

**Decent work in the Americas:
An agenda for the Hemisphere,
2006-2015**

Sixteenth American Regional Meeting
Brasilia, May 2006

Decent work in the Americas: An agenda for the Hemisphere, 2006-15

Report of the Director-General

International Labour Office

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Foreword

1. The ILO Programme and Budget for 2006-07 was approved by the International Labour Conference at its 93rd Session (June 2005). The programme recognizes that decent work is a global objective, since men and women all over the world aspire to obtaining productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and dignity. The ILO believes that this global objective, which is shared by the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization,¹ should be progressively incorporated into national development strategies, the implementation of which will be supported through the decent work country programmes developed and implemented by the Office and its constituents, as established by the Conference. The Sixteenth American Regional Meeting at which I am presenting this Report is taking place at the beginning of the period covered by this programme and therefore reflects its policies and strategies.

2. The ILO has been promoting the creation of decent work since 1999. As indicated in the Office's Programme and Budget for 2006-07, this aspiration is linked to the following four strategic objectives:

- 1) to promote and realize standards and fundamental principles and rights at work;
- 2) to create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income;
- 3) to enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; and
- 4) to strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

The action taken to achieve these strategic objectives will create synergies facilitating the attainment of a set of cross-cutting objectives which are increasingly considered as priority goals for the international community: a fair globalization, working out of poverty, advancing gender equality, enhancing the influence of international labour standards in development, and expanding the influence of the social partners, social dialogue and tripartism.

3. Last year, during the United Nations World Summit, the Heads of State and Government of 150 countries made the following declaration:

We strongly support fair globalization and resolve to make the goals of full and productive employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of our relevant national and international policies as well as our national development strategies, including poverty reduction strategies, as part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. These measures should also encompass the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, as defined in International Labour Organization Convention No. 182, and forced labour. We also resolve to ensure full respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work.

This declaration confirms the direction taken by the ILO member States.

¹ World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization: *A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all* (Geneva, ILO, 2004).

4. In the Americas, the belief that the creation of decent work, as defined by the ILO, is the best way to overcome poverty and reinforce democratic governance has progressively been consolidated, especially since 2003. In the case of Latin America, this belief is reflected in the conclusions of the MERCOSUR Regional Conference on Employment (Buenos Aires, April 2004), the Andean Regional Conference on Employment (Lima, November 2004) and the Subregional Tripartite Employment Forum (Tegucigalpa, Honduras, June 2005) with the participation of delegations from Central America, Panama and the Dominican Republic. Similarly, the conclusions of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Inter-American Conferences of Ministers of Labour, as well as the declarations of the continent's Heads of State and Government at the Ibero-American Summits (Santa Cruz, San José, Costa Rica and Salamanca), the Third Latin America and the Caribbean – European Union Summit and the Summits of the Americas held in Nuevo León and Mar del Plata (which include an action plan), all reflect the aspiration to make decent work a global objective. These documents (Appendix) acknowledge that the promotion of decent work is a strategy that can help to ensure increased participation of the poor and the socially excluded in the fruits of economic growth, the strengthening of democracy and the overcoming of poverty, inequality and exclusion within the context of fairer globalization.

5. In the light of the abovementioned declarations, I believe the objective of creating decent work should be explicitly incorporated into national development strategies. For the International Labour Office, this Sixteenth American Regional Meeting is the appropriate forum in which to examine the steps we should take to move towards achieving this global objective so as to respond to our citizens' aspirations for decent work for all with specific measures.

6. For these reasons, having heard the opinions of government officials and employers and workers of the ILO's American member States and considered how the strategic and cost-cutting objectives correspond to the particularities of the region, I am presenting you, in this Report, with an agenda for the Hemisphere of general and specific policies, the implementation of which would enable further progress to be made in promoting decent work for all. Logically, it will be for each country to determine whether or not it can raise the proposed targets, and to decide which combination of the proposed policies is better adapted to national characteristics, particularities and potential.

7. Decent work country programmes (DWCPs) are the ILO's contribution to helping countries incorporate decent work into their development strategies and policies. Throughout this Report, specific proposals are put forward for general policies which each country can adopt and adapt to its own conditions if it considers this to be appropriate, since the decision to make decent work a national objective lies with each country. Within each DWCP, ILO cooperation will be organized in a coherent manner and will respond to one or more key priorities to ensure that the country makes progress in achieving the decent work objectives. In the final section of this Report, I have put forward some thoughts regarding the DWCPs.

8. I am confident that the DWCPs can also be suitable mechanisms for focalizing and enhancing both horizontal technical cooperation between the countries of the Americas and international development cooperation, both multilateral and bilateral, within the region and beyond it.

9. We have before us a Report that takes into consideration both the technical and political progress made by the continent's ILO constituents with regard to the socio-labour dimension of development, its relevance and its fundamental role. It is a Report which seeks results through a programme that will help to prevent the dispersion of initiatives, bearing in mind that the promotion of decent work requires the integration of economic and social policies and the effective contribution of the public and private sectors in order to ensure that, in a globalized world, individuals and their work are at the centre of development.

1. General background and socio-economic labour trends in the Americas

10. The population of Latin America and the Caribbean currently stands at 563 million. Of that total, about 551 million live in Latin America, and at least 213 million of that number live in poverty (no figures are available concerning poverty in the Caribbean).¹ This social situation accurately reflects what is happening in the labour market, the main source of livelihoods and advancement for families. In Latin America there are 239 million economically active persons in employment or willing to work. Over 23 million of these individuals are affected by open unemployment, and approximately 103 million are employed in the informal sector, often without labour rights or social protection. There is thus a formal employment deficit of 126 million workers in Latin America (53 per cent of the economically active population). The two groups most affected by this situation are women and young people.

11. The regional average gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is US\$3,900, while productivity per worker is up to US\$10,100 per year, or around US\$840 per month. One fundamental problem, especially for the region's labour markets, is that, in many countries, that productivity has not risen over the past few decades. Indeed, the current average is more or less the same as that for the region at the beginning of the 1980s. Productivity per worker – or labour productivity – is a crucial element in economic and social progress, as was pointed out in a recent ILO report, because it is an important transmission mechanism between the world of production and the labour market.² The fact that it has remained at the same level

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