From Green to Greener: Good practices and training needs for green jobs in Sri Lanka

Employers’ Federation of Ceylon (EFC), 2012

Executive Summary

Green jobs in general, stand on the three components: namely, decent work for social justice, economic viability and environmental sustainability. In other words green jobs can be defined as decent work that contributes to environmental sustainability.

In the broader sense, decent work needs to address the core of international labour standards such as freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, effective abolition of child labour, elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, occupational health and safety etc. whilst aligning to laws applicable to Sri Lanka. Environmental sustainability addresses issues such as climate change, pollution prevention control, eco-systems, biodiversity etc.

In this context, Sri Lanka being a country belonging to the ILO’s Green Jobs in Asia Project has initiated an assessment on the subject of green jobs. However, there is no comprehensive study undertaken up to now in order to find out the status of green jobs in practice in Sri Lankan Organizations. The main objective of this study is therefore, to explore the role of organizations in each sector (Agriculture, Industry and Services) in contributing towards green jobs opportunities and emphasizing on the importance of decent work which will ultimately lead to a low-carbon economy. It has been done by formulating a questionnaire and sending it to the membership of the EFC. Fifty organizations responded to this questionnaire from which information and data were gathered to prepare this publication.

Among the responses received, 46 from the private sector and 3 organizations from the government sector and others constituted 1 organization only. The general information with regard to each organization was collected first and data on employees were given priority in the entire survey as it has been the core of this study.

Environmental sustainability issues were then looked at, concentrating on green technology and devices together with green initiatives taken by each organization. Renewable energy becomes one of the key areas in which – 26 percent have made a positive change. Energy generation through hydro, in terms of mini and micro systems is one which is on the rise and there exist numerous commercial banks of Sri Lanka who are willing to lend financial assistance in the form of either debt or equity components for such developments. Though biomass is a feasible option to produce energy still more efforts are needed to convince organizations to switch into biomass operated systems for their steam or electricity requirements. However, switching to solar energy may take some time and formal campaigns are of paramount importance in order to encourage organizations to use such options in the long run.

It was also noted that organizations have had direct benefits by saving energy costs by improvement of energy efficiencies. However, deriving long term benefits continuously by optimizing energy efficiency may be questionable as there are no Energy Managers always within organizations. However their involvement on energy calculations for improvement of efficiencies would be very worthy to mention and
most of the technical staff seem to have gathered good knowledge on improvement of efficiencies of certain machinery.

There has been a marked trend for Industrial sector organizations to go for green buildings and/or retrofitting as it helps secure more business opportunities from overseas investors and attracting more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by developing green attributes. Further it was found that there has been a group of people who are involved in green building maintenance with the registration of the Green Building Council of Sri Lanka indicating greener job opportunities particularly in the Industrial sector. It is clear that the Manufacturing sector is mainly involved in indoor climate control interventions as they directly benefit from such interventions particularly with the creation of a healthy environment to work comfortably within the factory premises. It is inferred that these scenarios undoubtedly increase productivity lead to gaining higher profit margins.

About Twenty Six per cent of organizations that took part in the survey have stated that rainwater harvesting is a good gesture to start off in conserving water (Sri Lanka already has the Kandy Declaration targeting rainwater harvesting). In particular, the Industrial sector is very keen on the 3R principle as it yields direct benefits to them.

In forestry related activities it is apparent that organizations that are in the Agriculture sector have directly contributed to reforestation, afforestation, conservation of biodiversity, as it is part of their business.

In an attempt of abating the generation of pollution, the amounts of pollutants generated were not quantified by most organizations. There are considerable numbers of organizations producing industrial wastewaters and they employ different wastewater treatment methods prior to discharge to the environment. However sustainability of such technologies is questionable as no 3R principles are applied. Therefore, it is imperative to note that pollution prevention needs to be paid more attention for environmentally friendly and sustainable practices.

About sixty per cent of organizations are generally in support of environmental goals, while expecting safe and healthy environment for them to work in. There are numerous policies in existence in order to support employees. There was no child labour being utilised; however, teenagers from 15 to 17 are employed in some organizations. The age for retirement is usually 55 years, but in some cases few of them are at work in accordance with their capability and willingness to work.

Some essential components of decent work such as freedom of association, forced or compulsory labour, elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation etc. could not be grasped only through the questionnaire. In other words decent work seems to be not yet a theme for many to work on. However, statutory components (EPF/ETF, maternity leave, overtime etc.) declared for labour are fulfilled by almost all organizations. It could be inferred that many have ratified at least one convention or standard and a few have voluntarily gone beyond borders of Sri Lanka in adopting many international conventions or standards.

The gap analysis manifested that most require ‘on the job training’ to enhance ‘soft skills’ and basic skills but do not necessarily require advanced green knowledge. The soft skills essentially uplift dependability and reliability, initiative, and interpersonal skills of employees. Green knowledge is more important for managers and small business owners who establish ‘green’ procedures and provide ‘on the job training’ for their employees. Hence the component of training particularly on decent work at different levels is of utmost importance for the establishment of green jobs in Sri Lanka. An apex body perhaps jointly with
EFC and the TVEC would be ideal to be appointed in order to encourage more green jobs in Sri Lankan organizations both in the public and private sectors.

Many organizations surveyed have adopted and invested in green technology. However, all four pillars\(^1\) of decent work are not evenly implemented across all companies surveyed though elements of decent work have been mainstreamed in every company surveyed. Therefore, the gap analysis undertaken through this survey, points to the necessity to take measures to improve the workplace, and meet the totality of decent work standards. What has been achieved so far in companies is commendable. Yet it should be reiterated that more needs to be done. These lacunae have been identified and it is expected that these survey results will guide the participating organizations and others within and outside the EFC membership to strive towards creating, converting, generating and promoting green/greener jobs for a just transition to a green economy.

Training on various topics of green jobs therefore becomes essential. The post monitoring of the status of the green jobs in Sri Lanka should also be carried out on a continual basis so that more improvements could be made through different instruments. Policies with relevant ministries on green jobs must then be worked out so that enforcement would become easy. In addition, a database on the types of green jobs in Sri Lanka could be prepared by the EFC to be distributed among enterprises and industries thereby facilitating faster adoption of the concept of green jobs.

In conclusion, however, in order to see a positive growth in green jobs, organizations must foresee the benefits of green jobs and the possibility of inclining towards becoming greener businesses by catering to green needs and opportunities and the green market. For this endeavor to succeed, employers should play a leading role by providing proper training to their employees so that “from Green to Greener” becomes a reality.

\(^1\) International Labour Standards, Productive and freely chosen work, Social Protection and Social Dialogue