

## SDC 2019 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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**Title: Employment: Still a Missing Dimension in Developing Countries**



The SDGs put forward the goal “Decent Work for all” (SDG 8a), but do not specify how progress towards this goal should be measured. As there is now widespread agreement that being employed does not guarantee a basic standard of living or well-being (OECD, 2014), job quality has therefore become an important subject of study. However, the relevant literature is still very diverse and spread across different academic disciplines and international institutions (Burchell et al, 2014). The existing conceptual confusion about what “Decent Work” actually means has led to a plethora of theoretical conceptualisations and measurements, which have limited its impact on practical policy-making (Sehnbruch, 2015). Traditional approaches still focus on unemployment rates and wages as the main indicators of labour market development, while international institutions still use varying definitions of “informal employment”. Meanwhile, the human development literature has mainly considered employment as a resource for achieving other valuable functionings and capabilities (Sen, 1999), which fails to consider that employment may provide workers with an opportunity for personal development, a sense of fulfilment, self-realisation, belonging and contribution to society at large, as well as being a space in which individual workers may exercise their own powers of agency. This paper therefore first re-examines the role of employment as both a means and an end for achieving well-being. It thus makes a theoretical contribution to the human development (or capability) approach by reflecting on which capabilities and functionings are developed through employment. Based on this theoretical framework, the paper then looks at which dimensions of employment should be measured in developing countries to achieve sustainable standards of well-being over the life cycle, work-life balance and personal freedoms and rights that could serve as a measure of “Decent Work” going forwards. In sum, by reviewing the concept of employment from the capability approach, this paper brings much needed conceptual and theoretical clarity to a rather unwieldy body of literature on “Decent Work” that, so far, has been driven by multiple academic perspectives as well as the frequently conflicting interests of stakeholders of labour markets.