



**Trade Union Policy Options and Practical Actions on  
Agriculture, Rural Development, Desertification, Drought, Land & Africa  
At the 17<sup>th</sup> Commission on Sustainable Development  
CSD-17**

A sustainable agriculture and rural development are the key for ensuring decent and sustainable working and living conditions for all. CSD-17 must promote the following policies and actions for all the issues of the current cycle:

**Democratic governance and respect of fundamental rights**, including labour rights as well as the equitable provision of public services, and their oversight and regulation. Governments must engage in national and local dialogue with all Agenda 21 partners.

**'Decent Work'** for combating poverty, reducing vulnerability to economic, social and environmental changes and for empowering communities. This ILO concept includes the respect of rights at work, secure employment, social protection, and social dialogue.

**Opportunities for 'green and decent job' creation**, along with sustainable agricultural production patterns and natural resource management. In addition, action needs to be undertaken against occupational injuries and diseases in agricultural work, which kill 170,000 workers every year. Governments must ratify ILO Conventions 155 on Health and Safety, 170 on Chemicals and 184 on Health and Safety in Agriculture, as well as the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

**Planned transition** to protect workers in environmentally-vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries, from loss of employment or livelihood due to environmental stresses or sustainability measures to respond to them. Adaptation of agriculture to altered weather patterns, economic diversification, non-farm development, education and skills development are essential.

**Worker and trade union involvement** through effective workplace action for sustainable development, environmental protection and community well-being. This requires the promotion of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles for Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

**Sustainable development** through concrete tools such as the National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) that are guided by accepted UN indicators and involve Major Groups.

#### **Agriculture**

- Promote land reform, food security and sovereignty, rights for workers and farmers, environmental sustainability and justice.
- Put in place international and national regulations for preventing instability and speculation on food prices, ensuring a fair distribution of benefits and protecting the purchasing power of rural and urban workers.
- Take active measures to enforce the rule of law and combat forced labour, a significant feature in the rural areas of some countries.
- Legislate in favour of a phase-out of toxic pesticides which put workers, consumers and the environment at risk.
- Combat the expanded use of agrotoxics and intensive agricultural production based on unsustainable techniques and promote agroecology and family agriculture.
- Mainstream climate change impacts within agricultural-related decision making. Adaptation is vital for securing the world's food supply.
- Undertake an ecological and social assessment of the full-life cycle of agroenergy in each production zone.
- Implement policies aimed at providing rural women equal land access, tools, technology, education, rights and credit.
- Apply the precautionary principle to genetically modified organisms (GMO) or new chemicals for the food-chain.
- Encourage organic farming.

- Enforce integrated and sustainable water management, as agriculture is the largest user of global water supplies.

### **Rural Development**

- Promote decent employment and implement effective regulations that enable the shift from informal to formal work status, thereby extending coverage of existing rights, social protection and social dialogue as well as raising productivity and increasing earnings.
- Develop appropriate systems of education, vocational and technical training and lifelong learning policies for helping workers to find and sustain decent and productive jobs and keep pace with changing technologies and new employment opportunities.
- Empower communities through access to services, including for water, sanitation, health care and clean energy.
- Ensure quality public services. Health care services and service providers need support with resources to tackle HIV/AIDS and other diseases.
- Respect workers' rights, including the right to organise and bargaining collectively, provide security and protect trade unionists and community leaders from violence, particularly in rural areas.
- Address agriculture and food security in education programmes. Skill-based education, such as that provided by trade unions, offers immediate results on resource efficiency and productivity, food safety and occupational health.
- Ensure adequate rural transport, in order to reduce unemployment and exclusion in rural areas.
- Reverse the trends causing losses of income of common resources-dependent communities. Privatisation, agricultural intensification, population growth and ecosystem degradation are some of these factors.
- Use the opportunity of improved prices and reduced price volatility to stabilise incomes for farmworkers and improve conservation of natural resources.

### **Desertification, Drought and Land**

- Ensure decent income and increased power for communities as a means to adapt to extreme weather events such as drought or to long-lasting modifications in ecosystems, such as desertification.
- Improve international cooperation, including aid for emergencies and disasters and funds for rapid adaptation programmes. Secure the livelihoods of the poorest through social protection, poverty reduction strategies and decent jobs programmes.
- Direct financial flows to adaptation in agriculture and the food supply chain.
- Honour the commitments made at Monterrey and Gleneagles for a major increase in development aid to assist poor countries and for greater accountability by governments to properly deliver on their commitments from one year to the next.
- Commit to new paths for sustainable rural development that could yield positive effects on employment.
- Promote synergies between different UN Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCD and UNCBD) and institutions (ILO, FAO, OECD). Trade union participation in these bodies must be ensured and expanded.

### **AFRICA <sup>1</sup>**

- Decent Work should be taken to embrace also environmental sustainability, as essential to sustainable livelihood.
- Make the fundamental rights of workers and their unions a central feature of sustainable development strategies, e.g. for freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to refuse dangerous and hazardous work.
- Ensure gender equity and women workers' issues as indicators of environmental and social sustainability.
- Guarantee the participation of trade unions and other civil society groups (NGOs, local communities, etc.) in decision-making. Promote tripartite dialogue, collective bargaining and other democratic processes.
- Promote the introduction of sustainable development in education at all levels and provide adequate tools for workers to become meaningful actors of change.
- Call for Governments to:
  - regulate companies and world markets, as it relates to the provision for sanitation, health, water, energy, housing, education and public transportation.
  - increase investments for environmental policies and their implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> The content of this section is derived from a Resolution agreed by the 2006 Trade Union African Conference on Labour and the Environment. Sixty-two union members representing twenty-four national centres from nineteen countries met for the First African Trade Union Conference on Labour and the Environment, held in Johannesburg, 28-29 July, 2006.

- Create "just transition" programmes to ensure that workers negatively affected by restructuring obtain the ILO's Decent Work provisions which are key in the process towards sustainable production and consumption.
- Establish and improve the accountability and transparency of multinational enterprises' social and environmental behaviour and reject their "double standards" that "export" environmental, social and production methods to Africa which are not allowed in the countries of origin.
- Make water a priority for union organising efforts in the regions. Promote universal, equitable, egalitarian and environmentally sound access to basic resources such as water and energy as essential components of human rights.
- Ratify ILO Conventions 155 on Health and Safety, 161 on Occupational Health and Safety Services, 170 on Chemicals, 176 Safety and Health in Mines, 182 Worst Forms of Child Labour and 184 on Health and Safety in Agriculture. Support the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. Adopt the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management (SAICM) and call for a complete global ban on asbestos use, for its proper handling and disposal in accordance with the Basel Convention and for its inclusion in the Rotterdam Convention.
- Promote accountability to promises for universal access in connection to HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases and help address these through workplace-based approaches.