

The Doha Forum on Decent Work and poverty reduction fits within the initiatives undertaken by the Doha Institute on Family Studies and Development on a regular basis to provide the region and other part of the world with academic research and knowledge as well as interdisciplinary dialogue aimed at exchange of experiences, best practices and coherent policy formulation. The forum will contribute in the preparations of the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the international year of the family, 2014.

The Forum offered an opportunity for multi-stakeholder dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of applying a Decent Work approach to poverty reduction and to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The exchange of experiences and policy lessons from different countries including from the Arab region, will help to consolidate the Decent Work approach in the national development strategies and plans.

Introduction

The strategic goals articulated in the Decent Work approach to development spearheaded by the ILO are a main component of the human rights imperatives, enshrined in the Universal Declaration. In order to achieve the aim of full productive employment and decent work for all, the ILO pursues the Decent Work Agenda which focuses on four inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive objectives:

Employment – The MDG Outcome document adopted in September 2010 clearly reaffirms that work and income are a critical route out of poverty.. National reports and research conducted show economic growth alone is insufficient to eradicate poverty unless it is accompanied by policies aiming at creating sustainable jobs. This dimension was initially missing in the MDG agenda until Decent Work was explicitly endorsed by the UN Summit in September 2005 as an integral part of poverty reduction and development strategy. More recently, in the context of the current economic crisis and its impact on employment and poverty, the ILO adopted in June 2009 a Global Jobs Pact which offers policy guidance and practical advice on addressing the major challenge of creating decent work for all as a sustainable way out of the crisis;

Rights – without the effective enforcement of fundamental rights at work people will not be empowered to escape from poverty. In particular, phenomena such as forced labour, child labour, ethnic, social and gender discrimination are a product of poverty but at the same time contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and injustice;

Social protection – it safeguards income and underpins health: ILO research shows how even limited social transfers targeting the poor – affordable even by developing economies – could make a substantial difference in the reduction of poverty levels. The United Nations Social Protection Floor initiative promotes a basic set of social transfers and access to essential services as a means to alleviate the social impact of the crisis;

Dialogue – the participation of employers’ and workers’ organizations in shaping national development policy in the social sphere and poverty reduction strategies that helps ensure that they are appropriate and sustainable and that their results will reach out to the final beneficiaries. .

Together, these four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda support coherent and gender-sensitive development strategies. The progressive realization of the strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda is recognized as a critical element for a sustainable route out of poverty.

Objectives of the forum

The main objective of the forum was to contribute to a better understanding of the Decent Work approach and the powerful impact it can have on the Millennium Development Goals, with an emphasis on poverty reduction and to identify policies that have proven their capacity to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the MDGs.

More specifically, the forum aimed to:

- 1) enhance awareness among participants of the Decent Work Agenda, its four strategic objectives and its relevance to poverty reduction strategies;
- 2) present relevant and replicable good practice and experiences on innovative approaches in the GCC, Arab and others countries which have had tangible results in terms of poverty reduction.;
- 3) generate a discussion among participants on practical recommendations leading to the integration of a Decent Work approach into National Development Strategies and plans.

Content of the forum

***Session 1-* the Millennium Declaration, the MDGs and the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda**

This session provided the contextual framework on how the implementation of the ILO Decent Work agenda can contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

***Session 2-* Promoting employment: creating a sustainable institutional and economic environment**

The session reviewed the creation of a sustainable institutional and economic environment for employment generation for young people through skills development¹ for improving the employability and productivity of the disadvantaged groups and social

¹ Skills development can be an important tool for reducing poverty and exclusion and enhancing competitiveness and employability. Education and skills can enable the working poor and vulnerable groups, such as persons in rural communities, persons with disabilities, or disadvantaged youth to escape the vicious circle of inadequate education, poor training, low productivity and poor quality jobs with low wages.

finance² to address three major goals: reducing vulnerability, creating jobs through enterprise development and making financial policies more employment sensitive.

Session 3- Developing sustainable, country-specific social protection schemes: Towards social protection for all

This session examined Social Protection Floor National Initiative and analyse different social protection models and mechanisms, and other relevant experiences in relation to extension to the poor in the informal and rural economies.

Session 4 - Gender equality and decent work

This session highlighted the pivotal role of gender equality in poverty reduction through Decent Work. Targeted strategies to ensure the formulation and effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies have been identified and illustrated. How can attention to gender specificities make development and poverty reduction efforts more relevant and sustainable?

The session introduced conciliation of work and family and presented the ILO legal instruments which provide policy guidance. Work-family measures as policy solutions intended to facilitate all workers' access to decent work will be presented.

The session also illustrated how maternity protection for women workers contributes to the health and well-being of mothers and their babies, and thus to the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 adopted by the member States of the United Nations, which seek the reduction of child mortality and improvement of the health of mothers.³

Session 5- Promoting social dialogue and respecting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work

This session reviewed the importance of building consensus on employment and decent work policies, strategies and programmes and making labour law and institutions more effective in support of the achievement of all MDGs. Improved labour market governance and social dialogue are critical and ways of building capacities within government and among social partners to play their essential role in developing, monitoring and enforcing labour laws and their contribution to social development will be discussed.

² Social finance is about credit, savings, insurance and other products that help the poor to cope better with risk, take advantage of income-generating opportunities, organize and have a voice.

³ By safeguarding women's employment and income security during and after maternity, maternity protection is also essential for ensuring women's access to equality of opportunity and treatment in the workplace, and progress towards Millennium Development Goal 3, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

The session also discussed the ILO's unique experience in adopting international labour standards and the role of ILS as part of international human rights and national legal systems. Questions debated included how to make labour laws consistent with fundamental principles and rights at work? How can a rights-based approach contribute to development and poverty reduction? And, conversely, how can the promotion and enforcement of labour rights be made more effective through social inclusion and through the generation of employment and income opportunities?

Session 6- Conclusions and way forward

This session was devoted to the outcomes of the discussion and provided recommendations.