

8

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Employment is an important part of daily life. It helps keep our economy moving, it helps us earn money to support our families and can offer us a way to contribute to the economic prosperity of others. However, not everyone makes enough money as they should. Sometimes people can't find work, or are discriminated against because of their identity or ability. In many impoverished areas, adults and children are exploited, or forced to do work in dangerous and underpaid situations, to support their families. Achieving this goal means making sure jobs are available, safe and supportive for everyone. In the process of making a living, we need to make sure we are having a positive impact on our planet too.

TARGETS

- Generate safe, creative work that motivates people to fulfill their potential.
- Ensure our natural resources are respected and protected in economic development.
- Promote decent work and safe working environments for all: men, women, youth, people with disabilities and migrant workers.
- Take action to give more jobs to unemployed youth by increasing access to training.
- End forced labour and child labour in all forms.

“ I am a believer in women, in their ability to do things and in their influence and power. Women set the standards for the world, and it is for us, women in Canada, to set the standards high. ”

Nellie McClung
Canadian women's
rights activist



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1** Learners will understand the concepts of sustainable economic development, productive employment and decent work.
- 2** Learners will understand the relationship between employment and economic growth.
- 3** Learners will understand how inequalities between labour force and management, owners and stakeholders can lead to poverty and civil unrest.
- 4** Learners will be able to understand and demand fair wages, equal pay for equal work and labour rights from their employers and government regulators .
- 5** Learners will be able to understand their individual rights and clarify their needs and values related to work.
- 6** Learners will be able to develop and evaluate ideas for sustainability-driven innovation and entrepreneurship.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Media

How are labour issues reported in the media?

Environment

How can we improve the impacts on our environment through the jobs we have?

Poverty, wealth and power

How does wage and employment relate to the poverty cycle?

Indigenous Peoples

What are the labour issues impacting Indigenous people and communities?

Oppression and genocide

In what ways can people exercise their right to work and fair pay?

Health and biotechnology

How can people working in dangerous occupations improve their working conditions?

Gender politics

How can we improve gender parity in employment?

Social justice and human rights

What are the rights of workers and how can we spread the word?

Peace and conflict

How can we address civil unrest caused by unfair working conditions and low wages?



THE BIG QUESTIONS

1 Where did it begin?

- Throughout history, workers have been exercising their right to organize and fight for decent work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was formed in 1919 as part of the League of Nations. When the ILO was incorporated into the UN, labour rights were written into several articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. They defined **decent work** as employment that respects the fundamental rights of the human person, as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety, physical and mental integrity, and earning a wage.
- **Labour unions** or **trade unions** are organizations of workers coming together to achieve common goals such as improving safety standards, achieving fair pay and **gender equality**.
- Local, national and international economic growth depends on the productivity of workers. In order to sustain economic development, people need to be making enough to contribute to their local economy by spending money on goods and services.
- We measure the economic growth of a nation by the total dollar value of all the goods and services produced over a period of time—we call this **gross domestic product**, or GDP. The global annual growth rate of GDP per capita increased by only 1.3 per cent in 2014, a significant slowdown compared to 2010 (2.8 per cent growth) and 2000 (3.0 per cent growth). Developing regions grew far faster than developed regions, with average annual growth rates in 2014 of 3.1 per cent and 1.4 per cent, respectively.¹
- As a means of increasing gross domestic product, investments in economic development create better job opportunities, self-sufficiency and improve quality of life for communities. At the same time, economic development has a direct relationship with the environment and environmental issues. It is important to ensure our well-being does not negatively impact our ecosystems.

2 Why does this issue matter?

- **People need jobs, particularly women**

The global unemployment rate stood at 6.1 per cent in 2015, down from a peak of 6.6 per cent in 2009, mostly owing to a decline in unemployment in the developed regions. While contributing to the poverty cycle and poor economic, physical, and mental health, unemployment ultimately affects population groups differently. Globally, women and youth (aged 15 to 24) are more likely to face unemployment than men and adults aged 25 and over.² In all regions, except Eastern Asia and the developed regions, the unemployment rate among women is higher than that of men.



- **Financial inclusion**

While economic development and employment are important for economic security, access to financial services and credit is essential to inclusive growth. In 2014, 62 per cent of the world's adult population had an account at a financial institution or a mobile money service provider, an increase from 51 per cent in 2011. During this period, 700 million adults also became account holders, meaning they were able to secure and independently control their finances.³

- **Inequalities still exist**

In 2014, the pay gap ratio between chief executives and median workers in the US was 204-to-1.⁴ At the top of the list, some CEOs earned more than 1,000 times the salary of their average worker. Government corruption can also impact marginalized individuals and communities by utilizing funds intended for social good and economic development for their own personal benefit. To protest these inequalities and exercise their rights, workers seeking pay raises and better working conditions will often strike. In areas of conflict where **human rights** are at risk, protests can be met with violent action on behalf of the government.

3 Who and what are affected?

- **Women**

Existing inequalities between men and women are amplified by lower economic resources and reduced access to employment. Lack of employment can increase women's dependence on men, increasing men's decision-making power within households. This can also lead to an increase in unsafe sexual practices and/or risk of intimate partner violence. We also know that many times, women are the first to cut back their food intake to ensure food for their families in times of financial crisis.⁵

- **Children**

Although the number of children engaged in child labour declined globally by one third from 2000 to 2012 (from 246 million to 168 million), more than half of child labourers in 2012 (85 million) were engaged in hazardous forms of work. Incidences of child labour have typically been highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 21 per cent of children were employed as child labourers.⁶

- **Migrant workers**

As of 2013, an estimated 232 million international migrant workers participated in the world's economy compared to 174.5 million in 2000.⁷ Made up of people working outside their home country, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable because there is no systematic monitoring to ensure their rights are being respected. In addition, they are often denied access to federally funded services and educational opportunities for their children.



4 What needs to be done?

- One of our best efforts is providing youth an opportunity to transition to a decent job. To do this, we need investments in education and high quality training to give youth the skills to match the demands of the labour market. They also need access to social protection and basic services, in a non-discriminatory environment.
- The role of the government is to support dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies. By supporting development that respects the rights of labourers, decent work can be had by all.
- In building our communities, we should look for ways to foster community support, personal security, innovation and employment.
- Government policies have been, and still are, developed to protect people from exclusion, forced labour and unequal pay. Governments must act responsibly and protect the rights of workers, and support those rights through training, fair pay and monitoring for safe working conditions.
- Labour unions and coalitions are organizing changes to government legislation to make it easier for migrants to move between jobs, gain opportunities for work permits and allow permanent resident status upon arrival. Since many migrant workers pay taxes to the government of the country they are working in, they should have access to the same benefits.

“ We have words for racism and sexism, but wealth discrimination isn't fully recognized. It is a bias in favor of the wealthy and against labour, the environment and the community. Concern for the public good must become the animating force of our economic order. ”

Marjorie Kelly
American journalist



CONNECTION TO THE OTHER GOALS



Effective economic development supports gender equality. Empowering women by ensuring they have control and access to resources like land, and ensuring an equal pay helps reduce the impact of poverty, provide better opportunities for children and helps support community resilience.



Those encouraging economic development must understand impacts of overconsumption of resources and the impact of emissions on **climate change** and **environmental degradation**. Sustainable economic development should provide for the present without sacrificing the ability for the future to do the same.

“ We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation to conserve the environment so that we can bequeath our children a sustainable world that benefits all.”

Wangari Maathai

Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Laureate



Consequences of inaction

- If we fail to provide decent work opportunities for all people, we are sacrificing investments and job opportunities that uphold the social need to share in progress. We are continuing to participate in the cycle of poverty that marginalizes some populations.
- If we do not act, 168 million working children will not have access to education, protection from injury or dangerous conditions and poverty.
- By not pursuing sustainable economic development and supporting environmental policies, we are sacrificing our natural ecosystems and resources in return for an unsustainable future.

REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

- 1 How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?
- 2 How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?
- 3 How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?
- 4 What questions do you still have?

“Equal pay for women is a matter of simple justice.”

Mary Anderson
American inventor



RESOURCES

How to take action

- **Learn the laws.** Protect yourself and your community by learning about your rights as a worker. Share what you know with your community and find out more about labour inequalities in your community. Education is key to ensure safe working environments and decent work.
- **Vote with your dollar.** Support fair working conditions and workers' rights by supporting companies whose treatment of their workers is fair and just. A way to do this is buying **fair trade** products. Look for the label and ask the places that you buy from to support them too. Learn how and where products are made and if they use child labour or exploitative working conditions to source their raw materials. You can also take action to [make your school Fair Trade](#) or learn more about Fair Trade Canada [here](#).
- **Support economic empowerment projects.** If you want to donate to a cause that supports labour rights, look for projects that involve gender equality, **microloans** and poverty reduction. Investing in people's skills, training and providing access to start-up capital can offer them the support they need to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams.
- **Join a cause.** Learn about local workers' unions in your area and show your support for a cause you believe in. International Workers' Day (May 1) is a celebration of the working class and international labour movement. Join a charity that supports ending unfair child labour and educate others about how they can make ethical choices in their shopping.
- **Learn about the cycle of poverty** within your own community, province, country and internationally and understand the interconnected relationship of the global market and its workforce. Support an aspect of this by campaigning for equal rights, equal pay, smaller wage gaps and more.



Educational resources

- The World's Largest Lesson page for Goal 8 has downloadable comics, posters, and lesson plans [here](#). [Challenging Common Conceptions](#) is a lesson plan that focuses on how environmental issues are interlinked to economic issues and students will investigate different ways of approaching environmental, social and economic issues.
- MCIC has a workshop and lesson plans available on Child Labour. [Contact us today](#).
- Alliance87 provides educational resources, facts and graphics around ending forced labour and child labour around the world. Check out their [website for more resources](#).
- The [Canadian Labour Congress](#) helps you understand the issues facing workers in Canada, including aboriginal workers, employees of colour and LGBTQ employees.
- [Republic of You](#) is an online interactive game available through Oxfam. It explores inequality by allowing participants to create their own nations, become national leaders and make necessary decisions on real world issues like taxes, wages, public services, education, gender wage gap and more. A teacher's overview, two sessions and a slideshow are included.
- Explore [Dollar Street](#) with students and learn how poverty, lack of resources, unequal pay and different living conditions affect families all around the world. The interactive platform demonstrates how we all have the same needs yet cannot afford the same solutions, how families and incomes compare nationally and internationally, and highlights different families' experiences and circumstances.
- [Giving Credit Where Credit is Due](#) (Grades 11-12) is a lesson plan that addresses micro-finance as an alternative approach to lending money to those who would not normally qualify for traditional banks loans. Students will explore the social and environmental impacts of microcredit programs, the costs and benefits of micro-crediting, and compare the model with traditional lending systems. This lesson can be found on the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation Resource page, which also has other global justice lessons available for download.



CASE STUDIES

1 Women in Coffee

The Women in Coffee project encourages independence and income for women coffee farmers in Kenya. Despite doing 70 per cent of the work growing coffee, many women are not given rights to what they grow.⁸ Products that are certified as being 'fair trade' are made by companies improving the social and environmental standards of their work. The products are usually commodities exported from developing countries, and seek to promote sustainable development by securing the rights of workers. Women in Coffee demonstrates this by empowering women through sustainable jobs and an industry that is continually growing.

2 Canada Labour Code

Exploitation of labourers was still common in Canada during the 1960s. When a fire broke out in a tunnel being built in Toronto, five Italian immigrant workers died. This tragedy became the catalyst for government policies supporting health and safety in the workplace, leading to the Ontario Industrial Safety Act and the Canada Labour Code. These laws are still in place today to protect the health and safety of workers.

3 iDE Canada

Lack of education and skill development are key barriers to economic development. The Innovation for Rural Prosperity project by iDE Canada in Ghana helps farmers earn income from dry season farming through training on crop cultivation and disease and pest management. By supporting labour unions for farmers, they can take advantage of stronger buying power and collective action.

4 Mennonite Economic Development Associates

Mennonite Economic Development Associates of Canada are working in Myanmar to help women and small producers increase their income and status as economic actors and leaders in their communities. Through grants, the project helps strengthen the provision of goods and services to women from Myanmar's public and private sectors. The project will help implement an innovation fund and other related business assistance to help make more sustainable opportunities available to women farmers and entrepreneurs.



5 Canadian Lutheran World Relief



In collaboration with Lutheran World Federation-Uganda, a Canadian Lutheran World Relief project is helping reduce vulnerability and dependency for 300 South Sudanese refugees and host community members in Adjumani, Uganda. This project remains focused on vulnerable youth aged 15-30, prioritizing child-headed households. Youth are able to develop marketable skills and competencies, helping them become economically self-sufficient and better prepared for their future.

6 Canadian Hunger Foundation



Using a market-led approach, the Canadian Hunger Foundation is working to improve the livelihoods and food security of 8,000 smallholder farmer households (40,000 beneficiaries) in the Eastern Amhara Region of Ethiopia. They do this through training government specialists and development agents, and over more than Cooperative members on business skills, marketing, and agricultural business management.

End notes

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/ceo-worker-pay-gap_us_55ddc3c7e4b0a40aa3acd1c9

⁵ http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/JC2368_impact-economic-crisis-women_en_0.pdf

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg8>

⁷ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_398078.pdf

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLKTGWH398Q>