Workers' Health in the Green Economy and Sustainable Development

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Health arguments for sustainable development

• **Universal health coverage** –
  – People who are healthy are better able to learn, to work and to contribute positively to the societies

• **Health and the green economy**
  – A healthy environment is a prerequisite for good health

• **Health as an outcome of all policies**
  – Measuring health integrates economic, environmental and social dimensions
What is "green economy"?

Greening the economy is expected to create a series of health, economic, social and environmental benefits, including a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a better adaptation to climate change.
Green economic approaches can make a difference to health, sustainability and equity
Example 1: 'Green/clean energy production can reduce NCD burden'

Coal mining is one of the most hazardous industries:

- 14,000 deaths annually are attributed to coal workers' pneumoconiosis
- occupational injuries, noise induced hearing loss, vibration disease, musculo-skeletal disorders

Communities next to coal mines:

- 70% increased risk for developing kidney disease.
- 64% increased risk for developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- 30% more likely to report high blood pressure
Example 2: Integrated pest and weed management will reduce pesticides poisonings

Suicides from pesticides ingestion

• 258,000 deaths

Acute pesticide poisonings among agricultural workers

• 18 – 130 per 100,000 full time workers

Chronic effects, including cancer
Key messages

- Health and safety at work are among the fundamental pillars of decent work\(^1\); these are also essential for a green economy. Those values must therefore be given high priority and visibility as core components of just transition. Transition to a green economy has the potential to reduce many aspects of workers’ exposures to workplace hazards and pollution risks. But “green jobs” are not automatically or necessarily decent, safe or healthy unless clear policies, programmes and actions support social sustainability in a given workplace, enterprise, and sector.\(^{1,2,3}\)

- Greener, more energy-efficient building and transport infrastructure also can produce co-benefits for workers’ health. For example, low-energy office buildings and workplaces that offer good daylighting and natural

http://www.who.int/hia/green_economy/hgebrief_occ.pdf
Green technologies reviewed

1. Renewable energy sources: solar, wind, biofuels, biomass, and bioenergy
2. Replacement and/or reduction of traditional fossil fuel energy: selected industries and vehicles
3. Materials recycling: whether “external” raw material collected for the purpose or generated at the site in selected industries
4. Energy efficiency in buildings
5. Transportation: reduced energy consumption and efficiency
6. Mitigation measures in agriculture: techniques for reduction of carbon emissions
7. Mitigation measures in forestry: techniques for reduction of carbon emissions and fixation
8. Waste management
9. Fuel cells
10. Carbon dioxide capture and storage (CCS)
Conclusions

- Balance benefits againsts risks and compare to conventional technologies
- Jobs in green technologies are not free of hazard, nor in many cases are they any less hazardous than jobs in conventional technologies.
- The cost of disabling diseases and injuries may compromise the sustainability of the green economy
- The predictable risks of green technologies is manageable.
- The solutions to occupational health and safety risks in green jobs are the same as for conventional technology.
- A green economy that does not adequately protect workers will be perceived as exploitive and therefore unsustainable.
A vision of workers’ health in Sustainable Development:
Setting goals & measuring success
SDG Questionnaire responses:
Priority areas mentioned by Member States

- Food security & sustainable agriculture
- Water and sanitation
- Energy
- Education
- Poverty eradication
- Health
- Means of Implementation
- Climate change
- Environment/management of natural resources
- Employment
- Gender
- Sustainable consumption and production (SCP)
- Cities and housing
- Economy & macro-economic stability
- Oceans and Seas
- Disaster risk reduction
- Biodiversity
- Equity
- Desertification
- Waste management
- Transport and Infrastructure
- Peace and security
- Green economy
- Good governance
- Land management
- Forests
- ICT
- CSR
- Community culture and spirituality
- Tourism
- Beyond GDP

Relative frequency of responses
Set goals and measure results - Examples of possible indicators for sustainable development

- Rate of occupational accidents – fatal/non-fatal
- Rate of occupational diseases
- Index of production of toxic chemicals, by toxicity class
- Economically active children aged 10-14
- Coverage with employment injury schemes
WHA Resolution 60.26 "Workers' Health: Global Plan of Action

• The health of workers is an essential prerequisite for productivity and economic development.

• Work towards access of all workers with essential interventions and basic occupational health services for prevention of occupational and work-related diseases and injuries.

• Incorporate measures for workers' health economic development policies, poverty reduction strategies and national plans and programs for sustainable development.
Incorporate workers' health in the post-2015 agenda