

RIO DECLARATION 1992
Chapter 29

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WORKERS AND THEIR TRADE UNIONS

PROGRAMME AREA

Basis for action

29.1. Efforts to implement sustainable development will involve adjustments and opportunities at the national and enterprise levels, with workers foremost among those concerned. As their representatives, trade unions are vital actors in facilitating the achievement of sustainable development in view of their experience in addressing industrial change, the extremely high priority they give to protection of the working environment and the related natural environment, and their promotion of socially responsible and economic development. The existing network of collaboration among trade unions and their extensive membership provide important channels through which the concepts and practices of sustainable development can be supported. The established principles of tripartism provide a basis for strengthened collaboration between workers and their representatives, Governments and employers in the implementation of sustainable development.

Objectives

29.2. The overall objective is poverty alleviation and full and sustainable employment, which contribute to safe, clean and healthy environments - the working environment, the community and the physical environment. Workers should be full participants in the implementation and evaluation of activities related to Agenda 21.

29.3. To that end the following objectives are proposed for accomplishment by the year 2000:

- To promote ratification of relevant conventions of ILO and the enactment of legislation in support of those conventions;
- To establish bipartite and tripartite mechanisms on safety, health and sustainable development;
- To increase the number of environmental collective agreements aimed at achieving sustainable development;
- To reduce occupational accidents, injuries and diseases according to recognized statistical reporting procedures;
- To increase the provision of workers' education, training and retraining, particularly in the area of occupational health and safety and environment.

Activities

(a) Promoting freedom of association

29.4. For workers and their trade unions to play a full and informed role in support of sustainable development, Governments and employers should promote the rights of individual workers to freedom of association and the protection of the right to organize as laid down in ILO conventions. Governments should consider ratifying and implementing those conventions, if they have not already done so.

(b) Strengthening participation and consultation

29.5. Governments, business and industry should promote the active participation of workers and their trade unions in decisions on the design, implementation and evaluation of national and international policies and programmes on environment and development, including employment policies, industrial strategies, labour adjustment programmes and technology transfers.

29.6. Trade unions, employers and Governments should cooperate to ensure that the concept of sustainable development is equitably implemented.

29.7. Joint (employer/worker) or tripartite (employer/worker/Government) collaborative mechanisms at the workplace, community and national levels should be established to deal with safety, health and environment, including special reference to the rights and status of women in the workplace.

29.8. Governments and employers should ensure that workers and their representatives are provided with all relevant information to enable effective participation in these decision-making processes.

29.9. Trade unions should continue to define, develop and promote policies on all aspects of sustainable development.

29.10. Trade unions and employers should establish the framework for a joint environmental policy, and set priorities to improve the working environment and the overall environmental performance of enterprise.

29.11. Trade unions should:

- Seek to ensure that workers are able to participate in environmental audits at the workplace and in environmental impact assessments;
- Participate in environment and development activities within the local community and promote joint action on potential problems of common concern;
- Play an active role in the sustainable development activities of international and regional organizations, particularly within the United Nations system.

(c) Provide adequate training

29.12. Workers and their representatives should have access to adequate training to augment environmental awareness, ensure their safety and health, and improve their economic and social welfare. Such training should ensure that the necessary skills are available to promote sustainable livelihoods and improve the working environment. Trade unions, employers, Governments and international agencies should cooperate in assessing training needs within their respective spheres of activity. Workers and their representatives should be involved in the design and implementation of worker training programmes conducted by employers and Governments.

Means of implementation

(a) Financing and cost evaluation

29.13. The Conference secretariat has estimated the average total annual cost (1993-2000) of implementing the activities of this programme to be about \$300 million from the international community on grant or concessional terms. These are indicative and order-of-magnitude estimates only and have not been reviewed by Governments. Actual costs and financial terms,

including any that are non-concessional, will depend upon, inter alia, the specific strategies and programmes Governments decide upon for implementation.

(b) Capacity-building

29.14. Particular attention should be given to strengthening the capacity of each of the tripartite social partners (Governments and employers' and workers' organizations) to facilitate greater collaboration towards sustainable development.