Sectoral meeting on promoting decent work and safety and health in forestry

Conclusions on promoting decent work and safety and health in forestry

The Sectoral Meeting on Promoting Decent Work and Safety and Health in Forestry,

Having met in Geneva from 6 to 10 May 2019,

Adopts this tenth day of May 2019 the following conclusions:

Introduction

1. Decent work is fundamental to ensuring sustainable and productive forestry operations that are environmentally friendly, safe for those working in them, and benefit the millions of people, many of whom are indigenous and tribal peoples, who depend on forests for their livelihoods, food and shelter. Despite the sector's potential to promote growth and employment, a number of decent work deficits persist, particularly in relation to occupational safety and health (OSH). Climate change further exacerbates the challenges for the sector. The promotion of decent and sustainable work in forestry can contribute towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, while the Paris Agreement recognizes the impact of forests on climate change. The importance of a Just Transition [1] to sustainable production and the creation of decent and productive work are imperative.

Challenges and opportunities for decent work in forestry

2. Despite efforts and some improvements over the past decades, forests are dangerous workplaces. Decent work deficits such as poor and unsafe working conditions, obstacles to the right to freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, inadequate OSH measures, low productivity, low wages and lack of access to social protection continue to exist in the sector. The deficits are more pronounced among those working in the informal economy, many of whom are women. The high incidence of informality, and in some cases illegal practices, is a major challenge in advancing decent

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[1] ILO: *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all,* Geneva, 2015.

work in the sector. Outsourcing, contracting and subcontracting as well as casual and seasonal work can further exacerbate some of these challenges. Some countries employ migrant workers in their forestry sector, particularly countries that face labour shortages in the sector. However, migrant workers are sometimes vulnerable to exploitation and deprived of labour protection.

3. Coherent and effective laws, regulations and policies aligned with international labour standards and duly implemented are a precondition for advancing decent and sustainable work. Appropriate legislation is often in place, but is often not adequately complied with, partially due to the isolated nature of forestry work. National labour administration and inspection systems may have limited capacity and human and financial resources to reach out to remote forestry operations.

4. Forests will continue to provide direct and indirect job opportunities in the changing world of work, including new jobs in the green economy. Leveraging technological developments can support higher productivity, quality of output, and improved working conditions. These may further contribute to labour law compliance through, for example, enabling labour inspection in areas otherwise unreachable, and increase safety in forest work. Reforestation efforts can provide employment opportunities and, given the renewable nature of wood, sustainable forest management can help in mitigating the effects of climate change. Promoting access to quality skills development, training opportunities and skills certification is key for improving the working conditions and employability of forest workers as well as to increase the attractiveness of the sector to young people. The promotion of a transition from the informal to the formal economy is crucial to improve the situation of forest workers and small and medium-sized forest enterprises.

Promoting occupational safety and health in forestry

5. Work in forests has high OSH risks. This is due inter alia to the nature of work that takes place outdoors, often in isolated locations with highly varying terrain and harsh climatic conditions. Forest work includes risks related to the use of machines, falling trees, transportation, climatic hazards, noise and vibration, and exposure to chemical and biological substances, among many others. Climate change is further exacerbating OSH risks in forestry, for example through increased climatic extremes and forest fires, and the prevalence of vector-borne diseases in new areas. Robust regulatory frameworks coupled with meaningful implementation and enforcement mechanisms are essential in addressing OSH issues in forestry. Extending social protection systems to forest workers, including migrant workers, is paramount to promote OSH in the sector. Given the hazardous nature of the sector, employment-injury benefit schemes that ensure the provision of fair, equitable and effective compensation to workers and their families in the event of accidents and illnesses are particularly important.

6. Availability of reliable and comparable statistical data and research on accidents and work-related illnesses is a prerequisite for enabling evidence-based response strategies. In many countries forestry-specific data is not easily available, as it is often categorized under more generic sectors such as agriculture and does not cover all the categories of the workforce. The high incidence of informality in the forestry sector further hampers the reporting, availability and reliability of data. Furthermore, often the available data is not disaggregated by diversity and by activities.

7. Skills development is key for improving productivity and sustainability of enterprises and to ensure safe forestry operations. Improvements in and increased use of machines and technology in forestry play a role in reducing accident rates provided that the workers are trained in their appropriate use and apply the safety measures. Technology can reduce exposure to hazardous work but can also introduce new hazards. Furthermore, certain

technologies can render some work superfluous and workers redundant. Therefore, Just Transition [2] and a sensible "human in command" [3] approach to technology is needed for a healthy, sustainable forestry industry. Forestry skills training, the establishment of OSH committees with employer and worker representation, and the development of safety guidance and codes of conduct are essential for improving OSH in the sector. Furthermore, capacity-building of employers' and workers' organizations as well as of labour inspectorates and other relevant government institutions at different levels are essential to reduce OSH hazards.

8. The ILO has developed two useful forest-specific tools to provide the framework and to support the constituents in addressing OSH issues: the code of practice on *Safety and health in forestry work* (1998) and the *Guidelines for labour inspection in forestry* (2005). While these tools are still relevant, they may need revision on aspects such as the impacts of climate change and application of new technologies in forestry. Also there is a need in some countries to further disseminate and promote the use of these tools.

Social dialogue in forestry

9. Social dialogue based on respect for freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining is key in the promotion of decent and sustainable work including safe working conditions in forestry. Free, independent, strong and representative employers' and workers' organizations, together with trust, commitment and respect by the governments for the autonomy of the social partners are key conditions for effective social dialogue in forestry. Social dialogue has diverse forms and levels depending on the contexts and traditions of each country, with collective bargaining at its heart. Consultations, exchanges of information and other forms of dialogue between social partners and with governments are also important. Social partners have negotiated transnational company agreements including but not limited to international framework agreements to promote decent and sustainable work in the forestry industry.

10. Governments have an important role in promoting decent and sustainable work in all operations of forestry enterprises, including in state-owned forestry enterprises, and in public procurement. This includes the creation of an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and the formulation and implementation of policies to facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal economy.

Recommendations for future action by the International Labour Organization, governments and employers' and workers' organizations

11. Considering that ensuring the safety of workers and workplaces in forestry requires a joint commitment, governments and employers' and workers' organizations should engage in various forms of effective social dialogue at different levels to advance decent and sustainable work, OSH and a Just Transition towards sustainability in forestry. As the sector is engaged in the global economy, cross-border social dialogue could be considered where possible.

12. Governments have the duty to adopt, implement and effectively enforce national laws and regulations including those specific to the forestry industry. They must ensure that the

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[2] ibid.

[3] ILO: *Work for a brighter future – Global Commission on the Future of Work*, Geneva, 2019.

fundamental principles and rights at work and ratified international labour Conventions relevant to the forestry sector, protect and are applied to all workers in the forestry industry. Enterprises have a responsibility to comply with national law wherever they operate.

13. The Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (MNE Declaration) sets out principles in the fields of employment, training, conditions of work and life, and industrial relations which governments, employers' and workers' organizations and multinational enterprises are recommended to observe on a voluntary basis; its principles shall not limit or otherwise affect obligations arising out of ratification of any ILO Convention. Governments of host countries should promote good social practice in accordance with the MNE Declaration among multinational enterprises operating in their territories. Governments of home countries should promote good social practice in accordance with the MNE Declaration among their multinational enterprises operating abroad, having regard to the social and labour law, regulations and practices in host countries as well as to relevant international standards. Both host and home country governments should be prepared to have consultations with each other, whenever the need arises, on the initiative of either.

14. Governments should make efforts to collect and compile statistical data on employment and occupational accidents in forestry. This data should be disaggregated by diversity and activity, with a particular focus on groups vulnerable to discrimination.

15. Governments, in consultation with the social partners, should develop and implement coherent policies and strategies to create an enabling environment:

    – that promotes the benefits, employment, productivity and inclusive growth in the sector, including in micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, as drivers of innovation and job creation in line with the *Conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises* adopted at the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference in 2007;

    – that generates equal opportunities for women and men as well as for groups vulnerable to discrimination, including migrant workers and indigenous and tribal communities;

    – that promotes the formalization of the informal economy in forestry;

    – to support the sector in strengthening its contribution to Just Transition towards more sustainable economies and production which includes reforestation and the provision of well-designed incentive schemes to promote decent and sustainable jobs;

    – that ensures adequate social protection to all forestry workers including implementation of employment-injury benefit schemes;

    – that ensures adequately resourced labour inspectorates responsible for forestry, including with a view to modernizing them, making use of new technologies;

    – that fosters the potential of the sector to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to effectively contribute to a future that works for all;

    – to develop and implement education and training programmes that respond to the rapidly evolving sector and pay attention to OSH, the promotion of digital skills and Just Transition.

16. Governments and the social partners should collaborate in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces in forestry, in line with relevant ILO instruments. Governments, in collaboration with the social partners, should develop and implement sustainable forest management.

17. Workers' and employers' organizations, businesses and state-owned enterprises should consider developing joint initiatives to ensure safe and healthy workplaces in forestry, including through independent compliance schemes safety training and sharing of knowledge and information on effective ways to comply with safety and health standards.

18. The Office should:

– promote ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards relevant to the forestry sector, as well as respect for the fundamental principles and rights at work and build the capacity of constituents to realize these rights;

– develop a work plan in consultation with tripartite constituents to support governments and social partners to promote and further implement the code of practice on *Safety and health in forestry work* (1998) and the *Guidelines for labour inspection in forestry* (2005), including through capacity-building; and initiate preparations to update through a meeting of experts these two tools to include specific provisions on emerging issues such as climate change, new technologies, migration, and the informal economy, among others;

– support governments in their data collection and reporting efforts and undertake and disseminate research and comparative analysis and develop and share knowledge on trends and developments, lessons learned and good practices in addressing decent work and OSH challenges and opportunities in the industry; and

– strengthen collaboration and partnerships with other international organizations active in the sector with a view to promoting international policy coherence on decent work;

– support tripartite constituents to engage in effective social dialogue to ensure safe and healthy workplaces in the forestry industry.

Appendix

International labour standards that have an impact on forestry operations and practices

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
- Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81)
- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
- Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention, 1949 (No. 94)
- Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)
- Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
- Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121)
- Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128)
- Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129)
- Medical Care and Sickness Benefits Convention, 1969 (No. 130)
- Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131)
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
- Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141)
- Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (No. 142)
- Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143)
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
- Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 (No. 161)
- Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment Convention, 1988 (No. 168)
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)
- Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184)
- Minimum Age Recommendation, 1973 (No. 146)
- Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164)
- Occupational Health Services Recommendation, 1985 (No. 171)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190)
- Safety and Health in Agriculture Recommendation, 2001 (No. 192)
- Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193)
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 2006 (No. 197)
- Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)
- Forced Labour (Supplementary Measures) Recommendation, 2014 (No. 203)
- Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204)