



DECENT WORK IN BALKH: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: This research investigates the current state of decent work in Balkh Province, Afghanistan, with a primary focus on Mazar-e-Sharif, using the International Labor Organization's (ILO) framework as the analytical foundation. Decent work, encompassing employment opportunities, fair wages, safe working conditions, social protections, and social dialogue, is critical for achieving sustainable economic growth and social inclusion. Despite its importance, the concept remains underexplored in the Afghan context, particularly in Balkh Province.

The study employs the Delphi technique, engaging a panel of experts, including policymakers, labor activists, and academics, to evaluate the region's labor market dynamics. The findings reveal a multifaceted picture of the current situation: while some progress has been made, such as the development of small-scale industries and growing awareness of labor rights, significant challenges persist. These include high unemployment and underemployment rates, the dominance of informal labor markets, inadequate enforcement of labor laws, lack of comprehensive social protection systems, and limited platforms for effective worker-employer dialogue.

Opportunities for improvement are also identified, including the province's strategic location as a trade and economic hub, its potential for industrial and agricultural diversification, and increasing international interest in labor and development initiatives. By leveraging these opportunities, Balkh Province could significantly enhance labor market conditions and align with the broader goals of decent work.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges and opportunities for decent work in Balkh Province, offering evidence-based recommendations to policymakers, labor organizations, and stakeholders. These include strengthening labor market institutions, enhancing social protections, promoting formal employment, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders. The research aims to contribute to building an inclusive and sustainable labor market, supporting the socio-economic development of Balkh Province and Afghanistan at large.

Key Words: Balkh, Challenges, Decent Work, Opportunities

1- INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the last two decades, economic transformations have led to changes in the labor market and the flexibilization of labor relations. The economic crisis of 2008–2009 accentuated this tendency further by increasing unemployment, long-term unemployment, informal work, underemployment, flexible contracts, and precarious employment. If, on the one hand, globalization has created great economic opportunities, on the other hand, it has contributed to the increase of social inequalities (Susana Pereira, Nuno Dos Santos and Leonor Pais, 2019).

As for the changing nature of work, it is subsumed with the expression of the Second Machine Age (By Erik Brynjolfsson & Andrew McAfee, 2014) or the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Hirschi, 2018) and both expressions stress the transformation of the workforce due to technological changes and the digitalization and robotization of employment ((Carl Benedikt Freya, Michael A. Osborn, 2017). Within this context, accessing decent work has become a critical challenge worldwide. The ILO (2013) considers decent work to be not only a fundamental human right but also one of the main challenges the world is facing. (Jonas Masdonatia, Marc Schreiberb, Jenny Marcionettic, Jérôme Rossiera,, 2019)

The concept of decent work was developed by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1999 which describe ‘opportunities for men and women to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (Stuart Bell and Kirsten Newitt, January 2010) and it has been used in recent years to sum up the aspirations of people in their working lives. These aspirations are for job opportunities and sufficient incomes; rights at work, representation and a voice at the workplace; family stability and personal development; and fairness and gender equality. Ultimately, these various dimensions of decent work help to ensure that communities, and society at large, live in peace. (Peter Wingfield-Digby, Chernyshev and Steven Kapsos, 2008).

According to the ILO, the conditions for decent work are: having access to full and productive employment, benefitting from rights at work, having guarantees of social protection, and promoting social dialogue. The issue of decent work also concerns vocational psychology and career counseling advocate “the need for a broad community of scholars from diverse perspectives tackling the growing problems faced by people across the globe in their quest for decent and dignified work. A psychological perspective of decent work focuses on the effect of work on individuals' well-being, psychological health, and identity. (Jonas Masdonatia, Marc Schreiberb, Jenny Marcionettic, Jérôme Rossiera,, 2019)

Lack of decent work reflected in high underemployment, high precarious/casual employment, and working poverty highlight the poor state of the Afghan labor market.

Objective of the study

1. To describe the current situation of work and decent work in Balkh.
2. To analyze the economical, legal and working standards in related to acceptance of decent work in Balkh.
3. To identify and recognizing the solutions for decent work challenges in Balkh.
4. To demonstrate the solutions for boosting the opportunities of decent work in Balkh

Research question: What are the challenges and opportunities of decent work in Balkh?

2-LITERATURE REVIEW

2-1- Introduction to Work

(Drenth, 1991) Describes work as a crucial activity for human survival, which allows cultural development, professional fulfillment, and the satisfaction of the needs of life.

(Richardson, 1993), has pointed out that work serves to achieve personal success and satisfaction and also allows to connect the individual to society.

(Warr, 1984), states that work has not only advantages but also disadvantages: the author observed the cost of work in terms of psychological and physical stress and strain. (Lea Ferrari, Laura Nota, Salvatore Soresi, David L. Blustein, 2009)

According to (Blustein, 2006) Work is about making people feel like a part of the society they live in.

(Lea Ferrari, Laura Nota, Salvatore Soresi, David L. Blustein, 2009) Showed that the complexity of the concept of work is linked to different levels of achievement, self-evaluation abilities, self-regulation abilities, and abilities to gather information useful to making a choice. (Andrea Zammiti, Paola Magnano and Giuseppe Santisi , 2021)

2-2- Introduction to Decent work

Decent Work” was launched in 1999 by International Labor Organization (ILO) director-general Juan Somavía ¹as an organizing principle that would structure the work of this tripartite organization of governments, employers and workers. As declared by Somavía: ‘the primary goal of the ILO today is to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent work and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity’ (ILO, 1999). Decent work was thus an expression of the historical mandate of the ILO, summarizing the principles that have traditionally guided its work and converging the focus of its main objectives: the defense of human and labour rights, the preservation and creation of new jobs, social dialogue, and access to social protection.

The launch of the concept of Decent Work and its declaration by the ILO as an institutional priority followed from the increased importance that aspects of the quality of employment were acquiring during the 1980s and 1990s. This attention was largely a counterweight to negative effects on employment conditions and commodification of labour that occurred during globalization and market liberalization. The decent work approach was also launched to re-establish the ILO’s influence as a UN institution at a time when the thinking of the Washington Consensus was also at its most influential.

Decent work thus juxtaposes the generation of employment as a goal in itself with the conditions under which it is generated as well as workers’ rights and their voice in the community. Its definition was formulated in a deliberately broad manner that took into account the priorities of the ILO’s tripartite constituency: governments, employers and unions. The immediate question that arose from this all-encompassing definition based on the rights and entitlements of workers was how such a broad approach could be operationalized and measured. (Agnieszka Piasna, Brendan Burchell and Kirsten Sehnbruch, 2020)

(Okafor, 2012) Defined decent work as the availability of employment in conditions of freedom equity, human security and dignity. ((Adebayoo.Akinsanya, Lolo John Okuola, Gabriel Babajide Agboola, Peter Ilesanmi Ogundola, 2020).

ILO stated decent work in 1999, as “opportunities for work that is productive (to satisfy individual basic needs and to give a contribution to society) and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

In other words: it is as an opportunity that is given to men and women to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, safety and respect for human rights, prospects for individual development, and social integration. A job, to be decent, should provide a fair income, job security, protection for workers and their families, opportunities for personal development, social integration, and the ability to express concerns and organize into groups, equal opportunities, and equal treatment for all.

“Decent Work” is an umbrella concept that combines access to full and productive employment with various qualitative dimensions of work such as rights at work, social protection and the promotion of social dialogue. Since its launch by the ILO in 1999, decent work has become a universal objective and has been embraced in major human rights declarations and United Nations (UN) resolutions. In 2015, decent work together with the main objectives of the Decent Work Agenda, that is employment creation, social protection, rights at work, and social dialogue, became an integral element of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (Agnieszka Piasna, Brendan Burchell and Kirsten Sehnbruch, 2020)

In a Tran’s disciplinary study on the concept of decent work, (Annamaria DiFabio¹ and JacobusG.Maree², 2016) distinguished different perspectives: philosophical, legal, economic, sociological, and psychological.

The philosophical perspective focuses on the concept of dignity and how it can be influenced by the culture of belonging. The legal perspective focuses on the labor law system, which should make it easier to access new job opportunities and strengthen employability policies. The economic perspective (Committee on economic, social and cultural rights , 2006) underlines “the right

¹ Juan Somavía Altamirano: The former Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO)

of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work” (UN, 1966) on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), reiterating the concepts of equity, safety, equal opportunities, and respect for rights.

The sociological perspective refers to how the concept of decent work has changed over time: the four initial points highlighted by the International Labour Organization (workers’ rights, employment, social protection, and social dialogue) evolved into the promotion of employment, the guarantee of labor rights, social protection, which comprises inclusion and promotion of social dialogue. Finally, the psychological perspective, with (Brendan Burchell, Kirsten Sehnbruch, Agnieszka Piasna and Nurjk Agloni, 2014), reflects on decent work in terms of (1) job satisfaction, which refers to the expectations of the worker at work and the perception of the quality of work (Agassi, 1982) (2) intrinsic quality of work, which refers to the well-being of workers, also guaranteed by the strategies adopted by employers; and (3) the desirability of work, i.e., the objective characteristics of work that can promote workers’ assessment of their situation and contribution . (Andrea Zammitti, Paola Magnano and Giuseppe Santisi , 2021)

Four interdependent strategic objectives were suggested to achieve this goal, within the perspectives of development and gender equity. These were:

- Promotion of human rights in particular the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (core labour standards);
- The creation of greater employment and income opportunities for women and men;
- Increasing the coverage of social protection; and
- Strengthening social dialogue and tripartism. (Stuart Bell and Steve Gibbons, 2007)

According to the ILO, the policy approaches that fall within the four contributing pillars to decent work may be summarized as follows:

1. **Employment creation and enterprise development:** Helping the poor. It also encompasses policies that enhance productivity and therefore competitiveness within the world economy; macro-economic and fiscal policies that aid employment growth; creating an environment conducive for entrepreneurial activity; linking trade policies to employment; promoting education and training (i.e. employability); focusing on local economic development; adopting labor market policies that help generate more stable employment relationships; promoting fair wages or fair returns for workers; addressing youth employment and employability; incorporating an employment dimension into crisis responses (war, famine); and adopting policies that help improve the management and governance of labour migration.
2. **Social protection:** This pillar relates to the promotion of social justice, cohesion and protection. Relevant policies can provide safety nets to protect consumption capacity or incomes, so reducing the level of risk to workers’ lives, health and well-being. They can also be seen as investments in human capital.
3. **Standards and rights at work:** This pillar relates to the promotion of compliance with the fundamental principles and rights at work (Core Labour Standards) which all member states of the ILO are bound to respect, whether or not they have ratified them, and also to those other Conventions ratified by individual states.
4. **Governance and social dialogue:** This refers to social dialogue between governments, employers and workers, as a means of achieving wider understanding and acceptance of social and economic policies as well as greater democratization. (Stuart Bell and Steve Gibbons, 2007)

2-3- Decent work in Balkh

Balkh has made great strides in economic and social development since the return of relative peace. Yet it still remains one of the world’s least developed countries, with more than one-third of the population living below the poverty line, more than half vulnerable and at serious risk of falling into poverty, and three-quarters illiterate (Richard Hogg, Claudia Nassif, Camilo Gomez Osorio, William Byrd and Andrew Beath, 2013). While measured unemployment rates may be low, the lack of decent work reflected in high underemployment, high precarious/casual employment, and working poverty highlight the poor state of the Afghan labour market (Hall, 2012). The main challenges lie in creating work opportunities to absorb new labour market entrants (estimated at 500,000 per year), overseeing the transition of the large informal sector, improving the quality of employment, and addressing the low educational and skill levels of the workforce, all amid growing concerns about political stability and security.

According to Hervé Berger, ILO Senior Coordinator / representative for Balkh, who spoke in a conference named lunch of decent work country program for Balkh. In this conference stated that when the ILO will be supporting the ministry of labour, workers' and employers' organizations in the implementation of the DWCP, it will also be supporting the government of Balkh in accomplishing its priorities as presented to the Kabul conference.

The DWCP has three key priorities, in addition to the cross-cutting themes of social dialogue and gender equity. The priorities are:

1. Promoting productive employment through labour market information and skills development.
2. Promoting and applying International Labour Standards with a focus on ratifying ILO core conventions and strengthening the labour inspection machinery.
3. Strong, representative employers' and workers' organizations that contribute to national policy formulation and better industrial relations.

The focus of all of the DWCP is to strengthen the capacity of the ILO constituents, namely the Ministry of Labour, Workers' and Employers' Organizations, as well as 2 other partners that will be involved in the implementation of this framework agreement.

This DWCP will support the Government of Balkh as well as workers and employers in creating decent work at a critical juncture in its history. That is, work which is carried out in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. (ILO, Launch of Decent Work Country Programme for Afghanistan, 2010)

3- RESEARCH BACKGROUND

- According to the report of ILO in 2021, the challenges and opportunities for productive employment and decent work in the natural stone mining industry supply chain in Rajasthan" identified as: inconsistent available data for evidenced based policy making ,weak enforcement of rules and regulations "limited coordination, low capacity", overlap between rules, high cost and low benefit of compliance, a significant percentage of the sector is informal ,low mechanization across the sector, shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labor, low awareness of rules and rights among workers and smaller employers, workers' voices are not being heard; low trade union membership and collective bargaining, women are typically relegated to the lowest-paying jobs, significant OSH risks and highly variable profit margins across the sector.(ILO, 2021)
- According to Stephanie Ware Barrientos working paper No 77,"Global Production systems and Decent Work. In this paper the researcher described that in the context of global production systems, there are significant challenges in achieving decent work within global Production systems which are:
 - The rights challenge relates to the difficulty of organization or representation amongst such workers. Without collective power to negotiate with employers, workers are not in a position to access or secure other rights.
 - The social dialogue challenge arises from the lack of effective voice and independent representation of such workers in a process of dialogue with employers, government or other stakeholders. (Barrientos, 2007)
- Adebayoo.Akinsanya and Lolo John Okunola. (2019). "International Labor Organization Decent Work Agenda for Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges" stated that the employment challenge arises from the diversity of employment generated by global production systems and the social dialogue challenge arises from the lack of effective voice or independent representation of such workers in a process of dialogue with employers, government or other stakeholders. (Adebayoo. Akinsanya, Lola john okunola , 2019)
- According to the report of ILO in 2014 "Decent work and Social Justice in Pacific Small Island Developing States: Challenges, Opportunities and Policy Responses", a number of decent work challenges faced with the Pacific region highlighted as high rates of unemployment and under-employment (particular amongst youth), prevalence of poorly regulated, low quality jobs that generate inadequate incomes and limited social protection, skill shortages and other employability impediments, gender and other forms of discrimination, outdated labour laws, limited enterprise and entrepreneurial development, weak labour institutions, poor regulatory capacity of governments and insufficient social

dialogue and some key opportunities for creating decent work for all pacific islanders highlighted as policies to create an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, policies to create decent jobs through climate change resilience and adaptation, policies to enhance human capital, policies to create and inclusive labour force, policies to promote labour and social protection, and policies to foster sustainable and well manages labour migration and mobility.(ILO, Decent work and social justice in pacific small island developing states: challenges, opportunities and policy response, 2014)

- Manwel Debono. (2021). researched regarding the Migrants and the challenge of decent work in Malta country. The Maltese population has traditionally resisted foreign workers and multiculturalism. The research indicated a range of challenges that the workers faced in achieving decent work which are: Barriers to accessing employment, High qualifications “underemployment, and lack of job mobility”, insufficient training opportunities, higher at-risk-of-poverty rates despite long working hours, greater health and safety risks, especially among those in undeclared work, complex relationships with superiors, colleagues, and clients and low unionization. (Debono, 2021)
- According to Antoniadou. (2021).”Decent Work: Opportunities and Challenges” the researcher described that collectively, the knowledge platforms also address seven challenges, which we believe decent work faces and relate to areas of specialism within the Centre, those are: Changing Nature of work, workplace wellbeing, vulnerable workers in employment and self-employment, creating greater diversity and social mobility in the workplace, generating decent and productive work in small enterprises, designing decent and productive work in health and social care and using knowledge to generate decent work and productivity for all. (Antoniadou, Marilena and Crowder, Mark and Christie, Fiona and Albertson, 2021)
- Lorenza Errighi, Charles Bodwell and Sameer Khatiwada highlighted in a report “Business process outsourcing in the Philippines: Challenges for decent work” which was published by the ILO in Dec 2016. The researchers stated the key challenges for decent work in Philippines as skills shortage and high turnover, business process outsourcing sector employee health and well-being, women in the BPO sector, worker s voice” collective bargaining and ability to organize (Trade union activities almost non-existent in the BPO sector”, although in the theory workers in the sector can organize.(Lorenza Errighi, Sameer Khatiwada and Charles Bodwell, 2016)

4- RESEARCH METODOLOGY

4-1- Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with decent work in Balkh, with a specific focus on Mazar-e-Sharif. Given the complex socio-economic and political environment of Balkh, the Delphi method was selected as a systematic and iterative approach to gather expert insights and achieve consensus on the subject.

4-2- Methodological Approach: Delphi Method

The Delphi method is a structured communication process that engages a panel of experts through multiple rounds of questionnaires. It is particularly suitable for this study because it facilitates in-depth exploration of challenges and opportunities while accounting for diverse perspectives.

The methodology involves the following steps:

- **Selection of Experts:** Experts were purposively sampled based on their knowledge and experience in labor markets, employment policies, and socio-economic development in Balkh. The panel includes:
 - Policy makers in labor and employment sectors.
 - Academics and researchers specializing in Afghan economic development.
 - Local business leaders and entrepreneurs from Mazar-e-Sharif.

- **Preparation of the Initial Questionnaire:** A comprehensive questionnaire was designed based on an initial literature review and preliminary stakeholder discussions. It covered themes such as:
 - Key barriers to decent work in Mazar-e-Sharif.
 - Opportunities for promoting decent work despite socio-political challenges.
 - Policy interventions and initiatives for sustainable employment.
- **Round 1: Exploratory Phase:** Experts were invited to respond to open-ended questions to identify the current situation, challenges and opportunities. Their responses were analyzed thematically to generate a comprehensive list of factors influencing decent work in the region.
- **Round 2: Refinement Phase:** Based on Round 1 responses, a structured questionnaire was developed. Experts were asked to rate the importance and feasibility of the identified challenges and opportunities on a Likert scale. Feedback was synthesized to identify emerging patterns.
- **Round 3: Consensus Building:** A final round was conducted to present the findings from previous rounds and seek consensus on the most critical challenges and actionable opportunities.

4-3- Data Collection

The data collection process for this research on decent work in Balkh Province, specifically Mazar-e-Sharif, utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the labor market conditions.

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with workers and employers across various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, and trade. These interviews offered detailed qualitative insights into wage levels, working conditions, job security, and the prevalence of informal employment.
- **Secondary Data Analysis:** Secondary data was analyzed to provide contextual and quantitative support for the findings. Key sources included government labor reports, statistics from the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), and publications by the International Labour Organization (ILO). This data helped establish benchmarks such as unemployment rates, informal labor market size, and the status of social protections in the region.

This multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive examination of the current challenges and opportunities for decent work in Balkh Province, forming a solid foundation for the study's recommendations.

4 - 4 - Research Population and Sampling Process

4 – 4- 1- Research Population

The research population for this study includes experts and stakeholders who possess substantial knowledge and experience regarding decent work and employment issues in Balkh. The target group comprises:

- **Policy Makers:** Officials and professionals involved in labor policy formulation and implementation in Balkh.
- **Academics and Researchers:** Scholars specializing in socio-economic development, employment trends, and labor markets in the Afghan context.
- **Private Sector Leaders:** Entrepreneurs, business leaders, and employers based in Mazar-e-Sharif with direct insights into labor market dynamics.
- **Local Community Representatives:** Advocates or leaders from worker groups or informal sectors who understand the challenges faced by the workforce in the region.

4 – 4- 2- Sampling Process

The Delphi method necessitates a purposive sampling approach to ensure the selection of qualified and knowledgeable participants.

4 – 4 - 2-1- Justification for Sampling Method: Purposive sampling was chosen for its effectiveness in selecting individuals with specific expertise. The iterative nature of the Delphi method emphasizes depth of understanding over breadth, making it critical to engage a targeted group of well-qualified participants.

5- DATA ANALYSIS

5-1- Current Status of Decent Work in Balkh Province

5-1-1- Implementation of National and International Labor Standards in Balkh Organizations

Unfortunately, the implementation of decent work in Balkh is in poor condition. The country, with its inadequate labor market structures, lack of enforcement of labor standards, and a high unemployment rate (affecting over 69% of the workforce), has failed to meet national and international labor standards. The collapse of the republic and Balkh's severe economic downturn have worsened the situation. Over 20% of international organizations have ceased or suspended their activities in the country, leading to deteriorating working conditions for laborers in companies and organizations. Job opportunities have decreased, and workplace environments have become more challenging.

5-1-2- Motivation for Entrepreneurship Development

In recent years, international organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and GIZ have collaborated with the Afghan government to promote entrepreneurship and business management skills. These efforts included training programs and introducing entrepreneurship as a subject in university curricula, particularly in management and economics faculties. However, challenges such as insecurity, political and economic instability, and a lack of critical infrastructure (e.g., electricity and banking facilities) have hindered the development of entrepreneurship in Balkh.

5-1-3- Health, Safety, and Environmental Risk Management

While companies have made efforts to address health, safety, and risk management responsibilities, there are no legal obligations to enforce compliance with these regulations. Measures such as providing fire extinguishers and first aid kits are implemented only at a basic level. These actions are often voluntary and lack formal oversight.

5-1-4- Labor Unions

Labor unions exist to some extent in Balkh but have a limited role in protecting workers' rights. Insufficient funding and weak enforcement of laws allow employers to bypass regulations, leaving workers unable to voice their concerns effectively. There have been no notable protests or negotiations between workers and employers in recent times, reflecting the unions' ineffectiveness.

5-1-5- Wage and Payment Systems

In Balkh Province, wage payment systems and the determination of minimum wages are not standardized, often favoring employers. Employment contracts are mostly verbal and informal, which allows some employers to withhold wages or violate payment agreements. Additionally, there is no regulatory body to oversee employers' adherence to labor rights, making it difficult for workers to seek justice for unpaid wages or unfair treatment.

5-1-6- Current Security Situation

The security situation for investment and economic stability in Balkh has worsened compared to the republic era. This decline has diminished investor confidence, leading to reduced investments, fewer job opportunities, and limited progress toward decent work. However, personal security has improved, which could potentially encourage the return of investors and foster economic development. Improved safety conditions may gradually rebuild trust among investors and create an environment conducive to investment and job creation.

5-2- Challenges to Decent Work in Balkh

5-2-1- Disruption of International Trade

Balkh depends on importing raw materials and technology for producing limited goods and exporting agricultural products, carpets, and handicrafts. However, international trade and financial connectivity have significantly declined, particularly with Europe and the United States. Since the fall of the Islamic Republic of Balkh and the subsequent suspension of trade relations,

the country has faced severe economic crises, transitioning into a state of emergency reliant on humanitarian aid. Many domestic companies have ceased operations due to the economic recession, heavily impacting workers' livelihoods and daily sustenance.

5-2-2- Current State of Infrastructure

Balkh's existing infrastructure does not support companies and organizations in competing with international counterparts, thereby reducing their competitive advantage. Key issues include:

- Insufficient electricity supply for industries.
- Lack of cost-effective transport systems such as sea and rail networks.
- Poor condition of road transportation. Additionally, the absence of skilled and specialized labor is another significant challenge, increasing production costs for investors.

5-2-3- Current Political Stability

Political instability is a significant challenge, particularly the lack of international recognition for the Islamic Emirate. This instability discourages investment and economic development. Moreover, the absence of clear, enforceable labor laws across Balkh, which could safeguard the rights of both workers and employers, has impeded the proper implementation of decent work standards.

5-2-4- High Unemployment Rate

The lack of sufficient job opportunities has led to minimal focus on decent work standards by employers in Balkh Province. Employers often exploit cheap labor without proper contracts, further exacerbating the problem.

5-2-5- Lack of Employee Training and Skills Development

Training employees to improve their professional skills is essential for achieving both individual and organizational goals. Unfortunately, companies and organizations in Balkh pay little attention to this issue, resulting in unskilled workers handling tasks ineffectively.

5-2-6- Brain Drain

Human capital is critical for ensuring high-quality production and decent work environments. However, the ongoing brain drain significantly reduces this vital resource, negatively impacting the performance of companies and the implementation of decent work standards in Balkh Province's production sectors.

5-2-7- Collapse of Financial and Banking Services

The collapse of banking systems and monetary transactions—both internationally and domestically—has severely damaged Balkh's foreign trade. This disruption has adversely affected production levels in factories and businesses. Many companies have been forced to either cease operations entirely, dismiss workers, or scale down their activities, resulting in reduced employment opportunities and deteriorating workplace standards.

5-2-8- Capital Flight

Capital is a key element for the growth of companies and organizations. Capital flight has led to economic stagnation and diminished corporate performance, reducing job opportunities for workers and employees. This situation has created a competitive and challenging environment for workers to secure employment.

5-2-9- Discrimination

Decent work is defined as providing equal opportunities without discrimination. However, in Balkh Province, forms of discrimination—such as ethnic, gender, religious, regional, and political bias—persist. This discrimination undermines companies' ability to hire skilled and experienced workers, ultimately reducing overall performance.

5-2-10- Non-Recognition of the Government

The lack of international recognition of the Islamic Emirate government significantly impacts Balkh's ability to establish stable political and economic relations, further hindering progress toward implementing decent work standards.

5-3- Opportunities for Decent Work in Balkh

5-3-1- Population Growth

While population growth could theoretically support decent work implementation, Balkh's economic recession and high unemployment rate (exceeding 60%) diminish its potential as an opportunity.

5-3-2- Implementation of Laws and Regulations

The enforcement of labor laws provides a foundation for advancing decent work. These laws facilitate legal and judicial advocacy for workers and employers and establish a framework to enforce workplace standards.

5-3-3- International Aid and Development Programs

Organizations like the ILO and UN continue to provide aid and training programs aimed at improving workplace conditions, promoting skills development, and creating job opportunities.

5-3-4- Youthful Workforce

Balkh's predominantly young population could drive economic growth if proper investments in education, vocational training, and skills development are made.

5-3-5- Agricultural and Handicraft Sectors

These sectors hold significant potential for employment. Improving access to markets, providing fair wages, and ensuring workplace safety could make them contributors to decent work.

5-3-6- Renewable Energy Development

Investments in renewable energy projects could address electricity shortages while creating formal, stable jobs.

5-3-7- Regional Trade and Connectivity

Balkh's strategic location offers opportunities for trade and infrastructure projects that could generate employment and improve workplace conditions.

5-3-8- Cultural Heritage and Tourism

With improved security and infrastructure, tourism could become a sustainable source of employment.

5-3-9- Diaspora Engagement

The Afghan diaspora could support entrepreneurship and investment initiatives, fostering job creation and skill transfer.

5-3-10- Potential Policy Reforms

Government reforms aimed at reducing administrative barriers and fostering labor rights could improve decent work standards.

6- FINDINGS

6-1- Current Status of Decent Work in Balkh Province

The findings indicate that the state of decent work in Balkh Province is poor. Despite international efforts and some national initiatives, the implementation of national and international labor standards remains inadequate. Key challenges include a high unemployment rate exceeding 69%, deteriorated economic conditions post-republic collapse, and limited operational capacity of international organizations, with over 20% suspending their activities. Consequently, laborers face worsening conditions, reduced job opportunities, and strained workplace environments.

- **Motivation for Entrepreneurship Development**

The collaboration between international organizations like the ILO and GIZ and Afghan government institutions to foster entrepreneurship has yielded some progress, such as entrepreneurship education in universities. However,

systemic challenges—including insecurity, unstable political and economic conditions, and insufficient infrastructure—have impeded the broader development of entrepreneurship in Balkh.

- **Health, Safety, and Environmental Risk Management**

Efforts toward workplace health and safety measures in Balkh are limited, with minimal adherence to risk management practices. Companies implement basic actions, such as providing fire extinguishers and first aid kits, on a voluntary basis without legal mandates or formal oversight.

- **Labor Unions**

Labor unions exist but play an insignificant role in protecting workers' rights. Their operations are hindered by insufficient funding, lack of enforcement, and employer dominance, which collectively stifle worker representation and advocacy.

- **Wage and Payment Systems**

The absence of standardized wage and payment systems allows employers to exploit workers through verbal contracts and irregular payment practices. A lack of regulatory oversight further exacerbates this problem, leaving workers with limited recourse for unpaid wages or labor disputes.

- **Security and Investment Climate**

While personal security has improved, the broader economic and investment climate remains fragile. Political instability and lack of international recognition discourage investments, leading to reduced job opportunities and weak economic progress.

6-2- Challenges to Decent Work in Balkh

- **Infrastructural Deficiencies**

- Limited electricity supply and poor transportation networks hinder industrial growth.
- Absence of skilled labor increases production costs, reducing investor confidence.

- **Disrupted International Trade**

- Economic recession and weakened trade connectivity with Europe and the U.S. have limited market access, impacting production and livelihoods.

- **Collapse of Financial Systems**

- The banking crisis has disrupted monetary transactions and foreign trade, leading to mass layoffs and reduced operational capacity for businesses.

- **Political Instability**

- The lack of international recognition of the Islamic Emirate and the absence of enforceable labor laws discourage investments and impede decent work standards.

- **Unemployment and Lack of Training**

- High unemployment and insufficient skill development programs leave workers ill-equipped to meet organizational demands.

- **Brain Drain and Capital Flight**

- The emigration of skilled professionals and the flight of financial resources have led to economic stagnation and weakened organizational performance.

- **Discrimination in Employment**

- Ethnic, gender, religious, and political biases persist, reducing the efficiency of the workforce and hindering economic development.

- **Non-Recognition of the Government**

- The absence of international recognition further limits the potential for economic and political stability, essential for decent work standards.

6-3- Opportunities for Decent Work in Balkh

- **Labor Law Implementation**

- Effective enforcement of labor laws can provide a foundation for workplace standards and legal advocacy.

- **International Aid Programs**

- Continued support from organizations such as the ILO and UN offers potential for skill development and job creation.

- **Youthful Workforce**

- Investments in education and vocational training for Balkh's young population could drive economic growth.

- **Sectorial Potential**

- Agricultural and handicraft sectors, with better market access and fair wages, can contribute significantly to decent work.

- **Renewable Energy Projects**

- Investments in renewable energy can address infrastructure gaps while creating formal job opportunities.

- **Strategic Regional Trade**

- Balkh's geographical position provides a unique opportunity to strengthen regional trade and connectivity, fostering economic growth and improved workplace conditions.

- **Tourism and Cultural Heritage**

- Enhanced security and infrastructure can transform tourism into a sustainable source of employment.

- **Diaspora Engagement**

- The Afghan diaspora holds potential for fostering entrepreneurship, investments, and skill transfer.

- **Policy Reforms**

- Reforms aimed at reducing administrative barriers and strengthening labor rights can support the development of decent work environments.

This comprehensive analysis highlights the critical challenges and potential opportunities to improve the state of decent work in Balkh Province. Addressing these factors systematically will require collaborative efforts from governmental, private, and international stakeholders.

7- CONCLUSION

Balkh, particularly Balkh Province, faces profound and interconnected challenges in achieving decent work standards. Systemic issues such as political instability, weak governance, inadequate infrastructure, and an underdeveloped labor market have created an environment where workers face significant difficulties in accessing fair wages, safe working conditions, and stable employment. High unemployment rates, limited access to skills development programs, and the collapse of financial and trade systems exacerbate these challenges, leaving much of the labor force in precarious or informal employment.

The current situation is further complicated by the lack of enforcement of labor laws, insufficient workplace safety measures, and the absence of mechanisms for labor advocacy and protection. Political and economic uncertainties, coupled with Balkh's international isolation, have eroded investor confidence, reducing job opportunities and slowing economic growth. Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and regional affiliations further limits equal access to decent work, while the mass emigration of skilled professionals and capital flight deprives the country of critical resources for rebuilding its workforce and economy.

Despite these significant obstacles, there are several opportunities that, if leveraged effectively, could pave the way for improving decent work standards in Balkh. The presence of labor laws offers a legal framework to address worker rights and protections, provided these laws are implemented and enforced effectively. International aid programs continue to support skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment generation initiatives, which are critical in creating pathways to decent work. Balkh's strategic geographic location could enable regional trade and connectivity projects that boost economic activity and job creation. Furthermore, renewable energy development, tourism, and the potential reduction of corruption provide additional avenues for fostering a more inclusive and equitable labor market.

Realizing these opportunities, however, requires concerted efforts and a long-term vision. Addressing structural deficiencies, such as rebuilding infrastructure, strengthening governance, and establishing transparent legal systems, will be crucial. Investing in education and vocational training, particularly for women and young people, is essential to prepare a workforce that can meet the demands of an evolving economy. Moreover, fostering collaboration between international organizations, private sector stakeholders, and local communities could amplify efforts to create sustainable employment opportunities.

In conclusion, while the challenges to achieving decent work in Balkh, particularly in Balkh Province, are formidable, the potential for progress exists. By prioritizing governance reform, structural development, and human capital investment, Balkh can move toward creating a more inclusive and equitable labor market that aligns with the principles of decent work. Such efforts are not only critical for individual livelihoods but also for the broader socio-economic stability and growth of the nation.

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