

## CONCEPT NOTE

2021 session of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)  
Focus: Review of SDG 8

**SIDE EVENT TITLE:** “Achieving Decent Work for Resilient and Sustainable Recovery from COVID- 19: Contributions of Humanitarian Work Psychology to the Economic, Social, and Environmental Dimensions of Sustainable Development for all Populations especially Youth”

Main Sponsor: International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP)

12 July 2021

Platform: Zoom, as per UN Directives

Time: 07:30-09:00am

### BACKGROUND:

While advances had been made in reducing the level of poverty in the world since the adoption of the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, 2.2 billion people were still living below the poverty line of \$1.90/ per day in 2017, and progress has seriously been impeded in recent times by the economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to statistics reported in 2021, the global economy is growing slower than in previous years and the unemployment rate is higher. This is especially a problem for young people throughout the developing world. The process of economic, social and environmental recovery from the pandemic necessitates reducing and eventually eliminating poverty in the world, in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 1, which is integrally tied to SDG 8 about decent work for all, requiring that people have jobs paying enough to sustain themselves and their families. In addition, inequalities within and among countries and different populations (e.g.by age, gender, race, vulnerability) must be addressed, in accordance with SDG 10.

SDG 8 calls upon governments to “promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment for all women and men and decent work for all...foster sustainable, equitable economic growth for all workers, irrespective of background, race, gender and achieve higher levels of productivity through technology an innovation.” Target 8.5 calls specifically for full employment and decent work with equality for all, and Target 8.3 calls for “promoting development oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation.”

The goals and targets of SDG 1 and SDG 8 align with the professional discipline of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I-O), an applied science whose research and best practices are used to improve the world of work. Applications of I/O principles and practices increase the success of both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, as well as increase the productivity, work satisfaction, achievements, and well-being of workers. As such, these applications also help achieve SDG 1, eliminating poverty, which can only be accomplished by providing sustainable employment for people, as well as SDG 3, Health and well-being, SDG 5, gender equality, SDG10 about inequality, and, SDG 17, by promoting partnerships among organizations and between organizations and their governments. While I-O psychology is applied universally, it is exceptionally important for developing countries where resources, conditions, policies and programs for decent work are most urgently needed, especially in these pandemic recovery times.

The term “decent work”, as referred to in SDG8, was defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as a work life, which promotes the well-being for workers and their families. The elements of decent work include: employment opportunities, a living wage, favorable conditions at

work including safety and health, adequate time for rest, health care benefits, and the right to organize and negotiate salaries and working conditions. Decent work should apply to the informal as well as the formal economy. The four sectors of decent work as described by the ILO are: standards and rights at work; employment creation resulting from enterprise development; social protection; and social dialogue. The ILO monitors the achievement of these goals in their member organizations, and provides assistance to business organizations to promote decent work and censure those organizations which fail to do so. In its 100-year existence, the ILO reports improvement in working conditions around the world and increased successes in business.

A subset of industrial organizational psychology has emerged in recent years, referred to as Humanitarian Work Psychology (HWP), which applies the best practices of I-O psychology to humanitarian efforts in developed as well as developing countries. Special attention is given to humanitarian efforts in developing countries and underserved and at-risk populations in whatever settings.

For example, a study in Papua New Guinea demonstrated that equivalent salaries for local workers and expatriates enhance cooperation, productivity, and positive outcomes, while salary inequality leads to the opposite result. In Uganda, a focus on Personal Initiative in entrepreneurship training resulted in higher success in new businesses, thereby increasing employment opportunities and decreasing poverty. In a girls' empowerment camp in Lesotho, training in "income-generating activities" combined with life skills resulted in new businesses (layers, hair salons, selling phone cards), increased self-agency, and HIV testing. "Career shifting" in African countries increased ability of healthcare workers to provide critical treatments. Resilience training in the United Kingdom prepared the homeless for work, and in a program in the United States, managers are trained to support newly hired refugees. Such approaches are valuable for the post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery period, to facilitate reintegration into the workforce, and bolster economic growth and psychosocial resilience of workers, families and communities.

A key factor shown by HWP research is that rebuilding the economy requires evidence-based approaches but also innovation, including on personal as well as organizational levels.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the current work-life situation as countries emerge from the pandemic and enter the recovery phase
2. To elaborate "decent work" as a means of establishing a resilient sustainable work life experience in various countries
3. To suggest policies based on HWP that countries can adopt that will improve decent work conditions and help achieve SDG8, and coincidentally SDG 1,5 and 17, and target 3.4 of the UN Agenda 2030.
4. To demonstrate and recommend specific programs for nations to achieve a resilient and sustainable work life.
5. To highlight the importance of employment opportunities for youth
6. To make recommendations which focus on development of entrepreneurship for job and work creation; institution of a living wage that will sustain both the workers and business organizations; development of a work culture which promotes health, mental health and well-being; reduce inequalities; and encourages use of in technology, and neuroscience.
7. To encourage consideration of proven evidence-based methodologies but also innovation on all levels to achieve these ends.