

# **Framework for Action: Trade Union Priorities for the WSSD**

## **Framework for Action: General Aims**

Trade unions<sup>1</sup> propose a framework for action that is based on the central themes of Agenda 21, as they have been articulated and developed over the last ten years. Our proposals for the WSSD presuppose an expanded role for Trade Unions and other Major Groups in Civil Society, working through partnerships with each other, and with governments. We believe that the WSSD will achieve its goals insofar as it is able to mobilise stakeholders within a *Framework for Action* based on the following general aims:

1. The implementation of Principles 1, 3, 5, 8, 20,21, and 25 of the Rio Declaration, which establishes that human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development and equality in standards of living and poverty eradication are at the center of our collective aims in fulfill Agenda 21;
2. The full integration of the three pillars or ‘dimensions’, resisting any tendency to return to the segregated approaches that preceded the Rio Accords and the full integration of the Social Dimension in all development decisions, as a prerequisite to gaining the widespread consensus that is necessary to achieve the required changes;
3. A focus on employment and dignified work as a means of eradicating poverty and promoting equality; and
4. Full recognition of the rights of all stakeholders to participate, including workers and trade unions, as outlined in Chapter 29 of Agenda 21.

## **Framework for Action: Areas for Concrete Action**

Based on our experience since Rio, trade unions propose the following as areas for action,. The WSSD should promote several types of partnerships, which include trade unions:

### **Employment & Equity Partnerships;**

Employment alliances to resolve poverty, equity and access questions are important to a number of Major Groups (indigenous people, women, workers & trade unions, youth and agricultural worker with farmers). Such alliances are also important to NGOs’ business & private institutions, as well as local authorities & governments bodies, in developing and implementing economic and environmental policy. The change required to existing patterns, necessitates promoting a better understanding of the social and employment impacts and to developing effective and just transition measures.

### **Work-based Partnerships For Sustainable Development :**

The beginning place for work-based partnership should be between employers and their workers, through collective agreements that act a best practice and become the basis of developing frameworks by government authorities over a broad-range of sustainable development objectives, as they relate to work and production. These could take the form of ‘voluntary agreements’ of which thousands already exist in enterprises between employers and unions in the form of collective agreements, and more recently, world-wide ‘framework agreements’ involving some of the world’s largest multinational corporations. They can also

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<sup>1</sup> Representative of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), Global Union Federations, and national unions.

take the form of joint projects, institutions, and processes for consultation and cooperation. Since these partnerships address community issues, NGOs and Local Authorities should be involved in some of their development and evaluation of progress. Work-based partnerships can serve a number of combined purposes:

- Improving and cleaning up production, as a means of promoting worker or community health and environmental protection;
- Meeting agreed government targets for sustainable development;
- Establishing verification mechanisms for a broad range of voluntary agreements and government inspection roles;
- Developing and conducting sustainability impact assessments;
- Developing effective links between production and consumption, through verifiable workplace eco-labels.

Trade unions have participated in workplace assessments, target-setting, implementation, monitoring and verification, reporting, and accountability on all aspects of environmental and occupational health & safety. Using participatory methods, they have linked workplace action to consumer behavior through verifiable eco-labels and linked occupational health & safety practices with public health programs, for control of such diseases as HIV/AIDS and exposure to dangerous substances.

### **Integration and Capacity Building Partnerships**

For the purposes of implementing effective change it will necessary to predict impacts, interpret their implications and to devise transition plans to deal with them, at the same time as fulfilling overall sustainable development aims. Partnerships will have to include those focusing on:

*Research, Analysis, and Tools Development Partnerships:* It will be necessary to better understand and respond to the social employment implications of change. Research partnerships must take place with the scientific, technological and academic community, as well as with and among intergovernmental bodies and community-based research groups. The above mentioned employment and work-based partnerships will be made effective if workplace assessments incorporate data gathering at the workplace level, twinned with information feedback systems, which can only be developed through piloting and development and involving technical expertise. Such partnerships will also be needed to render social indicators, impact assessments and tools useful in implementation of programmes

*Training and Education Partnerships,* capacity building of workers, employers and trade unions must become the basis of the above suggested employment and work-based partnerships. In implementing social transition programs, within environmental and economic planning will involve training and education, acting in tandem with workplace information and feedback systems. Such training and education will involve partnerships educational and governmental institutions, as well as with informal processes, linked to formal educational institutions. Trade unions, with 165 million members on over 2 million worksites around the world, have much to offer in this regard with a tradition of joint workplace action and participatory education, and well-developed global networks.

## **Public Policy and Action Partnerships**

Sustainable development decision-making calls for expansion of institutional provision for multistakeholder discussion and involvement at all levels. This is important because public policy (including contentious policy) will need public agreement and support of entire communities and all stakeholder will need to work together in campaigns and strategies to develop such support. Such partnerships must be supported by

*An active role for government and Intergovernmental Bodies* - in sustainable development through stronger regulatory systems, including inspections and enforcement, as well as in provision of such essential services as water, sanitation, and infrastructure for sustainable development. Local authorities, in particular, must be encouraged to promote participatory activity in workplace and community, with increased levels of support from other levels of government.

*Incorporation of sustainable development goals into trade, investment and governance decisions* – with a priority on the social dimension of policies, practices and agreements governing trade, investment, financial decision-making, and corporate accountability.

## **Fundamental Participation and Rights Partnerships**

A rights based-approach will be necessary to implement the full potential of the RIO Declaration. Current partnerships will need to be strengthened and new ones fostered to meet this aim. Partnerships will be need to safeguard issues, such as: precautionary principle, corporate accountability, freedom to information, and fundamental participation rights in environmental decision-making. These rights must be equally ensured for workers in workplace decision-making affecting the environment. Opportunities to expand agencies and instruments of global governance; e.g., such international standards as ILO Conventions, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Corporations, and the principles of the Global Compact, as well as recognising the contribution that can be made by such international achievements as the 1995 Social Summit, the Global Reporting Initiative, and the WSSD itself. Wherever possible, governance should be carried out through multistakeholder dialogue and action. WSSD should call on the ILO to use its tri-partite structures to strengthen employer-worker-government partnerships, as is contemplated in the ILO “Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work”

## **Framework for Action: Specific Action Proposals**

The above provides a Framework for Action that can be readily translated into specific proposals for action, based upon the unique capacity, structure and objectives of each Major Group, cooperating with other Groups, governments and international agencies. Through the WSSD process, trade unions will commit themselves to concrete, well-defined time-bound proposals for action of the following type :

- Together with employers, continue to seek cooperative initiatives among the OECD, UNEP, ILO, the EU and others to research and better understand the social and employment impacts of change, in order to build public support for the social and employment transition programmes that will be required to meet such threats as global climate change, as well as for increased financial and technical assistance to allow developing countries to fashion their own solutions

- Seek new opportunities to adapt workplace structures and processes with a proven record of success to broader social problems and applications. Prime amongst these are joint worksite committees and workplace assessment model.
- Take concrete steps to increase participation by trade unions in all regions and at all levels, in the sustainable development process, including multistakeholder processes, and joint ventures for designing, monitoring, designing and implementing change.
- With social partners and international agencies, undertake initiatives to expand education and awareness-raising programmes in order to increase the application of such instruments as the ILO core labour standards and Conventions, and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises to sustainable development issues.
- Undertake initiatives with willing governments, particularly at the local level, to promote consensus on the need to safeguard public ownership and control of such vital human services as water, sanitation, health and welfare.
- In conjunction with such ongoing programmes as the ILO's Decent Work' Programme and Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS & The World of Work, launch new initiatives to link occupational health and safety with public health, as a means to significantly reduce deaths, injury and disease.
- With the leadership provided by the Swedish TCO, launch a 'Universal Sustainable Development Label' that will signify that a product or service has been produced in a sustainable workplace and is consistent with sustainable development to promote a closer linkage between workplace principles of action and consumer behavior.
- Take steps to promote the organization of roundtable meetings on a sectoral basis, specifically devoted to building of partnerships and agreements amongst Major Groups, governments, and international agencies
- Increase efforts to expand on the success of existing framework agreements that utilize experiences and resources of corporations and Major Groups to promote voluntary agreements on a sectoral, regional and international basis.
- Take steps to increase local trade union participation in Local Agenda 21 groups to fully utilize the unique capacity of local authorities and a history of community-based action to achieve identifiable results, and encourage close cooperation between workplace, community and domestic life
- Launch programmes to capitalize the position of workers and trade unions in the workplace and community to act as 'watch-dogs' and educators to make workers, employers, consumers and the public more aware of sustainable development issues.
- Build on a tradition of global cooperation by taking steps to expand international cooperation between unions to share capacity wherever it is needed to promote sustainable development

In addition to pursuing the above, trade unions are committed to working closely with and supporting specific proposals and action plans put forward by other Major Groups, governments, and international agencies.

Respectfully submitted

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