

Intervention of ILO Director Office for Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, S. Sudan, Special Representative AU/EAC at the ITUC/ATUDN's online session: "SDG for recovery and resilience in Africa: Trade union priorities"

18 February 2021

Introduction—Abidjan Declaration and ARFSD

Congratulate ITUC Africa for the initiative, and in particular the continued interest in participating at the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In December 2019, Government, employers' and workers' delegates from 49 African countries met at the ILO 14th African Regional Meeting held, Côte d'Ivoire, and made a strong call for a human-centred approach to the future of work, to unleash Africa's potential for inclusive growth and create a future of work with social justice.

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Abidjan Declaration (Advancing Social Justice: Shaping the Future of Work in Africa)--- building on the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work and calls for committed actions on the following 5 priorities:

1. making decent work a reality for Africa's youth, developing skills, technological pathways and productivity for a brighter future in Africa, transforming Africa's informal and rural economy for decent work, and respecting international labour standards, promoting social dialogue and ensuring gender equality.
2. strengthening the capacities of all people to benefit from the opportunities of a changing world of work.
3. strengthening the efficiency of the institutions of work to ensure adequate protection of all workers.
4. promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development and growth, full and productive freely chosen employment and decent work for all.
5. strengthening synergies between the ILO and institutions in Africa,

In March 2020, the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development held in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe , reviewed progress towards implementations of SDGs in its key messages adopted at the end of the Forum, more specifically for SDG 8 that:

- ▶ Member States should integrate pro-employment policy approaches in their macroeconomic and sectoral economic policy frameworks to stimulate labour demand and decent jobs. These should be complemented with social protection

systems to address extreme poverty and to facilitate a transition to affordable renewable energy;

- ▶ Member States should focus on youth employment as a core pillar for promoting peace and security in Africa by establishing income-generating programmes for young people in Africa to prevent them from joining rebellious groups;

We have the policy framework, and recommendations for implementation of SDGs and in particular SDG8

Let me just remind you on the targets for SDG 8, which include:

- ▶ sustain per capita GDP growth of at least 7 per cent in the least developed countries;
- ▶ achieve high levels of productivity through diversification;
- ▶ promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage formalization and growth of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises;
- ▶ improve resource efficiency; achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men;
- ▶ substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training;
- ▶ take immediate action to; eradicate forced labour and the worst forms of child labour;
- ▶ protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers;
- ▶ promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs; and
- ▶ strengthen access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.

Progress towards implementation of SDG 8

How are we faring on these targets, let me give a few examples on how we are faring on these indicators: from the Report to be presented at the 7th ARFSD,

The annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (Indicator 8.1.1)

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, average economic growth in African economies has been insufficient to absorb the growing labour force. It is estimated that between 10-12 million new entrants join the labour market each year and these numbers are

projected to rise in the coming years¹. The quantity and quality of economic growth on the continent over the past years have been inadequate and has generally not had strong employment creation, poverty-reducing and productivity-enhancing effects.

The continent faces a scarcity of regular wage employment, which is important to create secure and stable employment and thus activate sustainable pathways out of poverty

Informal and vulnerable employment (Indicator 8.3.1)

Africa continues to face huge labour market challenges related to poor job quality and high levels of working poverty. Ninety-five (95) per cent of young people are informally employed and a higher percentage of women (79 per cent) are in informal employment compared to men at 68 per cent.

Gender discrimination consign many women into insecure, low-productivity, and low-paying jobs. Women also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Informal employment is characterised by lower productivity, lower wages, limited access to social protection and few or no rights at work. Moreover, those in informal employment have been the worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic on account of the limited social protection coverage.

Unemployment Rate (Indicator 8.5.2)

Unemployment rates are generally low because of the low household incomes coupled with limited social safety nets that drive many Africans to assume any type of economic activity to eke out a living especially in the informal economy. Women fare much worse than men, both in terms of unemployment and vulnerable employment.

Proportion of youth (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Indicator 8.6.1)

The youth NEET rate for Africa is estimated at 20.7 per cent, meaning that more than one in five of all young Africans have neither a job nor are they participating in education or training. The numbers of NEET young people are much greater than the number of young unemployed. The ILO (2020b) estimates that in Africa 12.4 million young people are unemployed in 2020, whereas 53.5 million (well over four times as many) are NEET.

Forced labour, human trafficking, modern slavery, and child labour (Indicator 8.7.1)

¹ World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020, United Nations.

Child labour remains a stubborn challenge on the African continent. Child labour on the continent has many characteristics including forced labour, prostitution, as well as work in mining, agriculture and small family businesses.

The adoption of the African Union Ten Year Continental Action Plan on Child Labour by African Heads of States in February 2020 is an important milestone in the fight against child labour. The launch of the International Year on the Elimination of Child labour will give new energy towards the 2021 target.

The ILO Approach to giving effect to SDGs:

To achieve the 2030 Agenda, the ILO works to promote understanding and recognition of its values, mandate and standards in the course of its work.

Ensure that the critical elements of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda are incorporated in the integrated framework and 2030. All the SDGs are, in one way or another, linked to the mandate of the ILO and the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda. In addition, specific reference to the areas of competence of the ILO ILO's constituent partners must be fully and actively involved in the implementation SDGs, including supporting national strategies for sustainable development.

ILO continues to be a leading player in the United Nations system at the national, regional and global. ILO provides consistent advice and exhibit our effective methods of work based on the system of International Labour Standards and our tripartite working methods at all levels.

The ILO fully supports the overall action of the United Nations system in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by emphasizing decent work in the most recent national sustainable development strategies, policies and plans. It works with partner institutions to promote the results of decent work at national, regional and global levels through more coherent and better-integrated approaches, as advocated by the 2008 Declaration of the ILO on social justice, the 2030 Agenda and the Centenary Declaration.

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to report that the UN and the ILO has seen a significant increase in requests from the member states with regard to the development and practical implementation of national strategies that give priority to SDG 8 on decent work and inclusive growth.

In this context, the ILO works to respond to new challenges and take advantage of new opportunities by continuing to improve its effectiveness in responding to the needs of Members, in particular by strengthening the capacity of its constituents to play a leading role in national implementation strategies.

This brings me to the question on how the trade unions can play a key in national implementation strategies, particularly through the UN Cooperative framework and taking into account the ongoing UN reforms empowering the UNRC.

The reforms provided challenges and opportunities for trade unions and this leads us to pose a number of challenges for the ILO, for example:

- How can we guarantee our identity as a tripartite organization?
- How can we ensure that our social partners participate in Cooperation Frameworks?
- How can we ensure that our supervisory system based on international labour standards continues to function if the Cooperation Frameworks do not include standards issues?
- How can we continue to serve our constituents in countries with no physical ILO presence?

What role should trade unions play in this context?

There is no doubt that trade unions are critical to promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all, social dialogue, social protection, and partnerships as key elements of national and global policies and so much more.

What can you do? Trade unions are invited to fully engage with UN Resident Coordinators, governments and employers organizations. Your voice is central to integrating decent work and economic growth into all national development policies.

We highly encourage you to participate in Agenda 2030 Voluntary National Report processes at the regional and global levels to guarantee that worker's concerns and priorities are adequately addressed including in social protection floors.

All of this is fundamental to delivering decent work, dignity, justice and security to working men and women across the world.

Earlier in the week, the ILO (through the Bureau for Workers' Activities) launched two important publications and held discussions as part of our contribution by raising consciousness among trade unions and expanding the knowledge base of workers on the interlinkages between UN Cooperation Frameworks, Agenda 2030/SDGs and the Decent Work Agenda.

The just-launched manual explains why the workers organizations should be more active in the UN sustainable development processes and why they must share their policy perspectives pertaining to the economy, employment and jobs, social protection, social dialogue and collective bargaining, occupational safety and health and working conditions in general.

Using these tools, it is our expectation that trade unions will be pro-active by arming themselves with the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively influence the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the UN Cooperation Frameworks. Areas such as development and trade policies, macro-economic, fiscal and tax policies must form part of the discussion agenda of the representatives of workers when engaging with these processes.

Conclusions, ILO Monitor and key messages

During the whole of 2020, ILO regularly monitored and updated the world on its assessment of the global impact of COVID-19 on economies and labour markets, together with policy recommendations for lessening its effects and aiding a fast recovery.

The latest Monitor was released late January, and I conclude with some highlights and policy recommendations

First --The share of workers living in countries with COVID-19-related restrictions has remained high, with 93 per cent of the world's workers residing in countries with some form of workplace closure measures in place in early January 2021.

Second, In 2020, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost relative to the fourth quarter of 2019, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs.¹

Third , Employment, unemployment and inactivity- Globally, the decline in working hours in 2020 translated into both employment losses and a reduction in working hours for those who remained employed, with significant variation across regions.

In total, there were unprecedented global employment losses in 2020 of 114 million jobs relative to 2019. In relative terms, employment losses were higher for women (5.0 per cent) than for men, and for young workers (8.7 per cent) than for older workers.

Employment losses in 2020 translated mainly into rising inactivity rather than unemployment

Forth Labour income losses- Global labour income (before taking into account income support measures) in 2020 is estimated to have declined by 8.3 per cent,

What does this mean for 2021

While there are expectations that a robust economic recovery will occur in the second half of 2021 with the roll-out of vaccination against COVID-19, the global economy is still facing high levels of uncertainty and there is a risk that the recovery will be uneven.

The world enters 2021 still facing an unprecedented crisis in jobs and incomes and heightened levels of uncertainty.

To that end, policymakers need to consider:

- (a) maintaining an accommodative macroeconomic policy for income support and investment;
- (b) assisting low- and middle-income countries with vaccination and policy measures;
- (c) ensuring that hard-hit groups (notably young people, women, the low-paid and low-skilled workers) are supported in finding decent work opportunities and that they do not suffer any long-term “scarring effects”;
- (d) balancing the needs of the diverging sectors, with effective policy measures to support workers’ labour market transitions as well as enterprises (particularly smaller firms); and
- (e) implementing recovery strategies, based on social dialogue, that promote a transition to a more inclusive, resilient and sustainable world of work.