Preface

The international community has reached a consensus that poverty reduction should be a primary goal for economic and social policy. At the Millennium Summit, the Heads of State and/or Government committed themselves to combat poverty and to address the special needs of the least developed countries (LDCs) where this problem is particularly acute. The Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC III) allows us to review the results of past action and consider future support to those countries. I suggest that it may be fruitful to do so in the context of the broader lessons of our collective experience.

The ILO’s historic mandate has focused on the world of work. This stamps our contribution to LDC III for we see employment creation as key to the reduction of poverty. The consultations leading up to the Social Summit in the early 1990s showed that employment provided the first step out of poverty and social exclusion. Employment generation thus became the third core issue of the Summit and Commitment Three of the Copenhagen Declaration: “we commit ourselves to promoting the goal of full employment as a basic priority of our economic and social policies, and to enabling all men and women to attain secure and sustainable livelihoods through freely chosen, productive employment and work”.

Today, we have defined our primary goal as the promotion of opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. At the Special Session of the UN General Assembly “Copenhagen +5”, the entire international community endorsed the ILO’s decent work agenda.
Decent work provides an integrated perspective to employment-intensive growth as the most effective way of making a significant impact on poverty reduction. It allows safety and health at work, social protection, fundamental rights at work and voice to be built into a development agenda simultaneously with work itself. Poverty is about income, but also about rights and capabilities. Decent work integrates the enabling rights that allow people to develop and enhance their capabilities, including the working poor and those in the informal economy. We must salute the efforts of those LDCs which have made a commitment to pursuing such an integrated decent work agenda into their development strategies.

Tackling poverty through decent work, together with an appropriate macroeconomic policy, institutional development and the host of other requirements evidently cannot be accomplished by any one country or multilateral institution. It requires a coherent approach shared by all actors including the LDCs, the multilateral system, and the donor community. I believe that we must assess the failure of many development efforts in terms of the failure to adopt an integrated approach to the problems of people in poverty.

LDC III provides a timely opportunity to take stock and demonstrate such coherence in the policies and programmes which we jointly develop. Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminds us that the future of these countries, the poorest of the poor, is connected to the well-being of the entire human community. It is, therefore, in the interest of all that we make a renewed effort to find new solutions, new ways of working to achieve the goals we have set.

At this event the ILO has joined France and Ethiopia in leading an interactive thematic session on human resources development and employment. We hope that this will launch a fruitful debate on the role of human resources development and employment in stimulating growth and reducing poverty in LDCs within the broader decent work framework. This paper has been prepared to guide the debate. The decent work approach offers the possibility of making a major contribution to attacking the multidimensional poverty problem in LDCs as highlighted in the paper. We have also submitted proposals for practical interventions which apply the approach to poverty reduction advocated by the ILO.

The LDCs and development partners can count on the ILO’s commitment to making LDC III and its follow-up a success.

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