



UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPEN WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS FOURTH SESSION - JUNE 17-19, 2013

JOBS V. JOBS IN THE SDGs

- ◆ States must acknowledge the short- and long-term job loss caused by the extractives development model and the failure to fight climate change;
- ◆ A goal of decent work must prioritize the restoration of local economies and eco-systems with job-creation in emission reduction, land reparation, and other sustainable fields.

At the national policy level in countries around the world, the economics of sustainable development are too often framed as jobs v. the environment. The Franciscan Action Network, the U.S.-based National Partnership for Climate Solutions, and the NGO Mining Working Group at the UN call on Member States to acknowledge that **the real choice before States is to protect jobs that are undermining the economy and the climate or expand jobs that enhance the economy, restore eco-systems, and reduce climate change.** The question cannot be understood as anything except jobs v. jobs.

The recent High Level Panel's report includes a proposed stand-alone goal on creating jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth (Goal 8). Unlike other thematic goals, there is no incorporation or consideration of the environmental pillar of sustainable development under this goal or its targets. The framework proposed falls short of its professed aim to be a transformational agenda when it ignores the integral connection of decent work to eco-system health (degradation) and environmental sustainability (planetary boundaries).

Although the HLP addresses emission reductions under a different goal (12), in our experience with advocacy at the national level, **job-creation is the justification that policy makers most frequently cite for delaying action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or supporting devastating extractives projects. Without addressing this false dilemma, neither the job-creation or climate and environmental goals will be actionable.** Leading climate scientists now believe temperatures will rise by at least 2° C and might go much higher, causing massive droughts, food shortages, and other catastrophes that significantly reduce global GDP. **Promoting jobs that increase emissions is frankly suicidal.**

The major finding in a report on the United States titled *Jobs vs. Jobs*¹ produced for the National Partnership for Climate Solutions states that **government leaders destroy more jobs than they save when they oppose policies that cut greenhouse gas emissions in the name of protecting jobs and fail to directly engage their citizens in emissions reductions.** Although refusing to aggressively reduce emissions protects jobs in some sectors of the economy in the near term, it also destroys existing job in many other sectors. Moreover, it sacrifices the growth of millions of future jobs that our children will need when they enter the workforce.

¹ Ernie Niemi & Bob Doppelt, *Jobs vs. Jobs: The Refusal to Rapidly Cut Greenhouse Gas Emission Is Destroying Jobs, The Economy, and The Climate*, available at <http://natpcs.org>. The National Partnership for Climate Solutions is a broad-based coalition of representatives from faith communities, business leaders, farming and community organizations, academia, and political leaders, dedicated to demonstrating that people of all walks of life support solutions to the climate crisis.

Instead of blocking emission reductions, States must assist to transition workers into family-wage and similar-skilled jobs in the “restorative economy.” This includes jobs ensuring climate resilience in buildings and other infrastructure; restoring natural landscapes; increasing energy efficiency; developing renewable energy; and reengineering processes, products, and services. States do not face a choice between protecting jobs and preventing climate disasters — the best thing they can do for both objectives is act quickly to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and engage their citizens in doing so. In this way they provide more jobs while also taking steps to protect those jobs threatened by climate change.

Similarly, mining, hydraulic fracturing, and other extractive industries are hailed as job creators; yet the reality is that these activities and the environmental devastation left in their wake are detriments to the health, opportunities for decent work, and livelihoods of the surrounding communities. Rural populations and small-scale farmers are particularly hard hit. **States must critically examine the extractives development model and answer serious questions: Does the employment generated by these industries constitute decent work? Which population sector fills those positions? How long will those employment opportunities exist? What decent work is being lost immediately and in the long-run? Who and what are most affected by these losses?** These questions can only be adequately answered in consultation with local and indigenous communities potentially affected.

The oil and gas industry has promoted shale gas development through hydraulic fracturing as a job creator during difficult economic times. For example, industry spokespersons have suggested that in New York State over 62,000 jobs would be created through shale gas development. Yet, Food and Water watch determined in its recent report² that the economic forecasting model that industry relied on supports a claim of only 6,656 New York jobs by 2018 and does not take into account the jobs that will be lost in other industries such as agriculture and tourism.

The HLP report also makes an important contribution by revealing how climate change, natural disasters, land-grabbing, and the extractives development model have a disproportional negative impact on women. The failure to adequately address these questions and their gendered repercussions in the analysis of employment and decent work undermines the transformative potential of the new agenda.

Thankfully, alternatives exist. The same skill sets that are needed by the extractive industry can be transferred to restoring the environment, improving the public health of local communities, and improving local economies. Workers in the coal mines in Pennsylvania, for example, can easily transition to similar skill positions restoring the environmental damage done by mining. **Instead of supporting environmentally destructive development, States can take advantage of concrete opportunities to promote development that restores the environment.**

Both extensive research and common sense tell us that “jobs vs. the environment” is an erroneous interpretation of the choice we face today. The economics of sustainable development are about jobs vs. jobs. Specifically, the real choice policymakers face today is between climate and economy *destroying* jobs or climate and economy *restoring* jobs.

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² Food & Water Watch, *Exposing the Oil and Gas Industry’s False Jobs Promise for Shale Gas Development: How Methodological Flaws Grossly Exaggerate Job Projections* (2011).