

Nairobi Work Programme

« Engaging stakeholders through capacity building »

“Enabling trade unions' and workers' action on climate change”

The ITUC is the International Trade Union Confederation that represents 170 million workers of the world in 157 countries and territories and has 312 national affiliates. Its primary mission is the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions. The ITUC's main areas of activity include trade union and human rights; economy, society and the workplace; equality and non-discrimination and international solidarity.

As part of its commitment to accompany the unions in understanding, committing and taking action on climate change, the ITUC has presented an Action Pledge to identify and commit publicly to undertaking studies, training sessions and information sharing towards the objectives and expected outcomes of the Nairobi Work Programme.

The specific objectives of the ITUC Action Pledge, which provides a framework for projects on climate change are to:

1. Integrate the employment dimension into climate change policy making, including in adaptation planning;
2. Raise awareness among trade unions about climate change impacts and its effects on employment and livelihoods as well as policy measures that could reduce these impacts;
3. Foster international, national, sectoral and local trade union action on this area, in cooperation with other governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental institutions.

Unions on the move

While key activities identified in the ITUC Action pledge are scheduled for taking place in late 2009 and early 2010, many preliminary activities have already started to show concrete outcomes. These activities were aimed at enabling a broad trade union participation at regional, national and local level with the clear intend of disseminating information on adaptation, sharing of knowledge and good practices, raising awareness and by promoting Decent Work opportunities as the tool to escape poverty and climate change vulnerability. Government officials, policy makers, non-governmental organisations, researchers and climate change experts were engaged in the activities below.

For the 1st objective (integrate the employment dimension into climate change policy making, including in adaptation planning), the ITUC pledged to undertake the following activities:

- Integration of climate policy (including adaptation) in broad union policy lobbying documents (for the G20 summit, G8 Environment, UNFCCC negotiations doc.)

In this topic, progress in achieving coherence within the international labour movement has been impressive. All major labour statements to the UN, G8 and G20 included a prominent section on climate change, where the need for commitment by developed countries and action on emerging economies on mitigation and the need for increasing public funding for adaptation was highlighted. This was particularly challenging as the labour movement needed to react to the economic crisis, rising unemployment and the financial chaos and there was a risk for loosing track on long term challenges, such as climate change.

- Organising high level bilateral union-government meetings, all raising the importance of social and economic consequences of climate change as well as the need for better inclusion of employment and social aspects in adaptation policies.

Several high level meetings have been organised between labour leaders and high level governmental officials in Denmark, Norway, Australia, Spain, Argentina, Japan, UK

Training

For the 2nd and 3rd objectives (Raise awareness among trade unions about climate change impacts and its effects on employment and livelihoods as well as policy measures that could reduce these impacts; Foster international, national, sectoral and local trade union action on this area):

Only in 2009¹, more than 186 trade union representatives from 77 trade union centers, from 40 countries received training on climate change. These activities, organised and coordinated by Sustainlabour with the support of the ITUC and its regional bodies are considered a key first step in the consolidation of unions' understanding about climate change.

Regional training sessions were held in Buenos Aires, for the Latin American region², in Togo³, for the African region, in Baku⁴, for the Eastern Europe and Central Asian region. National trainings were held organised in Nepal⁵ and Argentina⁶, where 34 young trade unionists below 30 years old.

Other training and awareness raising activities have been planned in Bangladesh in November and in Africa in January.

Debates

As part of the strategy aimed at raising awareness among trade unions on the need for them to act on climate change, debates were organised in Togo, on Climate Change and Food Security. Participants analysed adaptation and resilience strategies among other things. Other two key spaces are going to be organised by the ITUC in the remaining months of 2009:

- The First ITUC Women's Conference in October 2009, which will discuss impacts of climate change on women workers, as well as options for developing green jobs for women as a means for diversifying economies. A publication, "Green Jobs and Women Workers" is to be released for that occasion.
- The World of Work (WoW) Pavilion, which will be the parallel space trade unions will organise during three days in Copenhagen, showing the linkages of the world of work with climate change). The ITUC will have a specific event on the means to fund adaptation and sustainable livelihoods strategies to address vulnerability to climate change.

Research & workshops

A Research Workshop on Climate Change Impacts on Employment and the Labour Market will be organised in the framework of the ITUC Action Pledge, in cooperation with the Global Unions Research Network. The meeting will explore, through several research papers, the social consequences and positive potential of adaptation and mitigation policies for labour, the linkages between the ILO's Decent Work agenda and the need for reducing vulnerability vis à vis climate change, among other issues. The workshop will be held in Brussels, in February 25-26 2010.

Key preliminary outcomes, challenges and opportunities

The ITUC emphasises the ongoing character of these activities. Training, awareness raising and

1 Activities undertaken until October 2009

2 2nd Latin American Conference on Labour and Environment, Buenos Aires, Argentina - May 2009. Jointly organised by Sustainlabour and the Trade Union Confederation for the Americas.

3 African Trade Union Conference on Food Crisis and Climate Change, Togo – August 2009. Jointly organised by Sustainlabour and the ITUC Africa.

4 First Trade Union Conference for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Baku, Azerbaijan – September 2009. Jointly organised by Sustainlabour and the ITUC Pan European Regional Council.

5 First Training Seminar on Climate Change in Kathmandu, Nepal – September 2009. Jointly organised by Sustainlabour, LO-Denmark, NTUC-I and GEFONT

6 First Trade Union Conference on Climate Change for the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA) – Buenos Aires, Argentina - June 2009.

active participation of trade unions on reducing vulnerability, enhancing resilience and helping communities adapting to climate change is of utmost importance. As part of a continuous evaluation, some improvements have been made to the training, which include now a broader permanent introduction to sustainability which frames action on adaptation, as well as group work, which facilitates exchanges within unionists from the same region and enables a more interactive approach to these issues.

For the trade union movement, the challenges ahead regarding climate change are huge: first, there is still a need for raising awareness among the labour movement about the need for action on climate change, and the strong linkages this has with the world of work and union's rôle. The second challenge regards the need for further research on this topic, in particular on specific initiatives, experiences and on-the-ground challenges for unions regarding climate change policies. The third challenge remains integrating employment and trade unions in the debates about climate change, where social issues are rarely mentioned, and when it is the case, they are hardly debated in depth.

The ITUC believes the fight against climate change should not be seen as a necessary burden, but as a real opportunity for changing production and consumption patterns, sustainably eradicating poverty and ensuring decent livelihoods for all workers of the world. This kind of actions help building on the potential the labour movement for achieving all these goals together, in a coherent manner, and ensuring social progress.

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