

Policy dialogue in preparation for the 4th UN Conference on the least developed countries at the launch of a New ILO Report, entitled “Growth, Productive Employment and Decent Work in the LDCs”

**THE LDCs AND THE DECENT WORK:
Some Trade Unions perspectives for Africa**

By

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1. Context of ITUC-Africa union action on decent work

Over the 48 LDCs counted 33 are in Africa and constitute more than **62 %** of the 53 countries of the continent. These countries are characterized by economies prevailed by an agriculture of subsistence and an informal sector which occupy more than **80%** of the workers, composed in majority of young people and women and who are mostly subjected to particularly precarious and vulnerable conditions: poor and irregular incomes for long working hours; exclusion from the protection of the work legislation and from social protection.

ITUC-Africa notices however that the most fundamental of all the economic opportunities remains employment or job. In Africa, it spring that at the same time as the wage-earning work which occupies relatively few employees, the major part of the populations operates in the informal economy where they work on their account under conditions of weak remunerations, what does not allow them to meet their essential needs. However a decent work is needed to be safe from the poverty.

The global economic and financial crisis has deteriorated the deficits of employment and decent work in Africa. Extremely of these reports, ITUC-Africa estimates that the low level of decent work on the continent would be one of the causes of the degradation of the living standard of the workers and the high incidence of the poverty. Africa must thus make growth more favorable to the employment, decent work and to the poor people in order to meet the MDG1 (*the reduction of half of the extreme poverty and hunger*) foreseen for 2015.

Decent work, concept defended for several years by ILO, has been essential these last years as a central question of the socio-economic policies and development strategies as well on a national scale and at the international level. Africa is not of rest. The African Union devoted in 2004 and 2009 special meetings with a strong implication of the social actors. In a specific way, ILO organized several continental dialogues on the topic. The symposium of Ouagadougou of December 2009 and the conference of Yaoundé of October 2010 on decent work are the most recent initiatives.

As regards to the promotion of decent work in Africa, the actions must be permanent to impulse a significant and deep change in the working conditions and ITUC-Africa is committed to this.

As proof: ¶

- The 2 forums of ITUC-Africa organized in 2009 and 2010 on the global economic and financial crisis and the global job pact join this perspective;
- It is even of the workshop on the elaboration of documents of policies on the decent work of October 2010;
- And of the trade-union annual beginning forum of January 2011.

These initiatives contributed to deepen the answers of the African trade union movement to the global economic and financial crisis in the optics of an effective appropriation of the guiding principles of the global job pact, and the realization of decent work country programs (DWCP) recommended by ILO in the African countries. They also allowed the various engaging parties of ITUC-Africa:

To better apprehend decent work as a tool for the promotion of the development in Africa;

To review the effects of the economic and financial crisis in Africa and to release the implications for the economies and the trade unions of the continent;

To better determine the recommended approaches for the implementation of the global job pact;

To appreciate the trade union action for the implementation of the global job pact and to raise the best practices;

To think about some axes of trade-union strategies of exit of crisis in the optics of alternative models to the neoliberalism and the creation of decent jobs

To be informed and to be made sensitive on the result based approach management recommended by the ILO;

To identify the strategies of promotion of decent work in Africa, particularly through the Decent Work Country Programs (DWCP) and the implementation of the global job pact

To think about trade-union priorities concerning decent work and to release trade-union strategies materialize these priorities.

It is thus essential that frequent considerations and dialogues are led on trade-union strategies concerning these questions. This dialogue at the time of launching the report “*Growth Employment and Decent Work in the LDCs*” offers an occasion to ITUC-Africa to give its orientations on the development strategy for Africa so that the Global Job Pact and the Decent Work agenda must be at the center of the economic program of restructuring and the investment’s development in order to satisfy the fundamental needs of the African populations.

2. Problems connected to employment and the working conditions in Africa

Generally, employment in Africa is characterized by four major features:

- an abundant young and low qualified working offer;
- a working demand directed to primary, not wage-earning activities and widely informal being translated so by precarious and informal jobs;
- an unemployment relatively low, urban, feminine but with an unemployment of the urban young people excessively raised and a massive underemployment, especially rural;
- a weak level of decent job.

These characteristics are now exacerbated by the perverse effects of the global economic and financial crisis which led to a deterioration of the employment picture all around the world (according to recent estimations of ILO, the unemployment figures could reach 240 million at the end of 2010 with nearly 50 million in Africa).

According to an investigation led with the African trade-union organizations, the problems connected to employment and the working conditions can be gathered in the following six categories:

- the absence of social protection;
- the absence of hygiene, security and health in working places;
- the non compliance with international standards and the social laws;
- the instability of the employment and the unemployment;
- the lack of production factors;
- the absence of competence.

These problems would be connected to the context of the world economy characterized by the preeminence of the neoliberalism, the bad economic and political governance, the weakness of the African States, the institutional weakness of the structures of protection of workers and the weak intervention capacity of the African trade unions. Among certain immediate causes of these situations, one can quote, *the profit maximization by the companies operating on the continent, the relocation, the excessive flexibility and the deregulation granted to the investors in the free zones of export, the resignation of the State in its mission of regulation, under equipment and the failure of the working administration, the absence of the trade-union forces on the level of national and international sectors, the absence of trade-union freedom, the lack of protection of the staff representatives, lack of capacity of the workers representatives, the weak capacity of job supply, the deficiencies of the policies of job creation, the fatal effects of policies imposed by Bretton Woods's institutions and the WTO, iniquity in the distribution of the fruits of growth.*

3. Trade-union strategies to face the problems of employment and the working conditions in Africa

Towards the African context and identified problems, the African trade-union organizations already undertook in actions of training and expertise not only to make a better diagnosis of their socioeconomic, cultural and political context but especially to strengthen their capacities in socioeconomic analysis and in formulation of alternative strategies of development.

The implementation of the global job pact can contribute to restore confidence and to help the countries to realize growth, to create decent jobs, and to guarantee the respect of the

international standards of work, to ensure an adequate social protection for the vulnerable groups and to provide the solid basis of a right and durable economic revival.

This is why, ITUC-Africa has already taken initiatives to promote the pact and to make sensitive its members. One can quote among others, the organization of two forums in September 2009 and October 2010 on the global economic and financial crisis and the global job pact and of a regional workshop on the elaboration of documents of policy on decent work, as well as the support brought to its affiliated members for their participation in regional activities.

These initiatives contributed to deepen the answers of the African trade union movement to the global economic and financial crisis in the optics of an effective appropriation of the guiding principles of the global job pact, and the realization of the Decent Work Country Programs (DWCP) recommended by ILO in the African countries.

With the global economic and financial crisis, Africa was seriously affected on several plans. Social implications are disastrous for the populations and the workers. The environment of the African countries did not change. To the climatic, ecological and food crisis effects are now added those of the global economic and financial. Trade unions have now a heavier and bigger responsibility to be involved even more strongly in the socio-economic dialogue by credible and relevant propositions.

Within this context framework and facing the heavy tendencies of the African context characterized by five phenomena, *the gearing of poverty, the weak accessibility of the economies to the world markets, bad the governance of States, the trap of the natural resources, the danger related on the climate change and the food insecurity*, the orientations of economic policy recommended by ITUC-Africa take into account three major characteristics:

- i. ***the need of a change of paradigm to lead policies and the development strategies in Africa.*** This supposes the desolation of the ultra liberalism and the recognition of the crucial role of the State as guarantor of the social justice, the promotion of the human development and the solidarity in all the African countries;
- ii. ***the requirement of good governance in the African countries.*** The durability of the threats of an evil governance on economic, social, environmental balances and the future of the workers in Africa is turned out ;
- iii. ***a real reform of the world governance*** to allow African States to free themselves from the dominion of the international institutions and from Occidental countries and from some of the emerging countries.

Concerning the social protection which has the advantages of short and the long term of economic growth, stability and reduction of poverty, one attends nowadays a social security coverage which is in regression with as corollary the accentuation of the poverty. Debates on the improvement of the social protection system were limited to the formal sector, to the restoration of the financial balance by the increase in the rate of deduction from the wages.

Current debates touch little the fundamental question which remains the absence of coverage of the majority of the populations, the extension of the informal sector but especially the capacity of auto-organization of this sector and its contribution to the development of the social protection system. However as the elements which are a part of human rights, the social protection floor is a

social and economic need in durable development, peace and security. Also, several components of the social protection floor can be implemented by becoming integrated into the fiscal space and national policies.

For that purpose, political decisions on social protection should be continued in order to ensure social protection to the weakest and most vulnerable groups.

So, it is convenient for the **Governments** to:

- Mainstream social protection into the development programs;
- Effectively implement social protection policies by ensuring allocation of adequate resources, and capacity building;
- Develop sustainable source of funding for social protection;
- Strengthen country-led social protection policies and programs;
- Develop social safety nets designed to buffer vulnerable communities from economic shocks.

Development partners should:

- Support countries technically and financially to develop and implement social protection policies especially for disadvantaged and poor communities;
- Support sharing of experiences between countries.

In conclusion, ITUC-Africa, observe that numerous its preoccupations in the perspective of the sustainable development in the LDCs and the promotion of the decent work are taken in account in this report.

The report notes distinctly that the priority for the LDCS is not anymore the growth for the growth. But the growth must have for pillar the productive employment but especially the decent work with a big responsibility being incumbent upon the government of these countries. And this, in the setting of a real social dialogue to institute between the governments and, the professional organizations of the workers and employers