



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 8 – DECENT WORK Transcript

DR ADAM FISHWICK: Well I think that the way that development has been considered and practised to date is that it's development first in a very generic sense of growth and expansion of different types of work, and then it's the workers' interests second. Now what the SDG around Decent Work is trying to do is develop a more inclusive understanding that incorporates that need for good quality jobs, good quality working conditions, as integral to development.

What my research is trying to do is think about that even further, to reverse that relationship even further and think about, well we need to be putting interests of workers and labour first.

Not just how to incorporate good jobs into patterns of economic growth but about thinking about how can we make good livelihoods, good conditions of work, workers' voice and influence over that process of economic development as the primary motive and I focus on this in the context of Latin America and I've looked at these historical and contemporary relationships thinking about both how do workers gain that voice, gain that influence, gain that ability to push their own interests in to the development agenda but also how do they begin to construct their own kinds of alternatives.

One great example of this that I've written a little bit on is what are known as the recuperative enterprises in Argentina. This is a kind of contemporary phenomenon Basically workers that have taken control through various complicated legal mechanisms that exist in Argentina of factories or other types of workplaces that have been officially declared bankrupt.

It ranges from hotels to graphics companies to park services to medical facilities so a whole range of different types of enterprises and they have been around since the beginning of the 2000s after this big economic crisis of 2001. What's been interesting about them - although it's relatively small I mean they number perhaps 300 in Argentina - but it's been a number that's been stable and been growing. What the workers have done here is they've taken control of these workplaces and organised them in a different way.

Now they've had different elements of support from the state but it's been driven from the interests of those workers who've taken control of the factories and organised the way they do work in different ways.

Now I think one of the most interesting things about this is that they've got a better survival rate than ordinary businesses within Argentina. So although some have not worked and disappeared off the radar again, that's at a rate that's much lower than those firms that are within the capitalist market. It's an interesting phenomenon where actually it's not just a type of development that benefits the workers but it's a type of development that works even on the terms we would traditionally understand development by.

DR ANITA HAMMER: DR I look at how changes in global economy are restructuring work and employment in the global south and particular I focus on India. I think India is an interesting test case because it has seen impressive economic growth in the past decade or so but paradoxically it also seems to see a declining quality of work.

I look at new industrialising regions in India which are also fast developing in other parts of the global south. These regions are supposed to be models of fast development and it's States that invest a lot in order to attract local but also foreign direct investment. The aim and the hope is that this will lead to job creation and skills development.

But actually what my research reveals is that that is not always the case. The key findings are that increasingly, more and more firms are relying on migrant labour from the region, from surrounding regions or they rely on women or they rely on other disadvantaged groups, which in the case of India can be the so-called lower caste groups.

These groups of workers are the most disenfranchised and the most disempowered. Most of them are in something known as the informal economy or the informal workforce which means they are basically they don't have a clear employment contract, they are in insecure, poorly-paid jobs, cannot fight for any kind of decent working conditions, certainly don't have any access or very limited access to any social security so we are not talking about women really having any kind of maternity rights or these workers having sickness pay. And obviously this leads to a power imbalance between the employers and the State on one side and workers on the other side and this results in obviously the workers not having much of a collective voice, and the trade unions are not able to mobilise them very effectively.

And I think it's these power imbalances if they are not addressed that are a major hindrance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly of Decent Work and that also links in to other SDGs which are of reduction of inequality, the kind of inequality that exists in these regions of the global south unless and until you address them how are you going to achieve Decent Work, and then that takes us to other issues that unless you have sustainable industrialisation how will you have sustainable cities and regions?

So Adam and I, since we do similar research, but in different geographical regions of the global south thought that we could come up with this Labour, Work and Development Network which addresses these issues of sustainable development and decent work but in different contexts and we thought that through experience sharing, through sharing or research, through conducting joint research we could develop a network of people with similar interests and orientations in order to chart the way forward.

What are the similarities and differences that exist in say, south Asia and Latin America or increasingly China and Middle East? What is it we can learn from these experiences or workers, what is it that the workers themselves are doing to address these issues? Do activists play a role in it? What can we as academics do? So the whole purpose of this network is to take the research forward, to develop networks, other networks, with other academics, activists, workers themselves.

Adam: I think what's interesting about the dialogue we have been having as part of developing this network is that we are seeing the different ways in which groups of workers organise, mobilise, try and gain this kind of political, social and economic voice and rights within the process of development and the different barriers that are in place.

For ex, we have talked a lot about different organising traditions in Latin America as opposed to South Asia, the capacity to develop these kind of more collective experiments, the different kinds of challenges they face both in terms of the role of the State in trying to suppress them or the capacity of employers to move them outside the workplace and limit their capacity to influence and to challenge these working conditions that they face.

But also, in terms of the overall transformations we're seeing in terms of the way of the world of work is changing, so the heightening precarity, heightening flexibilisation, heightening insecurity through the informal economy and how that is changing, becoming similar, becoming different in different regions of the world and what is it we can learn across these often different sites. I think one of the main motivations behind that is when you focus your research on these very much more micro areas of social life, there's a potential you end up siloed in the region. So my understanding of labour organising comes very much from my research on labour organising in Latin America, which is very different to the experience that workers in South Asia have.

Thinking about how this is different in different parts of the globe I think is very useful in beginning to answer these questions of what can be done and how can more international and transnational ways of thinking about these issues can be developed. I know that's quite an ambition saying that but I think that's the kind of thing we are trying to push towards through the network.

ANITA: And it's not as if what we're doing is just restructured to the global south, although that's our primary focus. Because informalisation, precarisation, feminisation of the workforce - the kind of insecure, poorly-paid jobs - that's unfortunately increasingly happening in the global north also. So we hope that there would be lessons learned on all sides and for all interested parties through the network and our research.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE NETWORK:

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www.labouranddevelopment.wordpress.com