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## **Linking SDG 8 with workers and Trade Unionists everyday work Report**

This workshop was held on July 6th 13-16.00 CET online. We had 16 participants live, mostly in Europe, but including a participant from the Philippines. Others might have watched the recording as there were over 40 registered for the event.

Our overarching purpose was to link participants everyday experience as trade unionists with the SDGs in general and in particular SDG8 - decent work for all and inclusive and sustainable growth. The way we did this was the following:

1) The SDGs are expressed as mostly high level aims and outcomes that are the concern of national level organisations and nation states who have control of the levers of government which can make the policy and legislative frameworks that might enable the achievement of the SDGs. However, I think it is becoming increasingly clear that the attainment of the SDGs, which is becoming more widely seen as necessary, will require more than governmental or intergovernmental level policy frameworks. It will require everyone's effort and consent and active participation both in their personal lives and their workplaces. This workshop bridged the gap between governmental policy and legislature and ordinary citizen's lives and experience.

2) We demonstrated the SDGs relevance to ordinary peoples lives and connect this particular goal with the work of trade unionists.

3) We demonstrated that by linking the SDGs goals and targets to trade unionists work we could create a virtuous circle of both meeting their aims at work and in doing so also demonstrate how the SDGs can be integrated into their work streams and projects. This outcome is in my view, is particularly important as it the 'holy grail' of aligning environmental positives with our ordinary everyday work.

4) We wanted to raise awareness of the SDGs with trade unionists as they are one of the most important frameworks for sustainable development as they are both systemic and inclusive as they are ratified by all 192 members of the UN.

### **How we achieved the outcomes**

After the introductions and overview and setting the scene by splitting participants into small groups to introduce themselves, I presented a short overview of the SDGs focussing on four points, their inclusiveness, systemic framing of issues of environmental sustainability, social and political fairness and justice, and economic equity, and the fact that this is a framework that has been adopted by all members of the UN, and the breaking the large issues off sustainability down into smaller interrelated pieces that comprise the targets and the 17 goals.

We had a short Q and A and then Giovanni presented a detailed exploration of SDG8 and why its key to both the SDGs but also why it is so important for the work of trade unionists. He presented the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development's index in monitoring the SDGs. The key take aways are that without the ability or willingness for our societies to provide decent and meaningful work we will not be able to achieve environmental sustainability.

We then did a process to invite participants to explore firstly how their current work is in alignment with the SDGs and in particular SDG8 and secondly explore how they might further (or start to align) their work with the SDGs. We did this on an online Miro board so that participants could self organise and interact within their small groups. This also provided more opportunity for participation, which was something that I had to encourage. There was a general unwillingness to



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share in the larger group, which is common for online trainings. There are often 3-4 participants who are confident or willing to share and explore within the larger group.



Miro board exercise on how is SDG8 connected to and could connect to participants work as trade unionists

Here is the results from the Miro board:

We used the work of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development to devise targets relevant to SDG8 in particular that the participants might be able to relate to in their professional capacity.

Some of their themes that emerged were:

- Noticing that intersectional work and cross cutting theme were related to the SDGs.
- The need for union delegates to work together at national and supranational levels.
- The need for a European minimum wage
- The need for life-long learning as labour and the nature of work is changing rapidly.
- The need to involve young people in this work.
- Seeing that traditional union action like workplace safety strongly aligns the SDG8
- Noticing that the on the shop floor that greening the workplace as well as work security and working conditions are all part of the same problem and solution.

This represents a significant step in aligning the work of trade unionists with the SDGs which is necessary if these goals are to be reached in a European level. As we know, one of the problems with the SDGs is that they were written for national level actors who could 'pull' large and powerful policy levers. That is probably the fundamental problem with the SDGs, the way in which they are written speak to governments and do not speak to or see the need to involve ordinary people in the framing or implementation of the targets and goals. This will only lead to more 'Gilet Jaune'



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moments where ordinary people are rightly revolting from imposed 'green taxation' that is not seen to be in their interests, or worse green taxes is an attempt to get the working class to pay for the greening of the economy. Either way there is a fundamental unfairness which needs to be addressed if the SDG goals are to be reached.

We ended the workshop with a next steps for everyone who wanted to share this. Some of the items were; exploring the SDGs with university partner, asking our trade union whether their work is aligned with the SDGs, promoting the SDGs in their workplace, researching how to make the SDGs more relevant to workplace, researching how Swedish Tis are working with them, asking how government is raising awareness of the SDGs, and the need to find TU tools for working with SDGs.

There is a larger issue at work in this space, which is how large a change is needed in our societies to achieve a regenerative social, political, environmental and economic culture. The SDGs are seen by many as inadequate to reach this level of change. And at the same time the SDGs highlight how far we are from that achievement, and what a gulf there is in developed countries which is small in comparison to developing countries. The task we face is an existential one. And it will require more than pulling a few even large policy levers. This mismatch between what is achieved and the ambitions is why we are not able to move fast or more comprehensively as a society. This is all against a backdrop of eroding democratic institutions (which nationalist demagogues are happy to exploit), deteriorating economic conditions, and ever increasing costs and disruption due to climate chaos (and that inconvenient virus!). It has always been my strong conviction that we all have to be pulling together at this time around something like the SDGs. For that to happen we all need to see the need for them, and be actively participating in this work. Trade Unions in my opinion need to play a large part in this work, as do other societal institutions, not just governments. This will take more than just a few SDG workshops. The tasks required are too large and important.

For the ETUC perhaps the most important policy change they can make at this time would be to put this work from a centre of everything they do. If they do this will achieve a whole series of cascading and systemic positives for their work. This might include:

- As some participants in this workshop recognised, there is a very large overlap between traditional union concerns like workplace safety and working conditions and the SDGs. By aligning union work with these wider goals unions will be seen as a force for good over and beyond the narrow interests of their members. But they will be doing the same work!
- Unions will acquire much from this shift and alignment. It will benefit their members and everyone in society.
- This shift will put corporation's work in a new and harsher light and force them to make the kinds of changes and importantly pay for the shifts we need to take.
- Unions will be playing a leading role in society which will earn them a much needed respect.
- By making this shift towards larger societal aims and progress, unions will be able to achieve much more for their members than by maintaining a more self-interested approach.

I think the SDGs represent an historical opportunity for trade unions. Not all SDGs speak like SDG8 to union needs and demands. But none the less, there is much overlap and opportunity. WE are at a particular time and point in history which we either seize or we decline. For ordinary people we also need to be playing our part and the work of unions and workplace organisations can play a leading role in this transformation. The time is now.