Challenges to the Effective Implementation of SDG 8 in Creating Decent Work and Economic Growth in the Southern African Hemisphere: Perspectives from South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe

Mikovhe Maphiri, Matsietso Agnes Matasane, and Godknows Mudimu

Abstract In September 2015, the UN Generally Assembly embraced the International Labour Organisations Agenda on decent work for sustainable development. Formally known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the agenda is made up of 17 sustainable goals and targets. SDG8, focuses on promoting inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. The decent work component of SDG8 is anchored on four pillars namely job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue. Notably, the objectives of the SDGs are interlinked with the objectives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which are to achieve economic development, peace and improve the quality of life for Southern Africans. Decent work and economic growth within the SADC region are critical for the respective governments and for regional integration. The SADC region has aligned the SDGs to its existing policies and to other regional and international normative instruments and policy documents in a bid to improve the life and welfare of citizens in the region. This paper seeks to investigate the challenges and opportunities in achieving decent work within the SADC region, with specific reference to South Africa, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe.

1 Introduction

In 2015, 195 nations came together for a unified purpose of changing the world for the better by bringing together their respective governments, business, media, local non-profit organizations and institute of higher learning to achieve unified goals by
the year 2030 (Chowdhury and Koya 2017). These goals are ambitious and inclusive in nature, with a too good to be true undertone as the aspirations seek to achieve what most developing African economies would describe as an elusive African dream.

The SDGs require member states to end extreme poverty in all forms by 2030, end world hunger and achieve food security through a commitment to end malnutrition as well as commit to good health and wellbeing for all at all ages (Pekmezovic 2019). This includes, among other things: reducing the number of infant mortality and the death of children through HIV and Aids (Cluver et al. 2018); promoting inclusivity by ensuring quality in education; championing the economic growth and decent work agenda (Moodley and Cohen 2012). The SDGs encourage member states to build sustainable communities and promote justice for all, by monitoring climate change and ensuring environmental justice through global partnerships and innovation (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, [APA] n.d.).

The intrinsic feature of the SDGs is to achieve common objectives that make people human. These objectives are interlinked with the objectives of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which are to achieve economic development, peace and improve the quality of life for Southern Africans by supporting the socially disadvantaged through a commitment to development, peace and security, alleviate poverty and enhance the standard and quality of life for Southern Africans (SADC 2013).

This article examines SDG8, focusing on the decent work component and economic growth for all. The subject of decent work within the SADC region remains a prickly issue as challenges to the effective provision for decent work remained an intangible goal for decades (Southern African Development Community Decent Work Programme 2013–2019, 2013). Challenges of colonization in Lesotho (Gocking 1997) and Zimbabwe (Chigwedere 2001) as well as apartheid and colonization in South Africa (Connolly 2001) created deeper levels of inequality and uneven economic growth across these countries (Southern African Development Community (SADC) Decent Work Programme 2013–2019, 2013). The century long struggle for decent work and sustainable economic growth continues with efforts put in place by members of the SADC community to achieve this goal and build societies free from the plagues of poverty and unemployment.

The approach of the SADC community has been to promote sustainable and equitable economic growth that ensures poverty alleviation and improve the quality of life for the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, promoting and maximising productive employment and using existing resources by member states. In addition, the SADC approach seeks to ensure that the region is self-sustaining and that there is a collective self-reliance and interdependence of member states (SADC Consolidated Treaty 2011).

This paper argues that the SDG8 of decent work and economic growth is not a new agenda within the SADC community. As such, pre-existing limitations and challenges for decent work and economic growth cannot be realised outside the partnership of countries within the SADC region and the investment made by the international community. The goals set out by the UN General Assembly should be commended for their recognition of the key elements needed to sustain humanity
which include an emphasis on innovation, collaboration and partnership. SDG8 as well as the other SDGs will struggle in the face of local governance challenges of corruption, political instability, unemployment and inequality as well as disunity among the countries in the SADC community.

This paper provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities in achieving SDG8 within the SADC community, with specific reference to South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. The review highlights the gap between the global aspirations of the UN and the local realities within which SDG8 is being implemented in South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. In what follows, we provide an overview of the challenges embedded in implementing decent work and economic growth within the three countries before evaluating the structures for improvement. Each section of this paper draws on scholarship from law, industrial sociology and economics to consider the barriers to implementation as well as the local challenges encountered in achieving SDG8 within the remaining 10 years of the 2030 deadline. The paper also recommends the robust and decisive actions that need to be taken to attain SDG8. Finally, we review the synergy and contradictions between SDG8 and the SADC agenda.

2 Decent work and SADC Initiatives

The significance of achieving decent work has formed part of crucial debates in realising sustainable development in both developing and developed economies (Decent work, ILO.org n.d). Thus, the concept of decent work is not a novel concept as its origins are traced to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Theron 2012). According to the ILO, decent work is a very broad and multifaceted agenda. It is about the aspirations of people in their working lives which involves the process of ensuring fair income, freedom of expression and participation in organisational and or corporate decisions that affect their working lives (Decent work, ILO.org n.d) Decent work can be summarised in terms of the four pillars of the ILO’s decent work agenda, namely employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue.

As Theron correctly puts it, decent work is not all about work in the literal sense, it is about sustainable job creation which embodies, inter alia: the notion of creating sustainable livelihoods; guaranteeing rights at work by giving workers a collective voice through labour laws; and supporting structures conducive for collective bargaining and worker participation by advancing structures for social protection and welfare (Theron 2012). To attain this objective, work must be non-discriminatory, safe and provide structures for collective bargaining and social security (Moodley and Cohen 2012).

One of the key contributions of the decent work agenda is that it applies broadly to all workers, including those operating in formal and informal sectors, unregulated wage workers, home workers and to self-employed workers (Ghai 2003). This is significant in the SADC region where a lot of work is being created in the informal
economy, then in the formal sector (Smit and Mpedi 2010). It is the quality of such jobs that the decent work agenda aims to improve, across all economic divides including in the formal and informal sector. More importantly, the decent work agenda recognises the critical role of various stakeholders, particularly corporations in the creation of jobs. It is through this recognition of stakeholders that strong social dialogue platforms between employers and employees can contribute towards the advancement and fostering of sustainable solutions (Rider 2015).

Furthermore, the concept of decent work presupposes that such work is pre-existing or rather structures for work are in place or have the potential to be put in place in a sustainable manner. The challenge for decent work in the SADC region is not only embedded in the decency aspect of it which include amongst other things workplace safety, fair wages and structures for workers to organise through collective bargaining and workplace forums (Bendix 2001). It is the lack of work which forms the biggest challenge to achieving decent work. This is created by the sluggish and reclining economic growth conundrum accompanied by wide gaps of inequality and poverty together with poor and ineffective corporate and public governance structures. This is an area that requires the immediate attention of the SADC community since it is grappling with high unemployment rates and high levels of poverty (SADC 2013). As will be demonstrated in the South African, Lesotho and Zimbabwean context, decent work is interconnected to other SDGs and basic human rights. Thus, the success of SDG8 is interlinked to other rights, particularly participation rights.

3 Perspectives on Decent work from South Africa: An Overview

South Africa is a diverse country with a unique socio-political history. The country possesses a great wealth of metallic and non-metallic mineral resources that are located across the nine provinces (Davenport 2013). The country’s wealth in mineral resources led to the colonization of the country as well as the apartheid regime which ruled in the country from the late 1940s until the early 1990s (Allen 2003). The exploration of mineral resources and the mining industry formed the foundation to South Africa’s economic development and industrialisation process. Apartheid in South Africa was a system of oppression put in place to ensure the marginalisation and discrimination of black persons through laws, policies and systems oppression (Saul 2012).

Work in South Africa has continuously been categorised from the lenses of race and gender (Hans 1935). This has been largely influenced by the history of apartheid and colonisation which not only fostered inhumane working conditions especially in the mining sector by employing cheap black labour (Allen 2003), but ensured that the SADC region supplied labour to South African mines through the migrant labour system. This in turn created systems of inequality that are still plaguing society
through wide gaps of inequality and poverty (Tabata 1973). The history of South Africa has played a key role in the development of the economy. However, despite the country achieving its democracy in 1994, and putting systems in place to redress the injustices and legacies of the past (Buhlungu 2006), South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. The country is grappling with high rates of unemployment and low job security (Collier 2015). Since democracy, South Africa has been on a quest to redress the patent inequality in society, this is done through laws that promote human dignity, equality and freedoms of all persons underscored by the spirit of Ubuntu (Wenckebach et al. 2019).

The South African decent work agenda is pursued under the umbrella of labour law with over 16 legislative instruments promoting the rights and freedom of workers. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 which is the highest law in the land forms the basis of the rights and freedoms of workers (Du Toit 2003). In particular, section 23 of the Constitution, read together with sect. 5 of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, aim to promote decent work by ensuring equality at the workplace through the creation of forums where workers can organise and have a collective voice (Bendix 2001). The pursuit for the attainment of decent work in South Africa led to the promulgation of legislation supporting decent work, which inter alia include legislation such as the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 which is derived from the equality clause entrenched in sect. 9 of the South African Constitution as well as the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997 which seeks to ensure that the agenda of decent work is pursued and regulated within existing labour laws.

Opportunities to achieve decent work in South Africa cannot be described outside the economic and socio-political setting of the South African society. The agenda for decent work has formed part of the history of the country during which the forces of apartheid and colonization were against the provision of decent work for historically disadvantaged racial groups under the apartheid regime (Stares 1977). Workers in the mining industry have been fighting for the enforcement of decent work within the mines for centuries (Allen 2003). The demand for sustainable wages, the quest to improve working conditions, the recognition of workers’ rights to organise have all formed part of the fight against apartheid and the promotion of decent work in the mines (Budeli 2007). Twenty-six years post democracy, the position has remained largely unchanged as the challenges for many workers in achieving decent work have remained unsolved. This was witnessed in the 2012 Marikana massacre where over 34 mine workers and police officers were killed by policemen in their fight for decent work and improved working conditions (Alexandra et al. 2013). In 2012 the mining sector underwent intense waves of labour unrest (Chinguno 2013). On 16 August 2012, the mining industry in South Africa received the world’s attention, when 34 mineworkers who took part in unprotected strike were shot and killed by the officers of the South African Police Services (SAPS) at the hills of Rookopies also known as Marikana in the Rustenburg (Farlam et al. 2015). This was the culmination of the preceding waves of unrest and violence by mine workers in post-apartheid South Africa (Luiz 2002). The Marikana Massacre was essentially a dispute about living conditions and the salary by the rock drill operators, who
demanded a wage increase to R12 500 per month, and to support these demands they embarked on a wildcat strike (Marikana Commission of Inquiry 2015). These events left so many questions on the state of the country’s democratic system, the question of decent work and the accountability of corporates through corporate social responsibility and accountability, the government’s role in promoting structures of decent work and labour governance in South Africa. On 23 of November 2018, the president of the Republic of South Africa, President Cyril Ramaphosa assented the National Minimum Wage Act 9 of 2018. The purpose of the Act is to advance economic development and social justice by raising wages of the lowest paid workers, protecting workers from unreasonably low wages, preserving the value of the national minimum wage as well as promoting collective bargaining by supporting structures for economic transformation. Although the promulgation of a Minimum Wage Act can be viewed as a commendable step towards alleviating the disparities in income in the national labour market, the functionality of the Act in promoting decent work is still a subject of much debate as trade unions argue that the South African minimum wage is nowhere near promoting platforms for eradicating poverty and inequality as it is below the inflation rate.

Decent work includes the payment of decent wages and decent working hours. In South Africa the Basic Conditions of Employment Act sets out the ordinary working hours for work at 45 hours a week and hours beyond the 48 hours indicate that the workers are working overtime. In 2018, South Africa adopted the National Minimum Wage Act and in March 2020, the new national minimum wages were pegged at R20.76 an hour. This rate is almost equivalent to $1 United States dollar per hour. This minimum wage remains a subject of much debate as trade union representatives argue that the minimum wage cap is below the inflation rate, thus undermining efforts to achieve decent work.

4 Opportunities to Achieving Decent work and Economic Growth in South Africa

4.1 Opportunities for Decent Work Through Law and Policy

The agenda for decent work for all in South Africa can be traced back to the South African socio-economic policy framework implemented by the African National Congress (the ANC) (Cameron 1996). The Reconstruction Development Program (RDP) was introduced in South Africa after months of deliberations between the ANC government and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) (Cameron 1996). Trade unions in South Africa play a unique role in that they have not only assumed power by fighting for decent work in South Africa prior to and post democracy but have been key players in the socio-political movement against apartheid by acting as key drivers for socio-political and economic transformation in South Africa
The RDP programme sought to oversee the transformation of the South African economy by embarking on a macro-economic stabilisation program formally known as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) which was aimed at driving the stabilisation of the economy and the settlement of the debts owed by the apartheid government which now passed on to the new democratic government (Michie and Padayachee 1998).

The creation of decent work has, since the dawn of the new democracy, been at the centre of new economic policies championed to promote decent work by the ANC government (SPPII, 30). The New Growth Path which was launched by the ANC government in 2010 envisaged the creation of five million new jobs by the year 2020. The vision was that by the year 2020 half of all the working-age would be in paid employment and that unemployment would have dropped by 15 percent. The New Growth Path focuses on identifying areas where large scale employment creation is possible through a series of partnerships between the government and the private sector (New Growth Path 2011). However, the objectives of the New Growth Path (Fine 2012) are yet to be realised as the expanded unemployment rate currently stands 35.3 percent (StatsSA 2020).

In a bid to promote stability and security of work in South Africa, the South African government has put in place structures for decent work through the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). The CCMA is a dispute resolution body established in terms of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 (Bhorat et al. 2009). The overarching goal of the CCMA is to give effect to the constitutional right to fair labour practices by providing platforms for conciliating workplace disputes, arbitrating certain categories of work disputes and conducting inquiries by arbitrators to name a few of the broad services offered by the CCMA. The provision of platforms for dispute resolution through conciliation and mediation forms part of the decent work agenda. During the 2018 to 2019 financial year, the CCMA received a total of 193,732 cases, making it the largest labour dispute resolution agency in the world by volume of referrals (Tshabalala 2019).

In addition, other legislative interventions like the Employment Equity Act are key drivers towards pursuing the decent work Agenda in South Africa. The Act has been hailed as a key instrument in promoting equality in the workplace (Du Toit 2003). The Act has two key objectives namely: to ensure that employees receive equal opportunity and fair treatment through the prohibition of unfair discrimination against all employees; and to achieve equitable representation of black people, including women and people with disability by means of affirmative action. Affirmative action’s procedures coincide with the country’s plight to promote transformation and redress areas of socio-economic inequality through black economic empowerment programmes such as South Africa’s Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policy which later developed into the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003 (BBBEEA).

The BBBEEE Act can be described as an advancement to the BEE policy as it seeks to encompass a wider range of historically disadvantaged persons and not to exclusively empower black persons. In other words, the difference in these policies is that while the BEEE policy sought to address the wrongs of the past through
exclusive Black economic empowerment, BBBEEE aims to redistribute the wealth of the nation to all races and genders including people with disability. The BBBEE Act seeks to promote affirmative action by promoting a preferential procurement process that aims to ensure the effective participation of historically disadvantaged persons into the economy. Historically disadvantaged persons being the Blacks, Indians and Coloured persons, women as well as people with disability through socio-economic strategies (Esser and Dekker 2008) into the mainstream economy which was previously exclusively white and inaccessible (Horwitz and Jain 2011). However, opponents of the BBEEA policy argue that the BEE policy has led to the enrichment of a small elite from the previously disadvantaged groups and its value in promoting decent work and addressing the challenges of inequality are yet to be seen. This is also the case as its implementation has been plagued by corruption with BEE contracts benefiting political elites (Simkins 2011).

4.2 The Barriers to Effective Implementation to SDG8 in South Africa

Despite the provision of legal structures and institutions to support decent work in South Africa, several problems persist. Key challenges to the attainment of decent work in South Africa include, among other things: high levels of unemployment; skills shortages; inequality; and; corruption. A quick glimpse at the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) for the fourth quarter of 2019 paints a gloomy picture. The QLFS is a household-based sample survey conducted by Statistics South Africa. It collects data on the labour market activities of individuals aged 15 years and older who live in South Africa. The official unemployment rate remained unchanged at 29.1% between Quarter 3: 2019 and Quater4: 2019. All provinces recorded increases in the expanded unemployment rate. The largest increase was recorded in Limpopo up by 5.2% followed by Free State up by 3.0% points Mpumalanga up by 2.7%. While it is too soon to depict the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South Africa’s plight to achieving decent work and the results of the 10 years New Growth Path put in place by the ANC government in 2010 to promote decent work and overall employment, the efforts made by the New Growth Path have substantially been destroyed by the COVID – 19 pandemic which led to the lockdown of the country for more than 5 months.

The lockdown in South Africa started from 26 March 2020 leading to a shutdown of large parts of the economy for 5 weeks and some smaller sectors remained in lockdown for 5 months post the initial date of the national lockdown. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, South Africa has experienced a massive decline in production and sales which then led to a vast number of job losses as many industries closed indefinitely due to the lockdown. Therefore, the gains made in 2019 in terms of employment prior to the pandemic continue to drop amid the COVID 19 pandemic.
A second barrier to effective implementation to decent work relates to high levels of corruption. Corruption is a plague that has been eroding national resources for decades. The fight against corruption also ties in with South Africa’s priority in achieving effective service delivery which is crucial in promoting decent work and improving the quality of life for all South Africans. In the last quarter of 2019, South Africa was recorded to have lost close to 27 billion Rands annually, leading to thousands of job losses as a result (Shuma 2018). Corruption allegations in State owned enterprises and some international companies doing business in South Africa has led to serious financial losses. This, in turn, led to massive job losses. The report published by the office of the public protector State of Capture in 2016 records in detail the extent of improper and unethical conduct by the office of the President and other state functionaries (State Capture 2016). The state of corruption amid COVID times has increased as South Africa has lost close to five hundred billion Rands set aside to assist financially distressed companies and unemployed South Africans during the pandemic. The prospects of achieving decent work in South Africa within the remaining 10 years of the 2030 goal remain improbable as the present state of the economy and the growing pangs of corruption amid the COVID 19 pandemic places unprecedented strains in the economy.

5 Perspectives from Lesotho Opportunities and Challenges

Lesotho was a British colony from 1884 until it gained its independence in 1966 (ILO EESEL 2014). Since its independence, Lesotho has sought to promote national development planning through the implementation of five-year development plans which were carried out until the year 2000 (Mashinini 2019). In 2000, the country formulated Vision 2020 to provide a long-term perspective within which national short to medium-term plans could be articulated (Lesotho Vision 2020). The Vision 2020 visualized Lesotho as a country full of employment opportunities and a magnet retaining its people to decent jobs by the year 2020 (Lesotho Vision 2020).

Alongside the Vision 2020, Lesotho also adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) to serve as the country’s development frameworks (Mashinini 2019). The MDGs included, among other things, plummeting poverty and hunger through the creation of employment (Lesotho MDGs Status Report 2015). The Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan, on the other hand, was anchored on three inter-connected approaches: rapid job creation through the establishment of a beneficial operating environment that facilitates private sector-led economic growth; delivery of poverty-targeted programmes that empower the poor by empowering them to gain access to income opportunities; and establishment of policies and legal frameworks that are beneficial to the full implementation of priorities (Lesotho PRS 2004/2005).

Lesotho adopted SDGs in 2015 to carry the baton from the MDGs and as a reflection of its commitment to the UN Agenda 2030. The implementation of SDGs in Lesotho contributes to a larger pool of policy frameworks put in place for the
development of Lesotho and Basotho, thereby assisting the government of Lesotho and its development stakeholders in mapping out strategies for enhanced execution of transformative sustainable development (Mashinini 2019). The adoption of SDGs, therefore, forms part and parcel for the acceleration of decent and productive job creation and inclusive growth, energized and dynamic private sector, modernized public service that supports the private sector and is built on the principle of “people-centred development” and good governance and accountability system (Lesotho VRN 2019).

Although Lesotho is struggling to introduce policies and strategies that would empower it to successfully implement the SDGs as its development programme towards 2030, as envisioned in Agenda 2030 (Mashinini 2019), the country’s commitment to SDGs generates both a challenge and an opportunity for the government to act differently, vigorously and with a clear purpose on investment in people-focused development (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017). Lesotho does not have a comprehensive set of labour laws compared to South Africa. However, the Constitution of Lesotho as the supreme law of the country protects the right to work by providing that “Lesotho shall endeavour to ensure that every person has the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts” (Constitution of Lesotho). The Labour Code Order 24 of 1994 is the principal law on labour and employment in Lesotho (Mosito 2014). The Code promotes employment by prohibiting unfair dismissals of employees in sect. 66, by allowing orders of reinstatement in sect. 73(1) and providing compensation in cases of unfair dismissal in sect. 73(2) (Labour Code 1992). The Labour Code provides a wide range of measures and policies that are aimed at ensuring the continued employment of employed persons, such as procedures to be followed prior to a dismissal (Mosito 2014).

5.1 Lesotho and SDG8

Lesotho continues to grapple with high rates of unemployment despite its efforts to alleviate poverty and create employment through the country’s long-term policies (Lesotho DCWP 2018/19). The continuing retrenchments of mine workers from South African mines have worsened the unemployment situation in Lesotho (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19). The employment of Basotho mineworkers in South Africa is the result of the migrant labour system which was introduced by the South African government as a system that would source mine workers from surrounding countries in the Southern African hemisphere as a means to optimize production during the apartheid regime (Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2015). This system has remained in place despite significant labour reforms in South Africa. The creation of additional decent jobs and faster economic growth are primary determiners of poverty alleviation in Lesotho (Lesotho VRN 2019). The Government of Lesotho recognises that creating decent employment to address the increasing number of people in need of jobs is one of the major challenges the country is facing (Lesotho VRN 2019).
6 Measures Put in Place to Achieve SDG Goal Number 8 in Lesotho

Lesotho is highly devoted to the implementation of the SDGs. The country has put in place programmes and initiatives that are intended to stimulate economic growth and decent job creation particularly for the youth (Lesotho VRN 2019). Lesotho has endorsed Decent Work Agenda which was launched by the ILO in 1999 as its contribution to UN country programmes and as one core instrument to better integrate regular budget and extra-budgetary technical cooperation (Rantanen et al. 2020). The Decent Work programme calls for quality jobs, dignity, equality, a fair income, and safe and healthy working conditions and environments as well as putting people at the centre of development and creating a future that is inclusive and sustainable (Rantanen et al. 2020). Lesotho as a member of the United Nations (UN), International Labour Organisation (ILO), African Union (AU) and Southern African Development Community (SADC), is committed to complying with International Labour Standards for Decent Work and inclusive growth (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19). The Lesotho DWCP encompasses a planning framework for achieving decent work for all by the government of Lesotho, employers’ and workers’ organisations as well as key stakeholders (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19). The DWCP’s key priorities include employment creation, social protection and good governance.

Apart from that, Lesotho has developed a National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) as a medium-term implementation strategy (Makoa 2014). The NSDP implements the SDGs by focusing on the need to pursue sustainable inclusive growth as the most effective route for poverty alleviation (Lesotho VRN 2019). In particular, the NSDP outlines the growth strategy built on four productive sectors that have the highest potential to create decent jobs and attain sustainable inclusive growth (Lesotho VRN 2019).

7 Challenges to Achieving Decent Work and Economic Growth in Lesotho

As indicated, Lesotho continues to battle the intensifying unemployment rate as a result of limited employment opportunities and low absorption rate in labour markets (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19). Although the country has pursued poverty alleviation through job-creation growth as the primary object of the government’s economic policies over the past two decades, unemployment rate is estimated to be 32.8 percent, with a higher prevalence for females and youth at 39.7% and 32.3% respectively, compared to males at 26.2% (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). The government of Lesotho acknowledges that to attain economic growth and generate employment, a strong focus should be put on tapping investments in development of the private sector, particularly in the four National Strategic Development Plan...
identified growth generating sectors - commercial agriculture, tourism, mining and manufacturing (Makoa 2014).

Currently, the fight against the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has left most countries’ economies crippled. Lesotho is no exception. The country already has structural, macroeconomic and social challenges which have been intensified over time by environment-related shocks, political instability and decelerated economic growth, as a result, covid-19 is likely to have devastating socio-economic impacts on the country, including sharp surges in unemployment, vulnerability and poverty (UNDP 2020). With the onset of covid-19, South Africa announced a national lockdown and closed its borders with Lesotho, thereby bringing the travel and tourism industry, which provides formal employment to over 20,000 people in Lesotho, to a complete halt. According to the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, no revenues were generated during the months of March and April due to the covid-19 response measures (UNDP, 2020). A recent review suggests that, due to COVID-19, a number of vulnerable households has increased by almost 50 percent to 899,000 (179,000 in urban and 720,000 in rural areas) as a result of factors such as loss of employment and income sources including remittances and the loss of productive assets (UNDP, 2020). Given the current status quo, it is expected that multidimensional poverty and inequality will significantly increase, thus reversing the hard-won progress towards the attainment of decent work in Lesotho (UNDP 2020).

Other challenges facing the successful implementation of SDG8 include climate change and environmental degradation which represent a significant threat to poverty reduction and to achieving SDGs in Lesotho as well as corruption (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017). The country is extremely vulnerable to volatile weather conditions including floods, drought and heavy rainfalls which contribute to soil erosion and deteriorating conditions of range and arable land (Lesotho NSDP I 2012/13). This is particularly bad because most households in Lesotho practise “low input, low output traditional rain-fed crop farming and extensive livestock husbandry under a communal land tenure system,” (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19).

These progressively irregular climate conditions, coupled with continuing environmental degradation, negatively impact production and productivity, leading to insufficient produce to meet these households’ food requirements even in what could be regarded as good agricultural years (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). To address the unreliable climate conditions that the country faces, Lesotho needs to promote sustainable agriculture strategies and climate-smart technologies to assist a high number of Basotho who depend on rain-fed subsistence farming (MDGs Status Report 2015).

In addition to that, Lesotho has recently experienced political instability as a result of the coalition government arrangement which culminated in a disruptive effect on the economy and developmental trajectory (Lesotho NSDP 2019/19). One more perturbing trend in the political landscape is the escalation of factionalism within Lesotho politics which seems to have shaped the conditions for political opportunism and rent-seeking amongst Members of Parliament, thereby threatening the continued existence of coalition governments and fuelling political instability
and uncertainty (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017). Like in South Africa, corruption poses a massive threat to the economic development and democratic governance in Lesotho (Malephane and Isbell 2019). Although, the overall picture painted by public perception assessments about corruption in Lesotho carried out by external organisations have revealed that Lesotho is faring better than its African counterparts in combatting corruption, the challenges posed by corruption have always been eminent in Lesotho (OSISA 2017). One of the most notoriously documented corruption case which put Lesotho on the map involved bribery in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), the largest water transfer project in the world, between Lesotho and South Africa (OSISA 2017). Under this project, Lesotho signed a treaty with the Republic of South Africa in 1986 in which Lesotho agreed to export water to South Africa. Several multinational corporations were accused of having paid bribes to the chief executive of the LHWP, Mr. Masupha Sole, for the award of the project-related contracts (OSISA 2017). After a long-drawn-out court cases, Sole was found guilty of accepting bribes and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. However, despite having a plethora of anti-corruption laws and having achieved some highly publicised victories over corruption, Lesotho still has significant room for improvement in the fight against corruption (Ardigo 2014).

The last challenge worth mentioning is the skills mismatch in the labour market. Lesotho has a persistent disparity between the skills required by labour market and those that are produced due to the country’s education and training system that is not in line with the skills needs of the labour market (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19). Lesotho labour market is filled with a high percentage of low skilled literate labour (educated labour without employable skills) as well as graduates from post-secondary institutions who are job seekers rather than job creators (Lesotho DWCP 2018/19).

8 Opportunities to Achieving SDGs in Lesotho

The prospects of inclusive growth and decent job creation in Lesotho remain largely dependent on opportunities the country possesses (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). Lesotho has economy wide opportunities as well as sector specific opportunities that, if exploited, can yield the anticipated objectives enshrined in the NSDP II, Vision 2020, SDGs and SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2005–2020 (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). Lesotho possesses approximately 80 percent of literate citizens, making it abundantly full of literate labour force and thereby providing it with a distinct advantage in both domestic and global markets in terms of educated workforce (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). It is this literate labour force that gives Lesotho the greatest comparative advantage in that, if properly trained and employed, the labour force could be the driver for Lesotho’s development (Lesotho NSDP 2012/13). The country also prides itself in well-established tripartite wages negotiation structures that encompasses representatives of workers, employees and government across sectors (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). To increase productivity and
compete in domestic and international markets, Lesotho needs to invest in effective skills development strategies (Lesotho NSDP 2012/13).

Moreover, as a least developed country, Lesotho enjoys a duty-free access for its goods to major world markets such as the United States and the European Union (Lesotho NSDP 2018/19). Because Lesotho’s national output is derived from trade in manufactured products, the country’s manufacturing sector constitutes the prime contributor to exports driven mainly by textiles and garments manufacturing, making it the leading textiles exporter to the US under African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Makoa 2014). Lesotho has, therefore, taken advantage of the AGOA to become the largest exporter of garments to the US from sub-Saharan Africa (ILO EESEL 2014). However, the greatest source of potential for diversification and growth comes from South Africa and other regional markets and Lesotho’s membership of bodies such as SACU and SADC provide access to the most advanced and prosperous markets in Africa (Lesotho NSDP 2012/13). In addition to that, Lesotho has a great potential for eco-tourism, which remains largely unexploited (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017). This potential lies in Lesotho’s natural beauty, rich flora and fauna, and captivating prehistoric and cultural heritage, with mountains, valleys, and rivers providing a memorable scenery for tourists (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017). If exploited, the expansion of community-based tourism products can create more jobs without heavy investment costs (Lesotho Country Analysis 2017).

Lastly, Lesotho has very large and unexploited hydropower potential (ILO EESEL, 2014). Lesotho’s electricity supply is already the greenest in the world and according to the pre-feasibility studies, the country has potential to produce about 6000 MW from wind, 4000 MW from pump storage and 400 MW from conventional hydropower (Lesotho NSDP 2012/13). Given that Lesotho is centrally located within South Africa, and that South Africa has a net power shortage, Lesotho has substantial potential to export electricity to South Africa.

9 Perspectives from Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe and SDG8

Zimbabwe has a high literacy rate of about 94 percent and an economically active labour population of over 60 percent of the total population (Zimbabwe ICDS 2017). In the 2019 budget statement, the Minister of Finance noted the high levels of unemployment particularly for the youths, informalisation of work, high import dependency, low industry capacity utilisation as some of the challenges facing the Zimbabwean economy (Ncube 2019). With a high literate rate, diverse resources and a huge population of economically active citizens, the expectation is that Zimbabwe would implement the SDGs, particularly SDG8 with less challenges than other African countries. However, as it will be shown below, this is not the case.

As will be shown below, SDG8 is interconnected to other SDGs and broadly to other labour standards. Thus, the success of SDG8 is interlinked to other rights, particularly participation rights including freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike.
10 Zimbabwe and SDG 8

Like Lesotho, Zimbabwe was a British colony until it gained its independence in 1980 (Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe 2012–2015). After its independence, Zimbabwe inherited a dual economy encompassing a modern sector employing a fifth of the labour force, existing alongside a subsistence agricultural sector employing 80% of the labour force (Decent Work Country Programme for Zimbabwe 2012–2015). Like many countries in the world, Zimbabwe is also grappling with a daunting challenge of dealing with the scourge of unemployment and endemic poverty (ZiNEPF 2009). As a result, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZTCU) and its affiliates have, for the recent past years, seized the opportunity to advocate and engage the government, employers and other national stakeholders for the achievement of the four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda namely: employment creation; workers’ rights; social protection; and social dialogue (Chakanya 2017).

The Ministry of Macro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion is responsible for coordinating the SDGs or the Agenda 2030, with supervision from the office of the President and Cabinet. In 2016, the Zimbabwean government aligned the SDGs to the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset) and to the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP) (Mpofu 2017). The government showed its commitment to decent work through several initiatives including the adoption of a strategic protectionist policy which was regulated by the Statutory Instrument 64 of 2016 with broader objectives of boosting local industry capacity (Mpofu 2017). The policy was designed to shield local industries from outside competitors, thus improving local job creation. In addition, the government removed several barriers for companies and persons seeking to do business in Zimbabwe prioritising key areas such as starting a business, protecting minority investors, enforcing contracts, trading across borders among others (Mpofu 2017).

Despite the noble intentions underpinning this policy, it has not yielded positive results and its implementation was not complemented with genuine support for local industries. In addition, the policy also offended the SADC initiatives on regional integration as it restricted the movement of goods across borders.

Collaborations between the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are also seen as paving way for decent work, with selected projects like the Young Farmers Innovation Lab being success stories. In addition, the ILO’s Skills for Youth Employment and Rural Development includes the training of rural youths and economic empowerment on agriculture and rural development (ILO Zimbabwe 2013). The government initiatives are also informed by regional initiatives including the Africa Union Vision, Agenda 2063 and the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2015–2020 and the SADC’s Industrialization Strategy 2015–2063. Yet as it stands, most of the commitments expressed by the government remain on paper, with no serious attempt to implement the SDGs.
11 Barriers to Achieving of Goal Eight of SDGs in Zimbabwe

As indicated, Zimbabwe is grappling with high levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth. There are no accurate figures on the levels of unemployment, with most of the data available, including on the ILO website being outdated (Van Wyk 2014). Many companies have been shedding jobs citing the difficult economic environment and COVID-19, has increased unemployment. Many graduates leaving universities within the country and from foreign academic institutions are grappling to find work in the country (Mwenje 2016). About 30,000 students graduate annually from Zimbabwean institutions of higher learning and the unofficial unemployment rate stood at about 90% in 2016 (Mwenje 2016, p. 50). There is nothing to demonstrate that this unemployment rate has decreased, since no meaningful reforms or economic interventions have been developed. The following section demonstrates how achieving the decent work targets in Zimbabwe is interconnected to key rights, particularly participation rights and to the overall permissible environment conducive for corporations.

The Millennium Development Goals (predecessor to the SDGs) are regarded as having failed to achieve various targets for many reasons. Bad political environment, poor governance, unclear policies have all been cited as reasons for the failure, particularly in Africa (Ogujiuba and Jumare 2012). These factors are presented in starker terms when one assesses SDG8 with reference to Zimbabwe. The creation of meaningful jobs relies on the government to set up a clear business policy that safeguards the interests of parties involved, including property rights. In Zimbabwe, the economy and the political environment are often seen as the Siamese twins, with the political environment shaping the economy (Noyes 2020). As such, corporations can only play their role in creating meaningful jobs to the extent permitted by the politics of the day.

Moreover, the nexus between good jobs created by corporations and the quality of such jobs is enhanced in an environment where workers can exercise various rights, including participation rights. This requires an environment that allows workers to negotiate with their employer and to exercise the right to strike when necessary. Notably, Zimbabwe ratified the ILO Conventions, including all the core conventions. Despite having entrenched the right to freedom of assembly and association, the right to demonstrate and petition, freedom of conscience, political rights among other progressive rights in the Constitution, exercising these rights is severely restricted. Most organised strikes by trade unions representing various categories of workers, including public servants are hardly approved. The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining only remains on paper and workers cannot enforce or exercise these rights. Following these restrictions and the levels of violence unleashed on workers who exercise their rights, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) lodged complaints to the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR). The 2019 CEACR Report highlighted issues of
non-compliance by the Zimbabwean government on the implementation of the Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, 87 of 1948 (ILO 2019b). The CEACR called upon the government to desist from arresting, detaining and harassing members of trade unions and to investigate allegations of violence against trade union members (ILO 2019b). There are further reports that the government is crushing professionals who are exercising their rights including journalists who have been exposing corruption (Amnesty International 2020). The undermining of these core rights further compromises not only the quality of jobs offered by corporations, but the conditions of employment. To achieve the decent work agenda in Zimbabwe, there is a therefore a need to create an environment where constitutionally guaranteed rights can be exercised without threats of violence or intimidation from the government. Employment creation, social dialogue, social protection and the rights at work must all be recognised as key elements of the decent work agenda in Zimbabwe.

There is therefore a clear linkage between political and economic policies and the performance of the overall economy. Economic growth in Zimbabwe has been hampered by the lack of political reforms. Some of the issues affecting decent work and corporate responsibility in Zimbabwe include the unclear monetary policy, high inflation, rampant corruption, lack of protection of property rights, lack of transparency in the exploitation of mineral resources and the shrinking of democratic space for workers to exercise their rights. Many companies continue to shut down, citing foreign currency shortages, the rising cost of doing business and the uncertain business environment among others. Thus, the success of corporations operating in Zimbabwe and by extension the success of SDG8 is hinged on the political climate prevailing at the time.

In addition to the above, corruption continues to undermine key transformative programmes.

12 Corruption and SDG8 in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is currently ranked 158/180 on the Corruption Perception Index – the most corrupt country outside a war zone in Sub-Saharan Africa (Transparency International 2019, p. 2). After ending colonial rule, Zimbabwe inherited the British public administration system characterised by hierarchy, departmentalism with mechanisms for checks and balances in handling unethical behaviour (Makumbe 1994, p. 45). With such a system of checks and balances and laws designed to curb corruption, the logical conclusion is that ending corruption and prioritising development is an easily achievable standard. However, since 1980, corruption has continued to grow with the ruling elite becoming the enablers and leaders of corruption in both the public and private space (Makumbe 1994, p. 46). There is close nexus between corruption and politics in Zimbabwe and institutions like the Anti-Corruption Commission have not been successful (Muzurura 2017, p. 106). In fact, those in public service have been accused of creating regulations and
procedures designed to delay the issuing of permits trade licenses among other documents unless some form of incentive is offered Muzurura 2017, p. 106). In 2019, the Minister of Finance acknowledged the effect of corruption including creating an economic dissatisfaction within the general citizenry; wastage of public resources; undermining a healthy, investment environment; reinforcing political instability and breeding economic inequalities (Ncube 2019, p. 117). Despite this clear acknowledgment, the mechanisms that the government seeks to implement to tackle corruption are weak and do not address the lack of political will which is the main root cause (Ncube 2019, p. 117).

Several governmental initiatives and policies have all failed to create meaningful jobs and to raise the living standards of ordinary citizens, partly due to corruption (Chitongo et al. 2020, p. 13). Achieving SDG8 thus requires a genuine governmental commitment towards fighting corruption and to implement principles of transparency and accountability enshrined in the Constitution.

Recommendations for achieving decent work in South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

13 CSR

Corporate social responsibility now forms part of the agenda within the sustainable development debates. Traditionally, the concept of corporate social responsibility denotes the voluntary obligations of companies and organisations to go beyond the requirements prescribed in law in promoting the advancement of socio-economic development by incorporating social responsibility measures in society (Amodu 2020). The process of implementing CSR within the SADC region has been a contentious subject since there is no uniformity on the applicable legal regimes on CSR among member states. In South Africa, several aspects of CSR that were traditionally voluntary are now mandated and prescribed by legislation (Howard 2014, pp. 13–15). The increase in legal prescriptions is particularly high in the mining industry, which notably still employs a substantial worker compared to other industries (Howard 2014), (Minerals Council South Africa 2017). Other CSR provisions are based soft law instruments, with voluntary codes of best practice such as the King Codes of good corporate governance being key towards ensuring that companies adhere to international best practice and standards (IODSA 2016). The Companies Act 71 of 2008 explicitly contains avenues which promote CSR through the creation Social and Ethics Committees (SECs) under sect. 72(4). The SECs are a paradigm shift in the governance of companies and in the recognition of companies’ role in advancing CSR. One of the significant inclusions on the duties of the SECs is towards monitoring the company’s standings under the ILO Protocol on decent work and promote the values of decent work. This is done through ensuring compliance of the company with ILO’s protocol on decent work as well as with supporting instruments and laws that aim to promote social responsibility values within the company. Within the SADC region, Corporations can play a meaningful role in
Challenges to the Effective Implementation of SDG 8 in Creating Decent Work and...
the SDGs, particularly SDGs around economic growth (goals 8–11), has been slow, with levels of inequality increasing (Cerf 2018). The limitations in achieving the SDGs in the SADC region are not purely related to the economy, but are imbedded in poor governance, corruption and a general lack of prioritization of critical areas of economic growth (Ogujiuba and Jumare 2012).

16 Concluding Remarks

This short article introduced the challenges to decent work in the SADC region, with specific reference to three countries in the SADC community namely, South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe. The article provided an overview of the opportunities and challenges for decent work in SADC. This of course is a distillation of a far more comprehensive body of work whose comprehension goes beyond the objective of the paper. Based on the brief discussions made on South Africa, Lesotho and Zimbabwe, it was argued that the challenges to decent work stem from the history of the countries and the socio-political setting in each country’s jurisdictions. In South Africa, the core function of decent work is to redress the injustices of the past by addressing socio-economic inequality through laws and policy aimed at redressing the impact of colonization and apartheid. On the other hand, Lesotho as a least-developed country is facing challenges that are embedded with climate change, high levels of unemployment and its interdependency on South Africa. In other words, economic challenges faced by South Africa can have a drastic effect on the economy of Lesotho. This is despite of the nations’ effort put in place under the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) as a medium-term implementation strategy. Lastly, Zimbabwe presents a unique opportunity for the realisation of the SDGs given the high levels of literacy, the number of graduates leaving universities yearly and the abundance of agricultural land and mineral resources. However, it is plagued with challenges of political instability and the shrinking of the democratic space. Due to the unstable political climate and the sluggish economic growth rate. Most skilled personnel with special and scarce skills have migrated to the diaspora and the countries in the neighbouring SADC region.

The Conclusion is that the objective towards achieving decent work in SADC is not a novel or new concept and the limitations faced by countries who are members of the SADC treaty persist despite the goals set out by the members of the SADC community under the SADC treaty. We therefore recommend that for the effective realisation of SDG 8 under the Agenda 2030, countries will require renewed efforts in promoting CSR as a real requirement in law and policy. The partnership between companies and government through CSR is pivotal in realising the decent work agenda. This is because private companies absorb most of the labour force in both developed and developing economies. Social entrepreneurship and improved efforts of regional integration is pivotal, and the collaboration of SADC member states is essential in re-engaging corporate social responsibility. However, for the SADC region to achieve the SDGs and to prevent another failure like the MDGs, amid the
ameliorate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on decent work and economic growth, governments must prioritise facilitating employment creation and public-private partnerships. In addition, the SADC region must take decisive action against corruption and must make full commitment to regional integration and promote entrepreneurship across member states. We therefore suggest that CSR, social entrepreneurship and regional integration can be a good start towards achieving decent work within the remaining 9 years of the 2030 Agenda.

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Mikovhe Maphiri is attorney of the High Court, South Africa. She is an academic (lecturer) at the Department of Commercial Law, University of Cape Town, South Africa. She holds LLB from the University of Limpopo and LLM from the University of Cape Town, where she is also currently a PhD candidate. She is an emerging researcher whose research interests are in corporate governance, CSR and sustainability in South Africa.

Matsietso Agnes Matasane holds LLB from the University of Venda, South Africa, LLM Mercantile Law from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, she is currently LLD Candidate at the University of Pretoria. She is an emerging researcher from the University of Pretoria. She is a PhD candidate in Banking Law at the University of Pretoria. Her area of research is in deposit guarantee system in the South African banking sector in which she interrogates the envisaged introduction of explicit deposit insurance system in South Africa. She is the recipient of the Absa Barclays Africa Chair in Banking Law in Africa scholarship which is awarded to PhD candidates in the field of Banking Law.

Godknows Mudimu is a Research Associate Mineral Law in Africa, a University of Cape Town PhD Graduand and currently works as a legal researcher, Office of the Chief Justice, Seychelles. He holds LLM from the UCT, LLB and BSoSc from Rhodes University, South Africa. His PhD thesis assesses the effectiveness of self-regulation on labour standards in selected South African mining sectors. His areas of interest include regulation, labour law, mineral law, occupational safety and health at mines, and transparency and accountability in the extractive industry.