



**UNCEB Joint Crisis Initiative on the Global Jobs Pact
2nd United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty**

Inter-agency Technical Meeting

Building employment and decent work into sustainable recovery and development – The UN contribution

Dates: 29 November – 1 December 2010

Venue: ILO Training Centre, Turin, Italy

Background

For the most vulnerable countries the global economic crisis is far from over. Good jobs are lacking and precarious work is on the increase. Poor households suffer from declining wages and earnings, reverse migration and volatile prices of food and fuel. Social spending and aid budgets are under threat. This undermines the prospects to achieve development goals and leaves economic and social scars that threaten social cohesion and may take years to reverse. The challenge for the poorest countries is not just to regain the jobs lost to the crisis but to set conditions for new patterns of growth that generate employment and decent work for a rapidly growing labour force.

The widespread concern with jobs is changing the contours of the official development agenda. In the aftermath of the global economic crisis, the questions of employment and decent work have become more central and the demands of countries for policy tools and assistance to cope with gaps in their labour markets more pressing. The review of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, ten years after their launch, is suggesting the need not just to extend basic welfare services for the poorest but, at the same time, to strengthen productive capacities, address inequalities and create opportunities and voice for people across the full spectrum of the job market. Greater policy coherence and complementarity between social policies to protect vulnerable people and economic policies to foster productive investment and productive employment is an emerging tenet of strategies to sustain recovery and growth, promote development and reduce poverty.

There are several implications for the organizations of the multilateral system.

First, the content of policies and strategies for development is changing as the lessons from the response to the crisis are spelt out and digested. Interventions directly catering to investment and jobs that were anathema a few years ago are now upfront - from sectoral policies to promote industrial change and SME development to public employment programmes, employment guarantee schemes and accommodative finance. Labour market initiatives for the unemployed, the youth and other targeted groups; skills development and social dialogue are more common. Governments are adopting more flexible and more pragmatic approaches to their policy mix and are keen to learn from experience and good



practice. The organizations of the multilateral system have made new steps to assist countries in such a shift: the ILO through its Global Jobs Pact has introduced a framework for action based on tried and tested measures to promote a job-rich recovery; UNDP and UN technical agencies are strengthening the employment and social protection dimensions of their work; important research contributions have come from UNCTAD and UNRISD among others; the UNCEB through its Joint Crisis Initiatives has provided a framework for stronger interagency exchange and cooperation in key policy areas. Yet, the challenge remains to improve multilateral knowledge and capabilities for technical assistance in addressing labour market issues.

Second, the need and rationale for policy coherence to achieve employment, decent work and poverty reduction goals have become more evident. Coherence and coordination are not just ways to eliminate bureaucratic waste and duplication. They are essential conditions for policy success. As suggested in a recent report by UNRISD: *"... efforts to tackle poverty through discrete and standardized policies unrelated to a country's production and macroeconomic systems, social policies and politics are of limited impact, and may even be counterproductive."* At the country level, initial lessons from the MDG Acceleration pilot countries show how coordination across different ministries, stakeholders and international agencies is essential to achieve even distinctive and very specific goals. At the multilateral level, organizations are developing a new sense of how policies in their specific areas of responsibility and expertise affect and are affected by policies in other areas. Promising dialogue and collaboration have started between the ILO and IMF and between the ILO, UNDP and other international organizations to better understand the linkages between macroeconomic frameworks, social policy and labour markets in achieving development objectives. Those debates at Headquarters should translate into more coherent operations at the country level, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the drive towards unified approaches and programmes.

Finally, the crisis is prompting a rethinking of orthodox economic approaches to development and a search for alternative models. In the transition, each institution is working with hybrid assumptions about key parameters of development - eg as it concerns drivers of growth, the scope of government and market failures, the role of labour market institutions etc. Different assumptions introduce additional obstacles to operational coherence, but no organization alone can craft consensus on those issues. Wider discussion and exchange based on "experience regarding what is working" are needed.

It will take time to shape a new consensus. In the meanwhile, it is important to promote stronger convergence and inter-agency collaboration in sharing knowledge, mobilizing funds and providing technical assistance in the key policy areas underlying employment and decent work. This would be especially beneficial to low income countries that were severely affected by the crisis and remain vulnerable to the labour market consequences of a volatile international economic and financial environment. The task is to set up open, lean and flexible inter-agency mechanisms geared to promote knowledge sharing and policy dialogue, to facilitate synergies and voluntary collaboration while avoiding duplication of efforts, and to strengthen system-wide policy coherence.



Objective

The objective of the meeting is to prompt stronger and more coherent UN policy responses to employment and decent work challenges by means of exchanging experiences and practice among senior officials from different organizations, selected international experts and practitioners.

The meeting will provide a forum to:

- Present good practice and compare notes on innovative approaches in critical policy areas.
- Review issues and challenges to coherent country level delivery.
- Identify opportunities to further inter-agency collaboration, knowledge-sharing and policy debate.

The meeting will be an occasion to review UN experience with employment and decent work issues in low income countries. The outcomes of the discussion will feed into the work of the agencies contributing to the system-wide *Plan of Action on Full Employment and Decent Work for All* under the 2nd United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017). They might also contribute to sharpen the preparation of inputs and deliverables for the 4th United Nations Conference on LDC that will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, on 30 May – 3 June 2011.

Participants

The meeting is jointly organized by the ILO and UNDESA , the co-leading agencies behind the plan of action under the 2nd UN Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, in cooperation with the ILO Training Centre in Turin.

The event will be of interest to senior technical officers from the agencies involved in the 2nd Decade as well the cooperating agencies under the UNCEB Joint Crisis Initiative on the Global Jobs Pact, including for instance FAO, IMO, ITU, UN Regional Commissions, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNIDO, UN-NGLS, UNWTO, UPU, WFP, WIPO, IMF and the World Bank.

Participants will include selected experts and practitioners. Papers commissioned prior to the meeting and technical presentations from relevant agencies will be used as an input to an open and interactive discussion.

Support is provided by the Government of Norway under the ILO-Norway Cooperation Agreement on Policy Coherence for Growth, Employment and Decent Work.



Tentative programme and preliminary questions

Session 1 – Policy frameworks for growth, employment and social cohesion

This session will review key features of the policy frameworks different agencies are proposing in order to address issues of unemployment, underemployment and poverty, highlighting commonalities/differences and gaps in knowledge and tools.

Session 2 – Sectoral policies, SME development and job generation in low income settings

The renewed interest in industrial policy could be especially relevant to lower income countries whose poorly diversified structures are vulnerable to economic and financial shocks. Is there a common pattern for upgrading and diversification, from agriculture to manufacturing and services? Does firm size matter? Are employment targets useful? How to address informality and quality of jobs? Can governance be improved along industries and value chains?

Session 3 - Innovations in public employment programmes

Nurturing a thriving private sector may require “patient” support and building of institutions. Meanwhile, public programmes could be necessary to cope with sudden labour market crises or structural inequalities. The scope of those programmes has broadened in recent years. What are the main lessons? Is there evidence of spillovers for sustainable local development and jobs? Is it feasible to use those programmes as permanent mechanisms to buffer demand, maintain/enhance employability and provide opportunities for the excluded? Is employment-oriented social protection a convenient option?

Session 4 - Decent work for youth development

The future prospects are of a large, very youthful, unskilled and rapidly urbanizing population in many low income countries. Programmes targeting vulnerable youth are critical to reap benefits from the demographic dividend and reduce threats to social cohesion. What do country experiences tell us? What is the track record of entrepreneurship programmes? How to better link education and training to the world of work? Is education and training all we need to offer?

Session 5 - Policy coherence on the ground

Despite much progress, inter-agency collaboration on employment and decent work issues at the country level needs strengthening. Where are the main bottlenecks – analytical differences, bureaucratic blinkers, lack of data etc? What are the lessons from success stories? Which of the existing frameworks could provide a stronger platform for coherence (UNDAF, MAF, GJP)? Is there a role for stakeholders and labour market organizations?

Session 6 - Conclusions and ways forward

This session will wrap up the outcomes of previous discussion and outline next steps