



THE FUTURE OF WORK WE WANT: Workers' Perspective from the Caribbean

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

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1. Background

Within the framework of the ILO Future of Work initiative which is the centerpiece of activities to mark the ILO centenary in 2019, a lot of work has been undertaken by the ILO and its constituents to deepen understanding of the changes occurring in the world of work and to develop policy responses. To address this, the director General's report on the Future of work initiative, submitted to the 104th International Labour conference in 2015 proposed a three stage implementation plan.

The first stage took place in 2016 and 2017 and consisted of the Centenary Conversations that included national discussions on the future of work among the tripartite constituents, international organizations, research institutions, universities, NGOs and governments. The discussions were very diverse and addressed a large array of topics around the four centenary dialogues:

1. Work and Society
2. Decent Work for all
3. The Organisation of Work and Production
4. Governance of Work

The second stage which started in September of last year, focuses on setting up a high-level commission on the future of work to examine the outputs of the Centenary conversations and draft a report to be submitted to the 108th session (2019) of the ILC. During four sessions its 28 members, composed of experts from diverse disciplines, sectors, geographical regions and tripartite constituencies are identifying the key challenges facing the world of work and are providing the analytical basis to advise the actions of the ILO as well as national policies to address these challenges.

The third stage will be the 108th session of the International Labour Conference itself, including the discussion of the Conference agenda and its conclusions that will provide concrete guidance to the ILO's work as the Organization goes into its second century of existence.

To carry this discussion forward and contribute to the global debate on the Future of Work, it is important to organize this sub-regional conference within the Caribbean context to reflect on the current developments in the world of work and how the countries can develop appropriate strategies to face the expected changes in future work. The role of unions in achieving this will be a particular focus of this conference.

2. Context

The Future of Work initiative is based on the acknowledgement that the world of work is changing at a faster pace than ever before.

Rapid population growth will lead to an increase of 40 million additional workers entering the labour force each year which will challenge the ability of labour markets to generate decent work for all. This will be particularly challenging given that globalisation and technological innovations are fundamentally changing the organisation of work and production on an unprecedented scale. The world is becoming more interconnected and the resulting increases in trade and investment have resulted in structural transformations within countries as well as large shifts of production from developed to emerging countries. While this has led to an overall convergence of the world economy, the increasing competition of global markets put pressures on worker's rights and decent wages that are essential for a broad economic development that benefits all in society.

New technologies have reignited the fears of automation and robotisation outperforming human workers and leading to mass unemployment that exacerbate the large inequalities between those who benefit from new technologies and those who do not. While these fears are not new, there is the need for a discussion how new technologies will be used to complement rather than replace workers in the Caribbean.

Advances in Information technologies have led to large scale platform economies and the emergence of new forms of production and employment, making it increasingly difficult to organise workers or to distinguish the employer to bargain with. These developments threaten the traditional model of industrial relations and will be a particular challenge for trade unions both in developed and in developing countries.

While some argue that these drivers that are affecting the world of work can lead to more efficiency for business, flexibility for workers and to greater development of emerging economies, what is clear is that they also increase inequalities, generate new and different forms of precarious work and have profound consequences for policies and institutions designed to promote social justice and decent work for all.

Therefore it is crucial, that the opportunities of these recent transformations are not to the detriment of workers' rights and lead to a broad development of society that leaves no one behind.

Lastly, the profound restructuring and rapid growth of the global economy have been achieved at the expense of the natural environment. Climate change, spurred on by growing energy demands, an exploding population and the dependence on fossil fuels are a major concern. Environmental degradation of natural resources has accelerated dramatically, threatening forests, water quality and the biodiversity. The increasing scarcity of resources will have a huge impact on the economy, severely jeopardising efforts in development and poverty reduction of the last decades. Water shortages and droughts are a major concern with 75% of employment worldwide would be affected by a lack of access to water. Deforestation and the destruction of biodiversity threaten food production and the supply of basic commodities on which billions of workers rely on for their livelihoods.

3. Methodology

The conference will be structured to cover but not exclusively the 4 themes of the Initiative: Work and Society, Decent Jobs for All, The organization of Work and Production, The Governance of Work. Rather than limiting to the 4 conversations, the different sessions would focus on regional trends and drivers of change as well as governance responses along the lines of the six outcomes of the ACTRAV symposium as addressed above and information from the global commission.

These will be discussed in the context of the specific issues and challenges facing countries in the Caribbean sub-region from a trade union standpoint. To broaden the discussion and deepen understanding of the issues, the conference will involve not only trade unions but also representatives from the Government, employers' organizations, the academia and UN Organisations. The participating countries are the 13 countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago) and 6 out of 9 non-metropolitan areas (Anguilla, Aruba, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Curacao, Montserrat, Sint Maarten, Turks and Caicos Islands) covered by the ILO DWT and Office for the Caribbean.

4. Participation

Trade unions	26
Employers organization	2
Government	4
Academia	4
UNORG	2
ILO (Geneva 4, Port of Spain 3)	6
Total	45