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UN Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

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Introduction

Since the end of the two world wars, the United Nations as a body has continued to advocate unity, security, quality life and cooperation among independent states. The body recognizes the importance of good standard of living and the need to improve the pace of economic growth. The body is equally concerned about the state of work across all continents with the full realization that decent work provides the platform for wealth creation and economic independence. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No 8 pushes for decent work and economic growth for all by the year 2030. Is this achievable, considering the status of unequal economic pace in different countries of the world?

In this paper, attention is given to the importance of Goal 8 in relation to education and attitudes of government over creating an enabling environment for decent work for citizens. Work culture in developing and developed economies tends to differ. In spite of the work and productivity conventions ratified by all members of the International Labor Organization, some countries still do not respect the integrity of such conventions. In many others, particularly in Africa, governments tend not to follow up on the standardization of work conditions. This paper holds that societies cannot grow if economic growth is not given adequate attention. The paper addresses the subject of decent work and economic growth for all by 2030 by responding to a number of questions and scenarios.

Question 1: Why is the United Nations goal of Decent work and Economic Growth important in your opinion?

Human beings were created with the innate ability to work for a living. They are by nature mobile with the economic desire for survival. Work provides leisure, experience and economic returns. It is also a platform for social interaction, sharing of ideas and life-long friendship. Work is a productive venture by which human creativity and ability for innovation are displayed. Work is an expression of resources to solve problems, provide goods and services as well as help to improve standard of living. But work must be decent (Raphael, 2021). Decency of work should relate to the environment of work. In essence, the environment of work should observe all the necessary principles of hygiene to prevent jeopardizing human health.

Decent work dictates that ethics and moral standards be applied in all work locations. Indeed, it appeals to the application of rules, regulations and standards. Societies continue to develop, and such development affects quality of human life of which work is part. From all indications, the development of society is hinged on work. Work which is the product of man's efforts at turning resources into goods and services eventually yields the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). By this logic, without decent and productive work, economic growth is a mirage. There is a significant and positive

correlation between work and economic growth (Yildrim, 2019). Work translates to wealth if the goal is to meet human and societal needs. Work and economic growth shift nations away from the poverty level. Poverty has socio-economic consequences for both population and society. The implications of poverty are multi-faceted as it could be reflected in inability to afford health and educational costs.

To a large extent, decent work and economic growth promote good quality life, thus reducing the dependency ratio. One of the major means by which poverty can be eliminated or drastically reduced is economic growth. Economic growth should therefore be the focus of attention by nations, particularly developing nations. The correlation between economic growth and work is strong, implying that an enabling environment is essential for people to participate in work.

Question2: How is the state of decent work and economic growth in the world?

The current world is structured into developed, developing and less-developed nations. The categorization of nations in some circles tends to suggest also that certain nations are under-developed. Each nation category goes by a corresponding economy. Both developing and less developed nations are grossly dependent on developed nations. Majority of the countries in Europe, Asia and America operate a developed economy. Indeed, a developed economy is a function of the state of work and the operating work/industrial policies (Shayan *et al.*, 2022). A critical examination of state of work across the globe will also reveal that work progress is tied to the political character of each nation as much as it is tied to economic policies. The state of work across the globe is better depicted in the statistics at the disposal of the International Labor Organization, which monitors the degree of compliance to its conventions by member nations.

Leaders in advanced economies understand the necessity of work, work relations and ethical values. To this extent, they have established a regulatory system that controls work relations, recognizing the role of all stakeholders in the economic system. Since the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019, work structure across the globe has changed significantly (He & Harris, 2020). The scourge has affected economic growth, rate of growth and production levels in most economies across the world. It has also caused many work organizations to fall back on the application of technology for work processes. While Western Europe, Asia, Canada, Australia and the United States have devised technological measures to improve work status, process and structure in order to raise productivity, Latin American countries and Africa have had a recurring negative impact on their gross domestic products.

In Nigeria for instance, the harsh realities of the economic environment compelled many organizations to embark on leanness, which means retrenchment of a significant proportion of the work force (Olurounbi, 2022). The action has increased the rate of

unemployment in the country. A number of measures have been devised by organizations in different sectors of the Nigerian economy. In certain cases, such measures as casualization, contract work and outsourcing among others were engaged. It is evident that the International Labor Organization is against casualization and other unethical work measures devised by organizations. While multinational corporations operating in host communities and in home countries tend to honour work agreements with respect to diversity rules and work ethics, indigenous companies, in some cases, underestimate the integrity of employees.

Governments across the world have continually intervened in the labor market by means of a range of labor policies and agency monitoring. This compels conformity and other forms of behavior from work organizations. Work improvement in countries depends among others on cooperation between the ministry in charge of labor/industry/employment and registered work firms on labor policies and conventions ratified with ILO (Raphael, 2021). Decent labor implies that attention is given as a matter of priority to security, health and welfare issues at work. Furthermore, labor law has different provisions and clauses in all countries, but the ILO and its conventions tend to be a stabilizing factor in international labor matters, setting the standard for all nations across the world.

Considering the importance of health, workers' health is a priority. Work is no longer decent if workers are exposed to ill-health conditions while at work or by the nature of their work without proper arrangements for healthcare facilities. In certain countries, workers' rights are denied under conditions over which workers have no power to defend themselves legally for fear of intimidation or losing their employment. Observation has been made of preferential treatment given to native workers against immigrant workers in foreign countries, although in some advanced countries efforts have also been made by means of a legal framework to define conditions and terms for immigrant workers (Raphael, 2021). Nonetheless, there is still need for fresh legal framework in the current dispensation for the protection of workers' rights. Within each nation, relevant labor laws should be observed by workers, government and employees.

Question 3: What changes need to happen to achieve work and economic growth?

For developing and less developed countries where the level of poverty is still very high, significant changes need to occur to achieve decent work and economic growth. Decent work is tied to education, ethics, economic ideology and a vision of self-reliance. This implies that the curriculum in schools should incorporate the ideals of decent work and basics of life. Economics should therefore be taught right from the lower level of education. Developed countries have continued to adhere to economic policies that

drive decent work, and are still forward-looking in their approach to work, using technology as the launch pad.

With the COVID-19 dispensation across the globe, new work orientation is imperative for employees. This can be achieved through regular training, management development programs and systemic review of performance. In sum, employee education is critical. Economic growth is a function of availability of infrastructural facilities namely a functional transport system, efficient communication facilities, good health system and functional equipment (Raim & Brown, 2019). However, government policy and political will to improve workers are critical without compromise. In addition, governments across the globe, particularly those countries that are signatories to ILO conventions and protocols. Adherence to ILO protocols aids workers' welfare and promotes cooperation between labor and owners of business. The role of ILO has been to ensure that labor is not exploited, and it has continually advocated the creation of a conducive environment for employees.

Productivity is hampered when work environment is unhealthy, and mistrust is rampant. There is therefore need for changes in the existing labor/employment law as practiced in different economies across the world. This has become imperative, considering the emergence of COVID-19 and its implications for work. Employment contracts will therefore have to be reviewed in the light of issues prompted by the new work environment in which technology tends to dictate new directions, policies and work relationships. It will appear now that governments across the world and ILO need to work closely together to drive economic growth through joint participation in labor programs. Indeed, cooperation between ILO and governments can further activate employers' interest in responding more responsibly to labor and work environment issues.

Question 4: Do you think it is possible to achieve decent work and economic growth around the world? Why or why not?

There is much concern for decent work and work environment in advanced countries than it is in many developing and less developed countries. The production and service system is taken as work in totality. Its result is economic growth or what is proxied as gross domestic product (GDP). In advanced nations where the government deliberately pursues the agenda of decent work and economic growth, the vision or objective is achievable. However, it will require the cooperation and commitment of employers of labor. It also suggests that both government and employers of labor should internalize the significance of decent work and economic growth (Hauf, 2016).

Observations have shown that certain factors could prevent the realization of decent work and economic growth across all nations by the year 2030. Of note is the violation of labor agreements. Violation of decent work principles, agreements, protocols and

conditions is denial of employees' rights to quality life. This violation is against the ideals of the United Nations and World Health Organization. In the first instance, only a responsible government whose leaders understand the socio-political contract with the people can consistently drive the attainment of decent work and economic growth. Work culture and orientation differ in Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Central Europe. So is it in Africa, Latin America, the United States and elsewhere on the globe (Raphael, 2021). Indeed, in Asia, the work culture provides another view of people's attachment to life standards. Work is life because it provides the resources that maintain and add value to life.

Because of different orientations, general level of education, and status of leadership, attainment of decent work and economic growth may not be realistic across all countries, but efforts by ILO and other organized labor groups can create consciousness (Shayan *et al.*, 2022). The continued use of technology at work across all industries seems to be changing the scenario of work, safety and degree of environmental hazards. The challenge against the possibility of realizing decent work and economic growth is with developing countries, particularly on the African continent. Commitment to economic growth is in principle, and not in reality. This demonstration is added to the fact that infrastructure and market opportunities have not grown significantly to the point where more productivity is motivated.

Question 5: How can education lead to a world with decent work and economic growth?

Education is the key to personal and national development. Indeed, sustainable development across the globe is hinged on education. Education unlocks human potentials and sets initiatives to work. Education sharpens human creativity and boosts the discovery of solutions to human problems and society challenges. While education prepares individuals for work roles in society, it significantly enables them not only to create jobs, but to develop their intellect for a meaningful life. However, the value of education to any individual is determined by the quality and volume of educational curriculum or content. Investment in education by governments and individuals is critical to growth and development of societies.

Education, however, has to be planned to meet the needs of individuals and society. Education contributes to the improvement in economic growth and decent work by addressing issues as well as providing the knowledge and skills that individuals require for the work environment. The type of education that leads to a world with decent work and economic growth is such that addresses clean work environment, safety, health, entrepreneurship, production and management of resources. Education remains the tool to decent work and improvement in national economic growth. Both those who constitute government and other members of the population need education for proper decision making, rational analysis and a better thought process. Consequently, adequate life-long investment in education is most ideal. Educational design should be

according to the environmental and economic needs of each nation. For instance, education in developing countries should focus on entrepreneurship knowledge acquisition, self-reliance, scientific orientation, technology, environmental management, healthcare and production management among others.

Decent work specifies obligations for both employees and employers. However, each of the work stakeholders should be responsible to ensure that workplace accidents, exploitations, injustice, denial of rights and privileges are prevented accordingly. Every stakeholder deserves fairness and equity. These ideals should be incorporated in the educational curriculum which prepares individuals to take up work roles in society. Even while still engaged in work, employees should be regularly involved in training, fresh orientation and development programs, which all promote decent work. In line with the above, productive work contributes to economic growth (Raim & Brown, 2019). What it takes to improve economic growth should equally be factored into educational training. In the light of the above, learners should be exposed to the rudiments of economics and management.

Question 6: How can education improve in your community so that the next generation has the tools and mindset to obtain decent work and economic growth?

In the first instance, the present generation of political leaders has to be futuristic in thought and planning. The world is fast experiencing changes, and only proactive leaders can impact the next generation. Education is a tool for national development as much as it is a tool for personal development. Education is a tool for problem-solving as much as it is a resource that transforms individuals' mindsets. It exposes individuals to opportunities as it empowers their minds to think creatively. However, the quality of education is a function of the curriculum and facilities that constitute the educational system. Nonetheless, the methodology of education (teaching) and individuals' preparedness to learn are critical to individuals' improvement.

As the environment continues to change, it demands that educational curriculum be improved to address society problems and meet individuals' diverse needs. An individual whose mind has been improved through education can identify a market, a need in society and create jobs to address the market need. Education broadens individuals' minds and equips them with the power to envision, guided by a clear mission. For my community in Nigeria, which is in the class of developing countries, there are enormous issues surrounding the development of education. There are issues with the supply of qualified teachers. Moreover, payment of teachers' salaries as at when due is an issue that tampers with teachers' motivation, effectiveness and efficiency.

Indeed, the issue of inadequate facilities is recurrent in public and private schools. Similarly, lack of consistent adherence to the school curriculum is a problem in the school system. There is therefore need to improve the educational system in my community to prepare the next generation for work as well as instill in individuals the culture that motivates economic growth. In the first instance, the present school curriculum has to be reviewed to reflect environmental and future needs of the growing generation.

There is also need for educational research to discover the next direction for the nation in terms of philosophy, ideology, vision and ethical orientation. Education provides the link as well as direction for these concepts. The world currently lives in an age of technology and every industry leverages technology. Education in my community must take advantage of technology to expand its base and contribution to society. Improvement in the present educational system is imperative. Stakeholders need to invest massively in education at all levels. Teachers also need to be involved in methods education to enable them adopt new teaching methodologies appropriate for the subjects they teach in community schools. While teachers need regular training to improve their knowledge, skills and competence, school libraries must be stocked with reading materials that could expose learners to more literacy.

Interactive learning is highly recommended. An educational environment in which learners are actively engaged in learning is ideal. Providing learners with the opportunity to participate in class activities is essential for learning improvement. Teachers need to simulate industry scenarios to introduce the industrial world to learners. Learners need to be aware of the practical operations in the various economic industries. Indeed, more frequent trips or excursions to industries are recommended to give learners some practical exposure and experience. Teachers could play video scenarios of events that occur in other sectors of the economy. Textbook learning and interaction with organizations outside the school system would give learners a comprehensive understanding of the demands of society as well as equip them with the motivation to take their place.

A critical recommendation is the introduction and teaching of all the UN sustainable development goals in community schools. This should be in addition to emphasis on economics, entrepreneurship and career talks in the school system. In sum, improvement in education should be seen as a function of the addition of value to the content, methodology and impact of education. For my community, improvement can only be effective with financial investment, discipline and commitment by educational authorities.

Conclusion

The United Nations, International Labor Organization and regional economic bodies have shown significant interest in economic growth among member-countries. Consistent economic growth across the world translates to improvement in standard of living as much as it attracts further investment. An environment that promotes economic growth tends to expand market and employment opportunities. Several international economic organizations and nations are concerned about the eradication of poverty, but owing to factors beyond their control, the fight against poverty may not be easy to win. However, creating the enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive is a strategic move towards providing work.

Furthermore, decent work will thrive when governments are committed to ILO conventions and protocols to the extent of putting them to effect. Decent work may not be feasible for all by 2030, provided public infrastructure is adequate, and appropriate education that meets society needs is planned with an underlining philosophy. Government alone cannot provide employment for all, but it can formulate and execute economic policies that enhance job creation in the private sector. The keys to economic growth are essentially education, entrepreneurship and technology in the current dispensation. Nevertheless, socio-cultural orientation inclusive of ethical values cannot be ruled out as these also make impact on both work and economic growth.

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