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KENYA

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2020

COVID-19: WORKERS DEMAND JOBS, INCOME AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

The Kenyan government has put in place specific measures to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, including a partial lockdown in four counties and a dusk-to-dawn curfew in all the country. The government has established an economic stimulus programme that comprises measures such as tax relief for people and enterprises, a horizontal expansion of the cash transfer programme to cover more vulnerable people (elderly, orphans and persons with severe disability), a weekly stipend for the vulnerable (especially the urban poor) and the lowering of the Central Bank Rate and cash reserve ratio by one per cent to provide affordable credit to SMEs. Expansion of healthcare towards universal coverage has initially been piloted in three counties.

Although other important measures are being put in place by the government, most of these leave out informal economy workers. These workers constitute 84 per cent of the workforce. COTU (K) calls on the Kenyan government to further extend social protection coverage to informal economy workers and provide more cash transfers and grants to vulnerable communities. Subsidised loans to SMEs should be increased, and childcare support to frontline workers should be guaranteed.

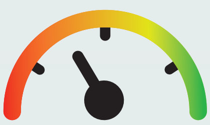
ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The Kenyan government implements the 2030 Agenda through its Vision 2030 strategy, rolled out in five-year Medium-Term Plans (MTPs). The 2018-2022 MTP, together with the County Integrated Development Plans, mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Agenda 2063.

Kenya aims to implement all SDGs, and all ministries are required to mainstream the SDGs in all their strategic plans, policies, budgets, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems. In addition, the government has prioritised the Big Four Agenda (Universal Health Coverage, Affordable Housing, Manufacturing and Food Security), which also mirrors the SDG aspirations. The Ministry of Devolution and Planning coordinates the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs; an inter-agency technical committee representing all ministries has been set up within it and linked with the county governments.

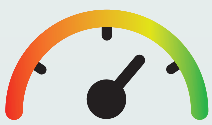
Trade unions report that there is a lack of transparency in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. They further add that government reporting, along with coordination among the different government agencies and non-state actors implementing the various SDGs, is not adequate. Trade unions are not specifically consulted on the implementation of the SDGs. Their engagement in the implementation of SDG 8 is only possible indirectly through the development and monitoring of the Decent Work Country Program, which involves both social partners.

TRANSPARENCY



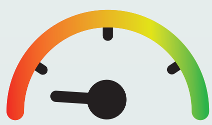
Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners not involved in defining and realising government's SDG national plan

IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

In 2019, 36 per cent of the Kenyan population was living on less than $1.25 a day, indicating that **target 1.1 (eradicate extreme poverty for all people)** was a long way from being reached. Poverty affects the urban population more heavily due to a higher unemployment rate (11 per cent) in cities, and the high level of informal sector employment in these areas. Thirty-one per cent of Kenyan workers are considered as working poor.

Reaching **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** is far off the mark: in 2019, only 21 per cent of Kenyans had any form of insurance, 11 per cent participated in contributory pension schemes, around 23 per cent of informal economy workers were covered by the statutory health insurance and a mere 24.8 per cent of over 65-year-olds were receiving pensions or cash transfer benefits. Government expenditure on health was a paltry 3.2 per cent of the national annual budget in 2019.

Women are more likely to be in informal employment than men – 63 per cent of workers employed in that sector were women in 2019, suggesting efforts need to be made to progress on **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)**. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life)**, in 2019 only 21.8 per cent of parliamentarians were women and only 29.8 per cent of women had at least a secondary level of education.

There are significant obstacles to Kenya meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. The percentage of people working in the informal economy was 84 per cent in 2019, posing a challenge to reaching **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of MSMEs)**. In addition, 53.5 per cent of workers were classified as vulnerable in 2019. Achieving **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all)** is still far off, as the combined rate of under-employment and unemployment was 12.6 per cent, 11.7 per cent for males and 13.5 per cent for females, in 2019. NEET indicators for **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 14.8 per cent, 10.8 per cent for men and 18.8 per cent for women, in 2019. Urgent action is needed on **target 8.7 (take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour)**, as 35.6 per cent of children aged 5-14 were involved in child labour, while modern slavery was estimated at 0.69 per cent in Kenya in 2019. Delivering on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** is a serious challenge given that there are only 44 labour inspectors for a 19 million-strong workforce and only 2.5 per cent of workers in the formal sector are covered by collective bargaining agreements. Trade unionists have experienced gross mistreatment from the state owing to their work, such as arrests for calling for strikes, the withholding of salaries for striking workers, the non-remittance of union dues by public employers and the non-implementation of collective bargaining agreements.

Significant progress remains to be made for Kenya to reach **target 10.4 (adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality)**, as the labour share of GDP (wages and social protection transfers) remained relatively low, at 43.9 per cent, in 2017. In 2013, the share of the top 10 per cent of income earners accounted for 31.6 per cent of GDP, while the bottom 20 per cent of income earners accounted for six per cent of GDP.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

COVID-19: WORKERS DEMAND JOBS, INCOME AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The government of Kenya needs to put in place policies and measures in order to tackle the economic and social shocks brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Today more than ever the SDGs show the way in building up a sustainable and inclusive economy and society.

The Central Organisation of Trade Unions (COTU) calls on the government of Kenya to ensure urgent action to cope with the pandemic crisis in line with the SDGs, through the following measures:

- Give priority in the budget to critical sectors like health and labour.
- Prioritise tax-funded social services over external debt-financed capital infrastructure.
- Set up a multi-stakeholder SDG monitoring forum which would include trade unions to allow for the monitoring of labour-specific SDGs.
- Institutionalise employment insurance as an integral part of the social protection system.
- Institutionalise a pandemic and emergency fund.
- Review labour laws to recognise emerging work arrangements, such as telework, and provide for responses to pandemic situations.

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