

**Opening ceremony of the 17th Regional Seminar
for Labour-Based Practitioners
Addis, 12th November 2017**

**Opening remark by ILO Regional Director for Africa,
Ms. Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon**

Your Excellency, Ato Demeke Mekonnen Hassen, Deputy Prime Minister of
the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,

Honourable Ministers,

Invited Guests,

Dear participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like first of all, to thank and congratulate the Government of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for organizing and hosting this important event, bringing together decision makers, practitioners and development partners supporting the employment creation through investments in infrastructure in Africa and beyond. This is an eloquent testimony of your conviction to the cause of human dignity and the wellbeing of the peoples of our continent.

Let me also express my deep appreciation to our common esteemed guests and participants, most of who have come from far and wide. Your presence today and continuous support and interest in the work of the ILO and its employment-intensive investment programmes is an expressive commitment to discuss issues that are very relevant to making decent work for all a reality across the African region.

His Excellency, Honourable Ministers, Dear participants,

The narrative of Africa's growth potential is well known to us all. The African Economic Outlook 2017 predicts that with its dynamic private sector,

entrepreneurial spirit and vast resources, the continent's average economic growth is expected to rebound from 2.2 % in 2016 to 3.4% in the course of 2017, assuming that the recovery in commodity prices is sustained, the world economy is strengthened and domestic macroeconomic reforms are entrenched. In 2018, growth is expected to consolidate. Things are looking up!

We also know that Africa is facing situations of fragility and poverty, and the threat from the climate change rendering productive lands and resources more precarious, including conflicts ever frequent that contribute to migration and forcibly displaced people as a result. In addition, the impact of unemployment, underemployment and poverty among the vulnerable groups, particularly, the youth, is now being widely recognized as a major challenge and threat to social cohesion, thus requiring urgent joint action by all partners, i.e. governments, social partners, development partners, private sector and civil society. We still have a long way to go. This is a call to which we must all answer, to defend the cause of human dignity.

In this regards, the World leaders gathered at the United Nations special summit and adopted in September 2015 in New York, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, representing the most comprehensive agreement by UN Members since the adoption of the UN Charter.

The special summit puts investment in people and safeguarding the planet at its Centre and gives the international community the impetus it needs to work together to tackle the significant challenges confronting humanity, including those in the world of work.

This was a major decision and a collective responsibility for all of us to take as a lesson – that when we work together we are stronger and the outcomes we achieve are stronger.

His Excellency, Honourable Ministers, Dear participants,

ILO is very pleased to be once again part of this 17th Regional seminar for

labour-based practitioners, aiming to discuss how investments in different sectors (e.g. infrastructure, agriculture, environment, social development) can be shaped to tackle the key development challenges towards achieving the SDGs. Through Goal 8, the Sustainable Development Agenda places social justice and decent work for all at the heart of Agenda 2030. This represents an ambitious trajectory towards sustainable and inclusive growth and development. At the same time by addressing the challenges faced with growing inequality, employment-intensive investment approaches are able to contribute to equity and full and productive work in different sectors, also then able to address the different goals of the SDGs.

Achieving such ambitious goals, however, requires an extraordinary level of mobilisation of investments and partnership at national, regional and global levels, which will harness energy, productive resources, strategic and strong political commitment.

We can no longer do business as usual. We cannot design and apply the same policies or implement the same programmes using the same concepts and resource allocation criteria as usual and expect different results. We need to rethink the way we work and engage across the board to initiate, integrate, and innovate to have transformative effects and this is why we are here in Addis this week. It is now our responsibility to assist in translating the different Head of State political commitments into concrete integrated action in the fields of employment creation, public works and infrastructure investments which have economic, social and environmental impacts.

His Excellency, Honourable Ministers, Dear participants,

We know that we are not starting from scratch; many countries have a foundation and a good record in using local resource-based employment-intensive investments in several sectors, from rural roads, public buildings (schools, health centres, etc.) to hydro-agricultural, land and forestry development and environmental protection, as well as upgrading of communal and sub-urban infrastructure. The application and outcome of

the approach remain limited in many countries. What is needed is more links between investments and employment and sustained over time to go to large scale, with a view to achieving integrated and structural changes in the economy, reaching economic growth and ensuring better distributional effects of such growth. I believe it is with this shared objective and mind-set that all of us: decision makers, practitioners and development partners, are sitting here.

I look forward to engaged discussions, and your commitment to the positive outcomes and resolutions towards concrete strategies and actions from your deliberations.
