

**Fourth Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals,
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Keynote address

ILO Deputy Director-General Greg Vines

Thank you very much for the invitation to address this fourth session of the Open Working Group.

I have come straight from the annual conference of the ILO where over 5000 government, employer and worker delegates from your countries have been discussing many of the key issues that figure on your agenda this week. The on-going conference prevents my Director-General, Guy Ryder, from joining you today. He sends his greetings and encouragement to you.

I am sure you will also join with me in sending our best wishes to Juan Somavia, special adviser to the Secretary General, who was also unable to come for personal reasons.

We are discussing today sustainable development from the perspective employment and decent work for all, social protection, youth, education and culture.

The current lingering economic and social crisis is a major source of concern for families and communities all over the world. Lack of decent jobs, increasing inequality of incomes and opportunity, social exclusion, worries about our children's future are feeding a loss of confidence in the ability of governments to assure sustainable growth. This is also undermining confidence in our international institutions.

Your discussion of the post-2015 development agenda offers an important opportunity to help the United Nations develop a framework that addresses those fears and encourages hope and aspiration for a better and sustainable future. The topics on your agenda today connect directly from the peoples of the united nations to this conference chamber.

I would like to make two basic points, drawing on your issues notes.

First, connecting a new framework to peoples' concerns is not a simple a matter of communications. It is about the much more complex task of **building partnerships for transformation**.

Sustainable development requires major transformations in the way people make their living. Moving the world onto a sustainable development trajectory must not shut off the route out of poverty that billions of the world's citizens need. And that route for most people is finding and keeping a job that is sufficiently productive to yield a decent income. There cannot be a sustainable development path that does not address poverty.

Moving onto a sustainable development path will require mass engagement by businesses, working women and men, community representatives, academia as well as political leaders. Engagement has to start now – and I applaud the initiative of the Open Working Group to engage systematically with non-governmental organisations.

Partnerships of all sorts will be vital to implement whatever eventual sustainable development framework is decided. For the ILO, I can say that the governments, employers and workers around the world who constitute our members will be very active players nationally and internationally.

The ILO's Conference will tomorrow adopt a set of conclusions on how to pursue the goals of achieving Decent Work and sustainable development. Managed well, transitions to environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a strong driver of job creation, job upgrading, social justice and poverty eradication.

But that will require a great deal of practical local and national work together to equip employers, especially smaller businesses, and workers with the education and skills to make these transitions, the social protection floors to provide security during the process of change and resilience to severe environmental events. It will require an enabling environment for sustainable enterprise and job creation.

My second point also draws on your issues papers and the evident connections between them. It is the necessity of an **integrated approach to sustainable development**.

What do I mean by an integrated approach?

Let me give an illustration. The gap between the number of young job seekers around the world and decent work opportunities available to them is at the top of the agenda for political leaders because of the damage to our societies and the frustration to our young women and men of not being able to find a job, make a living and contribute to society.

Improved training is one of the commonly suggested solutions. This is of course important but to be effective vocational training has to build on a sound primary and secondary education. In poor communities the teachers point out that kids can't learn when they are hungry. And in the poorest communities children are often working rather than going to school, to provide basic sustenance to themselves and their families. So social protection programmes that support families to send kids to school, properly nourished are a vital part of appropriate and integrated policy responses.

But what if the village does not have water and sanitation systems to prevent disease?

In rural societies, where most of the poorest people in the world live, the main source of livelihoods is agriculture.

Those villagers need an approach to sustainable agriculture that prevents deforestation, soil degradation and the lowering of the water table as well as providing decent earnings to small farmers and landless labourers.

The weakness of policy integration is obvious in poor communities the world over – in the least developed countries and in deprived areas in high income countries. But getting the balance right in a new framework is not going to be easy. The UN and its specialized agencies have to help governments meet the challenge of delivering integrated solutions. Again, I can say on behalf of the ILO that we are working hard to increase collaboration with other agencies of the international system to do exactly that.

Let me turn now to the employment and decent work issues note.

A series of crises over the last decade– food, fuel, financial – have exacerbated an already precarious jobs situation.

Global unemployment is estimated to have increased by 28 million as a result of the global economic crisis, reaching a total of almost 200 million in 2012. This figure is projected to grow further in the near term.

Moreover, some 39 million people have dropped out of the labour market largely from discouragement, opening a 67 million global jobs gap since 2007.

To keep pace with the growth of the world's labour force over the fifteen-year period from 2016 to 2030, some 470 million new jobs will be needed.

The job creation challenge is particularly intense in the least developed countries with rapid population growth. We need to accelerate the pace of decent job creation in the least developed countries so that women and men have real alternatives to leaving their communities in a desperate search for what all too often is dirty, dangerous and degrading job in a foreign land.

So beyond the sheer number of additional jobs needed, the quality of jobs requires urgent attention.

Around 870 million working women and men are not able to earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US\$2 a day poverty line. They already work long and hard for very little. Eradicating poverty means meeting the global demand for decent work and will require a major commitment to the generation of more and better jobs.

Your countries, meeting at the International Labour Conference in 2008 adopted a Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, pledged the ILO to work with the UN to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all. Thinking together about a new framework is a tremendous opportunity for us all to take forward that solemn commitment, tackle the global jobs crisis and drive progress towards sustainable development.

The issues note **analyses a number of key issues** in fostering a pattern of structural transformations needed to generate decent work through sustainable growth.

First, a central task of development strategies will be to **maximize the potential of structural economic change to increase employment and productivity in sustainable ways.**

Structural change--in the form of movements of workers out of agriculture into activities with higher productivity in industry and services--has been a main driver behind sustained growth, employment and poverty reduction in the past. For those who remain in the agricultural sector, productivity has to be increased. Policies to promote productive structural change will have to be a key part of the policy packages to create employment, in line with the opportunities, resources and needs of each country.

Second, **an international framework of goals should support national strategies** for transformation, development and sustainable employment generation. Achieving decent work is a dynamic process of improvements in wages, working conditions, labour institutions, standards of employment and social protection. Policies and institutions to stimulate, extend and consolidate such improvements play a strong role in development.

Third, significant steps toward sustainable and inclusive development will **require a framework where the environmental and jobs dimensions are tackled simultaneously.** Without acting on urgent environmental problems, many jobs could be lost due to environmental degradation, resource depletion and disasters, with serious implications for the most vulnerable groups of the population. At the same time, new market opportunities could arise from the promotion of new sustainable industries provided incentive structures are in place and adequate investments are made, for instance through a shift to sustainable farming in rural areas where most poor people live.

Fourth, **employment and decent work policies are instrumental in achieving a variety of sustainable development goals.** Poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, food security and nutrition, rural and urban development, health, gender equality, equity and peaceful societies require that people are able to find work and make a living.

Fifth, **improving labour market statistical information is a basic necessity for stronger policies.** Current data do not fully account for the reality of labour markets in developing countries. Gender-disaggregated data and information on the duration, security and quality of employment and the level of wages and earnings are especially lacking. A concerted global effort to revise the scope and improve the national collection of statistics would produce valuable results with a relatively small

financial input. We should get started now to make sure all countries have the capacity to measure progress within a new post 2015 framework.

The ILO's Governing Body has identified **policy priorities** for action by our Organization to accelerate progress on the current MDGs and to contribute to the sustainable development framework after 2015. They focussed on:

- (i) well-designed policies promoting environmental sustainability that can generate decent work and vice versa;
- (ii) active follow-up to the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), as an important support to resilient and poverty-reducing sustainable development;
- (iii) promotion of small enterprises and the progressive absorption of informal activities into the formal economy to increase the rate at which decent and productive work is created;
- (iv) infrastructure investment designed to maximize the generation of employment, for example through the construction of rural roads, water harvesting and flood control; this is can be particularly important for countries recovering from conflict or natural disasters;
- (v) expanding access to employment-related training so that youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are better able to acquire skills and secure productive employment, reducing their vulnerability to poverty; and
- (vi) tackling discrimination at work and promoting gender equality to release suppressed productive potential and remove barriers that lock marginalized groups in exploitative working conditions.

The ILO has also given much thought to how to assess progress towards the goal of decent work. We have identified several indicators which can help us measure whether job creation is reducing poverty and narrowing inequalities. With a strengthening of data collection these measures could track progress and point to areas that need attention.

Full and productive employment and decent work for all is vital to poverty alleviation and to cohesive and thus sustainable societies. Managed well, transitions to environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a driver of job creation, job upgrading, social justice and poverty eradication.

So to conclude, and returning to the theme of connecting UN action for development to ordinary people's hopes and fears, we encourage you to look at your task through the lens of jobs and livelihoods, not least because that is very likely the way most people in most countries will judge the outcome of any new sustainable development framework.