

Concept Note

SUBREGIONAL TRIPARTITE WORKSHOP

Promoting forward thinking normative strategies through South South Cooperation

9-10 October 2023

Proposed event: NORMES and PARTNERSHIPS in collaboration with Dhaka CO, Kathmandu CO, Hanoi CO and Bangkok RO propose the organisation of a tripartite subregional workshop in Bangkok on 9-10 October 2023 in order to host a South-South exchange on normative strategies to benefit countries graduating from Least Developed Country (LDC) status.

This subregional tripartite workshop forms part of a pilot project that attempts to combine for the first time South South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) with the promotion of ILS, good governance and labour market institutions for Decent Work and sustainable development. A special focus is placed on countries about to graduate from LDC status. The workshop also aims to showcase how international labour standards and economic development can be mutually reinforcing objectives in pursuit of sustainable development, enabling everyone to benefit from the fruits of economic progress in pursuit of decent work and social justice.

In preliminary discussions, the initial reaction from participating Governments at senior level has been highly supportive and keen interest appears to exist on the side of the social partners for this type of approach.

Background and rationale: Countries in the global south have a need to build solid labour market institutions based on international labour standards and good governance in support of decent work and sustainable development. Labour market institutions are essential in order to navigate the challenges associated to an open world economy and sustain development trajectories through robust labour market governance. This is true especially in the case of countries graduating from LDC status as this process entails loss of preferential treatment in relation to trade, finance and investment. In Asia, this concerns inter alia, Bangladesh and Nepal which graduate from LDC status on 24 November 2026.

Parallel to this, certain countries of the South which have already graduated from LDC status, such as Vietnam, Thailand (and to a large extent Bangladesh prior to LDC graduation) have explored the potential impact that the ratification and improved application of International Labour Standards (ILS) can have for sustainable development, notably as a springboard for strong partnerships on trade, investment and responsible business practices. Viet Nam for instance, exited the EU Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) on 1 January 2023 as a result of a [European Union – Vietnam Free Trade Agreement](#). Elements of the normative strategy that Vietnam was able to build in this context included ILS ratification, improved ILS application through labour law reform, improved reporting to the ILO supervisory bodies and last but not least, social dialogue in a tripartite context.

Information sharing and peer learning among the tripartite constituents of Bangladesh and Nepal as LDC graduating countries on the one hand and Vietnam on the other, is proposed for the first time with a view to building forward-looking SSTC collaborations and ILS-based strategies which complement national development strategies while preparing for LDC graduation. As the meeting is to take place in Bangkok, the Thai tripartite constituents may also be invited to participate and share their own experiences in this area which are particularly interesting, e.g., in relation to EPZs, trafficking and labour law reform.

As a preliminary step, a training is proposed in September 2023 in order to raise awareness on the potential to navigate LDC graduation by linking normative with national development priorities and exploring South South cooperation. This will set the stage for the subregional workshop where SSTC collaborations will be explored. In this regard, the training will help initiate reflection at country level over potential areas of collaboration which will be explored at a later stage. The agenda of the trainings is provided in Annex I with a view to providing a clearer understanding of the scope of the exchanges expected in the October workshop.

The workshop should be attended by 10 participants from each constituent group, i.e., 10 government representatives, 10 employers and 10 workers.

A budget for the meeting is submitted as a separate document.

Tentative agenda

Day I

AM

1. Opening: introduction and welcoming remarks
2. Sharing of national experiences on normative strategies: interactive exercise organised by constituent group (G, E, W). Presentations in plenary of preliminary outcomes by country and group

PM

3. Interactive exercises exploring Strategic Opportunities for Leveraging ILS among the participating countries
4. Building the case for change: interactive exercises to identify key arguments and evidence for advocating in favour of the normative strategies within each constituent group.

Day II

AM

1. Recap of previous day
2. Brainstorming and interactive exercises exploring South-South cooperations (possibly by constituent group) on ILS in the context of LDC graduation
 - a. identify key stakeholders who can support strategy implementation
 - b. replicate successful examples of partnerships
3. Presentations of preliminary outcomes : elements for strategies and collaborations

PM

4. Exercise for the tripartite constituents from each country, develop detailed plans of action refining the national strategies and their follow up and share in plenary

5. Closing

Expected outcomes: The purpose of the proposed subregional tripartite workshop is to enable the participating countries to benefit from their respective experiences in addressing the challenges and opportunities linked to an open world economy and LDC graduation through the use of ILS related normative strategies. A concurrent and related purpose is to forge concrete collaborations and partnerships among the participating countries from the global South in the areas of ILS and sustainable development. The expected outcomes therefore include:

- Increased awareness and understanding of the South-South process and its benefits in navigating an open world economy (for Vietnam and Thailand), especially preparing for transition out of LDC status (for Bangladesh and Nepal).
- Enhanced understanding of the impact of LDC graduation and steps needed to address them through robust labour market governance.
- Increased tripartite understanding of each country's labour market institutions and how strengthening good governance through ILS ratification and application can help navigate an open world economy and LDC graduation.
- Tripartite engagement in an integrated strategy for each participating country, leveraging ILS and labour market institutions in order to promote sustainable development, including in the context of LDC graduation.
- Preliminary plans of action identifying, e.g., key stakeholders within each country and beyond, with whom to engage in specific normative areas and/or further capacity-building, potentially using the SSTC modality.
- Tripartite engagement in building a forward-thinking strategy through SSTC, linking normative with national development priorities of each participating country.
- Adoption of approaches to advance SSTC collaborations on ILS, building on the momentum and regional dynamics. For instance, development of SSTC dialogues and collaboration for harmonised normative approaches among the respective tripartite constituents.
- Promotion of social dialogue at country and subregional levels.

Annex I: preliminary online training to prepare for the October workshop

Tentative agenda

Day I

1. Welcome and introductory statements
2. Introduction to South South Cooperation : what it is and examples of its potential for collaborations among countries of the South
3. LDC graduation and its implications for financing Decent Work
4. Brief introduction: International Labour Standards, labour market institutions, good governance and sustainable development. Relevance to LDC graduation
5. Gender-related aspects of ILS, good governance and sustainable development.

Day II

1. Recap of previous day
2. Briefing on opportunities for ILS related partnerships in the region :
 - a. Trade and Decent Work
 - b. Common Country Analyses and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks
 - c. Environmental and Social Safeguards of regional development banks and IFIs
 - d. ILS as human rights
3. Concluding remarks