A demand-driven, social dialogue-based approach for designing and implementing decent work programmes is essential to ensure a quality working environment. Fair terms of employment, decent working conditions, safety and health at work and development for the benefit of all cannot be achieved without the active involvement of workers, employers, and governments. This can only be achieved through social dialogue defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to ‘include all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.’ It bridges the gap between who are making policies and programmes and who are affected by those policies.

Although ‘social dialogue’ is not specifically included in the 2030 Agenda, it is acknowledged that it is essential to achieving sustainable development, as stated in SDG8 ‘Decent Work and Inclusive Growth.’ This *de facto* indicates that the tripartite players in the workplace - governments, workers, and employer organisations - recognise social dialogue as a tool for negotiation and consensus-building. In fact, studies in the European Union have demonstrated that social discourse, supported by core workplace values and rights, may promote socioeconomic advancement and good governance for the achievement of sustainable development, serving as a crucial component of the SDGs’ implementation (Caspar, Rieff and Roelen n.d.). Collective negotiations between employers and employees improve the working environment and give workers a stake in economic growth. Their participation can significantly contribute towards social cohesion, good corporate governance, and equality (Eurofound 2015). Evidence, based on 14000 European workers, indicates that those who have greater individual liberty and voice at work are more involved in and have confidence in democracy (Budd, Lamare and Timming 2018). Wages, working conditions, and labour productivity all benefit through social dialogue (Caspar, Rieff and Roelen n.d.; Visser 2016; Guschnanski and Onaran 2018). But in addition to SDG8, social dialogue is also essential for accomplishing other objectives, such as Goals 1 (reducing poverty), 5 (Promoting Gender Equality), 10 (Reducing Inequality), and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) (Jondi 2019). Social dialogue assists in the transition towards a sustainable economy by fostering a shared knowledge of issues and solutions.

An efficient way through which social dialogue reduces poverty and inequality is by setting a minimum wage rate – it creates a minimum floor for everyone – adopted by various countries across the globe. For example, Argentina and Kenya achieved minimum wage rate by using tripartite negotiations at the national level.

The proportion of women across the globe varies in the informal economy based on various reasons (Maffei 2018). Globally, men are more likely to be involved in the informal sector as compared to women. However, the case is different in developing countries especially in Africa and Latin America. According to the IMF (2021), 58% of the global women are engaged in informal sector, however, in Sub-Sahara Africa, on average 83% of non-agricultural employed women are employed in informal sector. Similarly, 42% of the global women are engaged in the informal sector, however, in low-income countries, it is 92% (World Bank 2021). Social dialogue significantly contributes to eliminating gender inequality by increasing the inclusion of clauses in collective agreements on matters that affect women directly like domestic abuse, work-life balance, breastfeeding, maternity etc (ILO 2013). All women were covered under such agreements, at both informal and formal level, especially when such agreements take place at sectoral and governmental level and the agreement has wider scope of
coverage. For example, in Uruguay, the ‘National Tripartite Commission on Domestic Worker’ Salaries’ was established where the national leagues of housewives and domestic workers’ union determine the salaries and other employment conditions via collective negotiations.

The need of ‘protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working conditions for all employees...’ is emphasised in objective 8.8 of the SDGs 2030. The importance of social dialogue in workplace health and safety is generally acknowledged by governments and social partners. Social dialogue at domestic level discussion on crucial issues pertaining to basic health and safety conditions such as adoption of safer methods in specific sectors, updated occupational illness lists, and exposure limits etc. In Kenya, tripartite social dialogue culminated in the adoption of various labour laws including the ‘Work Injury and Benefits Act’. According to Otieno (2018), this law incorporated workers from the formal as well as from informal sector. In Ghana, Union of Informal Workers Association (UNIWA) and Trades Union Congress (TUC) have taken measures to establish a social protection platform for women engaged in the informal sector. Similarly, Morocco, with the help of social dialogue, formalised a social security system.

Social dialogue has always been one of the primary pillars of ILO’s priorities to promote decent work. Recently, it has been listed as a priority area of ILO’s Decent Work Country Programme-IV for Pakistan. Undoubtedly, a social dialogue is as good and as effective as its agenda. Setting the right agenda for social dialogue to strengthen rights of employees, employment, and social protection by engaging the right stakeholders is as critical as the dialogue itself. Therefore, ILO and SDPI think that this is high time to start the process of identifying and consolidating an agenda for social dialogue - while respecting national, cultural, and regional traditions - which meets local needs to design and implement polices for improving labour conditions promoting decent work.

This Roundtable Discussion aims to bring together stakeholders from the public sector, employers’ representative bodies, workers’ representative bodies, and most importantly, workers and employers to chalk out a clear agenda for social dialogue for decent work in Pakistan. The roundtable will have the following objectives:

1. Reviewing international best practices for social dialogue in promoting decent work and achieving SDGs agenda, with special focus on Pakistan (e.g., role of existing tripartite and bipartite forums including Tripartite and Bipartite Consultative Committees at the federal and provincial levels and Workers Employment Bilateral Council of Pakistan).
2. Identifying key stakeholders at the federal and provincial level, from the public and private sector, for social dialogue on decent work.
3. Identifying focus areas and main agenda points for social dialogue on decent work in respective areas such as measures to strengthen constituency capacity, measures to ensure quality of services of bipartite and tripartite forums etc.

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1 Cooperation project with LO/FTF Council, Denmark, and Mondial FNV, the Netherlands.
2 Cooperation project between the International Federation of Actors and Moroccan Union of Dramatic Arts Professionals.
References


Organisers

Rabia Razzaque, Senior Programme Officer, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: razzaque@ilo.org

Dr Sajid Amin, Deputy Executive Director (Research), Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
Email: sajidamin@sdpi.org