

REGIONAL TECHNICAL WORKSHOP ON LABOR STANDARDS
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Mr. Akira Seki - Deputy Director General for the Regional and Sustainable Development Department of the ADB, Mr. Brahm Prakash - Director for the the Poverty Reduction and Social Development Division of this department of the ADB, Colleagues in our joint development endeavors, Thank you for welcoming us to the ADB - and to a monsoon Manila. We are very pleased to be here.

The ILO is here in full force today, from our technical departments from headquarters, Mr. Swepston and his team, our team from the Regional Office, from the Manila office, and our valued external collaborators. We are here because this is the auspicious completion of the first exercise in collaboration between the ADB and the ILO, since the signing of the MOU between our two organisations in Shanghai this year. We are here because of a shared vision between President Chino and Director General Juan Somavia - of improvement in the lives of poor people - poor working people. We are here because this project marks a small but tremendously important step towards improving the conditions of poor working people.

Colleagues, the over arching objective of the ADB is poverty reduction. The over arching objective of the ILO is Decent Work. There is everything in common between our two objectives. 1.2 billion of the worlds population is poor. Two thirds falls into our region of the Asia Pacific. The ILO estimates that this 1.2 billion poor are supported by 0.5 million working poor. ***The poor, whoever can, all work.*** In our region especially, with little or no social protection to shield them, the poor cannot afford not to work. The opportunity cost of not working is too high - starvation. Therefore comes the all important realisation, that the poor are not poor because they do not work. They are poor because of their bad conditions of work. The poor lack Decent Work.

- The poor work long hours,
- under onerous working conditions
- for meager incomes and wages,
- with insecure and uncertain employment and work,
- with low levels of productivity, skills, and therefore low wages
- with little or no social protection, in work, out of work, or at the end of a working life
- with few rights, little voice, and weak institutions to secure their rights and change these conditions

So the ILO believes that the only sustainable route out of poverty has to be based on three elements:

1. Generation of work
2. Improvement in the conditions of work ie., generation of not just work but generation of decent and productive work
3. Enhancing workers capabilities to do that work

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The RETA project which we here to discuss the findings of, is aimed at these core issues, of improvement in the conditions of work, because these are fundamental rights, because they affect the poor, and because they thereby affect society. The project is aptly named : 'The Costs of Non Implementation of Fundamental Labour Standards', in the areas of child labour, occupational safety

and health (OSH), and gender discrimination. And the project shows that the costs on non implementation in these three areas are indeed very high.

The ILO' challenge in the work we are now completing was to demonstrate that failure to respect labor standards places an economic obstacle in the way of development in the ADB's member States. If the ADB is to take account of these standards in its work, it must be on a sound economic basis. We hope you will find that we have given you sufficient evidence that this is true. We have not attempted, in the short time of this project, to provide a full cost-benefit analysis, but we have been able to conclude to our own satisfaction that taking labor standards into account is an economic as well as a social imperative.

There is the cost to the individual. The child loses the fundamental right to be a child and not a worker - to study and play, and not to work in these formative years. Poverty is children working. Worse poverty is children forced to work in hazardous forms. Remember colleagues - that the poor are poor because they work in these conditions. Improvement of these conditions - removal of children from these working conditions, improves fundamental rights at work, and reduces the root cause of poverty.

The cost to the individual, of non implementation of this labour standard on child labour, is also the cost to society. A generation of children is trapped, in work, rather than learning and playing. A generation that learns to make carpets, and not computers.

And there is a cost to the economy as well. The ILO holds foremost that rights at work are fundamental and intrinsic human rights. But the ILO also wishes to demonstrate, that these rights also make economic sense. Child labour will not be as productive as adult labour. Better working conditions - better OSH - are an intrinsic human right at work, but it is also more productive. Discrimination against workers, for instance on the basis of gender, is again violation of a right at work, but it also leads to a less responsabilised work, which is less productive.

This is the direction that this all important RETA project takes us in. That non implementation of core labour standards have high human costs, high social costs, and high economic costs.

The following question, then, is how to promote the core labor standards. In the ILO, we have the standards supervisory mechanism on core labor standards; the committee of freedom of association as the complaints-faced supervisory mechanism, covering the non-ratified countries too. There has been lengthy, exhausting discussions on how to strengthen the supervisory mechanism on social clause at global scale, not only inside the ILO, but also at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in March 1995, the Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Singapore in December 1996, etc.

But the sanction does not help much in implementing the core labor standards. This has been clearly proved in the case of the Child Labour Convention, No.182. The International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) started as a small programme with Germany and six others. Today, it has expanded to 75 countries and 25 donors, while the Convention No.182 has become the most rapidly ratified one in ILO history, with over 120 ratifications in less than three years.

The IPEC has been an entry point into technical cooperation activities on core labor standards. Since then, technical cooperation on the core labor standards has been gradually increasing in this region. The technical cooperation, however, can hardly attain the objectives, if not being systematically provided, based on certain strategies; the strategy in the ILO now is called 'Decent Work National Plans of Action, which, as I said already, shares much in common with the ADB's Poverty Reduction and Social Protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the collaboration starts in this synergy. Therefore the ADB and the ILO are essential allies. This is not just because of fraternal good will - which of course is there. This is because we have a common cause - Poverty Reduction through Decent Work.

How do we promote decent work? Promoting decent work requires a variety of approaches. Macroeconomic stability attracts the investment which will generate jobs of a sustainable quality. Social stability rests on social dialogue mechanisms ensuring the participation of economic operators in decisions which affect them. International Labour standards provide the parameters and benchmarks for internationally acceptable, and indeed desirable action in favour of decent work. They are the software driving a system of State accountability for policies enhancing or dislocating the worlds' productive potential. The ILO has also set standards in the area of fundamental human rights, and the preferred approach in this area is the so-called rights-based approach. In essence, this approach no longer exclusively leaves the pace and pattern of development to State intervention, but aims to create space for people to define their own role in the development process by giving them certain immutable entitlements. The rights-based approach is typically used to promote policies which are fundamental both to the human being's dignity and to fostering other policies which are part and parcel of the development process, irrespective. For example, the right of children to be free from work in favour of education serves their own fundamental interest in full physical and mental development, but is also a basic prerequisite for any society to gradually build up the human capital which is the main resource of its future prosperity.

Thank you very much for your attention.