Report of the Asia and the Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting on "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work in Asia and the Pacific: a regional approach to sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and achieving the MDGs" for the 2012 Annual Ministerial Review of the Economic and Social Council

Summary

As part of the annual ministerial review process of the Economic and Social Council, an Asia and the Pacific regional preparatory meeting on the theme "Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work in Asia and the Pacific: a regional approach to sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and achieving the MDGs" was held in Kyoto, Japan on 7 December 2011. It was hosted by the Government of Japan, in collaboration with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Untied Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Organized as a multi-stakeholder event, with the participation of high-level representatives of Governments, workers and employers organizations, and a youth representative, the consultations consisted of two plenary meetings. The event took place in the context of ILO's 15th Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting, held in Kyoto from 4 to 7 December 2011.

Participants, including a minister, examined the central role of productive capacity, employment and decent work for realizing sustained inclusive and equitable growth and achieving the MDGs. Participants also shared national experiences, including good practices and lessons, in this area.

Key policy messages

The following key messages emerged from the discussion:

Progress has been made in the Asia and Pacific region on employment and decent work related Internationally-agreed Development Goals (IDGs), including the MDGs:

> Dynamic growth in Asia and the Pacific has lifted hundreds of millions of people from severe poverty. Much progress has been made in making decent work a central objective in national development strategies and in improving labour market governance
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> Progress was also observed in the following areas: increased investment in social protection systems; greater awareness in and action on the rights of migrant workers; enhanced efforts in combating child labour and providing greater skills to young women and men.
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> Sixty-eight Conventions were ratified by Asia-Pacific Member States since August 2006. However, ratification and implementation of ILO core conventions remain lower than in other regions.

inclusive, sustainable and equitable growth and sustainable development.

After recalling the role of ECOSOC in holding annual ministerial reviews (AMRs) of progress towards the MDGs and other internationally agreed goals, Ambassador Momen emphasised the function of the AMR as one of the important paths towards building a consensus for a post-2015 development agenda.

In closing, Ambassador Momen stated that in the region Bangladesh offered a model of a vision of peace and growth through the Peoples Empowerment concept advanced by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Citing the call for human equality of the Bengali poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, he invited the meeting to work together for the wellbeing of humanity.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Sachiko Yamamoto, Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, International Labour Organization (ILO), thanked the Government of Japan for hosting the meeting and welcomed it as timely and appropriate. The subject of promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work in Asia and the Pacific a regional approach to sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and achieving the MDGs was particularly useful and allowed for linking its deliberations with the outcomes of the just concluded ILO Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM).

The ILO Regional Director outlined the regional context in which the economies and societies of Asia and the Pacific are situated. The past decade had seen unprecedented development in Asia and the Pacific. Millions have been lifted out of poverty. Economies have been thriving and many look at Asia these days as the global economic powerhouse.

There were challenges for the growth story of the region, however, both economically and due to recent and recurrent disasters. The region's economies are also dependent on exports to the slowing markets of Europe and the United States. Moreover, while overall GDP and productivity had improved in many countries, wages have not kept pace. In the Philippines, for instance, real wages had actually contracted by per cent as periods of substantial nominal wage increases were offset by even higher wage inflation. Across the region, thirty-seven per cent of workers still live on less than two US dollars a day. The region also features widening inequalities, persistent vulnerability and gender disparities. The female labour participation rate in the Asia and Pacific region was only 50 per cent, whereas for men it was 80 per cent. /Ti1(e)-3(529Tw 1.545 0 To 0(n1r)3(n)(a)-3(l)11(n)11(s)-5(i) le)-3(1(E)-5

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B. Session 1: Promoting productive capacity, employment and decent work in Asia and the Pacific – Lessons learned and good practices

1. Panellist Presentation

Mr. Patrik Andersson, Chief, Social Integration Section, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), serving as moderator of the session, highlighted some key issues and concerns in the region for discussion.

He noted that economic growth in the region was impressive and many MDG targets had been achieved. There was, however, persistent poverty, which was projected to increase

In this context employers' priorities were: (i) an enabling environment to improve capacity to do business, so that enterprises can sustain growth and employment; (i

Responding to these questions, Minister Giri noted that restructuring the government is necessary to bring people with diverse backgrounds together and formulate inclusive policies that enable marginalized populations to better access resources and opportunities. Mr. Rahman responded by suggesting giving incentives to companies to overcome existing barriers such as: lack of credit; non-conducive regulatory framework; lack of infrastructure, in particular electronic, electric power; and unavailability of skilled workers. He noted that the shortage of skilled workers was particular hindrance in the serious mismatch between supply and demand of human resources.

Mr. Suzuki responded that developing constructive industrial relations and involving unions in skills development were also critical elements. Mr. Rahman pointed to the need for updating education curricula, but that this may not be sufficient. Curricula may need to be readjusted to accommodate what is required by industry.

As public institutions are not the major source of employment in many countries, skills taught in vocational training may be outdated. In this context, it was suggested that the private sector should be invited in designing vocational training programmes.

C. Session 2: A regional approach to sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and achieving the MDGs – Key Policy Messages for the 2012 ECOSOC AMR

H.E. Ambassador Abdul Momen, Vice-President, United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) chaired the session, which was moderated by Mr. Stephen Pursey, Director, Policy Integration Department, and Senior Advisor to the Director-General, International Labour Organization (ILO).

Neil Pierre, Chief, Policy Coordination Branch of UNDESA delivered a statement on behalf of UNDESA. He observed that the Asia-Pacific region has shown significant resilience in the context of two economic crises, first in 1997/98 and again in 2008/09. This resilience had led to prosperity. The region's economic growth has been remarkable, characterized by progress on poverty reduction. Furthermore, the region had made significant progress on

Providing a context forthe discussion, the moderator described Asia's dynamism, but noted the region's vulnerability given the global economic uncertainty. The region had a significant jobs challenge ahead in the coming ten years to meet the growing labour force and high unemployment levels. Furthermore, despite the progress achieved in poverty reduction, many are still vulnerable to falling back into poverty in the case of a prolonged crisis or recession. Slow employment growth particularly affected youth and this had been reflected in the recent Arab protests and the suppression of rights. He cited a revealing study by the Gallup Poll, noting that having a good job was the predominant demand of people around the world. Greater policy coherence and coordination is needed, and jobs should be that unifying issue that could bring policy coherence at the national, regional and international levels.

Jose Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Director of the Employmeis,bexe-1oyO3(t) As(

Her presentation highlighted that one of the biggest challenges was the "school to work" transition. There was a mismatch between the demands of the labour market and what schools were teaching. She emphasized that there is a need to revamp the education system in many countries and this should be done with the full engagement of employers and workers, in order to advise on the proper vocational training that should be introduced in universities and internships that are most effective to prepare students for work. She stated that employers must also look beyond paper qualifications, and more on passion and determination to learn on the job skills. Internships should be expanded to expose students to working life earlier. Employers should invest in young people who show potential by providing training. Young people must be recognized for their resourcefulness, not just in terms of their skills, while governments have a role to play also by providing a stable environment for businesses to flourish, which would in turn encourage entrepreneurship.

Finally, Ms. Yap noted that youth should be involved in decision-making processes and collective bargaining. The recent crisis has asserted the need for firms to be innovative in order to survive. Youth are able to bring the innovation and change needed to make companies competitive. She urged governments and social partners to tackle the youth unemployment problem urgently, before the opportunity is lost.

Mr. M.J.I.U Wijayaweera , Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Sri Lanka, underscored that the region is populous and continuing to grow rapidly. Informality is also on the rise along with marginalization and exclusion. He highlighted the challenges associated with migrant workers, internal and external.

He stated that the region must work to address the challenges associated with youth unemployment, marked by lack of decent work opportunities, rising informality and vulnerable employment. Also a pressing challenge is the issue of child labour, particularly in its worst forms, since too many children were being deprived of education and were exploited, thus depleting many countries of a well-educated, skilled labour force. Many countries in the region were also facing demographic challenges as a result of ageing populations. One consequence is that

contribute to economic and social activities. This was critical to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable growth and sustainable development.

The Ambassador informed the gathering of the urgent need to develop a framework for enabling job-intensive growth, in order to reduce inequality and vulnerability, alleviate poverty and hunger, and tackle unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable employment, especially among youth. This could be achieved through well-coordinated and coherent policies across various sectors, improving overall labour market governance, strengthening social protection systems, and creating green jobs. He concluded that this should be the foundation for accelerating progress in achieving MDGs and paving the way for the development agenda beyond 2015.

Design policy packages, based on the ILO's Global Jobs Pact, to promote an equitable jobsrich strategy;

Promote collective bargaining and the development ofminimum wage systems based on ILO standards;

Build and/or strengthen comprehensive social protection systems, social protection floors, targetedin particular at the most vulnerable and poorest, based on national circumstances and using the respective fiscal space of countries;

Support small- and medium--