

# Decent Work: Concept, Theory, and Measurement

Decent work is a concept that has gained increasing prominence in recent years. It refers to work that is productive, fairly remunerated, and carried out in conditions of freedom, equity, and human dignity. Decent work is not simply about having a job, but about having a job that provides a decent standard of living, allows for personal and professional development, and respects the fundamental rights of workers.



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by Jeffrey D. Sachs

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The concept of decent work has its origins in the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO). In 1999, the ILO adopted the Decent Work Agenda, which outlined a set of four strategic objectives for promoting decent work:

\* Creating more and better jobs \* Extending social protection \* Promoting social dialogue \* Respecting fundamental rights at work

These four objectives have become the cornerstone of the ILO's work on decent work, and have been incorporated into the policies and programs of many countries around the world.

## **Dimensions of Decent Work**

Decent work has four key dimensions:

\* **Productivity:** Decent work is productive work that contributes to economic growth and development. It is work that is carried out efficiently and effectively, and that uses resources sustainably. \* **Fair remuneration:** Decent work is fairly remunerated work that provides workers with a decent standard of living. It is work that is paid a wage or salary that is sufficient to meet the basic needs of workers and their families, and that allows for savings and investment. \* **Freedom:** Decent work is work that is carried out in conditions of freedom. It is work that is not subject to forced or compulsory labor, and that respects the fundamental rights of workers, including the right to freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. \* **Equity:** Decent work is work that is carried out in conditions of equity. It is work that is not subject to discrimination or exploitation, and that provides equal opportunities for all workers, regardless of their gender, race, religion, or other characteristics.

These four dimensions are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. They are essential for creating work that is both productive and human-centered.

## **Measurement of Decent Work**

Measuring decent work is a complex task. It requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account all four dimensions of decent work. The

ILO has developed a set of indicators that can be used to measure decent work at the national and international levels. These indicators include:

\* **Employment:** The rate of employment, the quality of employment, and the distribution of employment across different sectors and occupations. \* **Wages:** The level of wages and salaries, the distribution of wages and salaries, and the gender pay gap. \* **Working conditions:** The health and safety of workers, the length of the working day, and the availability of paid leave. \* **Social protection:** The coverage and adequacy of social protection programs, such as health insurance, unemployment insurance, and old-age pensions. \* **Fundamental rights:** The respect for fundamental rights at work, such as the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and the prohibition of forced labor.

These indicators can be used to track progress towards decent work over time, and to identify areas where further action is needed.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

Promoting decent work globally is a challenge. There are a number of factors that can hinder the creation and sustainability of decent work, including:

\* **Globalization:** Globalization can lead to increased competition for jobs and downward pressure on wages. It can also lead to the outsourcing of jobs to countries with lower labor costs, which can result in job losses and a decline in working conditions. \* **Technological change:** Technological change can lead to job displacement and a decline in the demand for certain types of skills. It can also lead to the creation of new jobs, but these jobs may not always be decent jobs. \* **Informal economy:** The informal

economy is a growing phenomenon in many countries. Informal workers are not covered by labor laws and regulations, and they often work in precarious and dangerous conditions. \* **Climate change:** Climate change is having a significant impact on the world of work. It is leading to job losses in certain sectors, such as agriculture and tourism, and it is creating new jobs in other sectors, such as renewable energy and environmental protection.

Despite these challenges, there are a number of opportunities to promote decent work globally. These include:

\* **Investment in education and training:** Investing in education and training can help workers to acquire the skills they need to compete in the global economy. It can also help workers to adapt to new technologies and to transition to new jobs. \* **Social protection:** Expanding social protection programs can help to protect workers from economic shocks, such as job losses and illness. It can also help to reduce poverty and inequality. \*

**Respect for fundamental rights:** Respecting fundamental rights at work is essential for creating decent work. It is important to ensure that workers have the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to a safe and healthy working environment. \* **Sustainable development:** Promoting sustainable development can help to create jobs and improve working conditions. It can also help to reduce poverty and inequality, and to protect the environment.

By investing in education and training, expanding social protection, respecting fundamental rights, and promoting sustainable development, we can create a more just and equitable world where everyone has the opportunity to work in decent conditions.

Decent work is essential for a just and equitable world. It is work that is productive, fairly remunerated, and carried out in conditions of freedom, equity, and human dignity. Promoting decent work is a challenge, but it is a challenge that we must meet. By investing in education and training, expanding social protection, respecting fundamental rights, and promoting sustainable development, we can create a world where everyone has the opportunity to work in decent conditions.



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