

Interregional Symposium on the Informal Economy: Enabling Transition to Formalization

Geneva, 27-29 November 2007

Information Note

Introduction

This Symposium is a follow-up to the 2002 International Labour Conference general discussion and Resolution on Decent Work and the Informal Economy.¹ In March 2006, the ILO Governing Body approved the organization of an *Interregional Symposium on the Informal Economy: Enabling Transition to Formalization* in order to provide a venue for a tripartite technical review of effective policies, programmes and practices on key areas of action.

The content of this Symposium is guided by the Governing Body discussion which took place during March 2007 and where the Committee on Economic and Social Policy reviewed the progress made in the operationalization of the framework since 2002.² The rich discussion showed that while informality is gaining ground and remains the greatest development challenge, many countries are searching for new policies, innovative solutions and practical responses that can promote decent work. The conclusions of the discussion reflected a wealth of emerging experiences and there was a broad agreement on the issues that need to be addressed nationally and globally.

The present Symposium aims to build on this momentum and provide a forum for further in-depth discussions on recent trends and policy responses that are being developed in key areas across the Decent Work Agenda. The meeting will bring together expertise from governments and employers and workers organizations. A selected number of researchers, practitioners and institutions will also be invited to participate in the discussion.

Objectives of the Symposium

The overall objective of the Symposium is to exchange experience on different approaches developed for enabling the transition to formalization based on the ILC Resolution on Decent Work and the Informal Economy in 2002. The more specific objectives are:

- To review, share, and disseminate information on effective policies, programmes and practices for upgrading the informal economy through different country experiences;
- to assist ILO constituents to develop knowledge on emerging issues and innovative approaches for addressing the informal economy across the four pillars of the ILO Decent Work Agenda: standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue;

¹ ILO: *Report of the Committee on the Informal Economy*, Resolution and conclusions concerning decent work and the informal economy, adopted on 19 June 2002, ILC, 90th Session, Geneva, 2002, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reilm/ilc/ilc90/pdf/pr-25.pdf>.

² The Informal Economy, Committee on Employment and Social Policy, GB.298/ESP/4298th Session, March 2007. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reilm/gb/docs/gb298/pdf/esp-4.pdf>

- to reflect on the respective and complementary roles of the governments and the social partners for improving the policy environment, given the multi-dimensional nature of the informal economy;
- to identify possible follow-up in research, capacity-building and technical cooperation to support processes towards formalization.

It is also expected that the Symposium will encourage and foster concrete follow-up by the Tripartite partners for a multi-faceted and integrated approach in addressing the informal economy and strengthen its integration in the Decent Work Country Programmes.

Structure of the Symposium

The Symposium will be organized around selected themes that were highlighted in the March 2007 Governing Body Committee on Economic and Social Policy discussion and which have particular relevance to the tripartite constituents.

These Themes are:

- Improving labour legislation, labour administration and labour inspection
- Representation: review of recent experiences
- Improving the regulatory environment to facilitate integration to formal economy
- Social security and the informal economy
- Gender equality, decent work and the informal economy
- Improving productivity and working conditions of informal economy workers
- Integrated strategies to address the informal economy at the local level

The Symposium is aimed at generating an open exchange of experience and broad discussion. As such, panel presentations on the above mentioned themes will be organized around a few case studies as a preamble to this wider dialogue on key challenges and possible approaches under each theme. The case studies will focus on presenting good practices, new perspectives and emerging policy approaches.

A background document will also be prepared by the ILO. This document will contextualize the informal economy within the broader economic and social trends and will review the challenges and approaches for each of the selected Symposium themes.

Participants

The composition of the Symposium will include senior officials from 17 governments, 17 employers' organizations and 17 workers' organizations from Africa, Arab States, Asia, Europe and Latin America. In addition, selected resource people, experts and institutions with well known expertise on the subject will participate. United Nations system agencies, the World Bank, regional organizations and donor agencies are invited to attend as observers.

Language

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Russian.

Organization

The Symposium is jointly organized by the Employment Sector and the Social Protection Sector of the ILO. The Symposium organization is part of the on-going activities of the In-Focus Initiative on the Informal Economy.