

11th Special session of UNEP GC/GMEF
Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum
Key messages from Workers & Trade Unions

Green Economy

Trade unions acknowledge that the multiple crises the world is facing – e.g. energy, food, jobs, and climate - have common origins in a socially unjust, environmentally unsustainable and economically inefficient model incapable of providing decent work and decent live to millions of people. This model makes wealth creation dependent on environmental degradation and generates unacceptable inequality.

The Green Economy must be a driver for the transition of our societies to truly sustainable ones. This can only be done by substantive investment flows, an adequate mix of regulatory and incentive mechanisms and the introduction of “Just Transition” policies for workers and communities:

1. Promoting “Green and decent jobs”

- Investment in new and emerging sectors such as renewable energies, energy efficiency in buildings, public transportation, sustainable forestry management, mentioning just a few, can be a new source for jobs, in particular in the context of the economic crisis and raising unemployment.

- There is a need to put in place policies to ensure those new jobs are also “decent”, ensuring good livelihoods and working conditions for workers, women and men, and prosperity for the communities in which those are created.

- An ambitious vocational education and skills’ development programme needs to be developed, in order to provide workers, in particular the unemployed, women and young workers, with opportunities to enter this labour market.

2. “Greening” the economy

- The “Green Economy” should not only aim at promoting new economic sectors, but at driving transformations in the traditional ones. All sectors (industry, services, agriculture, etc.) must become greener, and for trade unions, the transformation of production towards environmental sustainability can be a source of decent jobs, improved livelihoods and social welfare.

- A “Just Transition” framework has to be put in place, in order to ensure a fair process of transformation, and this needs to include focused investments, research and innovation, social dialogue, re-training, social protection as well as a local/regional dimension.

3. “Greening” the workplace

- The transition towards a Green Economy needs to incorporate the potential of acting from the workplace for fostering change. Workplace actions will be crucial in order to initiate and achieve the necessary process of change in all sectors.

- Workplaces need to be at the centre of material and emission reductions, environmental protection, changes in production and sustainable development. This implies also that Green Economy’s workplaces have to be more democratic and transparent if these are to deliver social progress.

- The role and responsibilities of enterprises need to be transformed to respond to the sustainability challenge. Bipartite (employer-union) and tripartite (employer-union-government) social dialogue and the inclusion of environmentally-related measures in collective agreements (for example in the area of skills and training) are key.

International Environmental Governance

In times of crises, there is a need to build, strengthen and comply with international regulations that put people and the planet first.

- International social, economic, financial and environmental governance need to be urgently strengthened in order to better address the challenges humanity is facing and avoid crisis to happen again.

- International governance can only rely in the United Nations system. The UN has demonstrated its efficiency whenever it has been given a mandate and enabled to implement it.

The frustrating outcome of Copenhagen should not be seen as a consequence of UN's lack of capacity but to the persistent obstruction of some countries, the very same that hypocritically raised this supposed failure to handle global challenges. This does not exclude that the UN needs to improve its democratic decision making, exploring i.e. possibilities for using the majority rule.

- The UN economic, social and environmental institutions, including UNEP, have to be properly funded to fulfil their mandates. With current public deficits, innovative sources for funding them should be explored including a financial transactions tax.

- International Environmental Governance (IEG) can only be improved if we advance in two parallel tracks: strengthening UNEP as an institution as well as promoting further coordination with other UN bodies, such as ILO, UNDESA, WHO, UN HABITAT, among others.

- The fundamental principles of IEG need to be based on substantial objectives agreed in Rio, which are still to be enforced. Rio+20 could be an opportunity to give momentum for implementation, an occasion we must not miss.

- Transparency in decision making is key to guarantee democracy. To better utilize the significant knowledge, expertise, and influence of civil society, full collaboration of civil society needs to be endorsed with the new Working Group of Ministers and their High-Level Representatives on International Environmental Governance in a formal capacity. We propose the creation of an advisory body that will spearhead and guide a dynamic and multidimensional process within civil society to communicate key messages to the governmental negotiations and foster constructive engagement of global civil society.

Chemicals

Decisions that are going to be agreed in the Extraordinary Conferences of the Parties to the Stockholm, Basel and Rotterdam Conventions (particularly on chemicals) should take into account the following concerns:

- Adoption of the multi-stakeholder approach by ensuring that the participation of all stakeholders is secured in all identified joint activities and programs.

- Inclusion of the ILO Convention 170 and other instruments developed by IGOs in the new synergy.

- Use synergy to further strengthen management of chemicals by avoiding the 'lowest common denominator' effect and guarantee that the synergies promote best practice and incorporates agreed principles.

A critical look into the strengths and weaknesses within and between the three conventions is needed. Lowering some already agreed standards and positive processes would be counterproductive. Some of the issues that may lead into the lowest denominator effect and that need a critical look include differences in:

- definitions of 'hazardous substances',
- perceptions on the multi-stakeholder processes,
- adoptions of core chemical management principles such as the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle, and the no data no market principle,
- decision-making approaches e.g. consensus vs majority rule,
- approaches in making the industry or business accountable, etc.

- Establish new, exploit and expand available financial mechanisms for financing programmes and activities. Those should also be made available to civil society.

- Address priority challenges identified by developing countries within the SAICM framework, particularly those related to illegal trafficking on hazardous chemicals and waste, e-waste and chemicals in products.

- Address as soon as possible the need for an international ban on production, trade and use of asbestos, which remains ignored by the three conventions and their programmes, as it has been repeatedly demanded by civil society and the international trade union movement.

- Ensure capacity building of government and civil society institutions in developing countries and countries with economies in transition so as to enable them to achieve the sound management of chemicals by year 2020 as per the Johannesburg Plan of Action.