

**Strengthening China-ILO Partnership in the New Era :
South-South Cooperation for Decent Work and Social Justice**

Dear,

Director National Social Protection Secretariat - **Madam Jane Muyanga**

Vice Minister of Human Resources and Social Security of China - **Mr. Li Zhong**

Secretary General, Central Organization of Trade Unions in Kenya (COTU-K) - **Dr. Francis Atwoli**

Chief Executive Director, Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE) - **Ms. Jacqueline Mugo**

ILO Director, Country Office Dar-es-Salaam - **Ms. Caroline Khamati Mugalla**

It is an honour to address you today on behalf of the PARTNERSHIPS Department at the launch of the project, “Extending Social Protection Coverage to Workers in the Informal Economy in Lao PDR and Kenya and Leveraging Digital Transformation through South-South Cooperation.” This event and interactive workshop represent a pivotal opportunity to advance the China-ILO partnership by reinforcing our shared mission.

As Director General said on the UN South-South Day on 12th Sept 2024, South-South and triangular cooperation are central to a contemporary approach to development. A better tomorrow with Social Justice depends on solidarity between countries, knowledge exchange, innovation, and directing resources to where they are most needed. South-South Cooperation could contribute to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda. South-South Cooperation could directly benefit ILO constituents and contribute to national ownership and supporting sub-regional, regional or inter-regional processes, including multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP). I sincerely hope that this project could help build such partnership across Asia-Pacific and African region.

With South-South Cooperation, we could facilitate peer learning through study visits, workshops, and capacity-building initiatives. These exchanges, featuring experts from diverse regions, enable contextually relevant knowledge-sharing. This allows countries to customize social protection policies to their unique needs, moving away from one-size-fits-all solutions a vision my organization, and especially my department, fully supports in our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and respond to the resolution of the Summit of the Future.

Building on this, since 2019, the ILO and the Government of have strengthened their cooperation within the framework of MOU, which provides the solid basis for an expanded programme of development cooperation. Based on MOUs, China has made continued contributions to promote employment and social protection in other countries through South-South Cooperation.

On behalf the Emerging and South-South Partnerships Unit, I'm looking forward this event as a critical platform to reflect on our South-South Cooperation (SSC) achievements and outline future pathways for collaboration. The diverse representation from governments, workers, and employers enriches our discussions. The continued support of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) reaffirms China's strong commitment to Decent Work, Social Justice, and South-South Cooperation, all central to the ILO's agenda.

for several years now, we have elevated our cooperation through projects focused on shared priorities, such as:

- The ILO-China Partnership Project on Strengthening Skills Development in ASEAN Member Countries (2018-2025), which enhances workers' employability and improves enterprise productivity. This initiative supports mutual skills recognition and promotes knowledge sharing across ASEAN, facilitated by the South-South Skills Development Network, created under this project, has already made significant strides with workshops, partnerships, and the facilitation of peer-to-peer relationships among technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutes across the region. You can see it on the attached PowerPoint, the Network currently brings together 22 TVET Institutes from China, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar. Thanks to this project 105,718 including 58,178 women but also men, youth and vulnerable groups accessed employment services through career guidance.

- Another project initiated together that i would like to mention is the ILO-China Partnership Project on Promoting the Global Development Initiative with a Focus on South-South Cooperation in Employment in ASEAN (2022-2026). This initiative supports the development of national employment policies and provides critical assistance in capacity building, technical support, and employment diagnostics. With its extension to 2026 and continued financial backing from China, this project promises to deliver vital support for employment growth across the region with our 45 partners. To date, over 46,000 participants are direct beneficiaries engaged in project activities.

The project we are discussing today, The Global Development Initiative with a Focus on South-South Cooperation in Social Protection, signed in December 2023, continues in this same vein. It aims to enhance social protection for informal workers, particularly in Lao PDR and Kenya, while contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting social justice, and fostering Decent Work for all.

This project marks a transformative step in expanding social protection in the informal economies of Lao PDR and Kenya. By leveraging South-South Cooperation principles, it facilitates the exchange of innovations and best practices across ASEAN and African countries, with China leading the way. The core goal is to extend social protection to vulnerable informal sector workers, who have historically been excluded from these benefits. Digital transformation is central to the project's strategy, ensuring social protection systems are modernized and more accessible to workers in remote or underserved regions. This includes enhancing social security databases to create efficient platforms for registration, contributions, and benefit payments.

The project also supports Decent Work by strengthening labour inspection systems, ensuring compliance with child labour laws, occupational safety standards, and fair wage provisions. China's expertise in using digital platforms to expand social protection coverage offers valuable lessons. For example, in Lao PDR, the digital expansion of the Lao Social Security Organization (LSSO) is progressing, with e-offices being established to provide social services to remote workers. In Kenya, the focus is on strengthening the National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF), which now includes new benefits like maternity cash assistance to support women in the informal economy. This initiative underlines a shared commitment to achieving universal social protection, aligned with the SDGs. The project contributes to greater social equity while laying the foundation for a self-sustaining development model where South-South Cooperation drives long-term progress.

As we move forward, The ILO-China partnership is well placed to make a significant contribution to the Global Development Initiative, addressing world of work challenges and promoting inclusive economic growth across South-East Asia and beyond, as this project demonstrates. Our joint efforts are reducing labour deficits and building resilience in a post-pandemic world. Our joint efforts are reducing decent work deficits and building resilience in a post-pandemic world. It is important to maintain this momentum to meet the challenges ahead, because although we have considerably reduced the unemployment rate After COVID-19, it is still higher than it was before the pandemic. we must continue to work together to promote social justice,

In this context, the trilateral cooperation between China, the ILO, and the BRICS+ group further exemplifies this collaborative spirit. China, a key member of BRICS, plays a vital role in advancing these efforts. The ILO, with its expertise in labour standards and workers' rights, supports BRICS in aligning their labour policies with international standards focused on social development, Decent Work, and improved working conditions in developing nations.

I would like to conclude my speech with a few recommendations aimed at strengthening trilateral cooperation with China to meet the major challenges regarding the use of resources, the quality of services and the coordination of this project.

First, we need to encourage the exchange of best practice and innovative policies between China, Laos and Kenya, which will help the project to succeed, particularly by adapting to the local context. To this end, we will need to create the conditions necessary for these exchanges between our different countries, regions and cultures, while keeping in mind the objectives centred on sustainable development.

Coordination is needed for the project implementation Asia-Pacific and Africa. Strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships, bringing together governments, private sector actors and civil society in these countries. It is another key priority for leveraging resources and expertise and being efficient.

Finally, the ILO advocates mechanisms to ensure that efforts to promote social inclusion, gender equality and the reduction of inequalities are considered, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Together, this cooperation fosters inclusive growth, reduces inequalities, and strengthens social security systems across member countries. South-South partnerships – along with triangular cooperation – are crucial to building a better future for all. They can help unlock the power of digitalization, data, and science-backed solutions for sustainable development.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to advancing social justice and promoting Decent Work
We look forward to the discussions ahead and to continuing our collaboration in shaping a future where social justice for all becomes a reality.