SDG8 – SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL
CONCISE GUIDES TO THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Series Editors
Walter Leal Filho
World Sustainable Development Research and Transfer Centre, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences

Mark Mifsud
Centre for Environmental Education and Research, University of Malta

This series comprises 17 short books, each examining one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The series provides an integrated assessment of the SDGs from an economic, social, environmental and cultural perspective. Books in the series critically analyse and assess the SDGs from a multidisciplinary and a multiregional standpoint, with each title demonstrating innovation in theoretical and empirical analysis, methodology and application of the SDG concerned.

Titles in this series have a particular focus on the means to implement the SDGs, and each one includes a short introduction to the SDG in question along with a synopsis of their implications on the economic, social, environmental and cultural domains.
SDG8 – SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Concise Guides to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

MADHAVI VENKATESAN
Northeastern University, USA

GIULIANO LUONGO
The Niccolò Cusano University, Italy
To all people actively engaged in forming an equal society.

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Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Madhavi Venkatesan is a Faculty Member in the Department of Economics at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. Her present academic interests focus on sustainable economic development and the role of women in fostering sustainability. She serves as the Executive Director of Sustainable Practices, a 501(c)3 non-profit that she founded in 2016. Sustainable Practices is focused on increasing financial and economic literacy to facilitate sustainability. She earned a PhD in Economics from Vanderbilt University, a Masters in Environmental Management from Harvard University and a Masters in Environmental Law and Policy from Vermont Law School. She is the Author of numerous peer reviewed articles and book chapters on the subject of sustainability and economics as well as the texts Economic Principles: A Primer, A Framework for Sustainable Practices, Foundations in Microeconomics, A Framework for Sustainable Practices and Foundations in Macroeconomics, A Framework for Sustainable Practices.

Giuliano Luongo is Acting Director at the EU-China Economics and Politics Institute (Prague and Brussels), and Contract Professor at the University of Rome ‘N. Cusano’, Department of Political Science, Department of Economics and Engineering. His current academic interests focus on sustainability education, public health and innovation policies, and the
relations between development and security. He worked for United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in the area of STI-STICT policies. He has authored various articles related to sustainability, security and international politics.
Sustainable development was defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. It contains two key concepts:

- The concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given.
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.

Essentially, sustainability acknowledges resource constraints and human dependence on the environment but also considers the impact of poverty on resource use and degradation as well as the moral parameters requisite of stewardship. Arguably, excluding explicit inclusion of morality, the defining of sustainability is in close alignment with the objective of the discipline of economics: ‘Economics is the study of human behaviour in relation to a resource-constrained world’ (Venkatesan, 2017).
The ability of economics to add value to sustainability objectives requires the insertion of value parameters or normative thinking in conjunction with the positive or observational stance adopted by the discipline (Knoedler & Underwood, 2003; Nelson, 1995). The catalyst for a value-based practice of economics rests with the ability to promote an understanding of economic systems relative to culture, to establish informational transparency, and to promote the attainment of optimal social and environmental outcomes relative to a measure of well-being that accounts for qualitative attributes (Beach, 1938; Costanza et al., 2014).

This text reviews the objectives of sustainable development goal (SDG) 8, economic growth and decent work for all through an economic perspective, and highlights the limitations in the assessment of the objectives. Further, the discussion focusses on the potential inconsistency between the implementation of SDG 8 and the measurements used to determine its attainment. The text concludes with a consideration of the role of data and the significance of cultural sensitivity as well as explicit inclusion of cultural protection in economic development as these apply to SDG 8.

The text is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the SDGs with respect to the millennium development goals (MDGs) they replaced. The chapter provides a basic foundation for understanding how SDG 8 is evaluated. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relationship between economic growth, as measured by GDP, and sustainability. The chapter considers the relationship between GDP-based economic growth and energy production; energy production and climate change; the concept of decoupling; and the role of consumption in economic growth and in achieving sustainable economic growth. The focus of Chapter 3 is defining decent work specific to its origin and evolution to the present period. The chapter considers the role of corporate social
responsibility in ensuring decent work, the inclusion of decent work within trade agreements, specifically addressing gender and working conditions, and the relationship between decent work and poverty alleviation.

Chapter 4 evaluates GDP and employment, the subject of Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, from the perspective of future prospects and issues to be addressed. The discussion focusses on the role of women relative to the achievement of SDG 8. The chapter includes a discussion of the role of gender in unpaid work, highlights the understated impact of women on the economy and surfaces the limitations of using quantitative market values to assess growth. Also included is the role of trade in promoting and reducing country-specific gender inequality and a discussion of the need for data to properly assess the on-going impact of female employment. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevance of alternative indicators to GDP as measures of societal value, followed by a discussion of the holistic assessment of SDG 8 implementation.

This text provides a foundation for understanding SDG 8, defines the concept of economic growth and decent work, and ultimately, provides the reader with the opportunity to develop a critical analytical perspective with respect to the objectives and attainment of SDG 8.