

The Decent Work Agenda in Kenya

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The International Labor Organization (ILO) Decent Work Agenda consists of four elements; employment, rights, protection and social dialogue. The ILO instituted as its main goal “decent work for all”. This paper will discuss the development and progress of these goals in the African country of Kenya. Although Kenya has the largest economy in East Africa with GDP at USD 18 billion, the poor have increased from 3.7 million in 1972-3 to 15 million in the latest data.

INTRODUCTION

Various international agencies including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations (UN) specialized agencies came together in 2000 to formally declare and recognize the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (MDG Report, 2008; UN, 2007). Serving as a framework for the creation of a global partnership for human and economic development, the goals and their targets set forth a plan to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is the agency charged to integrate the Decent Work Agenda into the UN Millennium Development Goals (ILO, 2006; UN, 2007). Significant recognition of the “decent work” proposed by the ILO has been achieved in the media and the public. A decent job is defined as not just any job, but a job to avoid and or escape poverty; not on a temporary basis, but rather on a permanent basis. In many instances, many individuals may be looking for job who cannot find work, many become frustrated with job opportunities, and even many work in jobs that make it impossible for the individual and their family members to escape poverty. This under employment of the work force lessens the economic development of the country’s economy (ILO, 2007). Human resource development is one key to enable the economic viability of the labor market. This paper will explore the Decent Work Agenda, the work of the ILO and the Kenyan government, and implications of the progress made by the programs (ILO, 2007).

KENYA AND THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

Kenya has the largest economy in East Africa with GDP at US\$18 billion (ILO, 2007). However, 46% of the population is determined to be absolute poor. Specifically, the agricultural sector continues to be a dominant sector of the economy, providing 75% of the employment opportunity for the labor force. The traditional social structure means that most live in large extended families on family farms that have existed for many generations. Industrialization remains a main developmental challenge for human resource development. The Decent Work Agenda in Kenya (Guidebook, 2005; ILO, 2007) has three strategic objectives:

- (1) Youth empowerment, youth employment, and elimination of child labor;
- (2) HIV/AIDS social protection; and
- (3) Expansion and strengthening of the national and international framework.

Youth Employment—Strategic Objective (1)

A key challenge to the young seeking employment is unemployment and underemployment, meaning that individuals are accepting work below their potential worth; the youth employment is a key factor to achieving economic stability and growth (Ministry of Labor and Human Resource Development, Kenya, 2003; ILO, 2005). Approximately half of the Kenyan population is under 15, forming 60 per cent of the Kenyan labor force. The unemployment trend has been steadily increasing over the last twenty years from 16 to 25 % in the urban areas to more than 9 per cent in the rural areas (ILO, 2007). Young workers are employed in temporary or casual terms of employment with low income levels and virtually no social protection. In urban settings, concentrations are seen in such occupations as sales, cleaning, domestic care, etc. In a more modern setting, the youth are employed in food processing, industries, textiles, and transport services. Young women face even more problems in the perpetuation of cultural attitudes and discriminatory practices (ILO, 2007). In Africa, the youth inactivity rate for females was 50.2 per cent compared with 31 per cent for males (International Labor Conference 2005). It can be noted that females have less access to education and training opportunities.

Child labor is considered a key obstacle to overcome for the achievement of the MDG2; universal primary education. Child labor is the result of a system with a low value placed on education, poverty, and disease, HIV/AIDS. In 1999 Kenya's Central Bureau of Statistics conducted a study on child labor (International Labor Review, 2003). The results indicated that 1.9 million are working children aged 5 to 17, comprising 51.8 per cent males, and 48.2 per cent females. It is estimated that child labor not only takes place on plantations, but also on small-scale farms (ILO, 2007).

The following table illustrates the governmental and ILO efforts towards youth unemployment and underemployment in Kenya. The implication of these efforts is a concerted focus on improving opportunities for the youth of Kenya.

TABLE 1
GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCY RESPONSES TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

ILO/UN/WORLD BANK YOUTH EMPLOYMENT NETWORK (YEN) 2005	KENYA UNDAF	CHILD LABOR LAWS	Social Security Laws	ILO
Ministry of Youth Affairs—Kenya ILO-Develop HRD strategies; creation of job opportunities	Focus on children	ILO CONVENTIONS 138 (Minimum Wage) of 1973 and 182 (worst child labor forms) of 1999	Being established by the Ministry of Labor and Human Resource Development	Assist with Kenya's goal of being the lead country within the YEN network
Women Entrepreneurship funds—GOWE: Growth Oriented Women's Network	Strengthen emergency preparedness, prevention response, and national systems	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1990		Provide support for labor market information by quantitative and qualitative databases by age and sex
National Employment Policy and Strategy	Promote sustainable livelihoods	African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)		Provide linkages to counseling, training, and entrepreneurship assistance; SYNDICOOP: organizing of informal economy through joint cooperative
Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS)	Reduce socio-economic effect of HIV/AIDS	National Plan of Action--Kenya		Assist with the ERS; technical advice; implementation and monitoring

Ministry of Labor and HRD 2005; Roundtable Meeting, 2003; UNDAF, 2003; ILO, 2004; Report to ILC, (Youth) 2005); Report ILO , 2005

HIV/AIDS and Social Protection—Strategic Objective (2)

The HIV/AIDS problem continues to be an economic, political “national disaster” (UNDAF, 2003). Indeed, it is considered to be the greatest social catastrophe in Kenya's history and a key challenge to Kenya's economic recovery. The massive scale of the disease is indeed having a macro-environmental effect on the country. Kenya's commercial farms have very high levels of HIV infection resulting in high absenteeism and loss of productivity (ILO, 2007). It is estimated that over 2 million are infected with more than 700 deaths daily. Females are being tasked with the caretaking of the HIV/AIDS patients, thus removing them from the workforce. Overall, HIV/AIDS has lowered the life expectancy and has resulted in higher rates of infant mortality (ILO, 2004; ILO, 2007). The government is advocating prevention and

proposing workplace programs; while the ILO is offering advice for the government on the development of various policies and programs and training for the workplace (ILO, 2004).

The following table examines The Kenyan National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and the ILO's assistance to the Kenya. The implication of this table is that strategic plans are in place not only in Kenya, but also within the ILO to combat the social "national disaster". This recovery is a necessary first step to assist in gender dimensions within the labor force.

TABLE 2
GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

KENYA NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN ON HIV/AIDS	ILO
Prevention Advocacy 200-2005 National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS	Global Fund to Aid AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM)
Managing workplace programs; national social insurance pension scheme to meet ILO standards	Assistance in drafting policies, regulations, and legislation span
Ratification on ILO Convention No. 111 Discrimination	Integrate HIV/AIDS indicators into the Poverty Monitoring Systems (PMS)
Ratification on ILO Convention no. 100 (equal remuneration)	Training tools in the workplace to address HIV/AIDS

(Kenya National Strategic Plan, 2008; ILO 2007)

Expansion and Strengthening of International Framework—Strategic Objective (3)

Human resource development is the key to building an effective program for handling labor disputes, collective bargaining, training programs in various human resource activities, and in building a labor market database. Entrepreneurial pursuits for women and small enterprises also will receive assistance and human resource development opportunities. Currently, the ILO has two programs aimed at women entrepreneurs, the Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) and Growth Oriented Women Entrepreneurs (GOWE). The programs are funded by Irish Aid and ADB/IFC and emphasize female entrepreneurs that consider a business with growth potential (ILO, 2004; ILO, 2007).

Sectors in education and training, mining, and tourism will also benefit from the human resource activities. United Nations agencies will continue to work with the Government of Kenya on the Decent

Work Agenda on youth development, HIV/AIDS and social protection, and the global development of the inter-agency cooperation within the framework of the Decent Work Agenda as illustrated in the previous tables.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Kenya's economic programs in conjunction with the Decent Work Agenda of the ILO and the funding of the World Bank will provide assistance in battling the unemployment and underemployment in Kenya. However, the challenges remain in fully realizing the potential of human resources within the country to realize economic and social progress in meeting the strategic objectives of the Decent Work Agenda. The Millennium Development Goals of halving the people living on US\$1 a day by 2015 has already been formally stated in Sub-Saharan Africa as "Not likely" (ILO 2003; ILO 2007). Through the Decent Work Agenda's strategies – the focus on the youth employment, the battle against HIV/AIDS, and the increase of global efforts by various agencies such as the ILO, World Bank, UN, and Kenya's government, the march forward to make progress on the Millennium Development Goals will continue (ILO,2006; ILO, 2007; Sparreboom, 2007). The final implication is as a result of these efforts, human resource development will be positively affected in Kenya; furthermore, promoting decent work opportunities.

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