

DECENT WORK AND FAIR GLOBALIZATION: A GUIDE TO POLICY DIALOGUE

How the MDG 'Decent Work' Target Can Support a New Approach to Development (Part 1)

After 25 years of the Washington Consensus, during which full employment goals had been downplayed, a worldwide 'social protection' counter-movement is today emerging in response to the consequences of economic globalization and liberalization. One focus of this counter-movement is the promotion of full and decent employment. At the last major international review of progress towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2005 United Nations World Summit, a major qualitative policy shift took place. All Heads of State and Governments committed to strongly support a "fair globalization" and in this context, resolved to make "full and productive employment and decent work for all" a "central objective" of "relevant national and international policies," including development strategies to meet the MDGs.¹

Before this, access to decent employment and livelihoods as an essential route out of poverty was absent from the MDG framework – and more broadly from the global economic agenda, but now is being mainstreamed across the UN and multilateral system.²

The reintegration of full and productive employment into the economic policy and development agendas can greatly contribute to supporting a 'paradigm shift' that has been increasingly called for, particularly in the wake of the food and fuel price increases of 2008 and recent global economic recession. Turning this commitment to a 'Decent Work' target within MDG 1 into concrete national and international policy changes and global economic architecture reforms is now the major challenge.

The 'full and productive employment and decent work for all' target offers potentially very powerful levers to strengthen the accountability of national and international economic policy making bodies

– if their decisions are now to be judged and reoriented in terms of their impact on the quantity and quality of employment; and on broader decent work objectives such as social protection, greater inclusion and meaningful socioeconomic transformation.

The 'Decent work' agenda

The concept of Decent Work grew out of deliberations at the ILO since 1999 to reframe labour and employment goals into four pillars:

1. Full employment (including enterprise creation)
2. Respect for basic workers' rights
3. Social protection
4. Social dialogue

The four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda are not a uniform prescription applicable to all countries, but serve as a development framework to help shape social and economic strategies at national and international levels. However, they do represent universal goals and aspirations to create conditions for a dignified life. People at work need better enforcement of **labor rights** (especially rights of association and collective bargaining) to claim decent remuneration and working conditions; there is also a need for different approaches to economic policy that can better create more productive **employment** and livelihood opportunities. People need **social protection** when they fall ill, reach old age, lose their job or source of livelihood. And people need greater voice to defend their rights – through peaceful demonstration when necessary; around the negotiating table through **social dialogue** when possible.

The decent work objectives cannot be separated from greater progress towards a more "**fair globalization**" – that can better address global inequities, imbalances and asymmetries, as well as failed economic policies. The need to better integrate macroeconomic, trade and financial policies with development and social goals – especially decent work for all – was a central conclusion

¹ Paragraph 47 of the 2005 UN World Summit Outcome Document.

² The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) also prioritized full productive employment and decent work for all during its 2006 session, which called on UN system agencies and invited international financial institutions to mainstream these goals in their policies, programmes and activities.

of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization established by the ILO, which concluded in 2004 that the current model of globalization has failed to meet people's basic and legitimate aspirations for a decent job and a future for their children.

'Decent work' is a human right

Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the "right to work" and that employment must be "freely chosen," under "just and favourable conditions" and equally giving right to "just and favourable remuneration," "protection against unemployment" and "to form and to join trade unions." The universal right to social security is clearly referred to in Article 22. And as the international community, especially advanced industrialized countries, seek to fulfil their commitments to the MDGs and engage in efforts at global economic and financial reforms, implementation of these rights has to be all the more understood in conjunction with Article 28, which states that: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized."

'Decent work' at the heart of a successful recovery: the Global Jobs Pact

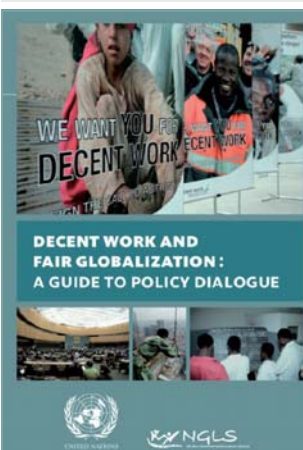
The ILO convened a Global Jobs Summit in June 2009 which adopted a **Global Jobs Pact** that outlines measures to speed up recovery and lay the foundations for the transition to a socially and environmentally sustainable global economy. It prioritizes placing a "social protection floor" under the global economy; preventing wage deflation and the erosion of workers' rights; and systemic financial reforms to ensure finance supports long-term productive investments, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises where most of the new jobs are created. An underlying objective is to increase the

share of wages in national incomes, which have tended to stagnate or decline in real terms all over the world. The Pact was referred to in the Outcome Document of the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and Its Impact on Development (June 2009); it was integrated in the coordinating work of the UN Economic and Social Council (July 2009); and was taken up at the September 2009 G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh (September 2009), which committed to adopt key elements of its general framework.

Broadening the movement

Countries are now developing Decent Work Country Programmes with support from the ILO Office to identify local decent work priority areas, and aim to influence broader national poverty reduction and development frameworks, including Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). It has previously been difficult to integrate meaningfully employment and decent work into PRSP-type frameworks and move beyond Washington Consensus policy orthodoxy. To change the development paradigm, national political leadership and the ability to mobilize different ministries, external partners and the broader civil society behind the decent work agenda is critical.

The Decent Work and Fair Globalization agenda provides a timely opportunity to **build synergies among various constituencies** working across a broad range of complementary issues. This includes those already working for social development; alternative pro-poor macro-economic policies; fundamental structural reforms to the international financial architecture, including new international mechanisms for debt relief/cancellation, global taxation, more just trade that supports development, and a paradigm shift in the development model towards an alternative rights-based approach to economic development.



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