***“The production and processing of agricultural products:***

***food security aspect of development, jobs creation***

***and eradication of poverty and income disparity”***

Today, close to one billion people worldwide suffer from chronic hunger and malnutrition. According to the UN estimates, one in every eight people around the world is chronically undernourished. At the same time, the current unprecedented increase in food prices brings about more hunger, poverty, unemployment and income disparity to millions of people.

Global unemployment exceeded 200 million in 2014 and keeps growing with 40 million new job seekers annually entering the world labour market. Half of the world’s working population is employed in informal economy while less than 25% of workers are covered by a full-time, permanent employment contract. Nearly 75% of them do not have access to adequate social protection. Furthermore, with168 million child labourers and 21 million victims of forced labour the fight for universal respect for fundamental principles and rights at work still remains to be won.

BRICS countries, as large agricultural producers, play an important role in the global agricultural market. They make fundamental contribution to food security: it is no coincidence that vast majority of the 209 million people who have been lifted out of food insecurity in the past two decades reside in the BRICS countries.

Throughout the existence of BRICS food security has been a major area of alignment for its five nations. It stands to reason that the very first summit of BRICS Leaders held in 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, made a separate statement on food security issue.

During the 2012 Summit in New Delhi BRICS nations pointed out in the Joint Statement that “*subsidies in agriculture by some developed countries continue to distort trade and undermine the food security and development prospects of developing countries*”.

In the Joint Declarationof the 4th Meeting of the BRICS Ministers of Agriculture and Agrarian Development (Brasilia, March 2015) it was emphasized that agriculture, rural and agrarian development are the areas in which all BRICS countries are confronted with similar challenges and are in a position to take advantage of similar opportunities. The ministers recalled that the five countries were committed to ensuring food and nutrition security in their own countries and worldwide being key global players in the production and trade of agricultural goods.

BRICS cooperation in the area of food security and agriculture development includes:

* development of a General Strategy for ensuring access to food for the most vulnerable population;
* exchange of experience in public policies and programmes for food security and nutrition and the strengthening of family farming.

It has to be recalled that one of the purposes of the ***Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership*** is to strive for inclusive economic growth in order to eradicate poverty, address unemployment and promote social inclusion. This is particularly important in the light of fragile economic recovery and high unemployment rates in many countries. They hamper efforts to attain the agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in particular – MDG1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The inclusion of Target 1B to “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all including women and young people” under MDG1 has acknowledged the fundamental role of Decent Work in reducing poverty and addressing food insecurity in a sustainable manner.

The ILO, with its tripartite constituency and in-depth expertise in the world of work, is uniquely placed to contribute to, and strengthen the existing UN efforts towards improved food security through decent work. It can be done by expanding opportunities for productive and fairly remunerated employment in key industries within the food system, underpinned by rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

The involvement of national trade union centres and branch trade unions, employers’ organizations, as well as national, regional and local authorities in the development and implementation of strategies to counter food insecurity will ensure their efficiency, sustainability and due regard to the countries’ needs.

The United Nations High-level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis (HLTF) has recently given the ILO and its Decent Work Agenda an enhanced role in the HLTF’s efforts to promote and coordinate a comprehensive response to the challenge of achieving food security. Against this backdrop, the ILO developed a multi-sectoral programme to promote food security across the global food supply chain.

Food security needs to be addressed in a comprehensive and coherent way. ILO advocates a twin-track approach by acknowledging the need for: (i) addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations and (ii) building longer term resilience by eliminating the structural causes of food insecurity.

The 1996 World Food Summit defined food security as existing “... *when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life*”. From the ILO perspective, this definition encompasses the ability of workers and their families to build sustainable livelihoods through decent work.

Decent jobs can accelerate economic growth, stimulate food production, processing and accessibility, and provide incomes to allow large parts of the population to exit poverty and to be food-secure. From the trade unions’ perspective the respect of workers’ legitimate rights and generation of fair income are the two essential prerequisites of sustainable food-security. Together, we have to ensure that this conviction is shared by our Governments and social partners.

Over the last decades, social protection has been increasingly recognized as a powerful tool in addressing food insecurity and building livelihood resilience. The ILO’s expertise in the design and governance of social security policies and programmes, aiming to reduce vulnerability and strengthen productive capacity, is therefore acquiring particular importance. BRICS trade unions should do their utmost in supporting the ILO approach when giving effect to national and BRICS-level food security strategies. Our goal is to expand decent work opportunities with the prospect to improve functioning of the entire food value chain. The “green jobs” approach should be pursued as well in order to ensure sustainability. The ILO estimates show that the transformation to a greener economy could generate between 15 and 60 million additional jobs globally over the coming decades.

The consumption component of the food system should focus on vulnerable workers who do not have access to adequate food, even though food supply may be secure in their country. The inability to purchase food in sufficient quantity and quality is an expression of inadequate purchasing capacity. Therefore, strategies aiming to generate adequate income and to provide safety nets to food-insecure workers will contribute to food security, poverty reduction and income disparity.

To summarize the above, these strategies – both at national and BRICS levels – should include tripartite efforts to:

* improve access to food for vulnerable groups of workers through income generation by means of decent and potentially “green” jobs, including the development of cooperatives, mutual benefit societies and social enterprises;
* improve workplace safety and health, working conditions and social protection with particular focus on vulnerable groups like youth and women;
* address decent work challenges in key sectors related to food market access and distribution, such as transport, storage, trade, retail distribution and catering;
* strengthen union organizing and involve informal economy workers in cooperation with the unions.

In this regard, a special mention should be made of the **global supply chains**.

Over few past decades the supply chains in agriculture – particularly in the tea sector – have grown and become more global in reach. Whereas large firms once owned their own plantations and factories, the liberalisation of trade and decreased costs of communication and transport made it possible for them to outsource an increasing share of their activities abroad from specialised suppliers.

Thus, today MNEs can take advantage of their size and market share to coordinate increasingly global supply chains (GSCs) without having to own them fully or in part. Complex supply chains pose new challenges to achieving decent work standards.

The trend towards outsourcing means many workers are sourced from specialised contractors rather than employed directly. The majority of these workers are in developing countries where labour regulation may be weak and the resources or capacities to enforce the law are limited. Many jobs are part-time, temporary, casual or seasonal, with long working hours and low pay.

There is a growing global recognition of the fact that in order to ensure decent work for workers employed in GSCs it is important to pay attention not only to the quantity of jobs, but their quality as well. It seems to be a relatively new challenge to trade unions, which should start paying due attention to transnational collective bargaining and transnational cooperation in safeguarding the respect for the ILO standards across the entire BRICS social space and along the supply chains.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 ***Agenda for Sustainable Development*** in which it resolved “*between now and 2030 to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources*”.

The Sustainable Development Goal #8 of the Agenda commits the UN member States to “***Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all***”. But the full extent of the alignment of the ILO Decent Work and the UN 2030 Agenda is to be found in the totality of the inter-related goals and the 169 targets which underpin them. It is today’s integrated global agenda for social justice and, as such, a major opportunity for the ILO and its tripartite constituents.

BRICS Trade Union Forum has a key role towards transforming these ILO and UN targets into a new pro-worker reality.

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