

Growth and Development

Any conversation on national development and growth, would be incomplete if it did not address the issues of employment and productivity. The creation of job opportunities and the reduction of unemployment are expected to be priorities for any Government, if the economy is to grow and sustainable development is to be achieved. For some reason, it would seem that by placing emphasis on education, training and skills development, that these will contribute to ensuring that productivity and growth will automatically take place.

In almost every society, sustainable growth and development is unlikely to occur where there is poverty, high unemployment and evidence of social imbalances. It may be nothing more than a fallacy to draw the conclusion that because the members of a society are educated, that growth and development are achievable. While education is important to human development, for this to be beneficial to human development, there must be the effective use and transfer of knowledge. With the growing number of millions of young people across the world who are unemployed or underemployed, it stands to reason that nations would not benefit from the unused or underutilized talents, skills and expertise.

Looking through the eyes of an economist, it can be gleaned that economists are mainly interested in measuring the economy by examining the gross domestic product (GDP). Their work is directed at creating a summary of the value of the national output of goods and services. It can be argued that a country is unlikely to realize its true output potential, where upon it fails to maximize the use of its human capital. This may be countered by those who share the view that the employment of people and the potential productivity capability and capacity, is not the only variable to be considered. This can be supported by the fact that consumption, investment, trade and stability of the country in its balance of payments and foreign reserves position, are variables that cannot be excluded, as these will potentially make a significant difference.

An argument can be made that the growth of an economy can only be accounted for, if an assessment shows that there has been an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP), improved business activity, a decrease in unemployment, an increase in consumer spending and incomes rising, Trade unions can identify with the fact that a decrease in unemployment, an increase in consumer spending and incomes rising, represent a sign of an economic recovery. These are signs that make for a positive outlook. The commencement of work on capital projects make for a high level of comfort, as this accounts for an uptake in industrial production.

The growth of any economy is known to inspire the confidence of foreign investors. Whilst a stable economic climate is ideal for attracting foreign investors, it should equally be encouraging to local investors to develop and invest in new business initiatives. It would make good business sense if new business ventures were designed to attract sales through the demand created for the export of products and services. Any expedient growth may be constrained if the focus is primarily of

engaging in retail business, rather than on the manufacturing of goods and the sale of services both on the domestic and external markets.

From a layman's point of view, the common thread between growth and development would be the positive change and progress made, that comes as a consequence of actions through policies and strategies that are implemented. Access to quality and sustainable jobs, commensurate pay for the work done, having good conditions of work, are determinants that may be applied in the measurement of growth and development. These indicators combine to improve the social status of the individual, to the point that they no longer fall below the poverty line.

This brings into the discussion, the role of trade unions in promoting growth and national development. The perspective is that trade unions are instrumental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. With this being the case, there must be a high value attached to the contributions of trade unions to growth and development. Trade unions are to be credited for their sustained efforts to promote an increase in labour productivity. It should be noted that trade unions work to ensure that workers are paid fair wages for their work, as a means of ensuring that there is improvement in worker' productivity at the workplace; which inevitably adds to growth.

Those who may wish to question the contribution of trade unions to growth and development, should take time out to see the difference which their efforts have made to increasing national output. This has been achieved through the promoting of the decent work agenda, ensuring good working conditions and safety in the workplace, safeguarding the rights and freedoms of workers and remaining committed to engaging in the collective bargaining process.