Introduction

The major problem facing the least developed countries (LDCs), as indeed the developing countries as a whole, is the persistence, and in some cases the growing incidence of poverty. Drawing on the experience and best practice from different parts of the world, the ILO is firmly convinced about the virtuous relationship between growth, employment and poverty reduction. Employment and different forms of sustainable livelihoods is generally the first and most important step out of poverty.

Seen from this perspective, the ILO contribution to LDC III is made within the general framework of achieving decent work. What is decent work? It is work which is productive, and carried out in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Put simply, decent work would require the creation of employment in the first place, and that employment should be of a decent quality, i.e., sufficiently remunerated and of a quality that protects the dignity of human beings. Moreover, social protection is absolutely necessary to guard against unexpected shocks, as well as ensuring the different generations a fair share in the fruits of growth and development. All this can only be achieved in a sustainable manner through social dialogue between the social partners: employers, workers and governments. Central to decent work is the concept of rights. Poverty is seen in terms of various forms of “unfreedom” that prevent people from realizing and enlarging their capabilities.

To contribute to the objective set at the UN Millennium Summit to halve poverty by 2015, this strategy needs to be operationalized and integrated into specific national poverty reduction strategies and plans.

It is against this background, that the ILO has elaborated a number of “deliverables” representing generic proposals for action at the policy and programme level to assist the LDCs in their national development process.

The “deliverables” proposed by the ILO may be divided into four categories:

a) human resources development and employment: The main objective is to respond to the specific characteristics of LDCs, offering a menu of components to be integrated in national employment strategies and to support national poverty reduction programmes through the achievement and consolidation of employment-intensive growth. Particular focus is placed on employment intensive infrastructure; skills development and vocational training (with emphasis on youth); self employment through enterprise promotion (with emphasis on women entrepreneurs); cooperative employment; access to financial services and labour market information systems. A combination of local economic development and the development of the necessary
human resources to allow LDCs to increase their competitiveness in international trade is also being proposed.

b) **social protection** : the overall objective is to extend social protection to those who are unable to benefit from formal social security systems. This focuses on innovative and cost effective methods of extending social safety nets to poor groups, especially in the informal and rural sectors. Innovative proposals are also presented in the form of a reinsurance facility for community-funded health schemes as well as a cash transfer (minimum income) programme conditional on basic education attendance, targeted to poorest and most vulnerable families.

c) **social dialogue** : the main objective is to ensure that the social partners (workers and employers) as well as Ministries of Labour are fully involved in the design and implementation of national poverty reduction strategies of LDCs and that employment and the **decent work** agenda are integrated into these strategies. This calls for social dialogue and a strengthening of the capacity of the social partners and Ministries of Labour, in particular through training in order to enable them to fully engage in the process of economic and social policy-making.

d) **Vulnerable groups** : This category targets particularly vulnerable groups, such as working children victims of the worst forms of exploitation and workers living with HIV/AIDS, with emphasis on prevention and fighting social exclusion.

In designing these “deliverables”, the ILO attempts to complement other proposals from the UN system in order to articulate a coherent response to the problems of LDCs. The Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC III) and its follow-up provides a unique opportunity for the multilateral system to demonstrate the possibility of advancing polices and programmes which respond to the specific needs of these countries. The ILO is fully engaged with development partners in making LDC III a success.