

ILO conclusions:

Research Conference: Green Jobs for Asia and the Pacific

Niigata, Japan 21-23 April 2008

Introduction

1. The Conference was an initial outcome of the ILO's 'Green Jobs Initiative' launched at its Governing Body session in November 2007, a joint initiative led by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Employers Organization (IOE) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to assess, analyze and promote the creation of decent jobs as a consequence of needed environmental policies. The Conference was jointly organized by ILO's International Institute for Labour Studies, Policy Integration Department and Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.
2. Over three days of wide-ranging discussions, the Conference:
 - explored new concepts and approaches to sustainable development occurring at the national, sectoral and enterprise levels across the region;
 - extracted lessons for policies and programs aimed at promoting green jobs;
 - identified priorities for action; and
 - considered potential partnerships for future work.

In addition, the Conference highlighted the unique role ILO constituents can play through tripartism and social dialogue to promote environmentally sustainable jobs and development.

3. The technical themes of the Conference examined Green Jobs and Decent Work in relation to:
 - the role of government policies, social impacts of environment-friendly tax policies, government support measures and market-based instruments;
 - energy efficiency and renewable energy;
 - waste management and recycling; and
 - natural resource management and environment protection.

Brief summary of the discussions

4. The Conference helped to define an agenda for policy-relevant research by ILO and its partners in the region and identified approaches for promoting green jobs which can be built into ILO Decent Work Country Programmes in the region.

Discussions highlighted the following issues:

There was a clear consensus that the current era signifies a great transformation for economies. Sustainable growth strategies in the Asia-Pacific region and global and national responses to climate change forecast major transformations in production and consumption patterns, which will have a profound impact on labour markets, livelihoods and social

development. This underscores the importance putting the inter-relations between the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development on the political map through the promotion of green jobs.

Greener enterprises and green jobs are an indispensable part of the solution of environmental problems, including climate change. Effective labour policy represents an important driver in changing the content of jobs, the way work is performed and the skills of workers to ensure they become more environmentally sustainable. While more and better employment and income opportunities can be generated by actively promoting green jobs, it is expected that both job gains and losses will occur in many sectors in the move towards eco-efficiency. New types of employment will be created as well as substituted, eliminated, and redefined. Policies should focus both on greening the manufacturing, maintenance and value chain process and encourage the growth of new green jobs.

Jobs must meet the economic, social and environmental criterion of sustainable development in order for them to be considered as both green and decent. Evidence emerging from discussions indicated that green jobs do not automatically constitute decent work. Many economic activities which are green in principle are not green in practice because of the environmental damage caused by inappropriate practices, leading to jobs which are 'dirty, dangerous and difficult'. Decent, green jobs effectively link Millennium Development Goal 1 (poverty reduction) and Millennium Development Goal 7 (protecting the environment) and make them mutually supportive rather than conflicting.

Without the commitment and initiative of employers and workers these environmental goals will not be achieved. Environmental performance standards and eco-efficiency targets will not be met without the necessary skills and without enterprises and workers prepared to adopt new technologies. Economic sectors and individual enterprises can make a major contribution to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases and reducing the environmental footprint generally through labour-management initiatives to promote green workplaces. Trade unions and employers can cooperate to design capacity building tools which emphasize green skills and develop measures to facilitate 'just transitions' for enterprises, workers and communities affected by changes in the labour market.

To this end, it is crucial and urgent to anticipate labour market implications of climate change itself as well as of policies for adaptation and mitigation. There is a need for better research into the sectors where jobs can be generated in more environmentally-efficient processes, particularly among the rural poor in developing countries. While skills shortages continue to be a bottleneck for a transition to cleaner production in many parts of the world, green jobs show major potential for development in contributing to broad-based improvements of living standards and poverty reduction. Many examples were given documenting the success of approaches targeting the informal economy and empowering local communities in types of employment linked to the environment and focused on energy security, environment protection, and rural development.

Equity will be a key issue for a future international agreement on climate change. This concerns both the sense of a fair sharing of burden and of access to opportunity between countries, particularly with regard to climate talks, the relative prices being set, industrial policies key decisions about technology transfer, financial flows and investments. Coherent policies are critical and will take commitment at the highest political level. Social dialogue can assist developing countries and emerging economies to foster South-South cooperation to design and put into practice pathways towards clean development with more and better jobs.

Key outputs

5. ***Raised awareness for the critical role of green jobs in the transformation of Asian economies and for their potential contribution to sustainable development***

The Conference was attended by 40 experts drawn from national and local governments, employers' and workers' organizations, labour research institutes, academia, environmental and social NGOs. The Conference helped to clarify the concept of green jobs as it applies to the region. The notion that a green job is not absolute term— that there are 'shades' of green— was elaborated upon and in this connection labour-management initiatives to promote greener workplaces were recognized as one important vector through which carbon emissions might be reduced at very low cost. Also underscored was the expectation that both job gains and losses will occur in many sectors in the transition towards cleaner development, leading to new types of employment being created as well as substituted, eliminated, and redefined. Emphasis was made on the importance for green jobs to comprise decent work in order to effectively achieve sustainable development goals.

Extracted lessons for use in policy and operational programmes

The Conference shared research results from the region and exchange experience from i) government policy reforms, including in the area of tax policy, financial support and market-based instruments; and ii) case studies, field projects and programs in a range of countries, sectors and enterprises.

Lessons distilled from discussions indicated that while there exist a number of policy options available to facilitate reductions in carbon emissions, there is as of yet no agreement on which strategy is most effective, or what approach is most conducive to the development of green jobs. A key lesson which can be drawn is that green policies that generate public revenues are preferable to other environmental tax instruments that do not raise public revenues. Adapting to climate change will require the right mix of government policies to facilitate environmental investments, promote green jobs, develop relevant skills, design new technology, and use taxes to better control emissions, which must be part of a long-term strategy in order to be truly effective. In light of this, ILO will work to develop methodologies to factor employment into national plans and programmes, thereby encouraging better adaptation to climate change.

The Conference identified nine employment sectors with potential for future ILO intervention on green jobs in the region: agriculture, forestry, waste management, energy efficiency, renewable energy, water resource management, construction, transport (especially public), and regeneration of natural resources. Working with its social partners, the ILO will assist in designing skills trainings and building social dialogue mechanisms via which green jobs can be supported through tripartite involvement.

Identified potential projects and operational activities for the ILO to add value to and be a partner in the efforts to promote green jobs in the region

The lessons which emerged from the presentations and discussions highlighted construction, agriculture, energy efficiency, forestry, and transport as priority sectors through which the ILO can contribute to the regional priority on 'Green Growth' spearheaded by UNESCAP, as well as actions undertaken by other national and development partners.

Drew up an agenda for future research and explore potential for a research network

Through macro-economic and sectoral assessments, the ILO intends to research criteria and indicators on economic, social and environmental sustainability and monitor policy impacts of different approaches to green jobs. and to certify products for marketing and trade. Participants also agreed to cooperate in building a 'green jobs network' which might generate a community of practice across the region.

Provided input to the ILO contribution to the G8 Meeting

The conclusions of the Research Conference provided input to the ILO contribution to the 2008 G8 Labour Ministers Meeting, hosted by the government of Japan. The six key policy messages are set out in the following:

- 1) The inter-relations between the environmental, economic and social dimensions of climate change and other policies need to be put on the political map;
- 2) Green growth and tackling climate change can become a major opportunity for employment and development;
- 3) Green growth and arresting climate change depend on greener enterprises and green jobs;
- 4) Labour markets and their institutions need to be prepared for the change;
- 5) Attention must be given to equity and pathways to clean development; and
- 6) Coherent policies should be promoted to engage and empower actors.