

## Australia-ILO Online Discussion:

(25 June – 6 July 2012)

### **"Apprenticeships in Asia and the Pacific"**

#### Background Note

Young people strive for decent employment and better income opportunities, as well as for the chance to participate in, and benefit from, economic and social development. Yet, many economies remain characterized by high levels of un- and underemployment of youth: substantial shares of young people are trapped in a vicious circle of low skills, low productivity and low income opportunities.

Today, smooth transitions from school to productive and decent work in the formal economy are the realistic expectations of a small share of young people: those with the opportunity for good basic education that opens pathways to further learning and to employment. Even for these young people, expectations often go unmet because low rates of job-rich growth in the formal economy result in scarce employment opportunities. Most young people however do not have the chance to attend formal institutions of learning.

Apprenticeship (formal and informal) is a widely used term. Some consider it as a mode of learning where skills are acquired at the workplace in a structured manner. Others think of an apprenticeship as having a dual character, combining institution and enterprise based learning i.e.: a combination of on and off the job training. An apprenticeship is often mistaken for training modes or concepts that appear similar but for the purpose of this discussion, what differentiates an apprenticeship from other approaches is reflected in the following 5 defining elements:

- 1) The master craftsman/employer and the apprentice conclude an agreement (a training contract);
- 2) The apprentice works to achieve specific occupational competencies required for a trade (the training content);
- 3) Training is mainly workplace-based and integrated into the production process wherever possible; (the training process);
- 4) The apprentice is typically a young person;
- 5) The costs of an apprenticeship are primarily shared between the master craftsman/employer and the apprentice.

The ILO has been working with constituents to upgrade and expand apprenticeship systems as they are seen as a cost-effective way for countries to make wide-scale gains in enhancing their skills base. A combination of approaches and interventions may be required to improve the quality of training, the level of skills acquired, working conditions, entrepreneurship and employability of apprentices across the board with attention also required for improving the access of young women to non-traditional occupations.

This online discussion will deal with the issue of apprenticeships and consider such approaches as efforts to expand and complement existing initiatives to improve national skills development systems and in doing so, boost young people's employability, income opportunities and access to decent work.

We would like to start off the first week (25 June to 1 July) of this discussion with the following two questions:

**1) What are the key characteristics of a successful apprenticeship system?**

**2) What safeguards can be put in place both formally and informally to protect the rights of young people in apprenticeships?**