

Forum: United Nations Human Rights Council

Issue: The question of maintaining healthy working conditions and standards of safety in developing countries

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Introduction

According to a recent report from the International Labour Organization (ILO), the major problem facing global labour markets is a lack of quality jobs, with millions of workers being forced to accept subpar working conditions.

A majority of the 3.3 billion people who were employed globally in 2018 lacked sufficient economic stability, material well-being, and equality of opportunity. Additionally, advances in the calibre of jobs are not keeping pace with progress in the global reduction of unemployment. The ILO research warns that, at the current rate of growth, achieving the objective of decent work for everyone as set forth in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - particularly SDG 8 - seems unattainable for many countries.

Among the most disadvantaged are sanitation workers. Millions of sanitation workers in LEDCs are compelled to work in hazardous conditions that violate their dignity and human rights, damage their health, and put their lives in danger. They frequently represent the most disadvantaged, underprivileged, and discriminated-against members of society, going about their work without tools, safety precautions, or legal protections.

Protecting the livelihoods of these essential workers is crucial to the development of Human Rights globally, especially in LEDCs.

Definition of Key Terms

LEDC

Less economically developed country

Developing Country

A sovereign state with a lesser developed industrial base and a lower Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries.

MEDC

More economically developed country

Sanitation workers

A sanitation worker is a person responsible for cleaning, maintaining, operating, or emptying the equipment or technology at any step of the sanitation chain. This is the definition used in the narrower sense within the WASH (Water, Sanitisation and Hygiene) sector. More broadly speaking, sanitation workers may also be involved in cleaning streets, parks, public spaces, sewers, stormwater drains, and public toilets.

Sustainable Development

The organizing principle for meeting human development goals while sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend.

Marginalised

Relegated to an underprivileged position within a society or group

Stigmatised

To characterise or brand as disgraceful or ignominious

Risk Assessment

The process of analyzing potential events that may result in the loss of an asset, loan, or investment.

Labour Force

The total number of people who are currently employed plus the number of people who are unemployed and seeking employment.

Absenteeism

A habitual pattern of absence from a duty or obligation without good reason. Absenteeism has been viewed as an indicator of poor individual performance, as well as a breach of an implicit contract between employee and employer.

Key Issues

Lack of government intervention

In LEDCs, where working conditions procure the most atrocious ratings, we can observe a laissez-faire attitude from the governments of those nations towards protecting the rights and working conditions of these workers. United Nations organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) inform these nations about their sanction violations but they often “sweep the problem under the rug” by presenting changes in a few of their worker's locations but never respond with widespread reform. This is also partly due to the fact that a lot of LEDCs simply cannot afford the widespread change that reform requires and the rehabilitation of working conditions of these workers is simply not important enough to fund using the limited capital they have. For instance, sanitation personnel encounter

many difficulties as a result of their low social visibility. Only a few developing nations have any rules in place to safeguard these workers. Where regulations do exist, governments may not have the resources or expertise to carry them out, and the lack of power these positions hold within the labour force create additional difficulties such as a lack of influence to fight for their rights.

Growing unemployment

In LEDCs where more than 50% of its working age population is unemployed, desperate families are willing to go through despondent measures to provide for their loved ones. With a lack of government intervention and thus a steady increase in unemployment, workers are willing to sacrifice the conditions they work in, only to make fractions of a livable wage. Because the workers do not complain about the working conditions they are given, the governments are not forced to change them and thus creating a vicious cycle where workers suffer through their working hours in order to survive.

Rising Health Concerns

Poor sanitation is responsible for up to 432 000 diarrhoeal deaths each year in East African states (ie: Madagascar, Mauritius) and is linked to the spread of other diseases such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid, hepatitis A, and polio. Sanitisation workers play an important role in improving the health and well-being of people all over the world, and they all have the same right to good health.

Waste must be properly treated before it can be disposed of or used. Developing nations such as Sri Lanka do not have the established infrastructure to properly treat waste, especially in rural communities. Therefore, Workers frequently come into direct contact with human waste, working without equipment or protection to remove it by hand, exposing them to a wide range of health hazards and diseases. This causes them to be infected with diseases as such dysentery, typhoid, hepatitis A, and polio as well as

spread them amongst their communities. Without the facilities accessible to them for the right treatment, these diseases are often fatal.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Africa

In Africa, only 4.5% of the working-age population in the region is unemployed, with 60% officially employed by recognised institutions. However, rather than indicating a well-functioning labour market, many workers are being forced to accept low-wage jobs that lack security, decent pay, and social protection. The labour force is expected to grow by more than 14 million people per year until 2027. In contrast, economic growth rates are not expected to hit targets until 2027 to create enough high-quality jobs for this rapidly growing labour force. This means that a significant proportion of Africa's labour market will continue to work under bad working conditions and Africa will not have the capital to fund any kind of structured nationwide reform.

The World Health Organisation

The World Health Organization calls on all government agencies, employers along with their workers' organizations, and the global community to take immediate steps to strengthen countries' labour forces' health. This is to protect the occupational health and safety of health workers and emergency responders, respect their rights to decent working conditions, and develop national occupational health programs and services for health workers. The ILO has designated World Day for Safety and Health at Work (28th April 2020) to address the outbreak of infectious diseases at work, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to promote the right of workers to habitable working conditions and occupational health.

Health workers in developing countries are still on the front lines of the COVID-19 outbreak response, putting them at risk of infection. Pathogen exposure, long working hours, psychological distress, fatigue, occupational burnout, stigma, and physical and psychological violence are all hazards.

Infections with COVID-19, insufficient infection prevention and control measures, occupational safety and health, mental health and psychosocial support for health workers all result in high absenteeism and deplete the health workforce. Governmental intervention to help prevent these rises in depleting health conditions, along with access to clean working condition environments will indefinitely improve worker morale, safety and health.

International Labour Organisation

According to the 'ILO Constitution', "Whereas labour conditions exist that involve such injustice, suffering, and privation to large numbers of people as to cause such unrest that the peace and harmony of the world are jeopardized." This statement emphasizes the crucial need of creating humane working conditions for sustainable and peaceful societies and moreover how people want to have a decent job, not merely a job.

According to the ILO: wages, working time, work organization and working conditions, arrangements to balance working life and the demands of family and life outside work, non-discrimination and protection from harassment and violence at work are all important aspects of the employment relationship and workers' protection, and they all have an impact on economic performance.

Working conditions involve a wide range of themes and issues, including working time (hours of labor, rest times, and work schedules), remuneration, and the physical and mental demands of the workplace.

Development of Issue/Timeline

| Date | Event | Outcome |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 16th Century | Textile Mills of Equador | Spanish conquerors put the Equadorian population to work in what would resemble modern sweatshops which were the first recorded conditions of terrible working conditions in order to shave costs of production. |
| 19th Century - 1889 | Industrial Revolution | <p>Women and Children were first allowed to work in inhabitable working conditions where health risks and safety risks were at an all-time high.</p> <p>In 1889 the British Government established a secret committee of the House of Lords on the ‘Sweating System’ to combat the harsh working conditions.</p> |
| 19th Century | Increasing immigrants from developing countries working under terrible working conditions in the US. | At this time the concept of sweat shops and the terrible working conditions that accompanied them because |

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| | | incredibly native to American cities on the east coast and newly arriving immigrants were glad to have these sweating jobs at any wage. |
| 20th Century | The plight of the workers in Developing Countries | Since the 20th century increased globalisation has allowed developed countries to improve their working conditions but this meant that LEDCs countries became poorer and poorer and the lack of wealth only grew the egregiousness of the working conditions in these developing countries. |

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Better Work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation launched the Better Work program in 2007. The program currently engages 1,300 manufacturers in seven countries, employing over 1.6 million workers in countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua, and Vietnam.

According to an independent evaluation conducted by Tufts University, the Better Work initiative shifts manufacturers away from practices that result in extended working hours, extremely low compensation, dismissal threats, or the exploitation of probationary contracts. Workers' weekly take-home pay is also increasing, and they are becoming less concerned about excessive overtime and low earnings.

According to the ILO, the program has achieved substantial success in terms of reducing coercive labor practices and restricting harassment and verbal abuse. In Jordan, allegations of sexual harassment decreased by 18%, and workers' feelings of dread in the workplace decreased significantly.

Additionally, researchers discovered that Better Work's Supervisory Skills Training is an excellent technique for improving working conditions and empowering women in the business. When compared to production lines handled by supervisors who had not yet received such training, manufacturing lines overseen by Supervisory Skills-trained female line supervisors enhanced factory productivity by 22%.

According to the reports, improvements in working conditions do not come at the expense of business performance. The study found a direct relationship between improved working conditions and greater profit enterprises. After four years of Better Work participation, average profitability increased by 25% across all factories tracked in Vietnam.

The Better Work programme is supported by Australia (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade); Denmark (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs); Switzerland (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs); and the United States (US Department of Labor).

Possible Solutions

Collective Bargaining

Collective Bargaining is a key means for employers, their organizations, and trade unions to secure equitable salaries and working conditions. It also serves as the foundation for healthy labour relations. Wages, working hours, training, occupational health and safety, and fair treatment are common problems on the negotiation table. The ILO's policy advice is based on the 1981 Collective Bargaining Convention (No.154) and the 1981 Collective Bargaining Recommendation (No.163).

Establishing a minimum wage

Wages are one of the most essential working conditions and a key topic in collective bargaining. The ILO is committed to promoting wage and income policies that assure a fair share of the fruits of progress for all, as well as a living wage for all employees in need of such protection. To fulfil this aim, it conducts research and provides evidence-based policy recommendations on topics such as minimum salaries, public sector pay, wage negotiating, and gender pay inequalities. Minimum wage policy advice is based on a collection of ILO Conventions, including the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention of 1970 (No.131).

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