E-discussion
Be Bold for Change - Inclusive Growth through Skills Development
From 6 to 17 March 2017

Drawing inspiration from this year’s International Women’s Day, this virtual discussion aims to explore and share innovative programmes and good practices that can contribute to the building of a better working world for present and future development—especially for women and other disadvantaged groups.

The persistence of crisis in labour markets, coupled with deep and rapid processes of change at work driven by globalization, demography, and climate and technological change is reshaping the world of work in profound ways.

On the one hand, some countries are benefiting from strong economic growth and employment creation, absorbing millions of rural poor into the modern urban economy, advancing development goals and fostering innovation in product development and the circulation of ideas. On the other hand, global economic integration has also presented many countries and sectors with major challenges such as income inequality, continuing high levels of unemployment and poverty, vulnerability to external economic shocks, and the growth of unprotected work and the informal economy.¹

Many of the global drivers of transformational change will have major implications for skills development. For example, technological advances will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another. Referred to by many as The Fourth Industrial Revolution, the advent of robotics, nanotechnology, 3D printing and biotechnology will require enormous changes in the skill sets needed to thrive in the new landscape.² This revolution is also expected to result in significant job creation and displacement, heightened labour productivity and widening skills gaps.

Yet, the biggest challenge facing governments, industry and people around the globe is not technology - it is adapting to these new realities while maintaining the sustainability of this Industrial Revolution and the relevance of public institutions.

The pledge that “no one will be left behind” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), commits member States to plan to end poverty, combat climate change and fight injustice and inequality.³

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² World Economic Forum (WEF), Davos 2016: The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond. According to WEF: The First Industrial Revolution used water and steam power to mechanize production. The Second used electric power to create mass production. The Third used electronics and information technology to automate production. Now a Fourth Industrial Revolution is building on the Third, the digital revolution that has been occurring since the middle of the last century. It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-fourth-industrial-revolution-what-it-means-and-how-to-respond/, Accessed on 31 January 2017.
A number of SDGs are particularly relevant in tackling these transformational drivers of change in the world of work and will be the topic of this E-Discussion. They include:

**SDG 4 on quality education and lifelong learning** - specifically, indicator 4.3 to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including at the university level, and, 4.4 to substantially increase the number of youth and adults with relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills.

**SDG 5 on gender equality** – specifically, indicator 5.b to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women, and; 5.c to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels.

**SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth** – specifically, indicator 8.5 to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value, and; 8.6, to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.

Bold changes are needed to stimulate hope and drive for the inclusion of all individuals in present and future development processes. Yet, ensuring that this inclusion is on equitable terms (i.e., everyone has equal access to available resources) is not automatic. It requires targeted efforts to help disadvantaged groups access such resources. Hence, fostering inclusion in formal skills training systems is one of the many ways to provide disadvantaged groups with better opportunities to be included in the labour market now and in the future.

**Towards inclusive and sustainable societies**
Investing in the education and training of the workforce is a key to increasing employability, reducing poverty, improving productivity and competitiveness and facilitating a pattern of economic growth that is inclusive and equitable. *But, how can this be accomplished?*

**Increase access to quality education and training and formal training systems**
- Focus on women and young girls: International Women’s Day provides an opportunity to shed light on some of the particular challenges women and girls face in accessing quality education and training and being included in formal training systems. Statistics estimate that 48 per cent of female students worldwide are in “general” programmes, while 44 per cent are in vocational programmes. This participation issue contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequalities at work and in society, including for countries that have achieved parity of access. Moreover, women’s participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) ranges from 9 to 13 per cent in public institutions and 33 per cent in private institutions. Strategic efforts therefore have to be placed on ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and

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4 ILO Policy Brief: Increasing the employability of disadvantaged youth, 2011: Defines “disadvantage” as factors such as income poverty, or lack of experience in and poor understanding of the formal job market, in addition to social factors such as gender, racial, ethnic or migrant background, and geographical isolation with poor access to quality education and job opportunities, [http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_167168.pdf](http://ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_167168.pdf), accessed on 31 January 2017.


6 Ibid.
quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university education, in conformity with SDG 4.3. Using this E-Discussion forum to pool ideas and country good practices on how countries have improved access and participation in TVET systems for women and other disadvantaged groups provides a step in the right direction.

**Equip workers with the skills needed to effectively adjust to local and global changes in technology**

- All disadvantaged groups, including those in the informal sector, need to be equipped with skills so they could effectively adjust to local and global changes in technology, the environment and demographics. While excitement is being built on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, those workers engaged in low-skilled jobs face bleak employment prospects in the future. Future inclusion for disadvantaged groups in the labour market is therefore largely dependent on well-functioning skills development systems and labour market information systems. Technology is on the other hand providing innovative solutions for reaching out to people in remote and difficult areas and with learning difficulties. The future world of work therefore provides both challenges and opportunities for decent work.

*Providing examples, via this e-discussion, of how disadvantaged groups could be equipped with skills to maximise available opportunities in the future would be greatly desired.*

**Integrate skills as part of broader efforts in pursuing equality and an inclusion agenda**

- Skills upgrading and diversification are essential for improving individuals’ employability but often not sufficient for the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in productive and better-remunerated employment. They need to be a part of broader efforts, for example, in the industry sector, supply chain upgrading, or local economic development. Skills need to be a “building block” for more enterprises to move up the value-chains and compete on quality, which requires more high skilled workers and which would yield higher incomes.

**ILO working to promote inclusion in skills development**

Recent examples demonstrate how the ILO works to include disadvantaged groups in skills development and training programmes. For instance, a pilot project initiated under the ILO-Irish Aid partnership programme on Promoting Rights and Opportunities for People with Disabilities through Legislation (PROPEL) in Zambia (2012-2015) supported five technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in fostering learning environments that enabled the enrolment and training of women and men with disabilities.

Equally, the ILO has shown through its Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) programme in Bangladesh, the Philippines, Niger and currently operating in Mozambique how a community-based initiative helps promote local economic and employment opportunities and related skills training for rural women and men leading to improved employment prospects, income generation and livelihoods.

**E-discussion:**

*This E-discussion is divided into two sections. Week 1 will focus on the inclusion of women in formal TVET whereas week 2 will focus on access and participation of disadvantaged groups.*
Week 1 (March 6 - 10)
- How have education and training systems and institutions in developing and developed countries facilitated greater access to women?
- What has worked in ensuring the inclusion of women in formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)?
- How have targeted interventions helped disadvantaged groups to gain access to formal education and training?

Week 2 (March 13 – 17)
- Different countries have taken different approaches to promoting inclusive growth through skills development. Yet, is it about broadening access to formal training institutions? Is it about improving the quality and perception of TVET? Is it about specific skills that could promote disadvantaged groups in gaining decent and productive jobs? Or is it about creating opportunities for more quality, high-income and high-skills jobs? What is your view and experience?
- What are unique and innovative programmes in your country that reach out and address specific skills needs of disadvantaged groups?
- Increased automation will change the nature of jobs and low-skilled workers are likely to face highest employment risks. What kind of skills or skills-plus programmes can assist in enhancing their employability and career prospects?
- We all know that skills alone may not be sufficient for realizing inclusive growth. How do your country’s skills development initiatives connect to broader programmes that promote inclusive employment and equality of opportunities?

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