

Decent Work – The Employers’ Perspective

Barbados Employers’ Confederation

Last week’s publication made clear the definition and importance of decent work in today’s society, however, this week’s focus would be the employers’ perspective of Decent Work and its impact on the Barbadian labour market.

Rights at Work

While international labour standards set the stage for the ideal labour situations within countries, countries differ in their history, culture and customs, the level of social and economic development and the level and distribution of their resources. Based on the foregoing, you would understand that to automatically ratify all international labour conventions might create inflexible labour markets for some and in others they might cause the industrial relations systems to become overly legalistic. For employment, they may stifle efforts aimed at job creation and growth thus leading to an expansion of the informal sector. For business, they may make the economic environment unattractive for investors thereby hindering a country’s quest to become competitive. Furthermore, ratification of ILO labour conventions is important, but what is more critical is the need for countries to implement and enforce the labour standards which they can contain.

Employment

When we analyze all the components of Decent Work and relate them to employment, we would realize that the main objective of Decent Work is to contribute to improved living standards for individuals. But before we reach this point, people must be employed and if they are not, there should be adequate opportunities to secure employment for labour market participants who are willing and available to work – from self-employment to wage employment. Therefore, employment creation should be the focal point of Decent Work. For this to happen, employers must fulfill their role of creating jobs and government must play its part by providing the necessary conditions and framework which would facilitate job creation. Policy creation becomes very important and Government should initiate the process of formulating an employment policy with input from employers and workers organizations. At the macroeconomic level they should identify the prevailing obstacles to, outline external factors that impact negatively on job growth and should be able to forecast labour market trends to match skills with existing and future jobs. Finally it should reduce unemployment and underemployment, and motivate the unemployed.

Social Security

One of the prerequisites for sustaining any social security system is to first conduct a critical assessment of the effect it will have on the country’s labour market, employment creation and on public expenditure. Countries should not create or extend social security programs that would impede business competitiveness, restrict employment generation, or encourage beneficiaries to rely on social security benefits rather than seek employment. Over the years the BEC has noticed an increase in private sector financing of social security items such as pensions and medical

schemes. More often than not, at the negotiating table we are faced with requests from the trade union for employers to provide non-contributory medical and pension schemes. Therefore, social security should not be considered in a vacuum but rather within the context of a broader national development plan. Social protection should be undertaken in a manner that is coherent with a country's level of social and economic development. A country should not hang its hat where it can't reach it.

Social Dialogue

Social dialogue has its relevance at the workplace that cannot be understated as it is a useful tool in matching the goals of capital and labour. To achieve the expected outcomes through tripartism and social dialogue, the social partners must be politically independent and self governing in conformity with ILO Convention 87 on the Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize. In the Barbadian context social dialogue has served as a propelling mechanism to increase awareness and continual progression of decent work for all employees.

Social dialogue should be a dynamic, rather than static, process, geared towards meeting the complex challenges of building economic competitiveness and social equity. Similarly, social dialogue should be a democratic process geared to reaching out not only to workers in the formal sector but also to the more vulnerable, atypical workforce in order to reduce the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion.

With the recent Decent Work Country Program, and the various Social Partnership meetings, this can help to further propel the ideals for the labour force.