

The Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment

Working Groups



There were five different working groups established for this Assembly, if you wish to know more about them or how to get involved please click here.

1. Climate Change and Energy Policies: mitigation and adaptation measures and their labour implications.
2. Chemical risks: Hazardous substances in the workplace.
3. Trade unions actions for equal and sustainable access to resources and services, e.g. access to water.
4. Occupational, Environmental and Public Health: Asbestos and HIV/AIDS campaigns.
5. Corporate social responsibility and accountability.



1. Climate Change and Energy Policies: mitigation and adaptation measures and their labour implications.

The transition to a less carbon-intensive economy is an opportunity to affect social progress and create more and better jobs, provided that measures designed to anticipate and fairly manage any industrial restructuring carried out are put in place. (*European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), UNI CCC, COP 10 declaration*)

The success implementation strategies form climate change depends in large measure on the engagement of workers, their trade unions to achieve targets at workplaces and to promote support for measures within their communities. Where workers do not feel confident that jobs of livelihoods are secured, their support for implementation measures will not only remain limited, they may actively resist any measures. (*International Federation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)/ETUC/ Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) COP 10 Statement*)

All countries should work together in negotiations within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change concerning implementation of the Kyoto Protocol (2004 ICFTU Congress)

Climate change is first and foremost an energy issue, caused to a considerable extent by energy use and production to meet human needs. Consequently, the need to prevent global warming is inextricably linked with the more traditional issues in energy policy, namely, security of energy supply, access to energy and technological advances in the use and generation of energy. (Climate Change. – Avenues for Trade Union Action).

2. Chemical risks: Hazardous substances in the workplace.

Chemicals constitute a part of our daily life, and have contributed to the improvement of living conditions. But it is also an established fact that some chemicals may cause irreversible damage to the environment and the health of workers and consumers. So there is a need to ban some chemicals or severely restrict the use of them, and there is a need for regulation and adoption of rules to ensure that chemicals in use are used in a sound and safe way both for the environment and health.

We recognize that chemicals are not always used in a sustainable manner and there is a need to do more including the development of regulation and control of chemicals. Specifically, issues such as bridging the knowledge gap, the effective implementation of the principles of precaution and substitution, development and marketing of green chemicals and processes,

and the development of research, assessment and prevention regarding multiple exposures to chemical risks need to be addressed.

However, the situation in many parts of the world is that there is a more general lack of knowledge, regulation and control with regard to the sound and safe use of chemicals. This is a major problem for consumers, for workers, and for the environment in these countries, but it also poses threats for the global environment when the chemicals in use are biologically persistent or degrade slowly and are globally spread via wind or water.

As the standard of living is improved in developing and newly restructuring countries, they will produce and use more chemicals than now. Even today, there are companies from within the chemical sector and other sectors using chemicals that have moved a number of their operations from developed countries to developing or newly restructuring countries. Often knowledge of chemical risks and hazards together with regulation and control is less developed in these countries. So there is a major need for the international community to help to raise the standard of education, training, regulation and control in these countries to the same high standard as in developed countries in order to help set developing and newly restructuring countries on a sustainable path and avoid environmental and social dumping.

(Trade Union Statement to Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management SAICM)

3. Trade unions actions for equal and sustainable access to resources and services, e.g. access to water.

Clean water is one of life's most essential substances. As clean and affordable drinking water relates closely to sanitation, access to both must be considered a fundamental human right and a crucial sustainable development objective. To treat water purely as an economic commodity runs counter to the 1992 Earth Summit declaration that "all peoples have the right to access to drinking water in quantities and of the quality equal to their basic needs."

Many sectors claim for social and economic transformations and an urgent promotion of a "New Culture for Water". The water policies oriented to environmental protection has to be based in: demand management, saving, raising and distribution efficiency, actual installations adaptation, application of reuse technologies. The scientific and technological advances in this direction have to be taken into account. Democratic participation must be fundamental in decision making.

Trade Unions asked during the last CSD session to:

- Recognise access to water as a fundamental human right, not merely as an economic good.
- A supply-side approach is needed to address consumption, waste and resource efficiency issues.
- Government's role must be reinforced through management and ownership of water resources.
- Public-public partnerships involving local authorities can address limitations in public-private partnerships & market-based approaches.
- Accountable partnerships, require an increase in democratic decision-making, information-sharing and evaluation processes.
- Upgrading public utilities should improve access to water by poor people and vulnerable groups.
- Tariff reform to target subsidies and avoid full cost recovery; to address access and poverty

issues.

- Research & Review the roles of the private sector; off-book accounting, long-term concessions, public guarantees for profits and public debt burdens must be questioned.
- Financing through user fees, taxation, cross-subsidies, and domestic bonds; a lack of domestic capital not a pretext for privatisation.
- Conservation and waste reduction can be achieved through promotion of sustainable patterns through joint action in the workplace.

4. Occupational, Environmental and Public Health: Asbestos and HIV/AIDS campaigns.

Over two million women and men die each year from unsustainable forms of work and 160 million more become victims of work-related diseases. In addition, globalisation fosters conditions which induce the replacement of safe and healthy workplaces in one part of the world by more dangerous working environments in others.

The Trade Union movement, as well as Governments, business and other members of the Civil Society, must address the social dumping inherent in the exporting of technology and work processes, innovation, machines, commodities, and chemicals or chemical products for use in workplaces of recipient countries.

Trade unions are taking leading roles to better integrate sustainable development with occupational health and safety for workers and to strengthen the bases for promoting forms of Decent Work and the well-being for workers and communities.

5. Corporate social responsibility and accountability.

Over the last few years, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as a concept that has had great influence on how many people think about the social responsibilities of business. It has become a big part of the debate on both globalisation and sustainable development.

CSR is about what management does, usually unilaterally. CSR is, therefore, not the same thing as regulation or the other legal frameworks that hold management accountable. The following elements are widely accepted as being the most important elements of the concept:

- CSR is about voluntary actions of management.
- CSR is concerned with the role of management. It is about management initiatives, management systems, and about how management manages social impact.
- CSR is, more often than not, about activities that are considered “above or beyond” compliance with the law. Where it is about activities that fall within the scope of law, CSR assumes compliance with the law.
- The essential idea of CSR is that management should take into account the impact of ongoing business activities on all of those affected by its activities. It is one kind of business ethics.

The current concept of CSR has many sources, one of which is concern over the environment.

CSR is both a concept and a phenomenon. It is shaping the environment in which trade unions

Trade unionists must take a nuanced approach and recognise both the dangers and opportunities in CSR, which is about what business does and about what it wants to do, must therefore not be confused with what society wants business to do. (understood as social responsibilities of business). The social responsibilities of business are the set of widely accepted expectations on how business should behave. These are the expectations of society as a whole. They can come in the form of laws or they can take non-legally binding forms. They can be legitimately defined in both formal, as laws or regulations, as widely shared cultural values expressed in various ways.

(ICFTU Trade Union Guide to Globalization, Second Edition:
<http://www.icftu.org/pubs/globalisation/globguide.html>)

The Role of Labour Unions in the Process Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP / EcoLogic; 2004), available at:
<http://www.unep.fr/outreach/business/labour.htm>

The Stakeholder Engagement Manual (including chapter on union perspectives / experiences on stakeholder engagement) (UNEP, AccountAbility, Stakeholder Research Associates; 2005), available at:
<http://www.unep.fr/outreach/home.htm>