

# A Trade Union Review on Agriculture, Rural Development, Desertification, Drought, Land & Africa

16<sup>th</sup> Commission on Sustainable Development CSD-16

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**Rising food & energy prices, resource depletion & climate change, and the lack of access to services and infrastructure; taken together these have a devastating impact on poor communities, especially in Africa. CSD-16 must analyse how agriculture and rural development can be made to tackle these problems and ensure decent and sustainable working and living conditions for all.**

We call on the CSD-16 to embrace the Asian & the Pacific Regional Implementation Meeting Chairperson's summary:

*Where policies, institutions, other aspects of governance and infrastructure are not sufficiently supportive, livelihood opportunities are limited and poverty and food insecurity increase. **Small producers, women, organised trade union workers and other vulnerable groups** are disproportionately affected. Changing economic and ecological environments pose risks to these groups and require better analyses and identification.*

The following issues should be mainstreamed for CSD-16 outcomes:

**Democratic governance and respect of fundamental rights**, including labour rights are a prerequisite for sustainable development. Governments must take responsibility for policies that ensure a fair social and economic balance in society. The equitable provision of public services, their oversight and regulation play a vital role. Governments must engage in national and local dialogue with all Agenda 21 partners.

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

**Opportunities for 'green and decent job' creation** within the CSD themes must be explored. Agriculture must move to sustainable production patterns to secure decent jobs. It should explore new avenues associated with natural resource management, e.g. terracing or contouring of land, building irrigation structures (which prevent further degradation), increasing water use productivity, or combating soil erosion through tree planting.

**A planned transition** is required to protect workers in environmentally-vulnerable sectors, such as agriculture and fisheries. 'Just transition' measures must protect workers from loss of employment or livelihood due to environmental stresses or due to sustainability measures in response to these. Adaptation of agriculture to altered weather patterns, economic diversification, non-farm development, education and skills development are essential.

**Sustainable production and consumption** patterns are key for addressing the CSD-16 themes. Agricultural work remains one of the three most dangerous occupations in the world, with more than 170,000 workers killed every year. For example, pesticides kill 40,000 workers annually. The sound management of chemicals needs to be enforced. 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. Governments must adopt the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management (SAICM) and join the UN SCP and NSDS processes.

**Worker and trade union involvement** are essential ingredients for change where collaboration with employers and governments could facilitate effective workplace action for environmental protection and community well-being.



## AGRICULTURE

- § Land reform, food security and sovereignty, rights for workers and farmers, environmental sustainability and justice are essential elements of a sustainable agriculture.
- § Skyrocketing food prices coupled with ill-distributed profits undermine progress in fighting poverty. The recent rise of food prices threatens low income earners and will increase inequality between countries if vigorous and immediate action is not taken to protect the purchasing power of rural and urban workers, especially in developing countries.
- § Agreement should be reached on the negative impacts of deregulation and liberalisation, which encouraged countries to dismantle government-run grain buffer stocks. They could have played a vital role in alleviating current food shortages. The shift to export crops contributes to the scarcity of basic domestic foodstuffs and severely impacts on developing countries' non-farming and transformation industries, as well as their food self-sufficiency.
- § Agriculture is a sector where having a job does not ensure an adequate quality of working or living conditions. Waged agricultural workers (and especially female workers) face discrimination, child labour, low wages, high occupational injury and fatality rates; millions live on the edge of life and death every day.
- § Pesticides put workers, consumers and the environment at risk. Trade unions call for combating the expanding uses of toxic agrochemicals and intensive agricultural production based on unsustainable techniques, to promote agroecology and family agriculture. Occupational health and safety must be enforced, through strong regulations and training and education for workers and ratification of ILO Conventions.
- § Agriculture must become a driver for sustainable development and this CSD needs to mainstream decent work promotion and underscore the need for and respect of ILO core labour standards.
- § Climate change will negatively affect employment in climate-sensitive sectors due to extreme weather events, such as in agriculture and fisheries. More than 1.3 billion people depend on fisheries, forests and agriculture for employment, constituting almost half of the total world employment.
- § Drought, water stress and other extreme weather events will damage crops, reduce yields and in some parts, render agriculture impossible. Thereby, climate change will affect employment in this sector, especially seasonal jobs associated with harvesting and crop-processing. Climate change will give rise to worker migrations, aggravating already crowded urban regions and putting severe strain on infrastructure-poor slums. Adaptation is vital for securing the world's food supply.
- § While agroenergy can potentially generate income and new markets for farmers, there is concern particularly about the impacts of large-scale energy crop plantations for agrofuel production on food security, sustainability of production and rural development. Competition and trade-offs for arable land, water and food production will yield upward pressure on food prices and other socio-economic and environmental costs. Ecological and social criteria must be assessed.
- § Rural women are responsible for half the world's production and between 60-80 per cent of the food output in most developing countries. Their role needs to be recognised and complimented with financial resources, education, and equitable rights. HIV/AIDS prevalence has reduced the number of adults able to support their families and the broader rural economy. HIV/AIDS is also diminishing the capacity of the productive labour force in many areas of public services that are responsible for emergency response measures, public health and environmental services. The impact, added to rural-urban migration of men in search of paid employment, has fallen onto women in agriculture. CSD should address gender issues, as women suffer from unequal access to land, tools and technology, and to rural credit.
- § The precautionary principle must be applied when dealing with genetically modified organisms (GMO) or with new chemicals to be introduced in the food-chain. Trade unions stress the need for encouraging organic farming.
- § Agriculture is the largest user of global water supplies. There is a need for enforcing an integrated and sustainable water management, that adequately distributes water resources between different demands. An environmental assessment should be made of current projects for the desalinisation of water.

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- § Agriculture remains the main pillar of poverty reduction in rural areas by providing essential nutrients as well as employment and income-generating opportunities to the rural labour force.
- § Decent employment (which includes respect for rights at work, secure employment, social protection, and social dialogue) needs to be recognised as a means for achieving poverty reduction and improving livelihoods. Precarious working conditions are at the beginning of a vicious circle of poverty and exclusion. CSD should recognise the ILO's Decent Work agenda's potential and further promote its spread, with an emphasis during this cycle on rural areas.
- § Access to services, including water, sanitation, health care and clean energy is essential for empowering poor communities. To improve public service delivery, access for all citizens and sustainable resource management, governments must ensure quality public services. Health care services need to be better supported with resources for tackling the HIV/AIDS challenge, so as to halt the slide of segments of the world's population into extreme poverty because they have no access to or are unable to afford adequate treatment or care.
- § Improved workers' rights, including the right to organise and bargaining collectively are key for a sustainable rural development. Governments must provide security and protect trade unionists and community leaders from violence particularly in rural areas. CSD should promote instruments such as the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises and the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles for Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy as a means for ensuring a socially-fair and environmentally responsible rural development.

## RURAL DEVELOPMENT (cont.)

- § Education programmes must better address agriculture and food security. Skill-based education, such as that provided by trade unions, offers immediate results on resource efficiency and productivity, food safety and occupational health, among others. Workplace-based education programmes should be sought and supported.
- § Absence of or inadequate rural transport undermines farm and rural processing industries, aggravating the already high unemployment rates in rural areas.
- § When agricultural development is complemented by non-farm growth of the rural sector, the impact on reducing rural poverty is more pronounced. In most countries non-farm activities account for 30-50 per cent of income in rural areas.
- § In many rural areas, the income generated from common resources (i.e. forests, fisheries, reefs, waterways, pastures and mineral resources) is a major constituent of household incomes of the rural poor. A combination of factors, including privatisation, agricultural intensification, population growth and ecosystem degradation, have caused common property areas to dwindle in size, quality and availability to the poor in much of the world. CSD recommendations must seek to reverse this trend.
- § Improved prices, and reduced price volatility can become an opportunity to stabilise incomes for farm workers and improve conservation of natural resources.

## DESERTIFICATION, DROUGHT AND LAND

- § A holistic approach to desertification is called for. Effective decisions on soil fertility are not merely driven by soil and climate factors but also by soil degradation, as well as biological, chemical, physical, social, economic, health, nutritional and political factors.
- § Our capacity to adapt to extreme weather events such as drought or to long-lasting modifications in ecosystems such as desertification is primarily related to income and capabilities. Poor people lack the resources, information or access to services which allow for anticipation of environmental stresses.
- § Developing countries are often less able to cope with adverse environmental events: poverty exacerbates, and is exacerbated by the impacts of environmental change. People living in these countries are highly dependent on climate-sensitive resources, have low adaptive capacity and, in the case of the poorest inhabitants, already struggle to cope with current extreme weather events and climate variability. Environmental events generate huge amounts of stress for poor households: droughts, resource depletion and floods, among others, are either at the source of or reinforce the already critical social and economic situation (i.e. resource depletion aggravates unemployment, which reinforces migration subsequently contributing to the loss of human resources and endangering rural economies).
- § Current international cooperation is insufficient. International solidarity must be strengthened and include aid for emergencies and disasters as well as funds for rapid adaptation programmes. Increased investment is necessary for securing the livelihoods of the poorest, through the development of social protection, poverty reduction strategies, and decent jobs programmes.
- § Financial flows for adaptation in agriculture and the full food supply chain are clear: Water, health and infrastructure have been identified as the most vulnerable sectors and those where investments urgently need to be made. Such investments need to take account of other realities as well, e.g. the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases which are reducing the capacity to properly deliver such services. In this context, long term financial flows should be directed towards developing countries, in order to better adapt to environmental stresses.
- § Governments must honour the commitments made at Monterrey and Gleneagles for a major increase in development aid to assist poor countries and for greater accountability of governments to properly deliver on their commitments from one year to the next.
- § Sustainable rural development offers the opportunity to commit with new paths for economic development, a development that puts people at the centre and is respectful of workers' rights and the environment. By improving societies' and economies' capacity to react and adapt to extreme weather events and climate variability, sustainable rural development could be made to yield positive effects on employment, or at least reduce the severity of the negative ones. It could also provide positive opportunities for sectors at risk and might even help to improve worker education and income.
- § Synergies between different UN Conventions (UNFCCC, UNCD and UNCBD) and common work with ongoing processes in other institutions (ILO, FAO, UNEP, OECD) need to be strengthened, and trade union participation in these bodies ensured and expanded.
- § There are institutional, financial, human and technological challenges that need to be addressed for achieving a more sustainable land management. Workers and their organisations are valid partners in the transition towards secure and sustainable tenure.

(See AFRICA overleaf)

## AFRICA\*

In Africa, poverty and environmental damage appear on different sides of a common coin. Drought, deforestation, desertification, water, soil and air pollution all have negative impacts on the lives of workers, their families and communities, with serious consequences for employment, food security and occupational or public health. The linkages between labour and environment must be strengthened, ensuring social and environmental cohesion. Their relevance to production, workplaces and community realities have given rise to new roles as trade unions of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and as practical actors of change.

**It is therefore essential to:**

- § Strengthen understanding of the links between the environment, labour and poverty. Decent Work should be taken to embrace 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 (e.g. of regions) and integrate such indicators into sustainable development strategies for designing and implementing change.
- § Guarantee the participation of trade unions and other civil society groups (NGOs, local communities, etc.) in decision-making for environment and sustainable development, and to promote tripartite dialogue, collective bargaining and other democratic processes.
- § Promote education at all levels that incorporates sustainable development for workers and their communities and provides adequate tools for workers to become meaningful actors of change.
- § Call for States to assume their roles in properly regulating companies and world markets, especially as it relates to the provision for goods and services, sanitation, health, water, energy, housing, education, public transportation and social security, i.e. indispensable elements for overcoming poverty.
- § Call for States to increase their investments for environmental policies and their implementation, e.g. research & development that eliminates risks and environmental pollution.
- § Strengthen union training for leaders and workers, as a political strategy for building common labour-sustainable development actions.
- § Call for "just transition" programmes to ensure that workers negatively affected by restructuring obtain Decent Work provisions in the process towards sustainable production and consumption.
- § Call on multinational and national enterprises to allocate resources for establishing and improving the accountability and transparency of their social and environmental behaviour, taking into account equity concerns.
- § Reject the "double standards" of some multinational enterprises that "export" environmental, social and production methods to Africa which are not allowed in the countries of origin.
- § Implement the 2002 Johannesburg plan of implementation with respect to chemicals, where the onus for chemical safety for workers, consumers and communities rests with industry; support the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants for the phasing out of hazardous substances; and adopt the precautionary principle and the Strategic Approach to Chemicals Management (SAICM) and its follow-up.
- § Call on governments to 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.
- § Combat the expanding uses of agrotoxics and intensive agricultural production based on unsustainable techniques; promote agroecology and family agriculture; and call for land reform, food security and sovereignty and justice in agriculture.
- § Promote social dialogue on national climate change policies when addressing vulnerability issues and in adaptation and mitigation plans.
- § Make water a priority for union organising efforts in the regions, and support the PSI and other social organisations in promoting universal, equitable, egalitarian and environmentally sound access to basic resources such as water and energy as essential components of human rights.
- § Promote the Global Framework Agreements signed by the Global Unions Federations with multinational enterprises to safeguard core labour standards, as well as environmental and sustainable development provisions.
- § Call for a complete global ban on asbestos use, for its proper handling and disposal in accordance with the decisions of the Parties to the Basel Convention and for its inclusion in the Rotterdam Convention.
- § Promote integrated and workplace-based approaches to fight HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

\* The content of this section is derived from a Resolution agreed by the first Trade Union African Conference on Labour and the Environment (Johannesburg, 28-29 July 2006) which brought together sixty-two union members representing twenty-four national centres from nineteen countries.

## TRADE UNIONS AT THE CSD-16

### International Trade Union Organizations

ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation)  
TUAC (Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD)  
IUF (International Union of Food workers)  
PSI (Public Services International)

### Regional Trade Union Organizations

TUCA - Americas  
ITUC - Africa  
ETUC - Europe  
EFFAT - Europe

### National Trade Union Centers

BMSF - Bangladesh  
CSC - Belgium  
CUT - Brazil  
CUPE - Canada  
UFCW - Canada  
SYNADER - Chad  
3F - Denmark  
CGT - France  
CFDT - France  
DGB - Germany  
IG BAU - Germany  
KTUC - Kiribati  
MTUC - Malaysia  
CROC - Mexico  
NLC - Nigeria  
LO - Norway  
COSATU - South Africa  
CCOO - Spain  
UNITE-HERE - United States