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Employment, decent jobs needed for sustainable development in Afghanistan— new ILO report

KABUL (ILO News) Employment and decent work must be at the heart of plans for Afghanistan's social and economic development, according to a new report on employment in the country released by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The new report, *Afghanistan: Time to move to sustainable jobs* says a balance must be found between the need for stabilization and the creation of more sustainable jobs that can lift people out of poverty. It calls for a longer term approach to socio-economic development. "In the long run, only coordinated, sustainable, market drive and contextualized initiatives" can create the economic and social growth the country requires, it says.

The report, published by the ILO's office in Kabul, highlights a number of challenges. These include a lack of reliable data and information systems, a lack of long-term thinking and programming, a lack of coordination between different Afghan ministries and agencies, poor linkages within the labour market (the link between employment and "political stabilization" has not been successful in creating sustainable jobs, the report says), too great a focus on the creation of casual and short-term rather than sustainable employment, and a lack of financial capacity.

Creating more sustainable jobs requires coordinated, coherent policies and programmes, the report says. In particular there is a need for international donors to focus on longer term employment support programmes, particularly those fostering job and skills creation. Other key requirements include support for the informal economy (including agriculture, micro enterprises and other forms of self-employment); making higher education (private and public) more responsive to the manpower needs of the economy; tailoring support to the specific needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups (rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach), including education, credit schemes and professional development; the promotion of social dialogue, and better labour market information on which to build employment strategies and programmes.

Looking forward to the July 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, the report says that the international community must reaffirm its commitment to supporting employment in the long term (to 2024) and place employment at the heart of long term programmes and support programmes.

"Ultimately most stakeholders will have to rethink their objectives, organization, design and implementation of programmes", to pave the way for placing "sustainable employment generation at the forefront of a multiyear, non-politicized economic development and employment generation agenda," the authors say.

Mr Herve Berger, ILO Senior Coordinator for Afghanistan said that National Priority Programmes must focus on job and skills creation. "The country needs a national employment policy and existing employment strategies, both bilateral and multilateral programmes, need to be coordinated and streamlined. They must be based on guidelines and principles", Mr Berger said.

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