

## ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL EIGHT (8) THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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### Abstracts

*Skills serve as a pertinent component that contributes to, and helps sustain a prosperous economy and an inclusive society. Enhancement in skills can directly influence and lift workers' productivity and this can bring growth and development to the economy. Automation has its benefits but to minimise disruption, a lifelong learning culture is very essential and needs to be implemented in organisations to reskill and upskill employees. Organisations will need to think about lifelong learning differently in order to capture the opportunities presented by intelligent automation. It has been recognised for a while that lifelong learning will be the bedrock of Industry 4.0 (fourth industrial revolution). The advantages of skill development and lifelong learning are of a great deal, multifaceted and cut across the economy of a society, technology trends and changing business models. It is pertinent to note that the impact of technological change and dynamic global market on jobs makes it important for individuals to reskill throughout life to remain competitive in the modern economy.*

**Key words:** Reskilling, Upskilling, New skilling, Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development Goal Eight.

### Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated - they recognise that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. The creativity, know-how, technology and financial resources from all of society are necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context. In addition, the rate at which changes take place in the world of work due to factors relating to technological, demographic, climatic realities are alarming. These changes have brought about lots of transformation and new opportunities but also come with a lot of challenges for enterprises. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 is likely to cause disruption to the world of work in

modern times, thereby accelerating the structural transformations that have evolved over years and aggravating existing inequalities.

In recent years, there has been a trend towards learning in non-formal and informal environments, including at home, online and in informal work settings. Technology trends and changing business models offer different types of access to education. Bacon and MacKinnon (2016) opined that skills serve as an important component in contributing to and sustaining a prosperous economy and an inclusive society. Improvements in skills can directly influence workers' productivity, boost growth, wages and consumption across societal economy. As one of the main factors of productivity, skills are known to be intrinsically linked with growth, productivity improvement, competitiveness and innovation in an economy. The environments are experiencing changes as technology trends and other changes to employment patterns have been changing the type and volume of skills required within the economy.

Bacon and MacKinnon (2016) buttressed the fact that, patterns in the supply of skills are shaped by regional economic needs and demands dictated by fluctuations in the labour market. This can result in short- or longer-term skills mismatches in local labour forces. This has the dual effect of increasing the requirement for training, as people adapt to new roles and even new sectors, and reducing the incentive for employers to invest in training their staff if they are less likely to stay in that company or sector for prolonged periods of time. Planned changes to pension age are likely to result in longer working lives. Collectively, these changes point to lifelong learning as critical to realising further growth driven by skill gains, building on the skills that individuals have when they leave the education system.

Research has established the fact that, lifelong learning can enable a more adaptable workforce to respond to market and technological transitions in a way that continues to deliver productive employment for those affected, helping to create an inclusive economy. This century is all about dreaming big, doing big, and delivering big in terms of solutions, offers, products, and services which can only be achieved through acquiring different types of skills. A non-skill person cannot compete favourably in this 21st Century. However, in order for people to deliver high expectations and to use technology to serve them, specific skills are mandatory (Green, 2016).

At the beginning of the 20th Century, it was enough to have one skill, and one's job could still be guaranteed. If someone had technical skills, such as typing and language they would have a

good job and a nice salary. Nowadays, to find a job, one needs to know computer skills and a globally acceptable language (meaning the English language). Skills and knowledge together comprise a nation's human capital on which the economy and society depend. For employers, they are concerned about productivity and, for the individual, a significant determinant of wages and wellbeing (Laurillard, Derrick, & Doel, 2016).

Green (2016) stated that, automation has its benefits but to minimise disruption, a lifelong learning culture needs to be implemented in organisations to reskill and upskill employees. Organisations will need to think about lifelong learning differently in order to capture the opportunities presented by intelligent automation. It has been recognised for a while now that lifelong learning will be the bedrock of Industry 4.0 (fourth industrial revolution). As automation continues to take root and flourish, workers will need to develop skills which are unique to humans.

According to the World Economic Forum 2020 these skills are: Innovation: this can be Incremental, sustaining, radical or disruptive, creativity which involves ideas, plan, writing and execution. Critical thinking which involves observation, analysis, inference, communication and problem solving. Design involves empathising, defining, ideating, prototyping and testing. Emotional intelligence also involves empathy, social skills, and creativity, self-awareness and understanding feelings. Problem solving involves defining the problem, generating new ideas, evaluating and selecting solutions, implementing and evaluating.

Reskilling is when people alter their skill set, often in order to take on new roles. *Reskilling* is the process of learning new skills by employees to move on to a new role within their current company. Reskilling might be a good alternative to firing current employees and hiring new ones with a different skill set. It is also a good way to move a person who fits better for another role, but for some reason is working in a totally different one (Diallo. 2001).

According to the World Economic Forum published in October 2020, the rapid acceleration of automation and economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic will shift the division of labour

between humans and machines, leading to 85 million jobs being displaced and 97 million new ones created by 2025. Not only are machines seen as a safer alternative to in-person work, but they can also complete some tasks more efficiently, and at a much lower cost to employers. While some workers are able to work at home, some workers are replaced entirely by machines. However, as seen by the World Economic Forum 2020, there are also going to be many new jobs created. Green and Hogarth (2016) anticipates that many of these jobs will come as a result of reskilling workers that were previously replaced by automated processes.

Upskilling is similar to reskilling, although upskilling simply involves teaching employee new skills, without the stipulation of taking on a different job role. Upskilling is when people extend and update their existing skillset, often in order to progress their careers or perform their existing roles with an added level of complexity and competence. This simply means facilitating employee skills and building on their foundations. It usually requires further training or education opportunities for employees to grow in their field of expertise. It is initiated through mentoring programmes, online courses, workshops, or other micro-learning opportunities. An example of upskilling might be that a company decides to use new data analysis software, and all affected employees will need to be trained in the use of the software (Holmes, 2017).

New skilling represents all types of continuous learning to help build high-demand skills, whether an individual is trying to upskill current capabilities or they need complete reskilling to build entirely new capabilities. A new skilling mindset keeps both a workforce and a company agile by ensuring learning initiatives are relevant to future business objectives and tailored to the needs of learners. This is simply the new reality, meaning no business will survive for long without reskilling and upskilling initiatives driven by a new skilling strategy. By regularly identifying what skills will be needed in the future and which of them employees currently possess, organisations can build more thoughtful, continuous skilling programmes to effectively develop those abilities in their workforce (Holmes, 2017).

Lifelong is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardised definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university or corporate training. Lifelong learning does not necessarily have to restrict itself to informal learning. However, it is best described as being voluntary with the purpose of achieving personal fulfillment. The means to achieve this could result in informal or formal education. Lifelong learning is the “ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated” pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons. It is important for an individual’s competitiveness and employability, but also enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development (Green, 2016).

Lifelong learning in this context is a combination of reskilling, upskilling, and new skilling. It is an opportunity for employees to learn in every aspect of their work. Whether that is via an external resource or by providing them internal options, an employee’s knowledge will always be expanding. Lifelong learning can enable a more adaptable workforce to respond to market and technological transitions in a way that continues to deliver productive employment for those affected, helping to create an inclusive economy.

**Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:** The goal focuses on promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. This goal states that over the past twenty-five years, the number of workers living in extreme poverty has declined dramatically, despite the lasting impact of the 2008 economic crisis and global recession. In developing countries, the middle class now makes up more than 34 percent of total employment – a number that almost tripled between 1991 and 2015. However, as the global economy continues to recover, there are slower growth widening inequalities, and not enough jobs to keep up with a growing labour force (<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>).

### **Corresponding Targets of Sustainable Development Goal 8**

The 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) specifically stated the corresponding targets of SDG 8 as follows:

Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 percent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed

countries; Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors; Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-small and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services; Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead; By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value; By 2030, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training. Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms; Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products; Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all; Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to the Least Developed Countries; By 2030, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organizations.

### **How Reskilling, Upskilling, New skilling and Lifelong Learning can help attain Sustainable Development Goal Eight (8)**

Education is a lifelong activity. Employers that recognise and embrace this truth by investing in the ongoing development of their employees stand to benefit in numerous ways.

Hiring and training new employees costs companies money and it can cost even more when you are looking for talent in specialised roles. When training new employees, you are not only

training them in their own specific role. You are also training them in company processes, software, and protocol. Your current employees are already well aware of and do not need to be retrained on them, which saves you money right from the start. Training is not the only part of hiring new employees that costs money: recruiting, interviewing, background checks, and much more are costly endeavours.

Your current employees already know how the company works, and what their roles entail. This is valuable information that can take months or years to obtain, and when an employee leaves, you lose that company's knowledge and experience. Reskilling allows you to keep these knowledgeable employees, so they can pass it on to less experienced employees. This also means that the company's time to market is significantly improved. *Time to market* is essentially how long it takes a company to produce a product, from the initial conception to putting the product out for sale. Because employees with solid company knowledge can work without needing as much assistance, tasks are completed more quickly. As an end result, you get higher quality products, faster production, and better profits. Reskilling means you do not have to simply fire otherwise excellent employees. Talented employees are not always easy to find, and it is far better to keep them in your company than have their talents go to another organisation. Reskilling top employees keep them in your organisation, and simply enhances their value to your organisation by giving them more skills to contribute to your company.

The other good news is that reskilling will not just help you keep your top employees; it can also help you attract the next round of dedicated employees. These new employees will want to work for an organisation that values its current employees and shows that by helping them expand their skills and roles within the company. People are much more likely to stay in a company that shows they are interested in expanding current employees' roles.

Employees feel that their company values them when they are given opportunities to grow their skills and elevate their positions in the company. When workers feel that their workplace cares about skills training, they are about 94 % more likely to stay within the company. It is not just about elevating their positions; however, it also lets employees know they have a measure of job security. New skills afford employees the opportunity to work in new roles should their current position be eliminated. This makes employees feel important and raises their esteem for their jobs and the company they work for. Of course, this creates a feeling of dedication for employees, which makes them take pride in their jobs, and create higher quality work.

## Conclusion

The benefits of skills development and lifelong learning are multifaceted and accrue in many ways across the economy and society. In recent years there has been a trend towards learning in non-formal and informal environments, including at home, online and in informal work settings. Technology trends and changing business models offer different types of access to education. Individuals are more likely to consider re-engaging with learning at various life stages and lifelong learning helps achieve a number of other policy objectives alongside improved earnings. Other benefits include the extent to which lifelong learning may be an effective tool for achieving policy goals relating to addressing regional or economy-wide inequality. The impact of technological change and dynamic global markets on jobs makes it important for individuals to reskill throughout life to remain competitive in the modern economy. Technology and business trends may result in greater opportunities for informal and non-formal training. There has been a shift from formal to informal learning for adults. Lifelong learning may have an important role in reducing the costs associated with unemployment. A number of the benefits are interlinked: benefits to the individual, for example increase in wages and the probability of remaining in employment; benefits to the employer, for example greater profitability (also positively affecting society); and benefits to society, including public health benefits, reduced welfare dependency and higher tax revenues. Providing individuals with an opportunity to address the negative consequences of their initial engagement with the education system from earlier in life could also be seen as part of a government's social contract with the citizens, especially where there may have been deficiencies in the education system or people's personal circumstances and attitudes to education may have changed.

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