

## Decent work works

“The ILO has always emphasized the importance of regulating labour markets, for preventing exploitation, promoting security, building consensus and encouraging social integration. But the organization needs to go beyond the moral high ground and also make a case on economic grounds. Safe and secure workplaces do not just meet vital human needs, they also boost productivity and enable businesses to grow.”<sup>1</sup>

Increased productivity will be imperative to build up Sri Lanka’s economic growth rate. But sustainable growth entails more than adding value to products and services. It is for people that prosperity is created. It is people that make society prosper. Work is a defining element of our material existence, in the sense that it allows us to be consumers and meet our fundamental needs. “Lets remember that it is through work – and work which is accomplished in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity – that people can rise out of poverty, earn a decent living and relate to society and the environment in a truly sustainable way”.<sup>2</sup>

The Decent Work Agenda, promoted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes the importance of human and social capital for sustainable growth and productivity. The concept of Decent Work is the product of a very wide process of consultation, and was endorsed by its 174 member states. It is not an abstract intellectual construct, but something that embodies the reality, the aspirations and expectations of men and women throughout the world.

Decent work is about providing access to quality employment. It is also about protecting workers and their rights—an essential goal, if workers are to recognize a personal stake in enhancing competitiveness

and productivity. The decent work agenda includes four main pillars: equal access to productive and remunerative jobs without discrimination; a safe working environment; social protection and workers’ rights; and social dialogue.

The fundamental premise is that adopting a decent work agenda is the surest way to sustained productivity in a highly competitive world. Specifically, this high road to development requires that (i) employment promotion is integral to economic growth plans; (ii) both quality and quantity of jobs are equally guaranteed; (iii) the enhancing of skills and employability are primary goals; (iv) the rights of workers are safeguarded and their voice is heard; (v) the workforce has access to basic protection.

“Lets acknowledge that changing unsustainable production and consumption patterns, through environmentally friendly technologies, means a revolution in the way we work and in the things we make. Lets address the fact that the present form of globalization is exacerbating rather than bridging social divisions within and between countries. Many throughout the world are deeply disturbed, and downright angry, at the failure to reverse these trends. To humanize globalization, we need to build a strong synergy between social, environmental and economic policies.”<sup>3</sup>

This is what the Decent Work Agenda stands for. And, contrary to what some may suspect, decent work and better productivity are not mutually exclusive, but instead, go hand in hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Decent work, The report of the Director general to the 87 th Session of the International Labour Conference.

<sup>2</sup> ILO Director General’s Address to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, August 2002

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<sup>3</sup> idem