International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW)

Towards Sustainable Industrial Development in Construction, Wood and Forestry

International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) is the leading global union body working to protect workers in the building, building materials, wood, forestry and allied sectors. 289 unions from 125 countries belong to IFBWW with a total of around 10 million affiliated members.

The IFBWW’s mission is to promote the development of trade unions in the construction, wood, forestry and allied sectors throughout the world and to promote and enforce worker rights in the context of sustainable development.

www.ifbww.org
1. Sustainable industrial development - a trade union perspective

Vital components of the concept of sustainable industrial development are that the three pillars of sustainability - economic viability, environmental protection and social responsibility and that the participation of workers and their unions in all decision making is ensured. The IFBWW's vision is that the realisation of the initiatives that we call "sustainable working life" is regarded as a decisive step towards sustainable industrial development. "Sustainable working life" means decent pay and working conditions, a meaningful job with prospects, a good working environment, continuous human resource development and secure employment.

There are several areas of common interests between the stakeholders in the construction, wood and forestry industries, which can create a framework for sustainable industrial development and a win-win situation for the industries:

- Sustainable development in forestry can only be achieved with a joint approach and workers involvement;
- Productivity can be raised by better trained workers, improved work organisation and health and safety training;
- Efficiency and productivity of small scale and big companies can be improved in order to achieve a stable employment situation and permanent employment relationships;
- A regulated construction and labour market can prevent unfair competition and social dumping;
- Social dialogue on all levels with social partners, which are well organised and representative, is necessary for workers to exercise their rights to organise and to collective bargaining.
- Use of energy efficient materials and responsible use of chemicals, including waste disposal, benefit workers and society as a whole.

Governments, companies, trade unions and development agencies should work together to promote sustainable industrial development at enterprise, national, regional and global level. A pre-requisite for the promotion of sustainable development generally and at industrial and company level is the involvement of union representatives.

Often it has been the case that the environmental and economic dimensions have overshadowed the social dimension. The IFBWW believes that the social dimension is of particular importance for trade unions. Employment, working conditions and health, safety and welfare are central areas of our work. Sustainable development is not only a matter of economics and the environment, but it is also about people.

The aspiration towards economic growth or a clean environment should not overshadow the fact that it is actually people who create this growth in value and keep society going with their work. Progress must not be at the expense of the workers. Exploitation of fundamental workers' rights is not acceptable.

The IFBWW believes that a sustainable working life is a pre-condition of sustainable development. Labour is not just a good that can be consumed, as you think best. Pay and working conditions must be good enough for workers to last a whole life. Also after a full working life, it should be possible to have a good life.

What is sustainable working life?

Sustainable working life is characterised by:
• Stable employment and permanent employment relationship
• Fair pay and good working conditions
• A good working environment, so that the labour force maintains its health during an entire working life
• Training and skills development
• Co-determination and democracy
• Solidarity with colleagues
• The possibility of working even after your working ability has been reduced
• No discrimination against women at workplaces
• No child labour or any form of forced labour
• Appropriate social insurance

IFBWW unions are well aware of what is needed in our industries to achieve sustainable industrial development securing jobs and good training and working conditions. They have to be involved on equal footing in social and tripartite dialogues in all countries.

2. How do building, wood and forestry unions put sustainable industrial development into practice?

Sustainable development is a term used in recent years to describe mainly a process towards an improved environment. This discussion has been widened to include almost every kind of development in society, not least the eradication of poverty. Workers and trade unions have developed their own particular position on sustainable development.

2.1 The forestry, wood and furniture industries

For unions in the forest sector sustainable industrial development became a reality when the global discussion on tropical forests started. This was followed by strong environmental and consumer demands on eco labelling and forest certification. The environmental and consumer demands on the forest industry forced all stakeholders together to discuss the future of the industry on equal footing – and this concept has proved to be very successful. Trade union realised that this is a way to improve both forest legislation, company employment policies, training policies and working conditions in general.

The forestry sector is a green sector and wood is a natural material that is carbon dioxide neutral, and a source for the sustainable manufacture of a whole series of products. Sustainable forestry includes versatile operations that open up the opportunities for business prospects, recreation and biological diversity. Furthermore, sustainable forestry must be characterised by good working conditions and a good working environment for forestry workers. Forestry workers in modern forestry are subjected to a number of working environment problems, for example, strain, one-sided work, accidents at work, vibrations, solitary work, oil and to a certain extent pesticides. Around the world, over 47 million people depend on the forests directly for their livelihoods.

Employment in the wood and forestry sectors is important at two levels. In a number of countries such as Finland, Sweden, Canada and countries in the tropics such as Brazil, Indonesia and Malaysia it is one of the main branches of economic activities. In other countries the forest and wood sectors may be less important nationally but very important to local timber-dependent communities. Even a small number of jobs in an area without other economic
options may be very important to the local economy, especially where communities are isolated and their ability to generate other forms of income is limited. Especially where value is added to wood through for example, processing, valuable jobs can be added to local communities. In addition, the indirect effects of forest and wood sector employment on other sectors can be substantial.

Wood forms a part of several kinds of building materials and can replace a number of other types of material. From the sustainable perspective, wood and wooden materials will be prioritised over other types of material, particularly if the sector is going to live up to the certification systems that are in the process of being implemented in many countries.

While much has been achieved in recent years there is still a very real need to ensure that union interests are not marginalised. With a membership of approximately 2.5 million in the wood and forestry industries it is important that IFBWW be a major player in discussions and policy making at international, regional, national and local levels. Unions need to be recognised as important stakeholders who are routinely invited to be part of decision-making on forestry and wood issues.

Forest certification is a means to promote sustainable forest practices. In this respect, it will provide protection for forest workers’ rights and promote greater occupational safety and health. In line with the global efforts towards sustainable forestry, the IFBWW promotes the inclusion of social standards in forest certification. Forest certification is a market-based instrument aimed at promoting sustainable forest management that takes into account environmental, economic and social issues. It involves the independent assessment of forest management according to internationally (or nationally) accepted standards, and the tracking and monitoring of the supply of forest products to the marketplace. If the forest management is in compliance with a set of specified standards, and the wood (or other forest product) from this forest has been tracked and accounted for through all stages of the production process, then it can be given a label, which is recognised in the market place.

**Sustainable forestry**

The Timber and Wood Workers Union (TWU) in Ghana has established a tree nursery and plantation which has become a showplace for good forest practices, and a focus for effective training in sustainable practices. These include reforestation, occupational health & safety, and forest certification. A gender awareness program based on local level needs identified by research has worked to establish women’s structures and to improve the condition of women in the workforce. The TWU is now sharing its experience with other unions, and has exchanged with unions in Burkina Faso and Kenya, where similar forest and training efforts are now underway.

Forest certification has emerged over the last decade as an important global initiative aimed at increasing the area of sustainably managed forest in the world and by late 2000 there were about 70 million hectares of forest under independent certification world-wide. For IFBWW, certification is a tool that can be used to improve working conditions and the global environment. For this reason, IFBWW has been involved for several years with forest certification activities and at its 20th Congress in Harare in 1997 adopted a policy that supports the certification of timber and timber products from sustainably managed forests. Over the last four years, through the Global Forestry Programme, IFBWW has undertaken a number of country related initiatives and has sought to raise the profile of the union movement at the international and national policy level by representing workers interests in sustainable forestry initiatives.

IFBWW and its affiliated unions have worked to get certification agreements to fully cover the following worker issues: right to organise, job security, remuneration and living and working conditions, health and safety, participation, training, equality for all workers, needs of special
workers, child labour, and indigenous peoples and community issues. In many countries the issue of contract labour has been very important, as the industry has sought to replace regular workers with contract workers who have less social protection.

While forest certification can be used to protect forest workers and improve forest management, it does not protect workers in the wood processing industry. Eco-labels, on the other hand, can address the whole life cycle of products and provide an evaluation of environmental and social performance taking into account the different phases of processing. IFBWW is now lobbying to get worker protection in all stages of the production process, not just in the forests. The ultimate goal is to move forest certification away from being just a single issue and work towards life cycle protection where wood processing workers are also protected. IFBWW affiliates are actively engaged in a range of certification activities including the development of national standards, participation in chain of custody activities, assessment and evaluation of workers’ conditions in operations to be certified, certification training for members, and field testing of criteria and indicators.

Sustainable forest management does not stop at the forest’s edge; it must include efficient and sustainable transport of products, minimising waste and hazardous materials in production and transportation, fair delivery and pricing for consumers, and decent work for all workers involved in the production of forest products. It also involves building and construction practices where wood is promoted as a sustainably produced resource. Whatever strategy is employed, workers must play a key role in its implementation.

Large parts of the wood industry are dependent on the future development of the building and construction sector. The wood and furniture industry is in a way in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, people are talking about a “green sector” that processes wood, a natural material that is carbon dioxide neutral. On the other, the wood and furniture industry is a sector that is characterised by a heavy working environment and the impact on the outer environment.

There has only been a fairly limited focus on sustainable development in the wood and furniture industry. However, there has been a greater focus on reducing the use of energy, using cleaner technology and reducing the emission of polluting substances into the outer environment. Discussions regarding the use of certified wooden raw materials are becoming increasingly important in the wood and furniture industry.

At the international level, the agreement between the IFBWW and IKEA is a good example for environmentally and socially responsible management. The agreement requires that IKEA demands of its suppliers that the employment conditions of their workers at least live up to national legislation and the ILO labour standards which are important for the industry. Similar agreements have been concluded with the construction companies Skanska and Hochtief and with pencil maker Faber-Castell.

2.2. Construction and building materials

The construction industry responded to demands on environmental sustainability by improving the handling of waste – a new and very lucrative sub-sector on waste handling developed. The demands from consumers and clients are now increasing in many countries. They are becoming more aware of the fact that good planning and quality thinking is also good from an economic point of view. People are becoming more aware of the risk involved in living in houses build with dangerous materials, pressured time schedules causing damp and mould problems. Even in developing countries there is an increased awareness about the often disastrous results of bad quality building not able to withstand earthquakes or severe
weather conditions. Insurance companies are also to a much larger extent putting pressure on contractors when it comes to quality and sustainability.

There is an increased awareness of the dangers of bad construction. The only way forward is better planning, better quality, skilled workers and good working conditions.

The building sector is enormously important for the economy, employment and the environment. The construction industry globally represents a $3.5 trillion market volume and a workforce of around 100 million. Construction creates employment, facilitates modern means of transport and also improves the living conditions of mankind. Infrastructure and building improve health, education, employment and the economy as a whole.

**Sustainable jobs**

German union IG BAU is collaborating with government and employers' federations in a programme to renovate buildings, contributing to climate protection measures, whilst creating sustainable jobs. The **Alliance for Work and Environment** aims to renovate 300,000 apartments, create 200,000 jobs, reduce CO2 emissions and lower heating bills for tenants, landlords, and the State by about US$4 billion, through reduction of unemployment costs and increased income taxes etc. The immediate objective is to improve insulation of buildings, advanced heating technologies, and use of renewable energy - like photovoltaic or solar thermal systems. Thousands of new jobs are anticipated in the construction, heating, sanitary and air-conditioning sectors, as well as in building service. Financing for the programme is provided by the German government, which will spend less than US$1 billion in the next 5 years. As well, a total of US$5 billion will be available through credits at favourable rates of interest.

"Production in the construction sector differs from other industries." This is a view often heard in the construction sector and there is great deal of truth in that statement. In other industries there is a far greater dynamism and technological progress is moving much faster compared to the construction sector. The reason for this is that, as a result of the market and international competition, there is a constant pressure for change, a tendency less pronounced in the construction sector.

The construction sector also differs from other business sectors on the production side. Buildings increase in value regardless of how badly they are maintained. The constant increase in value has to do with the character of the product. A building is not a disposable product; instead it is a product that is expected to "last" for many years. With the right maintenance and renovation, a building can age with dignity and can be constantly adapted to changes as regards function and use. Due to this longevity of the finished product, it is important that a number of considerations are made before a construction project is launched.

The whole *lifecycle of a building* must be thought through before the start of the building process: from conceptual development and realisation, to management and maintenance and lastly the demolition of the building. The building work cannot only be valued based on the price of the construction. The architecture, quality, lifetime, multipurpose, ecology and working environment on the building site are important factors that should be taken into account. A public building policy should contribute to the promotion of a *holistic approach in construction* where every stage of construction is taken into account in the decision-making process.

As shown in the illustration "life-cycle of construction", the link between the economic, environmental and social conditions is very close in construction. The three dimensions are interdependent and what happens in one of the dimensions has repercussions on the other two. It is essential to think through all three dimensions and the link between them before planning a construction project.
A further requirement as regards buildings and housing is the demand for quality. Buildings and construction activities must be "sustainable" in different respects. That does not only mean sustainable in the physical sense, but also in the economic, environmental and social sense. Actually the construction sector can play a very strategic role in various national strategies of recent years for the creation of a "sustainable society".

The building and housing sector is responsible for 30 - 40% of the total energy consumption of society, about 40% of material use and a large proportion of total waste.

### Building materials

For example the manufacture of cement from mineral feedstock requires a huge energy input. Most of that energy, worldwide, is presently supplied by coal; the burning of which releases large amounts of airborne pollutants. The cement industry can do much to improve this record. Increased energy efficiency, alternative fuels, and recycling of greater quantities of waste materials. Another significant environmental "charge" that has been levelled against the cement and concrete industries is the condition and fate of quarries, where limestone, gravel, sand, and other raw materials are obtained. The industry needs to examine the choice of materials on such factors as energy efficiency of buildings, indoor air quality, traffic noise, dust generation. The environmental impact of a product has marketing value.

A large quantity of global cement requirements is supplied by small, locally owned plants. Because it is heavy and bulky, cement is not traded in large quantities on the global market. However, a few large multinational corporations have been able to gain control of overall pricing and market access by controlling strategic positions in national and local markets. This process has continued in both developed and developing countries, and in the transition economies. The social impacts of that pricing and market control, and of the privatisation of former state-controlled cement facilities have been largely ignored. The cement industry, like many other economic sectors, is contemplating or has adopted voluntary initiatives. As a tool to build consensus and forge professional codes of ethics for the behaviour of credible
with an effective means of independent, third-party verification of performance, and can never entirely replace regulatory action.

The IFBWW believes that it is high time that the social dimension is put on the agenda. The social dimension is above all about pay and employment conditions for people who work in construction. It is also important to ensuring a good working environment, participatory decision-making and further training and from a broader perspective safeguarding the idea of a home and employment for all.

**Sustainable working environment**
Over 100,000 workers currently die world-wide each year as a result of exposure to asbestos, and fatality rates are expected to continue to rise, especially in developing countries where asbestos is being increasingly and more aggressively marketed. Trade unions were therefore quick to follow-up on a ruling by the World Trade Organisation in 2000 against Canada's appeal of a ban of asbestos by France. The WTO decision paves the way for more countries to support a world-wide ban on this product that was spearheaded by the IFBWW and the ICFTU Executive Board, effective December 2000. Trade unions representing workers, who produce asbestos, building workers exposed to asbestos products, and their communities expect governments and employers to provide asbestos workers with a "Just Transition". Governments and employers have a responsibility to all workers in the asbestos industries to ensure that they do not have to trade their health for their jobs, and asbestos workers should therefore be entitled to a Just Transition to new, safer and decent employment.

*From an economic point of view the inclusion of the social dimension will not make construction more expensive. As already mentioned, the conditions in the three dimensions have an impact on each other. For example, a good working environment reduces the risks of heavy, physically demanding work, leads to fewer accidents at work, fewer sick days, and thus shorter construction times and lower costs for the total construction. Improved energy consumption and the use of quality materials are important for the indoor climate in the finished home and for the comfort of living in the building. At the same time, improved energy consumption reduces the total operational costs for the homes.*

### 3. Initiatives for the promotion of sustainable development

Sustainable building and forestry activities can be achieved with a modest input of capital and technology. But they call for a degree of knowledge and skills during planning and implementation. The following are prerequisites:

- Comprehensive training and skills development
- Securing good occupational safety, health and welfare standards
- Stable employment
- ILO Core Labour Standards

**in the forestry, wood and furniture industries**

- *Joint eco-system and forest management planning through local land use and resource management proposals that bring together tenure holders, workers, industry, and community;*
A central role for government in planning, regulation and enforcement of standards, including labour standards;

Public repatriation of forest resources, and an end to privatisation of public forest lands;

An end to excessive clear-cutting, with a variety of harvest methods, with standards for silviculture, road building, soil protection.

Comprehensive recycling programs to prevent wastage of forest resources;

Adequate zoning to provide a balance of economic, social and environmental uses;

Comprehensive conservation measures to protect watersheds and vital habitat, as well as education and training on sustainable practices directed at industry, workers and the public.

Certification of forests and mutual recognition of systems and labelling of forest products (chain of custody)

Use of certified wood and promote certification of the wood and furniture industry

Demand the use of certified products in public buildings and construction activities

in the construction and building materials sector

A central role for government in planning, regulation and enforcement of standards, including labour standards;

Regarding construction from the holistic perspective that includes all the stages of the life span of a building (planning, building, operation, renovation, demolition, re-use, waste), for example

Drawing up criteria for benchmarking in order to be better able to compare different types of construction work

Carrying out lifecycle analyses to assess the total environmental impact of the construction work, including the impact on the working environment

Providing the legal and financial framework for investments which lead to employment through housing programmes appropriate to the needs of all people, as well as social and cultural infrastructure, urban renewal, and infrastructure projects in line with environmentally and socially sound practices.

Implementing measures for the controlled use, and eventual phasing out of dangerous substances such as asbestos

Promoting women’s access to jobs in building and construction occupations, and promote affirmative action in skills training, recruitment and career development.

Ensure equal pay for equal work for employees regardless of their origin and nationality. Migrating and posted employees must be ensured at least the same conditions as the national work force and “social dumping” must be counteracted.

Ensuring the maximum use of locally available natural resources, renewable building material, and local personnel as well as cost-effective technologies to the needs and characteristics of the country.

Promoting investments and provide tax incentives for environmental friendly building activities including energy saving measures.

Establishing funds for construction projects for use in time of recession.

Ensuring minimum labour standards in the execution of public contracts by implementing ILO Convention No. 94 concerning Labour Clauses in Public Contracts.

Ensuring that research programmes for construction industries, including social issues, are expanded.

Complying with ILO Convention 169 concerning Consultation with Indigenous Peoples whose land is affected by construction projects, and compensation rights in the event of relocation.

influencing the UN, the WTO, World Bank and regional financial institutions, companies and governments place an importance on "sustainable working life" and show respect for environmental protection and land management in the planning and carrying out of construction projects
International Labour Standards

There are eight ILO Conventions that have been identified by the International Labour Organisation as being fundamental to the rights of working people. They are intended to apply to all workers, whether the country of work is a developed nation or a developing one. All other workplace rights are considered to build upon these fundamental rights, in that they provide the tools of the conditions necessary for workers to strive to improve their individual and collective working conditions.

Freedom of association
1. Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)
2. Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
3. Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)
4. Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)

Equality
5. Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
6. Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)

The elimination of child labour
7. Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)
8. Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)

All of these should be very nearly self-explanatory; however complete text and detailed explanations are available from the ILO http://www.ilo.org if desired.

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