Sri Lanka

Youth unemployment has been recognized as a serious problem in Sri Lanka since the nineteen sixties. Two major insurgencies experienced in the southern part of the country in 1971 and 1989-1990 as well as the ongoing ethnic conflict are attributed largely to youth unrest and unemployment.

Current estimates put youth unemployment at about 280,000 or roughly 40 per cent of total unemployment. This picture could become bleaker should current peace efforts arrive to a conclusive end. Some 240,000 combatants could then be added to the pool of the unemployment, of which 144,000 or 60 per cent fall into the youth category. Urgent measures are, therefore, called for to alleviate the problem.

Yet, it is not that the initiatives are lacking. At present 45 different projects, through loans and grants, target assistance to youth in a variety of field that include education, skills training, employment creation and entrepreneurship, in addition to loans and credit schemes, job placement and research projects. These initiatives have been financed by 12 different donor and financial institutions, in addition to the Government of Sri Lanka.

Whilst all these efforts are commendable and many have undoubtedly achieved very good results Sri Lanka has historically lacked a coordinated policy response to the multi-faceted youth employment challenge.

From 27 February to 1 March 2002, as a lead agency of the Youth Employment Network (YEN), the ILO organized Tripartite Regional Meeting on Youth Employment in Asia and the Pacific. Out of the eight participating countries, Sri Lanka and Indonesia came forward as volunteers to be lead countries of the YEN and have committed to showcase the preparation and the implementation of a National Action Plans on youth employment (NAPs) be submitted to the UN General Assembly by September 2004 as outlined in UN GA Resolution A/57/165.

In order to support this task a Youth Employment Network of Sri Lanka (YENSL) was created. The Secretariat is housed in the Ministry of Skills Development, Vocational and Technical Education (MOSDVTE), and under a YEN Co-ordinator is tasked with the development of an integrated Plan of Action on Youth Employment

The YENSL Secretariat has assembled a task force consisting of the Government ministries, employers’ and workers’ organizations, and other non-governmental organizations and youth organizations in order to develop integrated national action plan.

A first step in the development of Sri Lanka’s NAP has been the writing of a National Report on Youth Employment in Sri Lanka, which is currently being finalised.

The YENSL Secretariat was supported in its start-up by the ILO through funding from the Dutch government and further support for 2004 will be made available from the Government of Korea.

Furthermore Sri Lanka is one of two agreed lead countries being supported by the German Government in an agreement signed between themselves YEN, which commits 790,000 euros for the project "Support for partner countries of the Youth Employment Network" for 2005-2006.

This funding will be used in Sri Lanka to support for the formulation and implementation of a National Action Plans on Youth Employment and to building the capacity of youth organizations and other YEN partners in the field of youth employment in order to support their effective participation in the activities of the Network, including through the NAPs.

This plan will include a specific focus on re-integrating ex-combatants, many of whom are youth, into the workforce.

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