

Promoting Sustained Economic Growth and Decent Work for All

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Abstract

Fostering decent work and economic growth is vital in the realization of the Sustainable Development agenda. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 under the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. This paper critically discusses the need to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all. It argues that achieving economic growth and decent work for all is vital in fostering Sustainable Development. The paper examines the measures and progress made towards promoting economic growth and decent work for all at various levels. It also interrogates some of the challenges facing the achievement of this goal. In addition, the paper discusses some of the interventions necessary for promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all.

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1.0 Introduction

Productive employment and decent work have been recognized as key elements to achieving a fair globalization and poverty reduction¹. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives². ILO notes that decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men³.

Fostering decent work and economic growth is vital in the realization of the Sustainable Development agenda⁴. It has been noted that decent work and economic growth focuses on creating opportunities for everyone to have access to quality employment that provides fair wages, social protection, and safe working conditions⁵. It seeks to eradicate forced labor, child labor, and all forms of discrimination in the workplace⁶. In addition, achieving this goal emphasizes the importance of economic growth that is sustainable, inclusive, and benefits all members of the society⁷.

The United Nations *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁸ captures the need to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all. It sets out the global agenda

¹ International Labour Organization, 'Decent Work' Available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Close the Gap Foundation, 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://www.closesthegapfoundation.org/glossary/decent-work-and-economic-growth> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ United Nations General Assembly, 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities⁹. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all¹⁰.

SDG 8 sets out several targets that are vital in realizing promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all¹¹. These include: sustaining per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth per annum in the least developed countries¹²; achieving higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors¹³; promoting development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services¹⁴; progressively improving global resource efficiency in consumption and production and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation¹⁵; achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value¹⁶; substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training¹⁷; taking immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, ending modern slavery and human trafficking and securing the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid, SDG 8.1

¹³ Ibid, SDG 8.2s

¹⁴ Ibid, SDG 8.3

¹⁵ Ibid, SDG 8.4

¹⁶ Ibid, SDG 8.5

¹⁷ Ibid, SDG 8.6

soldiers¹⁸; and protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment¹⁹. Realizing these targets is key in promoting economic growth and decent work for all.

This paper critically discusses the need to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all. It argues that achieving economic growth and decent work for all is vital in fostering Sustainable Development. The paper examines the measures and progress made towards promoting economic growth and decent work for all at various levels. It also interrogates some of the challenges facing the achievement of this goal. In addition, the paper discusses some of the interventions necessary for promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all.

2.0 Human Rights Approach to Sustained Economic Growth and Decent Work for All

Promoting decent work and sustainable economic growth within the framework of SDG 8 entails addressing gender inequalities, the consequences of market economies, and the role of the informal sector while also considering environmental sustainability²⁰. It has been noted that SDG 8 is unique among the SDGs in that it covers all three dimensions of sustainable development by integrating economic, social and environmental issues²¹. In terms of environmental sustainability, conserving the environment is key in promoting sustained economic growth since the natural environment plays an important role in supporting economic activities²². Environmental conservation contributes directly to

¹⁸ Ibid, SDG 8.7

¹⁹ Ibid, SDG 8.8

²⁰ Chigbu. B., & Nekhwevha. F., 'Exploring the Concepts of Decent Work Through the Lens of SDG 8: Addressing Challenges and Inadequacies' Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10694193/> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

²¹ International Labour Organization., 'World is "Well off Track" to Achieve SDG 8, New ILO Research Finds' Available at https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_894138/lang-en/index.htm (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

²² United Nations Environment Programme., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-8> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

economic progress by providing resources and raw materials such as water, timber and minerals that are required as inputs for the production of goods and services; and indirectly, through services provided by ecosystems including carbon sequestration, water purification, managing flood risks, and nutrient cycling²³. In addition, environmental and natural disasters directly affect economic activities resulting in huge economic losses throwing many households into poverty²⁴. Conserving the environment and maintaining ecosystems and mitigating climate change can therefore have a great positive impact on countries' economic and employment sectors²⁵. In the context of economic sustainability, sustained and inclusive economic growth is a prerequisite for Sustainable Development, and can contribute to improved livelihoods for people around the world²⁶. Sustained economic growth can lead to new and better employment opportunities and provide greater economic security for all²⁷. Promoting sustained economic growth and decent work is also key in fostering social progress by diminishing inequalities between the rich and poor²⁸. Realizing SDG 8 therefore envisages achieving all facets of Sustainable Development being environmental sustainability, social progress, and economic development²⁹.

Economic growth and decent work are key human rights that have been embraced in various human right instruments. According to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*³⁰, everyone person has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment³¹. It further provides that everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Universal Declaration of Human Rights., Available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

³¹ Ibid, article 23 (1)

ensuring for themselves and their family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection³². In addition, UDHR stipulates that everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay³³. The UDHR therefore sets out key labour rights are crucial in promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all.

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*³⁴ requires all states to recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain their living by work which they freely choose or accept, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right³⁵. ICESCR also requires states to recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work including fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work; safe and healthy working conditions; equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and competence; and rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for public holidays³⁶. The ICESCR also enshrines the right of every person to form and join trade unions³⁷. It further prohibits child labour and requires states to set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law³⁸. Due to these key provisions aimed at promoting

³² Ibid, article 23 (3)

³³ Ibid, article 24

³⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights., Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cescr.pdf> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

³⁵ Ibid, article 6 (1)

³⁶ Ibid, article 7

³⁷ Ibid, article 8

³⁸ Ibid, article 10 (3)

decent work for sustained economic growth, the ICESCR has been described as the most comprehensive treaty with respect to the right to decent work³⁹.

The ILO Conventions have also been identified as fundamental in ensuring decent work for all and sustained economic growth and are at times referred to as the core labour standards⁴⁰. These Conventions have been described as fundamental to the rights of human beings at work, irrespective of the level of development of individual member states⁴¹. They provide a necessary framework from which to strive freely for the improvement of individual and collective conditions of work⁴². They include Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)⁴³; Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)⁴⁴; Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)⁴⁵; Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105)⁴⁶; Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)⁴⁷; Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182)⁴⁸; Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)⁴⁹; and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)⁵⁰. In addition, the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*⁵¹ establishes four core labor standards based on ILO conventions which are: freedom of association and the right to

³⁹ Frey, D., & MacNaughton, G., 'A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda' Available at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2158244016649580> (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

⁴⁰ International Labour Organization., 'The International Labour Organization's Fundamental Conventions' Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_095895.pdf (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ International Labour Organization., 'The International Labour Organization's Fundamental Conventions' Op Cit

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work., Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_467653.pdf (Accessed on 15/04/2024)

collective bargaining; the elimination of forced or compulsory labor; the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in employment⁵². These instruments are vital in promoting decent work for all towards sustained economic growth.

At the continental level, the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*⁵³ embraces sustained economic growth and decent work for all as fundamental human rights in Africa. The Charter provides that all people shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind⁵⁴. The Charter further stipulates that states shall have the duty, individually or collectively, to ensure the exercise of the right to development⁵⁵. In relation to decent work, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights provides that every individual shall have the right to work under equitable and satisfactory conditions, and shall receive equal pay for equal work⁵⁶. Implementing this Charter can therefore enhance sustained economic growth and decent work for all in Africa.

Other key human rights instruments in this field include the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*⁵⁷ which seeks to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (including the right to decent work) by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity; the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*⁵⁸ which urges

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights., Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36390-treaty-0011_-_african_charter_on_human_and_peoples_rights_e.pdf (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁵⁴ Ibid, article 22 (1)

⁵⁵ Ibid, article 22 (2)

⁵⁶ Ibid, article 15

⁵⁷ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities., United Nations., Available at <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁵⁸ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women., Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in political, social, economic and cultural fields to enable them exercise and enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to work, on a basis of equality with men; and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*⁵⁹ which prohibits all forms of child labour. At a national level, the *Constitution of Kenya*⁶⁰ enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms including economic and social rights that are key in promoting sustained economic growth⁶¹. Further, the Constitution of Kenya envisages access to employment for all persons including youths, minorities and marginalized groups⁶². It also enshrines core labour rights including the right to fair remuneration, to reasonable working conditions, to form, join or participate in the activities and programmes of a trade union; and to go on strike⁶³. It is imperative to actualize these provisions in order to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all in Kenya.

From the foregoing, it emerges that embracing a human rights approach to economic growth and decent work can enhance the attainment of these key goals under the Sustainable Development agenda⁶⁴. States should therefore ensure the realization of these core human rights.

3.0 Linking Decent Work for All and Sustained Economic Growth

It has been noted that for a society to reach inclusive and sustainable economic growth, conditions must be created to allow people to have quality jobs that stimulate the economy while not harming the environment⁶⁵. Sustained economic growth requires the

⁵⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child., Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁶⁰ Constitution of Kenya., 2010., Government Printer, Nairobi

⁶¹ Ibid, article 43

⁶² Ibid, article 55 (c), & 56 (c)

⁶³ Ibid, article 41

⁶⁴ Frey. D., & MacNaughton. G., 'A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda' Op Cit

⁶⁵ Council of Europe., 'SDG 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All' Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/goal-8> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

creation of an equitable work environment that includes all members of society⁶⁶. In addition, the integration of disadvantaged populations presents countries with an opportunity to stimulate economic and social growth by undermining inequalities⁶⁷. Sustained and inclusive economic growth can drive progress, create decent jobs for all and improve living standards⁶⁸. According to ILO, putting employment creation at the heart of economic policy-making and development plans, will not only generate decent work opportunities but also more robust, inclusive and poverty-reducing sustained economic growth⁶⁹.

Decent work for all is also vital in sustained economic growth through poverty eradication and enhancing social progress⁷⁰. It has been asserted that poverty eradication is only possible through stable and well-paid employment opportunities⁷¹. According to the United Nations, society as a whole benefits when more people are being productive and contributing to their country's growth⁷². Productive employment and decent work are therefore key elements to achieving fair globalization, poverty reduction, and sustained economic growth⁷³. In addition, unemployment can lead to unrest and disrupt peace if it is left unaddressed therefore hindering economic growth⁷⁴. As a result, it has been posited that achieving SDG 8 is crucial for ending all forms of poverty and ensuring that no one is left behind, since obtaining decent employment is the most direct and sustainable pathway out of poverty⁷⁵.

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ International Labour Organization., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/goal-8/lang--en/index.htm> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁷⁰ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth: Why it Matters' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-8.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Background Paper on Decent Work and Economic Growth: Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 8 in Africa' ECA/RFSD/2021/8., Available at

Sustained economic growth and decent work are therefore inextricably linked. When there is sustained economic growth, more job opportunities are created, income levels increase, and the living standards for individuals and communities improve⁷⁶. In addition, access to decent work, which provides fair wages, social protection, and opportunities for personal development, helps lift people out of poverty and accelerates economic development⁷⁷. It enables individuals to meet their basic needs, access essential services, and break the cycle of poverty which is a crucial component of economic growth and social progress⁷⁸. Further, inclusive and sustained economic growth helps to reduce inequalities by providing equal access to resources and opportunities⁷⁹. Decent work also promotes social dialogue, workers' rights, and social protection, which can help address disparities in power dynamics and reduce inequalities between different social groups⁸⁰. Promoting sustained growth and decent work for all is therefore key in the Sustainable Development agenda by ensuring the efficient use of resources, minimizing environmental damage, and supporting long-term social and economic well-being of all persons⁸¹.

However, it has also been noted that the linkage between sustained economic growth and decent work for all may be problematic⁸². For example, it has been noted that the human right to full employment and decent work is not conditioned on economic growth⁸³. There are many steps that governments may take toward realizing full employment and

<https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/TCND/ARFSD2021/Documents/Background%20paper%20on%20decent%20work%20and%20economic%20growth%20progress%20report%20on%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goal%208%20in%20Africa%20EN.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁷⁶ Close the Gap Foundation., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ International Labour Organization., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

⁸⁰ Close the Gap Foundation., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Frey. D., & MacNaughton. G., 'A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda' Op Cit

⁸³ Frey. D., & MacNaughton. G., 'A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda' Op Cit

decent work even in the absence of economic growth⁸⁴. It has been observed that several countries have over the years implemented employment guarantee policies precisely because a lack of economic growth has resulted in the lack of employment opportunities⁸⁵. Further, it has also been noted that sustained economic growth does not necessarily result in the realization of decent work for all⁸⁶. For example, economic growth in some countries is wage-led, meaning that a boost in worker incomes has greater impact on sustained economic growth than creating more employment opportunities⁸⁷. Further, it has been argued that despite decent work being an important goal from an economic perspective, the work process is fundamentally important for sustainability⁸⁸. The goal therefore should become *sustainable* work in order to encompass social and environmental sustainability aspects of work, as well as decency, in line with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development(Emphasis added)⁸⁹. It is therefore necessary to address these causal linkages in order to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all. It is also vital to address some of the challenges facing the attainment of these key goals under the Sustainable Development agenda.

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Kreinin. H., & Aigner. E., 'From "Decent Work and Economic Growth" to "Sustainable Work and Economic Degrowth": A New Framework for SDG 8' *Empirica* (2022) 49:281–311

⁸⁹ Ibid

4.0 Factors hindering Sustained Economic Growth and Decent Work for All

According to the United Nations, several challenges are hindering the realization of SDG 8 including a persistent lack of decent work opportunities⁹⁰. It notes that the creation of quality employment opportunities remains a major challenge for almost all countries⁹¹. According to ILO, sustained economic growth is yet to be realized with approximately half the world's population still living on an income on the equivalent of about 2 United States Dollars a day⁹². It further notes that in many places, access to employment does not guarantee the ability to escape from poverty⁹³. According to ILO, a continued lack of decent work opportunities, insufficient investments and under-consumption lead to an erosion of the basic social contract underlying democratic societies: that all must share in progress⁹⁴. Inequalities are also evident in the job market with women and youths being underrepresented⁹⁵. It has also been noted that patterns of occupational segregation mean some occupations remain dominated by men or women, with the latter tending to be lower in status and pay⁹⁶. The progress towards SDG 8 is therefore characterized by slower growth, widening inequalities, and not enough jobs to keep up with a growing labour force⁹⁷.

Promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all remains one of the most daunting challenges facing the African continent⁹⁸. It has been

⁹⁰ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² International Labour Organization., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ United Nations Women., 'SDG 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All' Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-8-decent-work-economic-growth> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ United Nations Development Programme., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/decent-work-and-economic-growth> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

⁹⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Background Paper on Decent Work and Economic Growth: Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 8 in Africa' ECA/RFS/2021/8, Op Cit

noted that economic growth on the African continent had not been inclusive and fast enough to absorb the growing labour force in the formal economy. The majority of the labour force in Africa is in the informal sector⁹⁹. However, informal employment in Africa is often characterized by lower productivity, lower pay, limited social protection coverage, high levels of working poverty, and failure to adhere to human rights standards¹⁰⁰. The lack of sufficient full, productive and decent jobs is complicating efforts to eradicate poverty on the continent and ensure sustained economic growth prosperity for all¹⁰¹.

In light of the foregoing challenges, there is need to accelerate efforts towards sustained economic growth and decent work for all. ILO notes that despite isolated pockets of achievement, progress towards SDG 8 is slowing down in many areas of the world¹⁰². It points out that an urgent acceleration of efforts is required to bring about transformative change in support of SDG 8 in its three dimensions of sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth¹⁰³.

5.0 Way Forward

In order to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all, it is necessary for states to adopt and implement development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation¹⁰⁴. It is also vital for states to encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises through measures such as access to financial services in order to ensure sustained economic growth¹⁰⁵. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² International Labour Organization., 'Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity' Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--inst/documents/publication/wcms_725984.pdf (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

¹⁰³ Ibid

¹⁰⁴ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

urges states to achieve higher levels of economic productivity through approaches such as diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors¹⁰⁶. It has also been suggested that local authorities and communities can renew and plan their cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion, personal security and to stimulate innovation, employment, and economic growth¹⁰⁷. It is also key for states to ensure that while pursuing economic growth, the growth is sustainable¹⁰⁸. The idea of sustainable economic growth emphasizes the need to use natural resources more efficiently while promoting economic growth as a means to overcome poverty and underdevelopment¹⁰⁹.

It is also vital to ensure access to employment opportunities for all persons including the youth, women and persons with disabilities in order to ensure decent work for all for sustained economic growth¹¹⁰. According to ILO, youth unemployment is one of the key challenges facing the realization of SDG 8¹¹¹. It also notes that a notable gender gap still persists in the employment market especially in emerging and developing nations¹¹². It is therefore important to make decent work a reality for all persons including youths, women, and persons with disabilities. Providing youth the best opportunity to transition to a decent job calls for investing in education and training of the highest possible quality in order to provide youth with skills that match labour market demands, giving them access to social protection and basic services regardless of their contract type, as well as leveling the playing field so that all aspiring youth can attain productive employment

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

¹⁰⁷ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth: Why it Matters' Op Cit

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Available at <https://stats.unctad.org/Dgff2016/prosperity/goal8/index.html> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹¹¹ International Labour Organization., 'Global Unemployment Rate Set to Increase in 2024 While Growing Social Inequalities Raise Concerns, Says ILO Report' Available at [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_908068/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO's%20World%20Employment%20and%20Social%20Outlook%20Trends%203A%202024%20\(WESO,fallen%20below%20pre%20pandemic%20levels.](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_908068/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=The%20ILO's%20World%20Employment%20and%20Social%20Outlook%20Trends%203A%202024%20(WESO,fallen%20below%20pre%20pandemic%20levels.) (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

¹¹² Ibid

regardless of their gender, income level or socio-economic background¹¹³. It has been pointed out that governments need to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all¹¹⁴.

There is also need for states and all persons to respect and uphold fundamental rights and freedoms of workers and ensure compliance with core labour standards in order to foster decent work for all¹¹⁵. It has been noted that respect for workers' rights and compliance with labour standards are the foundation of decent work and social justice¹¹⁶. Substandard working conditions are often related to poverty, inequality, discrimination, and low levels of economic development¹¹⁷. SDG 8 requires all states to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers¹¹⁸. In addition, the *ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*¹¹⁹ establishes four core labor standards based on ILO conventions which are: freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of forced or compulsory labor; the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in employment¹²⁰. It is therefore imperative for all states and employers to comply with fundamental human rights and labour standards including the elimination of child labor, the eradication of forced labor, the protection of labor rights (including fair remuneration, reasonable working conditions, and the freedom to form, join, or participate in the activities and programmes

¹¹³ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹¹⁴ Ibid

¹¹⁵ International Labour Organization., 'Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity' Op Cit

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

¹¹⁹ International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work., Op Cit

¹²⁰ Ibid

of a trade union), and the promotion of safe work environments in order to promote decent work for all¹²¹.

Finally, there is need to integrate sustained economic growth and decent work with environmental sustainability in order to achieve Sustainable Development¹²². Achieving sustained economic growth and decent work for all is the result of successful integration of economic, social and environmental targets in a balanced manner¹²³. SDG 8 takes into account the environmental dimension by emphasizing the importance of a transition towards responsible consumption behaviour¹²⁴. It urges countries to strive for economic growth but decouple it from environmental degradation by adopting technological innovations and changing consumption behaviours¹²⁵. In order to achieve this goal, countries have been encouraged to embrace the idea of green growth¹²⁶. The concept of green growth presents countries with an opportunity to strike a balance between human development, environmental conservation and economic development¹²⁷. Green growth results in improved human wellbeing and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities¹²⁸. This idea emphasizes environmentally sustainable economic progress to foster low-carbon, socially inclusive development¹²⁹.

¹²¹ Frey, D., & MacNaughton, G., 'A Human Rights Lens on Full Employment and Decent Work in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda' Op Cit

¹²² International Labour Organization., 'Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity' Op Cit

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Bergius, M., 'Towards a Green Modernization Development Discourse: The New Green Revolution in Africa.' *Journal of Political Ecology*, 2019

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe., 'Greening the Economy: Mainstreaming the Environment into Economic Development.' Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=796&menu=1515> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

¹²⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific., 'Green Growth Uptake in Asia-Pacific Region.' Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/cep/CEP20/ppp/Item10_b_ESCAP_GreenGrowthUptake_esm.pdf (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

Greening economies is therefore a key tool of eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems¹³⁰. It is therefore necessary for all countries to green their economies in order to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all.

6.0 Conclusion

Fostering decent work and economic growth is vital in the realization of the Sustainable Development agenda¹³¹. SDG 8 seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all¹³². Sustained economic growth and decent work for all are related concepts that need to be pursued together¹³³. When there is sustained economic growth, more job opportunities are created, income levels increase, and the living standards for individuals and communities improve¹³⁴. In addition, access to decent work, which provides fair wages, social protection, and opportunities for personal development, helps lift people out of poverty and accelerates economic growth¹³⁵. It enables individuals to meet their basic needs, access essential services, and break the cycle of poverty which is a crucial component of economic growth and social progress¹³⁶. However, there has been slow progress towards promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all especially in Africa with economic underdevelopment and unemployment being prevalent all over the continent¹³⁷. In order to promote sustained economic growth and decent work for all, it is necessary for states to adopt and implement development-oriented policies that

¹³⁰ United Nations., 'The Future we Want: Outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20–22 June 2012.' Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/733FutureWeWant.pdf> (Accessed on 16/04/2024)

¹³¹ Close the Gap Foundation., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ International Labour Organization., 'Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹³⁴ Close the Gap Foundation., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Background Paper on Decent Work and Economic Growth: Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 8 in Africa' ECA/RFSD/2021/8, Op Cit

support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation¹³⁸; ensure access to employment opportunities for all persons including the youth, women and persons with disabilities¹³⁹; respect and uphold fundamental rights and freedoms of workers and ensure compliance with core labour standards¹⁴⁰; and integrate sustained economic growth and decent work with environmental sustainability in order to achieve Sustainable Development¹⁴¹. Promoting sustained economic growth and decent work for all is a key component that should be realized in our journey towards Sustainable Development.

¹³⁸ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

¹³⁹ United Nations., 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' Op Cit

¹⁴⁰ International Labour Organization., 'Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity' Op Cit

¹⁴¹ International Labour Organization., 'Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity' Op Cit

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