



FIRST ITEM ON THE AGENDA

From print to practice: Giving effect to the Global Employment Agenda**Contents**

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1. The Office's paper, *A Global Agenda for Employment* (the "Discussion Paper"), was discussed in November 2001 in the Global Employment Forum and its summary¹ by this Committee during its 282nd Session, on the basis of which it was revised. Consultations on the 15 December draft of the Discussion Paper were held with the Workers' and Employers' groups, and the regional Government groups in January 2002, resulting in further revisions.
2. Discussion in the November 2001 ESP Committee, and subsequent consultations, called attention to a variety of areas deserving of attention. An employment strategy has, for example, to address the specific needs of workers in the agricultural sector and, more broadly still, the informal economy. The specificity of national contexts argues against a "one size fits all" approach. In many developing countries there is concern that structural adjustment policies have resulted not only in job losses, but have on occasion reduced public expenditure available for sectors upon which future growth relies, such as health care and education. For some countries, accelerating the pace of debt relief needs to be given priority. Priority, too, should be directed toward dismantling the barriers to trade for those products in which developing countries have comparative advantage. Agreement on the launch of a new trade round in the Doha meeting of the World Trade Organization in November 2001 is a positive step. These suggestions were incorporated in the 15 December draft.
3. The greatest emphasis arising from the subsequent consultations, however, was on the need to elaborate a series of practical next steps to move the "living document" that is the Global Employment Agenda from idea to implementation. The focus of the present paper is on just this: how can the policy challenges identified in the Discussion Paper now be addressed in practical terms.
4. As such, the present paper will refer only briefly to the analytical underpinnings of the Agenda. These were described in detail in the paper submitted to the Committee in the previous session. With the broad support the paper received at the Forum and by the ESP Committee, it complements the present paper in providing the Committee with a comprehensive view of the Agenda and ideas for its implementation. In the present paper, the discussion is moved towards implementation, first by identifying the policy challenges that need to be addressed to give effect at national level to the global employment priorities outlined in the Discussion Paper, and by suggesting a range of global alliances instrumental in transforming the Agenda from analysis to action.

I. Summary of the conceptual framework underlying the Global Employment Agenda

5. The principal challenge of the Global Employment Agenda is to make employment central to all economic and social policies. To do so requires many things, but the cornerstone upon which this challenge is based resides in increasing the productivity of labour, especially that of the working poor. Productivity growth is the sole source of sustainable, non-inflationary improvement in living standards and employment opportunities, and it sets the scene for faster growth and development leading to increased scope for macroeconomic policies to be directed toward better employment outcomes and decent work.

¹ GB.282/ESP/282/1/1.

6. The Discussion Paper underscored the need for an employment strategy that promotes the major forces of change in today's global economy that enhance productivity growth. These are: the expansion of *trade and foreign direct investment*, and promotion of the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work so as to make globalization work for all; *technological innovation* of all kinds, but with particular regard to information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as technologies that decouple economic growth from pressures on natural resources, and thus promote *sustainable development*; and *entrepreneurial initiative and higher levels of investment for the growth of enterprises* in a context in which respect for core labour standards is assured.
7. Adapting to these forces amounts to adapting to change. Such change is necessary for increasing productivity and prosperity, and generating decent employment. These favourable outcomes are not a given, however: there are winners and losers in the process, and change therefore needs to be well managed. This is because labour markets are different from markets for goods and services. Labour markets are about people, their skills and competencies, their aspirations and motivation. While competition is necessary in markets for goods and services to improve productivity and prosperity, it may lead to a "race to the bottom" and exclusion from the labour market. The labour market therefore needs a policy for human resource development and a social floor in the form of labour standards, including those on social protection.
8. When the forces of change are actively promoted, and when change is well managed so that new demands are met by a speedy supply response and new investment in a climate of social stability, good industrial relations, and respect for core labour standards, then one result is a less inflation-prone environment and productivity growth. This in turn permits a more active and expansionary macroeconomic policy stance, particularly on the financial side, without running into inflation or balance-of-payment problems. Elements of this have emerged in many countries in recent years with considerable benefits for employment and poverty alleviation.

II. Global priorities for national action plans on employment

9. The Discussion Paper outlined seven key elements of a new employment strategy – elements that seek to promote a virtuous circle of productivity, employment, and output growth. The following section, therefore, outlines the main policy challenges, knowledge creation and dissemination, benchmarks and indicators for each key element of the strategy. There are policy challenges to address before these elements can be translated into action. At the same time, through its research, dissemination of best practices, and its proposal to elaborate specific indicators for each pillar, the Office has a role to play jointly with ILO constituents.

Promoting decent work as a productive factor

10. Irrespective of a country's level of economic development, there is no trade-off between the fundamentals of decent work and job creation. Moreover, a threshold of decency is not merely attainable with all work, decent work itself is a factor in economic betterment and productivity improvement. It follows that the framework of behaviours, laws, and labour market institutions that support a threshold of decent work are themselves contributions to the greater efficiency of labour markets and thus to the enhancement of overall economic and employment performance.

The main policy challenges

11. The main policy challenges are:

- the key policy challenge – the threshold of decent work – is the promotion of core labour standards and the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work relating to promoting freedom of association and right to collective bargaining, and putting an end to child labour, forced labour, and discrimination of all types;
- extend the scope of social protection to those presently without cover through the extension of public schemes or the development of innovative arrangements based on community or group support systems;
- ensure that social dialogue between the representatives of workers and employers, and the State be the cornerstone of employment strategy formulation

Knowledge creation and dissemination

12. Much of the ILO's work over the years has helped to clarify how raising job quality promotes productivity. While much evidence is supportive of the positive relationship between the elements of decent work and economic performance, additional empirical research is called for, and could assist in identifying best-case approaches to the design of labour market institutions. This would enable the dissemination of national good-practice examples.

Benchmarks and indicators

13. Indicators of successful performance could also be envisaged. The Office is already in the process of elaborating indicators of decent work. Among others, these could include:

- trends in the share of working men and women covered by basic social protection, such as health care, and improved productivity;
- trends in the reduction of occupational injuries and improved productivity;
- improvements in working conditions and higher productivity;
- reductions in child labour and economic performance;
- how the application of freedom of association contributes to economic performance; and
- how the application of non-discrimination encourages the inclusion of all population groups and contributes to economic performance.

Promoting entrepreneurship and private investment

14. The private sector leads in the creation of jobs, and tomorrow's jobs will come in large measure from the growth of entrepreneurship and of small and medium-sized enterprises. An educational system and policy environment that promotes a culture of entrepreneurship and a business climate that encourages enterprises to start up and grow is essential to a thriving economy. Product market regulations that stifle self-employment and small-business growth work against this. Appropriate industrial policies and an efficient, accountable public administration free from corruption are of central importance to private

sector development. An unpredictable, non-transparent or corrupt public administration is a substantial disincentive to investment, whether domestic or foreign. Policies must aim to balance the flexibility and efficiency concerns that underlie the needs of enterprises and private-sector development, with workers' needs for security and fair treatment in the labour market through the enforcement of labour standards.

The main policy challenges

15. The main policy challenges are:

- create an environment favourable to business growth with particular attention to macroeconomic policy, taxation, transparency and efficiency of public administration, and appropriate laws for property rights, the enforcement of commercial contracts and fair competition;
- remove constraints to the start-up and growth of SMEs and micro-enterprises, including constraints on access to credit and capital markets, lack of transport and other infrastructure, costly, burdensome, or time-consuming registration and other requirements;
- encourage entrepreneurs and workers in SMEs to be represented and engage the sector in social dialogue, particularly with respect to developing a conducive environment for business growth and social responsibility;
- industrialized countries should allow freer access of low-income countries' exports to their markets by further liberalizing trade in agriculture and labour-intensive manufactures.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

16. While policies need to create an environment in which trade and foreign direct investment are encouraged, they also need to support investment in and the growth of the domestic market. Research on the employment effects of trade and foreign direct investment can inform the policy formulation process. At the same time, promising programmes for local economic development and the growth of the domestic economy can facilitate an exchange of good practice. An exchange of good practice should also be encouraged on how best to promote small and micro-enterprises.

Benchmarks and indicators

17. Indicators of performance in the promotion of private-sector development could include,

- time, number of administrative steps, and cost of starting and running a business;
- share of entrepreneurs or would-be entrepreneurs having access to credit on reasonable terms, including microcredit; and
- how clarity and transparency of regulation and legislation contributes to productivity and decent work.

Promoting employability by improving knowledge and skills

18. Investing in people and people's investment in their own education and job skills increase the rate of economic growth. This is because education increases productivity and the ease with which new technologies can be absorbed. Education, skills, and the ability to learn also expand opportunities beyond a narrow range of occupational choices: they increase employability, in short. This, in turn, facilitates people's ability to adapt to change – their adaptability – and improves the functioning of the labour market. The demand for learning, its supply, and how it can be created are matters in which the organizations of workers and employers and the State all have a stake. Employability is also enhanced by basic social protection. Ill health is a major drain on growth and employment, and an employment strategy that includes a focus on access to health care is one that promotes employability. Social protection makes people more willing to change and to take risks, as does worker protection in a more general way. Social dialogue, such as collective bargaining, can be an effective means of striking the balance between the need for enterprise flexibility while protecting people from the risks of change – thus encouraging it.

The main policy challenges

19. The main policy challenges are:
- invest in education and training and link investments closely to employment growth strategies;
 - improve basic education and the literacy of people in the poorest countries, and promote core work skills, such as communication and problem solving;
 - promote lifelong learning through reform of vocational training and education systems, and recognize an individual's skills acquired from any source;
 - involve the social partners closely in training policy and skill development.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

20. Good practice on education and learning exists at all levels, from the enterprise to the community to the national level. In the design of vocational training systems, there is much to learn from inter-country comparison. Research firmly established a relationship between education and productivity growth. Much, however, is still to be learned on the link between workforce “readiness” through skills and the rate at which structural change can occur, as, for example, learning's relationship to the rate at which labour mobility between sectors occurs.

Benchmarks and indicators

21. Indicators could include, among others:
- public expenditure on education and training, extent and level of school enrolment and economic growth;
 - the extent of on-the-job training and the share of the workforce having access to training opportunities outside the workplace and productivity growth; and
 - cost and sources of financing for training to facilitate universal access.

Making the future more socially and environmentally sustainable

22. World economic interdependence has been increasing over a period in which income inequality has widened. However unfounded, the fear that losers may be outnumbering winners in the process of rising interdependence is enough to increase the risk of fuelling protectionist sentiment and social instability. The current course of rising global inequality is thus unsustainable. At the same time, environmental degradation has grown equally unsustainable. Therefore, any employment policy that ignores the environmental consequences of economic activity is equally unsustainable. Millions of livelihoods depend on patterns of production and consumption that are depleting or degrading the earth's environment; the challenge is to encourage development of environmentally sustainable technologies through investments that also promote employment growth. Social, economic, and environmental issues are thus all interdependent and mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development.

The main policy challenges

23. The main policy challenges are:

- improve the mechanisms for policy integration such that employment strategies contribute at one and the same time to the international goals for environmental protection along with those for development and the achievement of equitable growth;
- promote information exchange and social dialogue around the challenges companies and workers face in moving towards sustainability;
- examine how systems minimizing hazards at work could include sustainability targets and the dissemination of best practice.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

24. A substantial amount of research at the ILO has already focused on the social dimensions of rising international economic interdependence, and will continue to do so in the context of the newly established World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization. The Office now has the opportunity to undertake research on the employment consequences of environmentally friendly technologies and patterns of production and consumption. In addition to the dissemination of research results, the good-practice network in this area could focus on how bipartite and tripartite consultations and negotiations are addressing the social consequences of sustainable development in environmental terms.

Benchmarks and indicators

25. Indicators could include:

- trends in income inequality and economic growth within and between countries;
- the creation of a database on the take-up of environmentally sound production processes;
- employment gains and losses respectively in environmentally friendly and unfriendly sectors; and

- how investment in environmentally sustainable technologies and industries promotes economic and employment growth.

Generating decent and productive employment by the working poor

26. Policies need to recognize that employment is central to the objective of poverty reduction, and, for the working poor, initiatives to increase their productivity, level of the decency of their work, and income-generating capacity, particularly in the informal economy, are key elements of an employment strategy. A “trickle-down” approach to poverty reduction is ineffective, as is redistribution as a guiding policy. That there need be no trade-off between decent work and poverty reduction through employment can be illustrated by initiatives directed towards the working poor. Elements of core labour standards in programmes targeting the working poor can be and have been introduced. Programmes can incorporate the prohibition of child labour, forced labour, and discrimination, as well as standards relating to the payment of appropriate wages and safety requirements. Freedom of association and the organization of the working poor can also be encouraged and has the beneficial effect of improving the terms on which they sell their labour. Regardless of occupation or the level of income, all workers can progress towards decent work.

The main policy challenges

27. The main policy challenges are:
- develop an employment-led poverty reduction strategy ensuring a high rate of output and employment growth without sacrificing efficiency;
 - develop specific measures aimed at raising the productivity and incomes of the working poor focusing on skills, access to credit, and organization for bargaining power;
 - incorporate employment considerations explicitly into public expenditure programmes.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

28. In some countries, the ILO has become deeply involved in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process, and as experience accumulates, the best ways to create jobs and alleviate poverty can be disseminated and exchanged. The Office is also acquiring experience linking greater income security, as through microcredit, for example, with the promotion of core labour standards, such as ending forced labour.

Benchmarks and indicators

29. Appropriate indicators could include:
- trends in poverty reduction and in the incomes of the working poor relative to economic growth;
 - performance monitoring of PRSP policies and programmes in selected countries against present and past employment and economic growth.

Ending discrimination in the labour market

30. Violations of human rights have macroeconomic costs that an employment strategy can address. The evidence is particularly clear in cases of discrimination of all types. Discrimination restricting access to an education or the labour market, choice of occupation or to credit undermines output and productivity growth by preventing the most productive job matches from occurring. Discrimination is sometimes the cause of severe income inequality, which, in itself, slows economic growth. Ending discrimination in education against women, for example, tends to lead to higher female earnings, greater investment in healthier and better-educated children, and a lower rate of population growth – all determinants of future economic growth. Beyond overt discrimination, institutional constraints that discourage the labour force participation of population groups are appropriate areas of reform.

The main policy challenges

31. The main policy challenges are:

- mainstream equal opportunity for all population groups within policies and through labour market institutions;
- introduce measures to influence labour demand in favour of groups at risk of marginalization with the aim of social inclusion.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

32. Research on the economic effects of discrimination is abundant and conclusive. A focus on the institutional tools most effective in ending discrimination could yield a number of best-case examples from which to learn.

Benchmarks and indicators

33. Indicators could include:

- trends in unemployment rates and earnings ratios of various population subgroups and productivity improvement;
- trends in educational attainment comparing various segments of the population and relative growth of productivity; and
- access to credit for men and women or between various racial or ethnic subgroups and rate of entrepreneurial development.

Building a new macroeconomic framework for employment growth

34. The foregoing six pillars are structural elements of a national employment strategy. Each has the aim of improving the functioning of the labour market and economy, and to do so by increasing both productivity and employment in the same measure. If successful, it is an employment strategy that could permit greater macroeconomic policy expansion for non-inflationary growth. As such, the six pillars enable a seventh – a growth- and employment-oriented macroeconomic framework. Yet globalization has both reduced the autonomy and increased the importance of macroeconomic policy choices. The basis for higher growth

must be macroeconomic stability, since price stability, exchange-rate stability and low interest rates are essential for creating a healthy investment climate, which is in turn vital for employment growth. National policy remains the main lever in governments' hands, but that lever is constrained, particularly in smaller countries. In a world in which a leading economy's policies can have serious spill over effects on other economies, irrespective of how sound their macroeconomic management is, solutions must come at both the national and international level.

35. The international dimension to be addressed includes solutions to the problems of the volatility of financial markets. Similarly, assisting the process of macroeconomic stability through development aid and debt forgiveness are essential tools of international policy. Making the world trading system more open in a global context in which core labour standards are respected, as expressed at the WTO Singapore Conference in 1996 and endorsed at the WTO Doha Conference in 2001, are vital steps to ensure that globalization works to the benefit of all.

The main policy challenges

36. The main policy challenges are:

- greater international coordination of economic stimuli;
- policies to fight recession, to contain inflationary pressures and to sustain employment levels should be the subject of tripartite debate;
- in pursuing stabilization, damaging cutbacks in public expenditures on which future growth relies, such as the working poor and education, should be avoided;
- fiscal and monetary targets should be linked to targets for employment growth and poverty reduction.

Knowledge creation and dissemination

37. The Office's commitment to undertake a major study of globalization by 2003 will add further depth to the analysis of appropriate macroeconomic frameworks, while also exploring the relevance of international policy for global macroeconomic stability.

Benchmarks and indicators

38. Indicators might include:

- the number of tripartite accords on employment-friendly macro policies and their economic consequences;
- trends in public expenditures in areas on which future economic and productivity growth rely, such as health care and education and lagging economic performance; and
- showcasing countries' macroeconomic policy options when their employment and labour market consequences have been explicitly addressed and economic and employment performance improved.

III. Global alliances for implementing the new employment agenda

39. The Global Employment Agenda should be seen first and foremost as an invitation to governments, the social partners, the multilateral system of United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, and the regional development banks to review, rethink, and re-orient the policies of the past. It is not a prescriptive document. It is an open invitation to work together and to endeavour to seek common ground to shape a successful global employment strategy.
40. The Global Employment Agenda includes a mechanism, global alliances for employment, the intent of which is to forge closer cooperation between the ILO and other organizations toward the aim of giving higher priority to employment in the strategies of these organizations. The alliances could be used to develop policy, which, thanks to the participation of organizations from different fields and different technical or geographical focuses, would be more broad-based and have greater reach and impact. The alliances could become useful tools for policy implementation.

What is a global alliance?

41. A global alliance could be described as an organized and well-structured partnership between the ILO and one or several of the organizations mentioned above. It should be focused on specific policy areas and have the aim of identifying common ground and proposing common initiatives towards the aim of promoting employment.
42. Global alliances for employment could involve different players at different levels:
- *National governments.* National governments are responsible for employment policy and the ILO's global alliance will offer a framework for national policymaking, placing employment at the centre of economic and social policies. With this new emphasis on employment the ILO will provide governments with concrete and meaningful guidelines for the formulation of national employment strategies based on the goals of the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122).
 - *The social partners.* The social partners are crucial in achieving national and international consensus on, first, a new Global Employment Agenda and then, establishing a global alliance for employment. The social partners need to play a major role in both the design of a global strategy and in its implementation nationally and locally. Management of change in the labour market must be the responsibility of all the social partners and social dialogue must be a central element of labour market governance. The more the social partners can do together, the more credible, concrete and successful the strategy will be.
 - *Strategic alliances at the global level.* The ILO invites all United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions to contribute to the further development of the Global Employment Agenda and the preparations for the next step, global alliances for employment. The ILO and the other agencies can decide the form, content and timing of these contributions jointly. The review of existing global strategies can be a basis for such discussions.
 - *Strategic alliances for regional coordination.* There is an immense variety in economic and social conditions among different regions and countries in the world. The Agenda recognizes that the success of employment policies depends on how well these regional specificities can be taken into account. The ILO invites all regional

political as well as economic organizations, including the development banks, to contribute to the shaping of the Agenda and to the building of a strong alliance for more and better jobs.

43. Successful precedents exist. One is the Youth Employment Network, an initiative between the UN, the World Bank, and the ILO that has shaped a common focus on promoting youth employment and has scheduled a number of initiatives toward this end. Another is the agreement between the ILO and UNESCO, reached in July 2001, to form a joint Working Group on Technical Education and Vocational Training, which will reinforce cooperation between the two organizations in this area, based on the distinctive competencies of each organization.

Possible themes and partners for global alliances

44. There is no shortage of opportunities for seeking closer cooperation through alliances between the ILO and other organizations on the main policy challenges and requirements identified in the Global Employment Agenda and reflected in GB.282/ESP/1/1. The possibilities set forth below are thus neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.
- *Macroeconomic policies.* The Global Employment Agenda implies that efforts to seek greater common ground between the ILO's employment and decent work strategy and the International Monetary Fund's macroeconomic strategies could be encouraged, as could a focus on linking debt relief to job creation. Such an alliance could also explore the extent to which it is both feasible and desirable to promote greater international policy coordination.
 - *Development strategies.* There may be opportunities to broaden and deepen cooperation between the ILO and the World Bank on the theme of the centrality of productive employment to development and poverty reduction, for which a precedent currently exists through ILO participation in some countries in the PRSP process.²
 - *Trade policies.* The WTO's inaugural meeting in Singapore in December 1996, and its meeting in Doha in 2001, both endorsed respect for core labour standards. An alliance looking at how active labour market policies and social protection can facilitate structural change that promotes trade could be a possibility, as could exploring the employment consequences of making developed country markets more open to agricultural products and labour-intensive manufactures from developing countries.
 - *Technology.* Promoting the diffusion of information and communications technology (ICT) for productivity and employment growth could be the theme of an alliance between the ILO and the UN's ICT Task Force.
 - *Entrepreneurial development and social responsibility.* While there is no one organization with a lead role in this area, the ILO could seek an alliance among several partners in the multilateral system, lead business associations and trade unions towards the aim of making it easier to start and run businesses while respecting and strengthening labour standards.
 - *Sustainable development.* In the run-up to the Johannesburg "Rio +10" conference in 2002, the ILO could seek an alliance with the relevant agencies in the United Nations

² GB.283/ESP/3.

system to ensure that employment and decent work become the social pillar of strategies for sustainable development.³

- *Skills for employability.* Enhancing technical and vocational education and training is the theme of the new alliance between UNESCO and the ILO.
- *Social protection.* The purpose of a global alliance in this field could be to explore how social protection can assist the management of change. Possible partners in an alliance could include the World Bank and the International Social Security Association. Promoting safety and health at work has the additional dimension of reinforcing employability.

Regional and national alliances for employment

45. In view of the specificity of the employment issues in the different countries and regions of the world, a “one size fits all” approach to employment strategy is clearly unwarranted. Alliances for employment can also be appropriate at regional and national levels, and, indeed, with or without the participation of the Office.
46. Examples of those in which the Office is currently involved include its participation in country employment policy reviews, as well as in the PRSP process, as in Nepal. Additionally, as an outcome of the Global Employment Forum of November 2001 and, in conjunction with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Office and the People’s Republic of China, plans are underway for a China Employment Forum in October 2002, which would contribute to the formulation of a national employment strategy.
47. The major regional initiative for employment in which the Office is involved is the Jobs for Africa programme, to which the Global Employment Agenda can now provide further momentum.

Implementing the alliances for employment: A proposal for round tables

48. A direct outcome of the discussion of the Global Employment Agenda in the Global Employment Forum was the proposal that the Office organize a series of round tables on various dimensions of employment policy. Indeed, any of the policy challenges enumerated and discussed in this document could be appropriate topics for a round table discussion.
49. Round tables provide a particularly effective framework for dialogue and cooperation. They are a means that encourage partnership, in that no one participating organization is ranked above the other and no positions or stances need be given up in advance. Rather than a traditional institutional process, round tables function more as an intellectual process, a kind of think tank in which to exchange views on policy ways and means.
50. Round tables could be the most appropriate mechanism for initiating the alliances for employment discussed above, and thus be the first practical step to giving effect to the Global Employment Agenda. The ILO might aim to launch the first series of round tables

³ GB.283/ESP/4.

before the “Rio +10” summit. Through the Committee’s guidance, the themes, participants, and venues of this first series of round tables could be determined.

IV. Conclusion

- 51.** The Committee’s reflections on the foregoing ideas and, more generally, its recommendations on how to move the Global Employment Agenda forward are vital components of the Agenda’s implementation. This paper and the Discussion Paper on which it is based are “living instruments” to be updated and further developed through discussion in the Committee, with ILO constituents, and with the variety of potential partners in building global alliances for employment.

Geneva, 6 February 2002.