The 102nd Session of the International Labour Conference (2013), has scheduled a general discussion on the item “Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs”.

This topic featured on the agenda of the Conference in 1990 when the Director-General presented a report on “Environment and the World of Work”. The Conference adopted a resolution concerning environment, development, employment and the role of the ILO.

While the 1990 resolution of remains broadly relevant, the extent of the environmental and social challenges, the knowledge on the relationships between environmental sustainability, employment, social protection and incomes and the political resolve to act on these relationships have evolved dramatically since 1990.

The past two decades have been marked by increasingly scarce resources, by rising pollution levels and climate change, coupled with record unemployment levels and persistent working poverty and social exclusion. Preserving the natural environment and ensuring access to decent work for all have emerged as defining challenges of the twenty-first century.

While the enduring global economic crisis has exacerbated environmental and social concerns, recognition of the pivotal role of decent work for sustainable development has grown. This has been reflected in numerous recent national initiatives, especially in the wake of the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012.

The report prepared by the Office as a basis for this general discussion (ILC.102/V) reviews the growing body of evidence from country experiences, initiatives by constituents and research by the ILO and others concerning this interaction. It finds that environmental sustainability is crucial to the labour market, whereas continued deterioration can only reduce productivity, undermine enterprises and employment and endanger social protection.

All dimensions of decent work will be affected, in many instances with implications for gender equality.

The report identifies three major opportunities (net employment creation, upgrading of existing jobs and social inclusion) as well as three challenges (job losses from economic restructuring, adaptation to climate change and regressive income effects) for the realization of the goal of decent work for all in the shift to environmentally sustainable enterprises.

The emerging policy lessons show that positive outcomes in terms of more and better jobs, as well as social protection and inclusion can be achieved through active engagement of ILO constituents in the design and implementation of coherent environmental, economic and social policies in line with the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

The capacity building and advisory services provided by the Office since 2008 under the Green Jobs Programme have been important in supporting constituents in their vital role to adopt policies and implement strategies that maximize opportunities for decent work and enhance social inclusion in the drive towards environmentally sustainable development.

The discussion in the Committee, from 5-15 June, is expected to result in the adoption of a Recommendation laying out a set of key Conclusions, calling for a number of follow-up actions by the constituents and a suggesting a supportive role by the Office.