
The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) presented the 2015 Human Development Report on Monday 18 January 2016 at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva. It highlighted the importance of work in human development. According to the report, work is intrinsic to human development. “When positive, work provides benefits beyond material wealth and fosters community, knowledge, strengthens dignity and inclusion.” On the other hand, “when negative, in the form of forced labour, child labour and human trafficking, work can violate human rights, threaten freedom and shatter dignity”.

Work can drive women’s empowerment, security, dignity, participation, creativity, which can all contribute to opportunities, better skills, human capital and also better health. As reported in the study, “since 1990, 2 billion people have been lifted out of low human development, extreme income poverty has been reduced by more than a billion and every region of the world has seen Human Development Index (HDI) gains. Although all these positive results, a lot still needs to be done.

“An estimated 21 million people are currently in forced labour of whom 14 million (67 percent) were exploited for labour and 4.5 million (22 percent) sexually exploited. There are still 168 million child labourers worldwide. And some work e.g. work in hazardous industries may put workers in risk. In addition, there are 30 million workers in mining and they face risks every day”, says the report.

Globalization is posing new opportunities and also new threats. Patterns of trade, investment and growth have been changed. Jobs have been created, but also destroyed. Women still have less opportunities. The report highlights that “worldwide in 2015, 72 percent of working-age men were employed, compared with only 47 percent of women.” In addition, women are more likely to take part in unpaid jobs than men.

UNDP emphasizes the importance of creating and promoting sustainable work, which “refers to work that promotes human development while ensuring sustainability. It is critical not only for sustaining the planet, but also for ensuring work for future generations.”

National and international policymakers must be prepared and willing to guarantee a safe transition to a new work model. It is clear that termination and transformation of some works will happen. It is not sustainable to think that jobs in highly pollutants sectors will continue to increase. Workers currently in these fields will have to be displaced and prepared to integrate new occupations. Furthermore, some works will be newly created, especially those contributing to new ideas to preserve the environment.

As emphasized in the report, “policy options for enhancing human development through work have to be built around three broad clusters: (1) creating more work opportunities to expand work choices, (2) ensuring workers’ well-being to reinforce a positive link between work and human development and (3) targeted actions to address the challenges of specific groups and contexts.”

UNDP calls for an agenda for action to build momentum for pursuing a three-pillar approach—a New Social Contract, a Global Deal and the Decent Work Agenda.

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