

Attaining Decent Work through effective Health and Safety Management Systems



A life is fragile, and losing that life has a significant impact on the company, the family, the community, the economy and the future.

The ripple effect of a single loss of life or inability to work extends far beyond the superficial implications observed by the general public.

The primary goal of the International Labour Organization (ILO) today is to promote opportunities to obtain decent and productive work, subject to freedom, equality, security and human dignity.

A Global Initiative of Decent Work

The concept of "decent work" was launched in 1999 in the Report of the Director-General to the International Labour Conference meeting in its 87th Session. The concept conveys the broad and varied dimensions associated with work today and encapsulates them in an expression that everyone can appreciate. But what does the notion of decent work really comprise?

Four components of the notion are elaborated on in the same Report of the Director-General, namely employment, social protection, workers' rights and social dialogue. This also refers to adequate opportunities for work and remuneration and encompasses safety at work and healthy working conditions.

It was during this time that the ILO started to formulate a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which came into effect in 2016. These include Good Health and Well-Being, as well Decent Work and Economic Growth, as goals that the ILO hopes to achieve by 2030 through their Decent Work and Sustainable Development Agenda.

What is Decent Work?

This is explained very well in a video released by the ILO (<https://youtu.be/mZpyJwevPqc>). The video mentions that “Global poles rank access to jobs as a priority, and not just any job, Quality Jobs, and not just any work, Decent Work. Decent Work means dignity, equality, fair income, and safe work conditions. Decent Work puts people at the centre of development, gives women, men, and youth a voice in what they do, the rights to protect them from exploitation and a future that is inclusive and sustainable”. Decent work is not just a goal – it is a driver for sustainable development.

Dignity, equality, fair income, and **safe work conditions** are vital to Decent Work. The ILO determined how Decent Work would be achieved, identifying four indicators:

1. Full and Productive Employment
2. Right at Work
3. Social Protection
4. Promotion of Social Dialogue.

What are the outcomes to achieve Decent Work?

From the above four indicators, the following ten elements were identified as outcomes to achieve Decent Work:

- Employment Opportunities
- Adequate Earning and Productive Work
- **Decent Working Time**
- **Combining Work, Family and Personal Life**
- Work that Should be Abolished
- Stability and Security of Work
- Equal Opportunity and Treatment in Employment
- *Safe Work Environment*
- Social Security
- Social Dialogue, Employers and Workers Representatives.

Three of the elements can be accomplished by implementing effective health and safety management systems aligned with international standards and local legislation.

Understanding Decent Work in South Africa

South Africa was readmitted to the ILO in 1994 and participates in its initiatives. The two biggest initiatives in South Africa that align with Decent Work are the Decent Work Country Programme (2010-2014) and the National Development Plan 2030 (2015-2030).

Both of these link up directly with South Africa's Constitution, including the right to dignity, the right to work and the right to health.

Decent Work is a requirement imposed on businesses to support the global challenge of improving employee safety and well-being and promote dignity, fair income, equality, and a safe work environment.

SERR Synergy assists businesses with the development and implementation of a health and safety programme which promotes Decent Work, aligned with the OHS Act and International Standards. Our team of OHS Professionals can relieve the stress and concerns that might affect your business's capability to remain operational.

In our next article in this series we will delve deeper into these two initiatives by discussing buy-in from stakeholders, challenges, issues, solutions, *inspections*, and promoting health and well-being (goal 3 of the SDGs).

About the Author: Ilse-Marie Iding is an experienced National HSE Manager, who started her career as a Human Resources and Industrial Relations Practitioner in 2007, and her career at SERR Synergy in 2016 as an Occupational Health and Safety Practitioner. She holds a degree from the University of Pretoria and University of South Africa. With a passion for people and their well-being, she encourages professional and personal development to ensure growth and continuous motivation. Leading by example, she has also obtained various certificates, including a collection of International Standards, Behaviour-Based Safety and NEBOSH. She is currently studying towards an International Diploma in Safety Management at NEBOSH. As a professional Health and Safety Practitioner, she is registered with SAIOSH.

©SERR Synergy, www.serr.co.za