmental and development strategies. Trade unions can highlight the need for stimulating progress in these areas.

## What do unions want?

- 1.** Make green opportunities real: Demand major investments in long-term sustainable development policies that will stimulate decent and “green” employment, the “greening” of workplaces and the introduction of sustainable technology.
- 2.** A sound starting point: Demand research and the timely assessment of social and employment creation potential and impacts.
- 3.** Come and talk!: Governments must consult with unions, employers, communities, and other affected groups regarding this transformation to green, decent employment. Consultation and respect for both human and labour rights form the basis for ensuring an effective transition towards a more sustainable society.
- 4.** Train workers to create the future: Changes will require workers to be trained in new, sustainable processes and technologies; this will be the key to increased investments in green technologies and strategies.
- 5.** It’s about protection!: A “green” job must also be a “decent” job that provides adequate social security, decent wages and is covered by sufficient health and safety regulations. These social protections need to be in place before a “green economy” can truly serve as the driver of sustainable development.
- 6.** One size does not fit all: A “green and decent” economy must be developed based on available local resources and knowledge. A “green” solution starts with a “local” solution.

### More information:

ITUC submission to Rio+20: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/rio-20-trade-unions-submit-their.html>

ITUC green economy blog: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/climate-change-and-green-economy.html>

ITUC, A Just Transition: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/what-s-just-transition.html>

Sustainlabour: <http://www.sustainlabour.org>

Hazards, Green Jobs, Safe Jobs: <http://www.hazards.org/greenjobs/blog/>

ILO Green Jobs Initiative: <http://www.ilo.org/greenjobs>