

# Interview with Guy Ryder



5 June 2013: ILO + Sustainability = true: Guy Ryder, Director-General at the ILO explains it all to us

## **1. How does the ILO work with sustainability?**

The ILO has been actively engaged in sustainable development for a long time. Initially, it focussed on the close relationship between the working environment, in particular safety and health at work, and the general environment. This remains a very relevant line of work as we can see from the disastrous effects of major industrial accidents or the risks from hazardous chemicals.

In recent years, it has been more and more recognized that the world of work and sustainable development are linked very closely also in terms of employment, incomes and social inclusion. In the outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, world leaders and the international community recognize that decent work must be a central goal and driver for sustainable development.

Without environmental sustainability, we cannot achieve sustainable enterprises with stable and decent jobs. Greening enterprises and indeed entire economies is not an option from a labour market perspective, it is a necessity. But it is also true that greener, environmentally sustainable economies will remain an elusive goal without the support of the world of work, without the daily active engagement of millions of employers and managers and hundreds of millions of workers. Our Green Jobs Programme and the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin have been building the capacity of ILO constituents to analyse and act on these links. We have already assisted over 25 countries to formulate policies and practical programmes tailored for their national circumstances and the ILO stands ready to provide further assistance whenever governments or the social partners request.

## **2. Is it possible to combine decent work with job creation in a greener economy?**

Over the last few years, we have very actively studied this question and also looked at the experience in countries with shifting to a greener economy. The evidence produced by ILO and many others shows that we do not have to choose between jobs and protecting the environment for current and future generations. A greener economy can lead to net gains of 15-60 million additional jobs, perhaps even more. This is significant, even if we recognize that some jobs may be lost and the workers employed elsewhere. Particularly in the current economic crisis and in the face of high general unemployment in many countries, a strong push for investment - public, but even more so private - into a greener economy can be an effective short-term measure and one which does not

increase the mortgage we have already taken out on the future, but invest in the chances of youth and future generations. This is an important element of the ILO Global Jobs Pact adopted in 2009. In the early crisis response many governments heeded this advice and to good effect. Unfortunately, it has been abandoned prematurely.

Whether we will see a net gain in employment and what the quality of these jobs will be is not a given. It will depend on the policies which are used to drive the transformation. In fact, the opportunities to improve the quality of existing jobs in the shift to a greener economy are much larger than those of creating additional jobs. Well over a billion workers could benefit in agriculture, in construction and in waste management for example. To get these positive outcomes, but also to master the challenges of restructuring and of job and income losses due to climate change, we need coherent policies, which align economic, social and environmental goals. The report launched by the Green Jobs Initiative of UNEP, ILO, IOE and ITUC in June 2012 summarizes the policy lessons and contains many examples of what can be achieved and how.

### **3. What makes a job sustainable?**

Like enterprises, jobs will ultimately only be sustainable if they align the three dimensions of sustainable development. They have to be productive and economically viable and there has to be sufficient demand for the goods and services they produce. They also have to be decent work, because only then do they enable the workers concerned to benefit fairly from their work and so contribute to social cohesion, to inclusion and to poverty reduction. The ILO has always been clear on that. The Rio Conference has given the strongest endorsement yet.

And we need environmental sustainability across enterprises, national economies and globally. At the moment, production and consumption patterns are clearly not sustainable and we need to change that urgently and quickly. We already have seen the losses of hundreds of thousands, even millions of jobs and livelihoods because natural resources have been overused or the impact of climate change has disrupted and undermined enterprises.

### **4. For you personally, what area of sustainability does your heart beat extra for?**

The realities of climate change which affect us all and which bring home the urgency of moving on it before it's too late. I say this not just in my professional capacity but as an ordinary citizen. It makes your heart beat faster though not in a positive way, it makes you sweat a bit.

### **5. Is the future of workers green?**

In a sense, hopefully, yes. If we do not move towards a greener economy decisively and soon, the consequences for jobs, incomes and poverty reduction will be disastrous. The International Labour Conference this year will discuss the link between sustainable development, decent work and green jobs. The report prepared by the Office for this discussion makes this clear. It also shows that as many as 1.5 billion workers, i.e. practically half the global workforce, are active in sectors which will need major changes even in the short term in order to become environmentally sustainable.

For most workers this will mean acquiring some additional functions and skills. For a smaller, but critically important group, it will mean directly contributing to reducing environmental impact, and preserving or restoring natural resources. These jobs in growing environmental industries, but also key occupations in other sectors, like facilities managers, logistics officers, environmental assessors, among others, are what we call green jobs, provided of course, they are also decent jobs.