

# *Sustainable Development and Human Resource Development in China*

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**Abstract:** Human resources have an important position and role in sustainable development. In the process of implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the human resource development of China is facing new challenges and opportunities. This paper will analyse them from both demographic and economic factors, and proposes strategies and measures for China's human resource development.

## **1. Basic information about the UN Sustainable Development Report**

In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, jointly adopted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) system consisting of 17 goals and 169 sub-goals. This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom<sup>[1]</sup>. In each subsequent year, the UN publishes a Sustainable Development Report (SDR), which provides a comprehensive assessment of each member country's efforts to implement the SDGs in the previous year, highlighting relevant progress and areas where efforts are still needed. In July 2022, the 2022 Sustainable Development Report was officially launched. The report uses an interactive indicator panel to provide a visual representation of countries' annual performance against the SDGs, helping to identify targeted priorities for action.

## **2. China's performance in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

As the world's largest developing country, China has always insisted on development as its priority, attached great importance to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and made unremitting efforts in fulfilling its international commitments and working together to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the Sustainable Development Report 2022, China scored 72.4 points on 17 targets, ranking 56th out of 163 member countries, up one position compared to the previous year<sup>[2]</sup>.

This paper focuses specifically on the implementation of the following three objectives from a human resource development perspective.

## **2.1. SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

Adhering to the basic strategy of "giving priority to education development", the Chinese government has continued to increase financial input and strive to promote the development of China's education cause in a more inclusive, fair and high-quality direction<sup>1 3</sup>. With the implementation of the Program for the Development of Children in China (2011-2020), the gross enrolment rate of preschool education in China was 85.2% in 2020, 28.6 percentage points higher than that in 2010, which is far higher than the goal of "teaching 70%" in the program. Since 2010, the net enrolment rate of primary school age children has remained above 99.7%, and the primary school entrance rate has remained above 98%. At the same time, in order to meet people's lifelong learning needs, China also accelerated the pace of building a learning society, which is consistent with the goal of knowledge economy development. Human resources development also plays a key role in this process. Through the means of human resources development, we can not only improve the enthusiasm of the people to learn, mobilize the learning vitality of the people to affect the environment, and accelerate the construction of a learning society, but also improve the comprehensive quality and skills of citizens, improve the quality of talent.

## **2.2. SDG8: Promote economic growth and decent work**

According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China on January 17 this year, China's gross national product (GDP) in 2021 will be 114367 billion yuan, increasing of 8.1% over last year. Among them, the continuous emergence of high-quality comprehensive talents is the key factor to promote growth. Taking the manufacturing industry as an example, China's manufacturing industry reached US \$4.86 trillion in 2021, occupied for nearly 30% of the world's total, of which the growth of technology intensive electromagnetically products and high-tech products is the most obvious. This is inseparable from the human resources development to provide high-quality talents and labour for the manufacturing industry, thus improving the production capacity and efficiency of the manufacturing industry while reducing production costs and improving profit margins.

## **2.3. SDG9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation**

Since 2012, in terms of innovation achievements, the proportion of new product revenue of industrial enterprises above designated size in business revenue has increased from 11.9% in 2012 to 22.4% in 2021. As for infrastructure construction, by the end of 2021, the total mileage of China's comprehensive transportation network will exceed 6 million kilometers, 794000 kilometers of 220 KV and above transmission lines, 54.81 million kilometers of optical cable lines, and so on. The scale of high-speed railway, expressway, power grid, 4G network, etc. will rank first in the world for a long time. The remarkable progress created by China and the development of infrastructure construction are also inseparable from the provision of high-quality labour by human resources development, and the promotion of knowledge economy is also a major factor in development.

## **3. Challenges and opportunities for human resource development in China**

The core issue of sustainable development is human, and the level of human resource development largely determines the level of sustainable economic, social, and ecological

development of a country or region. As the world's largest developing country, China has rare opportunities and faces many new challenges in human resource development in the process of implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In terms of demographic factors, according to the Bulletin of the Seventh National Population Census issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, there are two clear advantages in China: first, China is rich in resources, with a total population of 141,178,000, ranking first in the world, and will continue to show a stable and low growth trend in future; second, the quality of the population continues to improve, and the number of people with university education (meaning college and above) rising to 15,467 per 100,000 people, and the average length of years of education for people aged 15 and above rising to 9.91 years. However, there are four obvious disadvantages in China: first, China has entered an aging society. By 2020, the proportion of people aged 60 and above will reach 18.7%; second, the length in the education is short, and the number of illiterates is large, with 2.67% of the population aged 15 and above still illiterate; third, there is a structural imbalance, with a shortage of high-level talents, the proportion of human resources in science and technology to the total population is limited, so as the proportion of R&D personnel to the labour force, and a shortage of skilled workers. Fourth, the regional distribution of talents is unreasonable. Talents are mainly concentrated in the southeast coast and economic and technological development zones, central cities, while the central and western regions, the vast rural areas are lack of talent, not only to attract talents, but also unable to retain talents.

As for economic factors, with the steady growth of China's economy, the continuous advancement of industrialization and urbanization has accelerated population transfer and human capital enhancement, especially the transfer of rural human resources and the human capitalization of rural population; economic globalization has provided a platform for international cooperation in human resources development and the international flow of human resources. However, with the new development situation in China, such as adjustment of economic development mode, optimization of economic structure, shift of economic growth rate and transformation of old and new dynamic energy, challenges are still faced in terms of unbalanced urban-rural and regional development, uncoordinated industrial structure, and employment structure. In addition, the burst of the COVID-19 has irrevocably altered the sustained economic growth and globalization in recent years of China, making the achievement of the SDGs even more difficult.

## **4. Strategies and Measures for Human Resource Development in China**

Human resources are the foundation of economic and social prosperity, stability, and harmony. The Chinese government should establish the concept that human resources are the first resource for China's sustainable development, determine a development strategy with human resources development as the forerunner, and implement a series of effective measures for human resources development.

### **4.1. Improve the cultural quality of workers**

The government and society should invest more in education, to improve the education structure and increase the school attendance rate of the younger population aged 15-19. Moreover, it also raises the rate of junior high school graduates, and increase the average length of years of education for the working-age population, to promote the level of education of the working population on a large scale.

## 4.2. Strengthen the construction of skilled talents

Continue to promote the high-quality development of modern vocational education. First, moderately expand the scale of vocational education, especially the orderly and reasonable expansion of vocational undergraduate education; second, through university-enterprise cooperation, industry-education integration to train more high-quality technicians, senior technical force, and application-oriented personnel; third, the government and enterprises should carry out large-scale and multilevel vocational skills training to facilitate the skills and quality of the employees.

## 4.3. Optimize talent structure

At present, the focus of China's industrial restructuring is to vigorously develop the tertiary industry, create many employment opportunities, and lead industrial transformation, while keep the innovation of the primary and secondary industries, accelerate industrial upgrading, and improve labour productivity<sup>[4]</sup>. Therefore, the optimization of talent structure includes not only the discipline structure, professional structure, and knowledge structure of talents, but also the industry structure, regional structure, and age structure of talents, all of which need to be further optimized and upgraded according to China's industrial structure adjustment.

## 5. Summary and Outlook

The SDG as the leading global development strategic for the next decade coincides to some extent with the 14th Five-Year Plan of China, which will continue to prioritize the promotion of economic development and reform and innovation over the next five to ten years. A sustainable view of human resource development will also be the guiding philosophy that will guide the country's training, development, and introduction of talent in the future, through the development of complex talent, upgrading the quality of the workforce, and optimizing the talent structure for China's future development plans.

This paper has analyzed the current situation of China's development from the macro level, including the current situation and future development goals in the economic and social fields; in addition, it provides suggestions and opinions for China's human resource development from both macro and micro perspectives, and predicts the future human resource development and sustainable development of China. However, due to the large number of entries in SDG, this paper only adopts three objectives for analysis, and there are fewer objects for analysis, and there is a lack of connection with the whole SDG entries, so there may be some errors in the conclusion, and we hope that other scholars can improve it in the future.

## References

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