Progress Report: SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) – Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU)

2024/2025 Session

Executive Overview

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU) aligns its academic, operational, and community engagement frameworks with **Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth)**. Guided by the university's **"3Vs Agenda" (Values, Viability, Visibility)** under the leadership of Vice-Chancellor Prof. Kate Azuka Omenugha, COOU drives regional economic growth across Anambra State. The university advances SDG 8 through structured graduate employability programs, entrepreneurship incubation, staff capacity development, technological innovation, and public-private industry partnerships.

Key Areas of Progress & Implementation

1. Entrepreneurship Incubation & Graduate Job Readiness

To bridge the gap between academic training and market demand, COOU builds student capacity for self-employment and micro-enterprise development:

- **Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI):** Formerly the Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies (CES), the CEI acts as an institutional hub fostering entrepreneurial skill acquisition, start-up incubation, and innovation for both students and staff.

- **Employment Readiness and Job Creation (ERJC) Programme:** COOU runs annual ERJC flagship initiatives—such as campaigns addressing the sustainability and persistence of graduate start-ups in Nigeria. The program delivers hands-on vocational bootcamps, financial literacy workshops, and mentorship from industry practitioners.

- **Student Micro-Enterprises & Expos:** Through practical course mandates, students design, manufacture, and commercialize physical goods (e.g., household products, clothing, and processed foods). Student-led trade fairs provide platforms to launch small businesses prior to graduation.

2. Workforce Welfare, Capacity Building, and Fair Labor Practices

COOU maintains fair labor practices and professional advancement channels for academic and non-academic staff:

- **Digital Literacy & Promotion Assessments:** The university conducts institutional ICT competency testing for administrative and support staff, tying technological literacy directly to career progression and workplace efficiency.
- **Continuous Professional Development:** Academic staff benefit from research grants, conference sponsorships, and capacity-building workshops focused on modern pedagogy, grant writing, and digital tool adoption.
- **Workplace Inclusivity & Protection:** Administered under transparent governance, university policies safeguard employee rights, enforce zero-tolerance for workplace exploitation, and promote equal pay and career advancement regardless of gender.

3. Technological Innovation & High-Value Industry Skills

Recognizing that economic growth requires technological upgrading and innovation (Target 8.2), COOU invests in future-ready skills:

- **Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics:** The centre trains students in robotics, programming, and data analytics, equipping graduates with high-value technical capabilities needed in modern digital economies.

- **Research and Industrial Solvers:** University research units develop practical engineering and software solutions tailored to local industry needs, driving regional industrial productivity.

4. Local Economic Integration & Circular Economy Initiatives

COOU serves as an economic engine across its host communities in Igbariam, Uli, and Awka:

- **Public-Private Agricultural Partnerships:** Collaborations with local agricultural ventures (e.g., commercial plantation MoUs) generate local employment, improve supply chains, and foster agricultural technology transfer.

- **Circular Economy & Environmental Ventures:** Through sustainable infrastructure initiatives—including university-led plastic recycling and waste management projects—COOU partners with local businesses, hotels, and recycling entities to foster green job creation and supply chain logistics within Anambra State.

Performance Summary against SDG 8 Targets

SDG 8 Target Area	COOU Operational & Academic Contribution	Impact Level
8.2 Diversify, Innovate & Upgrade for Productivity	AI & Robotics Centre, applied research, and digital skills testing for staff.	**High** (Institutional & Regional)
8.3 Support Enterprise Creation & Innovation	Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI) programs and ERJC student incubators.	**High** (Student & Graduate Level)
8.5 Full Employment, Decent Work & Equal Pay	Meritocratic staff promotion structures, ICT skills advancement, and inclusive hiring.	**High** (University Workforce)
8.6 Reduce Youth NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training)	Practical vocational skill acquisition and job-readiness training for all undergraduates.	**High** (State & Regional Youth)

Strategic Recommendations for Acceleration

1. **Establish a Formal Campus Venture Fund:** Partner with regional commercial banks and angel investor networks to create a seed-funding portal for top-performing student start-ups emerging from the CEI.

2. **Expand University-Industry Apprenticeship Networks:** Formalize structured, credit-bearing industrial internship placements with corporate partners across Anambra State and the South-East region to elevate graduate employment rates.

3. **Launch a Digital Freelance & Gig-Economy Hub:** Create an on-campus digital hub where students are trained and certified in remote technical skills (software development, digital marketing, content generation) to access global gig-economy employment while studying.

Signature:  Date: 24/09/2026

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Vice Chancellor