Solidarity with workers in Bangladesh

TUC Aid Project

July 2016

Building support for just transition in Bangladesh

TUC Aid has agreed to fund a project run by the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (BOSHE) Foundation to raise awareness of ‘just transition’, the idea that the transition to a low or no carbon economy must be based on principles of social justice and involvement of trade unions.

The issue

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to Climate Change and this is already severely challenging its ability to achieve high rates of growth needed to sustain reductions in poverty. In the coming years, it is projected that there will be increasingly frequent floods, tropical cyclones, strong surges and droughts, which will have a hugely disruptive impact on the economy.

A one-meter sea level rise will result in the displacement of almost 30 million people – “environmental refugees” - from southern coastal regions and have unimaginable adverse impacts on workplaces, livelihoods and long-term health of a large proportion of the population. Melting glaciers in the Himalayas will result in more waters rushing into Bangladesh from the north causing flooding in the short term and eventually lead to scarcity of water in the long run.

More than half of the workforce in Bangladesh is employed in agriculture, an especially vulnerable sector. Confronting changing weather patterns will affect agriculture which accounts for about 20% of national GDP and almost two-thirds of its jobs. Combined with rising sea levels, it is expected to result in Bangladesh losing 80% of its rice production and 32% of its wheat production by 2050, which also poses a serious threat to national food security. Some other economic sectors such as fisheries, river and sea-side industrial belts and activities in the non-formal sector will be severely affected, putting at risk the means of survival of many families.

Intended outcomes of the project

This proposed mini project will assist BOSHE to continue its work with the trade unions at field level on climate change issues through mobilization, awareness rising and knowledge building to promote and operationalize the ‘just transition framework’ at national level. It will involve:

production of 5,000 copies of awareness raising campaign flyer on just transition in local languages;

reprinting 2,000 copies of the workers’ education handbook *Green Jobs – A Just Transition to Low Carbon Economy*, as basic education material in BOSHE’s training programme on  Climate Change and Just Transition for  union representatives in vulnerable sectors;

production of a two-page briefing on the outcomes of the Paris climate change talks covering adaptation and mitigation issues; the role of just transition and decent work in national climate strategies; the Agreement's support for information and education initiatives at national level; and a summary of the Bangladesh government’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the overall international emissions reduction effort;

two days of National Trainer Training on just transition and green jobs for union leaders in vulnerable sectors. The training will be organized in Dhaka with 24 participants from 8 national trade union centres, namely Bangladesh Free Trade Unions Congress (BFTUC), Jatio Sramik League (JSL), Bangladesh Mukto Sramik Federation (BMSF), Bangladesh Jatioyatabadi Sramik Dal (BJSD),  Bangladesh Labour Federation (BLF), Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra (BTUK)  and Jatio Sromik Jote (JSJ).

The objective of this Training of Trainers would be to develop a set of new educators at union level with up-to-date knowledge and skills covering the UN's efforts to tackle climate change, climate change impacts on workers and the economy, government responses at national level, and union demands for a just transition of the workforce with green jobs and union lead green actions at enterprise level. Their action plan would cover conducting of enterprise based education and training programmes for plant level leaders and union members. They will also assist their respective unions to take part in collective bargaining on issues related to climate change and environmental degradation.

The trainees will come from agriculture, metal, transport, construction and brick manufacturing, wood and forestry, chemicals and leather, fisheries, tea and rubber plantation sectors. Participating unions are required to ensure that at least 30% of participants are women. Special attention will be paid to gender balance in all activities organised under this follow-up programme.

Issues to be covered at the training programme include:

climate change challenge issues in Bangladesh, as noted above, including predicted changes to sea level, rainfall, temperatures and other environmental trends;

workers’ vulnerability: likely economic impacts of these trends and their impacts on employment and livelihood of workers;

current strategies of the Bangladesh government to address these issues;

climate change, OSH and workers’ health - how climate change will affect working conditions and therefore why this is a trade union issue;

an outline of the International Labour Organisation's new green jobs instrument including its approach to just transition and the role of national plans of action to tackle climate change;

the role of trade unions in advancing the Green Jobs agenda in the workplace and the development of  workplace action plans to address both climate adaptation and emissions reduction initiatives; and

the vital role of workplace education for trade union members.

Our record of partnership

In 2007, TUC Aid supported BOSHE to develop and print a handbook titled *Green Jobs – A Just Transition to Low Carbon Economy* as part of an initiative to develop knowledge and understanding among the trade unions in Bangladesh on climate change.

In 2010, the TUC agreed to support the labour movement of Bangladesh to develop its educational capacity to work on climate change issues though a pilot project for nine months (July 2010 – March 2011). This was the first national level trade union project on climate change in Bangladesh. 12 major national trade union centers (including all ITUC national affiliates) were involved in joint working to achieve the Just Transition goals under the project framework. The project could not go into its second phase due to cuts in funding by DFID.

An interim project report should be produced in October, with the final project report in January 2017.