

FOOD AT WORK

WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS FOR MALNUTRITION, OBESITY
AND CHRONIC DISEASES

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FOREWORD

The rights to safe drinking water and to freedom from hunger are basic human rights and yet all too often ignored in the context of rights at work. Equally, they are an essential foundation of a productive workforce, and yet also all too often ignored in the context of productivity improvement and enhanced enterprise competitiveness. Measures to ensure a properly fed and healthy workforce are an indispensable element of social protection of workers, and yet frequently absent from programmes to improve working conditions and occupational safety and health. And despite the fact that these concerns are indeed fundamental ones for both employers and workers, they all too rarely feature as topics for social dialogue.

Food at work is therefore inextricably linked to the pillars of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. It touches not only on questions of nutrition, food safety and food security, although these in themselves are important enough. But it also calls into question other basic issues of working and employment conditions: wages and incomes, since workers – and their families – cannot eat decently if they do not receive an adequate income; working time, since workers cannot eat decently if their meal break is too short, or if their shift requires them to work at times when food is not available; and work-related facilities, since workers' health will be affected both by the quality of what they eat and drink at work and the conditions in which they consume it (such as protection from workplace chemicals and other hazards).

The importance of food at work is reflected in the Millennium Development Goals which set targets of halving, by 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and those without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. These targets are not only to be met at the workplace, but the workplace is an essential place to make a start. This recognition is not new: food at work was recognized as a building block of social justice in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia concerning the aims and

purposes of the ILO, which recognized the ILO's obligation "to further among the nations of the world programmes which will achieve: ... the provision of adequate nutrition, housing and facilities for recreation and culture".

This book was conceived as a response to the lack of attention to the issue of food at work. It aims to show not simply why this issue is important – that is rather easily done – but also, and more importantly, what employers, workers and governments can do and what they have done to improve food at work. It is intended as a practical rather than a theoretical contribution. We hope that amongst the many examples of good practice from around the world that are presented here, some will seem useful, relevant and replicable to the readers. These examples, taken from a wide range of countries and enterprises – from multinationals operating in highly industrialized countries to small-scale enterprises in developing countries and countries in transition – show that every business can benefit from improved attention to food at work. They also provide evidence that improvements – whether through improved cafeterias or mess halls, the introduction of meal voucher programmes, working with local vendors and others to improve street foods, or the provision of safe drinking water – are within the reach of any business, even the smallest. Furthermore, they demonstrate the active role that can, and indeed must, be played in this process by workers and their organizations, as well as the role for governments.

François Eyraud, Director

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Conditions of Work and Employment Programme
Social Protection Sector

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