

ILO Address at the Closing Ceremony

Terje Tessem

Chief, Employment-Intensive Investment Programme

ILO, Geneva

Honourable Ministers, Dear Participants,

It is heartening for me as one of the “Mbeya twelve” from the first ILO Regional Seminar in 1990 to experience the change that has taken place concerning these Seminars over the years. Following this initial setup by ILO in the early nineties, the responsibility for the organisation of these Seminars was gradually taken over by the Governments themselves. Today they are fully organised by the host Ministries, Participants are largely finding their own ways of financing their participation. The driving forces behind these South-South knowledge sharing events are now African governments, their partners in business and society at large.

While these Seminars are now yours; the African States and its people, we recognise and appreciate the profile that you have given to ILO in this Seminar. We do not see this appreciation only as a reward; it drives our ambitions higher and encourages us to strive harder in supporting your ambitious goals.

These Seminars are a unique framework as there are very few events around where one, in the same event, is linking practice to policy and policy to practice; here we have practitioners at all levels from Ministers to artisans, there are colleagues with vast experience sharing their knowledge with newcomers. I am confident that Participants appreciate that both the “basic” and the cutting edge knowledge have their place at the Regional Seminar for Labour-Based Practitioners.

We really appreciate the work done by many Governments and their Champion Ministers across Africa. We also recognise their good demonstration projects displayed here at the Regional Seminar. While a Champion is a necessary condition for success, it is however only a part of the process. Institutionalisation through policies and strategies that have been economically, socially and environmentally justified, operational capacities with public and private partners, an active involvement of local populations in planning, implementation and governance are but a few of the conditions that need to be in place to put policy into practice, and to ensure a sustainable application of labour-based technology and local resource use across different sectors.

It has been observed, also at this Seminar, that traditional sectors dominate; we all need to broaden our minds to explore technology choice and employment opportunities in new sectors. The Employment-Intensive Investment Programme (EIIP) of the ILO is, for instance, focussing on how best we can assist African countries to create employment and enterprises through Green Works for Green Jobs. We are also championing the development and sharing of recent innovations in Public Employment Programmes with multi-sectoral public works programmes and social sectors like home-based care for children and the elderly.

The Minister of Employment and Social Welfare in his address at the Seminar dinner was highlighting the ILO as an organisation with radical ideas. I will clearly concur and say that while they may have been very radical in the past, the world has slowly discovered that a paradigm shift is necessary; ILO speaks now for open ears in agencies like the IMF and G20, something that was probably a utopia only a few years back. Country partners know that decent work opportunities are a necessary condition in this paradigm shift. The scale of the challenge to put it into practice is however such that it calls for ever more radical solutions if we are to meet with expectations of our people.

While speakers both at the Ministerial Meeting and the Regional Seminar were highlighting important cross-cutting issues very well, we believe however that this gathering could have been able to enjoy a better direct representation of the voices of women, youth and other target groups of the programme interventions. We therefore encourage partners organising and planning for the participation at the next Regional Seminar to facilitate, of course within reach, that some of those benefiting from the paradigm shifts we are promoting will also be heard at the Regional Seminar. Please allow me to put in a digression; while fulfilling important aspects of equal rights, this may also facilitate a better filling of the dance floor at the dinner dance that has come to be an important highlight of the Seminar!!!

Honourable Ministers, Dear Participants,

I wish at this juncture to extend our sincere thanks to the host country and its three Ministers on behalf of the Director General of the ILO, Mr. Juan Somavía. We thank the Minister of Roads and Highways, the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development and the Minister of Employment and Social Welfare for their commitment and support extended to this Regional Seminar for Labour-Based Practitioners. We are of course extending our sincere thanks in great appreciation of the efforts made by the Organising Committee in taking this to such a successful conclusion.

I wish to wholeheartedly congratulate the new host country Cameroon with its victory in this competition. It is great that we this time will pass a language barrier. This should give us a chance to even better explore the experiences of francophone countries and possibly new challenges in a new sub-region for many of us.

The Ministerial Meeting took its tasks seriously and produced a challenging statement for African and World Leaders. There is already some who have picked up the challenge – in his speech to the Congress last night, the leader of the world biggest economy, President Barack Obama, launched his intention to invest massively in infrastructure and other sectors for job creation!

The Government of Ghana and their representatives have been tasked to take this statement to the African Leaders and their political organisations. We will stand by you in your efforts and the new host country will not only have to start the practical preparation of the Seminar but align itself with Ghana to follow up on the substantive issues.

ILO will follow up internationally in the coming weeks. The Director General, Mr. Somavía, will have a chance to share your resolutions and requests with the G20 Ministers of Finance and Ministers of Labour in upcoming meetings. We will also take it to negotiations with the World Bank already this month.

In addition, and possibly as important as the formal statements and their follow up, Participants shared knowledge, business products, opinions and views as well as addresses for direct follow up through projects and programmes. The importance of these contacts, both at the professional and personal plan should not be underestimated.

Honourable Ministers, Dear Participants,

I wish to extend, on behalf of the Director General of the ILO, our great appreciation and sincere thanks to all Seminar Participants for their excellent contributions. I believe that Seminar Participants have gained further insight to face the great challenges related to creation of jobs and business opportunities; a better understanding of how these job opportunities can reach the people most in need for it, how income and prosperity can be replacing worries many youth carry today: what is my role in society if there are no jobs? In a world full of conflicts, jobs for youth are jobs for peace and stability.

Let me close by the ILO Declaration of Philadelphia that was agreed towards the end of World War II in 1944, a Declaration with close connections to the title of the Regional Seminar in Accra 2011, a Declaration which has not lost its relevance:

“Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere.”