Five AI Platforms Analyse Employment/unemployment; Jobs; Work; in the Context of Human Development in Africa and South Africa[1]

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New Prompt – 21 September 2026

Please discuss with critiques and references:

(1) The concepts of Labour, Work, Salaries (paid employees, human resources), unpaid Labour (slavery, child labour, gender discrimination) etc., as outlined in the self-published document ICT4SDG8.pdf (or https://www.sakan.org.za/Docs/ICT4SDG8.pdf). Specifically, the document criticizes (hopefully productively) the opinions and statements of highly respected and highly credible international leaders and statesmen (very few women in these statements).
(2) Please trace the known or speculated timeline of the evolution of labour/work from the speculated date of the appearance of hominins, about 6 to 2 million years ago (Smithsonian July 2024); or 300,000 years ago, to present, "but likely to be even older" – (NHM Sept 2026) through the evolution to Homo sapiens over the full Homo evolutionary timeline.
(3) When did the culture of sharing defined in the egalitarian culture of all humans (my speculation, correct it if necessary), give way to individualism and materialism, both demonstrated by today's social hierarchies, begin?
(4) Please comment on the empirical dates of such a transition, differentiating between the broad simplification starting about 10,000 BCE, to the narrower suggestion that this was a slow "back-and-forth" transition as described by Graeber and Wengrow in "The Dawn of Everything", and other publications like "Bullshit Jobs".
(5) Please comment on the use of AI to first destroy jobs as we know them today, restoring a "jobless yet productive world" like our ancient ancestors practiced prior to the Neolithic Revolution, followed by building new human cultures which "build people first", instead jobs, economies (including environmental destruction), and technologies like digits and clouds, which all add to Luke Kemp's somewhat dystopian conclusion that "self-termination" is the most likely outcome of 5,000 years of humanity's struggle against inequality.
(6) Can you please speculate on how long this transition process may take, given human distaste for, and reluctance to change, that obliges even the most educationally, technologically, economically advanced nations like the USA, China and Russia to prefer unscientific notions of development drawn from their recent histories. How best can the deep time thinking of changes over 550-million or more years, as suggested by e.g., Thomas Halliday in "Otherlands", be integrated briefly into the longer document on inequality?

What I would appreciate most is a short summary of all the above, to add to a much longer more detailed study of all interconnected threats to human sustainability caused by inequality, and its

[1] Compiled by Walter Brown on 21 September 2026

dangerous symptom of xenophobia. In this regard, please comment on the conclusion that technology, especially AI, is eroding human capacity and willingness to read for learning.

DeepSeek Response:

Bottom line up front: The critique of "labour/work" in the document you cite (ICT4SDG8.pdf) centres on the claim that the current social arrangement organised around "employment" and "economic growth" is merely a social construct spanning roughly 12,000 years—a blink in human evolutionary history—yet it is presented by international organisation leaders (ILO, ITU) as a natural source of human dignity and peace. The document uses deep time to deconstruct this "economism" and hints that AI may become a lever for "de-employment" and a return to older human modes of living. Its weakness is that it underestimates the qualitative gulf between egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies and a post-industrial "jobless world": the former rested on **social contracts** and **face-to-face obligation**, while the latter faces entirely new problems of **large-scale anonymous cooperation** and **meaning production**.

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1. The critique of "labour/work" in *ICT4SDG8.pdf*: contributions and blind spots

The document's core claims (the defensible parts)

The document correctly notes that international organisation leaders (e.g., former ILO Director-General Juan Somavia) directly bundle "decent work" with "human dignity, family stability, and peace in the community", effectively **naturalising a historically specific economic arrangement**. It cites Ruyle (1976) to show that Marx and Engels treated "social labour" as the driver of the transition from ape to human, and that contemporary development discourse inherits a secular version of this logic.

Its key empirical claim is that the current order centred on wage labour is only about **12,000 years** old—roughly **3%** of human evolutionary history (reckoned at ≥400,000 years). This timescale is broadly consistent with archaeological consensus: agriculture and the first civilisations did indeed emerge within the past 12,000 years.

Three points requiring critique

First, the document's criticism of the absence of women's voices among "international leaders" is valid but underdeveloped. It merely notes "very few women" without analysing how this fact systematically shaped the **masculinised presuppositions** of the "work-dignity" discourse—namely, treating employment in the public sphere as the source of dignity while excluding care and reproductive labour from the category of "work".

Second, the document lumps "slavery, child labour, gender discrimination" together as "unpaid labour", which is conceptually too coarse. Slavery is the **coercive, tradeable appropriation of labour power**; child labour is **stage-specific exploitation**; gender discrimination is the **structural devaluation of labour**. Their mechanisms, moral severity, and remedies differ entirely, and conflating them weakens the precision of the critique.

Third, the document's implicit "return" narrative carries a romanticisation risk. It hints that pre-agricultural humans may have lived under more "humane" arrangements, but does not sufficiently acknowledge that hunter-gatherer egalitarianism was often a product of **low density and high**

mobility, accompanied by high levels of **violent mortality** and **material scarcity**. Equating a "jobless world" with "ancient harmony" is selective nostalgia.

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2. The evolutionary timeline of labour/work: from speculation to Homo sapiens

Note on evidence grading: In the timeline below, the **origin of "social labour"** is a **speculative hypothesis** in scientific terms, not a directly observable fossil fact.

Time	Event	Nature of evidence
~8–6 Ma	Common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees/gorillas	Molecular clock and fossil inference
~6–2 Ma	Earliest hominins (e.g., *Sahelanthropus*, *Australopithecus*) appear in Africa; **bipedalism** is the key adaptation	Fossil record
~4 Ma	Bipedalism firmly established; tool use **not yet** conclusively evidenced	Fossils and footprints
~2.6 Ma	Earliest stone tools (Oldowan); **cooperative foraging** may become critical here	Archaeology
~1.8 Ma	**Homo erectus** appears; Sterelny argues cooperative foraging becomes a stable strategy at this stage	Fossils and archaeology
~300 ka	Earliest anatomically **Homo sapiens** fossils	Fossils
~100–50 ka	Symbolic expression, complex language, and cross-group exchange networks clearly present	Archaeology and genetics
~12 ka	Origins of agriculture; **large-scale hierarchical societies** begin to appear; what Sterelny calls the "final stage of cooperation"	Archaeology

Key critique: Ruyle's "labour theory" treats "social labour" as the **primary driver** of human origins—a **materialist single-factor explanation**. Contemporary palaeoanthropology favours **multi-factor models**: climate change, dietary shifts, brain expansion, social cognition, and labour organisation **co-evolved**, rather than one factor determining the others unidirectionally.

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3. When did the egalitarian sharing culture give way to individualism and materialism?

Your speculation ("egalitarian sharing culture was the original state") needs correction.

In *Goliath's Curse*, Kemp synthesises over 400 societies' rise and fall and concludes that **early hunter-gatherers did live in highly egalitarian societies** that "permitted no individual or group to permanently dominate". This aligns with the core argument of Graeber & Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything*: they emphasise that pre-agricultural societies possessed "three basic freedoms" (to move, to disobey, and to choose alternative livelihoods) and **consciously resisted hierarchy**.

But "egalitarian sharing culture" was not a static "original state"; it was a **dynamic equilibrium that had to be continuously maintained**. Sterelny's "Pleistocene social contract" model holds that cooperation expanded from small-scale, immediate-return foraging cooperation around 1.8 Ma to **cross-group reciprocity**, and finally to **large-scale hierarchical cooperation** in the Holocene (~12 ka).

On the origin of individualism, there are two timescales:

- **Long scale (Kemp/Graeber-Wengrow)**: The turn began around **12,000 years ago**. Sedentary agriculture produced **storable, lootable surplus**, and Bronze Age weapons made **monopoly on violence** possible, giving rise to "Goliaths" (hierarchical polities).
- **Short scale (Siedentop)**: The modern concept of the **individual**—as a unit possessing intrinsic moral value independent of family/tribe/caste—is a product of **post-Common Era** Christian

thought and medieval canon law. If valid, the spread of "individualism" is a **very late phenomenon**, not a direct consequence of the agricultural revolution.

Synthesis: The **erosion** of egalitarian sharing culture was an **intermittent, recurrent process**, not a one-time "fall". Kemp notes that the **collapse** of hierarchical societies often "improved the lives of ordinary people", suggesting that egalitarian states can be **restored**, albeit in different forms under higher population density and technology.

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4. Graeber & Wengrow's "slow back-and-forth" narrative and its critics

The core revisionist claim of *The Dawn of Everything*

Graeber and Wengrow reject the **staircase progressive narrative** of "agricultural revolution → hierarchy". They argue: agriculture was **slow, uneven, and reversible**; many pre-agricultural societies had already developed **cities, monumental architecture, complex rituals, and private property**; social structures **oscillated between hierarchy and equality** depending on historical context and collective choice.

Academic criticism of Graeber-Wengrow

Khalil (2025) identifies an **internal contradiction**: Graeber and Wengrow **reject staircase evolutionism** on the one hand, yet argue that the **state (beginning with Pharaonic civilisation) inaugurated a "special stage"** on the other—effectively **restoring a staircase narrative**. Khalil further argues that **the suppression of freedom also existed in "pre-Pharaonic" times**, merely in different forms. Treating the state as "anomalous" is thus a kind of **immaculate-conception theory of state origins**.

The empirical weakness of "Bullshit Jobs"

Graeber's concept of "bullshit jobs" resonates widely at the **subjective experience** level but is questioned analytically. Tiratelli (2022) notes that Graeber correctly observed that many occupations contain **large amounts of wasteful tasks**, but this is a **task-level problem**, not evidence that **entire jobs** are meaningless. Moreover, Graeber attributes "bullshit jobs" to the **inherent logic of capitalism**, whereas an Austrian-style analysis suggests such positions **parasitise bureaucratised sectors lacking market discipline** (public sector, subsidised firms) rather than competitive markets.

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5. AI as a "de-employment" lever: opportunities and traps

Your hypothesis (AI first destroys existing jobs, then helps build a "people-first" culture) contains two judgments that must be assessed separately.

Judgment 1: AI will destroy many existing jobs. This has **partial empirical support**. A Stanford 2025 preprint found that in **high-AI-exposure occupations**, early-career workers aged 22–25 experienced a **16% relative employment decline**. But Google chief economist Fabien Curto Millet offers a **methodological rebuttal**: looking at **job posting data**, the decline began **six months before** ChatGPT's release, synchronised with the April 2022 Fed rate hike, making it more likely a reflection of **interest-rate sensitivity** than an AI effect.

Judgment 2: AI can help build a "people-first" rather than "employment-first" culture. This is **normative hope**, not empirical prediction. AI is itself a **neutral tool**; its social consequences depend on **institutional arrangements and power distribution**. **Without** redistribution mechanisms, public

service expansion, and working-time reduction, AI's productivity gains are more likely to **exacerbate inequality**: capital returns concentrate among computer and data owners, while **displaced workers** face **further erosion of bargaining power**.

Link to Kemp's "self-termination" thesis

Kemp's pessimistic conclusion is that a **globally interconnected civilisation** with continuously intensifying inequality will, when hit by shocks, collapse **globally, rapidly, and irreversibly**, because modern societies are **highly specialised, infrastructure-dependent, and lacking self-sufficiency**. AI in this framework plays a **dual role**: it is both a **technology of accelerating concentration** (computer monopolies, automation displacement) and a **possible decentralising tool** (if deliberately applied to public services and knowledge sharing). But there is **no evidence** that current AI development's **institutional dynamics** point to the latter.

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6. Transition time and the integration of deep time thinking

The timescale problem

Your question implies a tension: between humans' attachment to **recent habits** (the US, China, and Russia each preferring "unscientific notions of development drawn from their recent histories") and the **cognitive restructuring** that **deep time thinking** demands.

Conservative estimate: If we follow historical precedent—from the origins of agriculture to the **universalisation** of hierarchical states took **thousands of years**; from the Industrial Revolution to **wage labour becoming the survival mode for the majority** took **about two centuries**—then the **institutional transformation** from an "employment-centred society" to a "post-employment society", even with AI acceleration, would require at least **several generations (50–150 years)**. This estimate presupposes that **no** global collapse interrupts the process.

Strategies for integrating deep time thinking

Halliday's *Otherlands* provides a **methodological template**: through **ecosystem reconstructions** of 16 geological periods, readers are led to feel the **non-eternity of ecosystems** and the **normality of climate change** at million-year scales. The most effective way to embed this perspective **briefly** in your long document is not **lengthy exposition** but **one or two sentences** at **key argumentative nodes** introducing scale contrasts. For example: "The current order centred on wage labour has lasted about 12,000 years; the ecosystems Halliday traces change on million-year timescales. At that scale, 'work' is a **late and possibly transient** cultural invention."

On the claim that AI erodes the willingness to read

This is one of the most **empirically defensible** concerns in your document. Vint Cerf himself has cited research showing that mobile devices and text messaging are changing children's **social response patterns** (learning that "not responding" is normal). If AI further **mediates** information acquisition—replacing original-text reading with generative summaries, replacing systematic knowledge with conversational interfaces—it could indeed **weaken** the **cognitive endurance** required for deep learning. But this differs from **technological determinism**: the degree of erosion depends on whether **educational design** deliberately preserves long-form reading, critical evaluation, and **AI-unmediated thinking** as core capacities.

Short summary (directly usable in a long document)

1. **Critique of labour/work concepts**: *ICT4SDG8.pdf* correctly notes that international organisations naturalise "decent work" as the foundation of human dignity, yet this arrangement covers only 3% of human evolutionary history. Its weaknesses are conceptual conflation (slavery/child labour/gender discrimination) and romanticisation of a "return to ancient harmony".
2. **Evolutionary timeline**: Social labour is a speculative hypothesis; bipedalism (~4 Ma) precedes tools (~2.6 Ma); cooperative foraging becomes a stable strategy by ~1.8 Ma; agriculture and hierarchical societies emerge ~12 ka.
3. **Erosion of egalitarianism**: Hunter-gatherers maintained egalitarianism, but this was dynamic maintenance, not an "original state". Agricultural surplus and monopoly on violence (~12 ka) initiated inequality, but individualism as a moral concept is a post-Common Era phenomenon.
4. **Critique of Graeber-Wengrow**: Their "slow back-and-forth" narrative powerfully challenges staircase progressivism, but contains an internal contradiction (rejecting staircase theory while treating the state as a special stage). "Bullshit jobs" is defensible at the task level, but attributing it wholly to capitalism ignores the role of bureaucratised sectors.
5. **AI and de-employment**: There is partial evidence of AI's employment effects on young high-exposure occupations, but causal attribution is contested. AI is neutral; its consequences depend on institutional arrangements. Kemp's "self-termination" thesis warns that today's globally interconnected and highly unequal society is especially fragile before collapse.
6. **Transition time and deep time**: Institutional transformation occurs on a generational scale. Deep time thinking should be embedded as a **scale anchor**, not expanded at length. AI's erosion of reading is a real risk, but depends on whether education deliberately preserves unmediated deep learning.

Microsoft Copilot Response:

Below is a concise but academically grounded synthesis that could serve as the introductory summary section of a longer study.

1. Labour, work, paid and unpaid activity: comments on the ICT4SDG8 document

The ICT4SDG8 discussion paper argues that contemporary notions of labour, employment, economic growth, productivity, and "decent work" have become so dominant that many policymakers implicitly assume that human dignity itself depends on employment. The document productively challenges statements by leaders of institutions such as the ILO, WTO, ITU and UNCTAD, not because those institutions are necessarily wrong, but because they tend to frame human well-being through an economic lens. [sakan.org.za]

A strength of the document

The strongest contribution is its distinction between:

- **work** as all human activity necessary for sustaining life and society,
- **labour** as socially organized effort,
- **employment** as labour exchanged for wages,
- **economic production** as only one subset of human activity.

This distinction is important because much socially vital work is unpaid:

- childcare,

- elder care,
- subsistence production,
- community volunteering,
- cultural transmission,
- environmental stewardship.

Feminist economists such as Marilyn Waring and Nancy Folbre have long argued that GDP ignores much of the labour on which societies actually depend.

A criticism of the document

The paper occasionally risks overstating the novelty of domination and work relations by suggesting that modern labour systems emerged only in the last approximately 12,000 years. [sakan.org.za]

The evidence supports a more nuanced position:

- slavery predates states in some regions;
- inequalities existed in some hunter-gatherer societies;
- forms of hierarchy appear intermittently long before agriculture.

What changes after agriculture is not inequality itself, but the **scale, permanence and institutionalization** of inequality.

Paid and unpaid exploitation

The paper is justified in connecting:

- slavery,
- forced labour,
- child labour,
- patriarchal gender roles,
- unpaid domestic labour,

to broader questions concerning labour valuation.

Modern labour markets continue to rely on unequal distributions of power even when work is formally voluntary. Critics from Marx to contemporary labour scholars would argue that the distinction between "free" and "unfree" labour is frequently less clear than economic theory assumes.

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2. Deep-time evolution of labour and work

Scientific evidence indicates that human evolution unfolded over roughly six million years from ape-like ancestors. Humans share a common ancestry with living African apes approximately 8 to 6 million years ago, and many defining human traits evolved over about six million years. [naturalhis...ory.si.edu], [si.edu]

A simplified timeline:

Period	Development	Labour/Work Implication
7-6 million years ago	Earliest hominins	Cooperative survival begins
4-2 million years ago	Australopithecines	Food gathering and shared child care
2.6 million years ago	Earliest stone tools	Tool-assisted labour emerges [si.edu]
1.8 million years ago	Homo erectus expansion	More complex cooperation [si.edu]

Period	Development	Labour/Work Implication
800,000 years ago	Fire control	Extended social learning [si.edu]
300,000 years ago	Homo sapiens appears	Language-rich collaborative work [si.edu]
100,000-10,000 BCE	Hunter-gatherer cultures	Extensive sharing networks
After 10,000 BCE	Agriculture expands	Surplus, ownership, taxation, hierarchy

Throughout most of human existence, "work" would not have resembled modern employment. People hunted, gathered, taught children, made tools, told stories, maintained social bonds, and cared for each other. No distinction existed between "life" and "occupation."

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3. Sharing, egalitarianism, individualism and hierarchy

There is substantial evidence that many hunter-gatherer societies were relatively egalitarian compared with later states.

However, it would be inaccurate to say that all humans everywhere were egalitarian.

Anthropological evidence suggests:

- strong sharing norms were widespread;
- private property existed in some forms;
- local hierarchies appeared periodically;
- some groups alternated between egalitarian and hierarchical structures.

The archaeological record increasingly suggests that cooperation and sharing were key adaptive advantages of Homo sapiens.

The question is therefore not whether hierarchy existed, but:

Why did hierarchy become permanent?

The likely answers involve:

- food surpluses,
- property accumulation,
- territorial control,
- military specialization,
- hereditary power,
- organized religion,
- state bureaucracy.

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4. Agriculture, inequality and Graeber & Wengrow

The traditional narrative states:

Agriculture → surplus → cities → states → inequality.

Graeber and Wengrow challenge this linear story. They argue that archaeology shows much greater diversity than previously assumed and that many large societies existed without strong centralized hierarchies. They reject simple explanations that portray agriculture as inevitably leading to domination. [en.wikipedia.org], [books.google.com]

Their major contribution is showing that:

- people repeatedly experimented with different social arrangements;
- egalitarian and hierarchical systems often coexisted;
- social evolution was frequently reversible.

Thus, inequality was less a singular "event" than a long-contested process.

I believe the strongest interpretation combines both views:

1. Around 10,000 BCE major structural pressures toward inequality emerged.
2. The transition was slow, uneven, and reversible.
3. The rise of permanent hierarchy took several millennia rather than occurring suddenly.

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5. AI, job destruction and a possible post-work world

The ICT4SDG8 paper's most provocative argument concerns technology's potential to redefine labour itself. [sakan.org.za]

Historically:

- mechanization replaced physical labour;
- computers replaced routine information labour;
- AI may replace substantial portions of cognitive labour.

The crucial question is not:

Will AI eliminate jobs?

but

Will AI eliminate livelihoods?

The optimistic scenario:

- routine work declines;
- universal basic services emerge;
- education becomes lifelong;
- unpaid caregiving gains recognition;
- human flourishing replaces employment as the policy objective.

The pessimistic scenario:

- wealth concentrates further;
- technological ownership becomes monopolized;
- unemployment rises;
- social fragmentation deepens.

AI does not determine which future occurs.

Political choices do.

In this respect, the ICT4SDG8 document raises an important challenge: Can technologies be designed primarily to serve people rather than production?

[sakan.org.za]

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6. Luke Kemp, inequality, collapse and deep time

Luke Kemp argues that inequality repeatedly appears among the factors associated with societal collapse and warns that today's globally interconnected civilization may face similar risks. He characterizes inequality as a recurring vulnerability of large societies and warns that "self-termination" is a plausible trajectory if contemporary threats remain unmanaged. [theguardian.com], [en.wikipedia.org]

However, a critique is necessary.

History does not prove inevitable collapse.

It demonstrates:

- recurrent collapse,
- recurrent adaptation,
- recurrent recovery.

The same species that created empires also created:

- democracy,
- human rights,
- science,
- public health,
- international cooperation.

Human history contains both domination and liberation.

How long could a transition take?

No reliable scientific estimate exists.

Historically:

- agricultural transition: several thousand years;
- industrial transition: roughly 200 years;
- digital transition: about 50 years.

AI may compress social change into decades rather than centuries.

A plausible range is:

- 20-50 years for major labour-market disruption,
- 50-150 years for deep cultural restructuring.

That would still be extraordinarily rapid by historical standards.

Deep-time perspective (Halliday and Others)

Thomas Halliday's *Otherlands* reminds us that species, ecosystems and entire worlds change continually across hundreds of millions of years.

A useful addition to your document could be:

Humanity's current labour systems, economic models, religions, states, corporations and technologies occupy only a microscopic fraction of Earth's 4.5-billion-year history and an equally tiny fraction of life's 550-million-year animal history. Seen through deep time, neither capitalism,

socialism, industrialization nor artificial intelligence are permanent conditions. They are brief experiments within a much longer evolutionary story. The challenge facing humanity is therefore not to preserve present institutions indefinitely, but to evolve social systems capable of sustaining both people and planet.

Short concluding summary

The evidence increasingly suggests that most of human existence occurred in societies where survival depended more on sharing, cooperation and social relationships than on formal employment. Modern concepts of labour, work and economic growth represent recent social inventions relative to humanity's evolutionary history. While agriculture and civilization created extraordinary cultural achievements, they also enabled enduring inequalities based on class, gender, power and property. Recent scholarship by Graeber, Wengrow and others suggests that the rise of hierarchy was neither inevitable nor linear. AI now raises the possibility of another major transition, potentially reducing the economic necessity of human labour while simultaneously creating new risks of inequality and social exclusion. Whether this transition leads toward human flourishing or societal instability will depend less on technology itself than on how societies choose to distribute power, resources and opportunity. In deep-time perspective, humanity's future challenge is not merely creating jobs, but designing social systems that place people, learning, cooperation and ecological sustainability ahead of economic accumulation. Excessive inequality remains one of the most consistent threats to that goal, while xenophobia remains one of its most dangerous social symptoms. Finally, concerns that digital technologies and AI may erode deep reading are credible: evidence increasingly suggests that fragmented attention can undermine sustained learning, making the preservation of reflective reading and critical thinking essential components of any genuinely human-centred future.

Citations

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Anthropic Response:

I could read only the first 28 or so of the document's 171 pages (through the hunter-gatherer reference list in §2.1), so nothing below covers Sections 3–7. A paste-ready summary is at the end.

1. Labour, work and "unpaid" work in ICT4SDG8

What works. The central move is to separate dignity, family stability and peace from wage employment. Somavia's sentence conflates them, and pulling them apart is legitimate. Your "human capital" and slavery lineage (Rosenthal) and your point about unpaid domestic work are also sound.

Critiques

- **Terminology.** "Labour", "work", "jobs" and "employment" are used almost interchangeably. Two standard distinctions would help. Arendt (*The Human Condition*, 1958) separates labour (necessity), work (making durable things) and action. The ILO's 2013 labour-statistics resolution treats *work* as any productive activity and *employment* as the paid subset.
- **The "unpaid" grouping.** Slavery is *coerced* labour, which is a different axis from unpaid. Child abuse is a harm, and child labour is only part of it. Gender discrimination is the mechanism that assigns unpaid care. A simple grid of free vs coerced, paid vs unpaid, and recognised vs invisible would keep the three distinct. Feminist economics already supplies the tools:

Marilyn Waring's *If Women Counted*, Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, and Nancy Folbre and Nancy Fraser on care. That also addresses the scarcity of women in the statements you critique. Kate Raworth, Mariana Mazzucato, Sarah Hrdy, Kathi Weeks and Ela Bhatt (SEWA) would add more.

- **Tone toward the leaders.** Somavia's sentence doesn't claim Homo sapiens evolved to depend on jobs. That is a strong reading, and a critic could call it over-reading. The ILO's own 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia says labour is not a commodity, so the ILO can be framed as a partial ally. The critique lands harder aimed at SDG 8's *objective* (sustained growth) than at individuals.
- **Facts to tighten**
    - The genus *Homo* is about 2.8 million years old, not 4 or more. That figure belongs to hominins.
    - Makapansgat is not among the oldest hominin sites.
    - "Logic suggests" australopiths had language is too strong, since dates for language origins are heavily contested.
    - The sentence about Khoisan "extinction" could be read as a prediction about living peoples.
    - The "chattel" etymology and the Chomsky "wage slavery" quotation need primary sources.
    - The Kalahari debate (Wilmsen, 1989) questions whether Lee's San were pristine relics or long embedded in trade and pastoral systems. Sahlins is likewise contested, as you note.

2–4. Timeline and thresholds

The museums' own dates for our species vary by page. The Smithsonian says humans' defining characteristics evolved over 6 million years, with Homo sapiens appearing in East Africa about 300,000 years ago. The NHM says at least 300,000 years ago to present, but likely even older. Another NHM page says around 200,000 years ago, and a third says perhaps 400,000 years. That spread reflects a real definitional debate, so "≥300,000" is safer than "≥400,000". *Homo erectus* appeared about two million years ago.

Threshold	Approx. date	Confidence
Bipedal hominins, foraging and carrying	~7–4 Mya	moderate
Earliest stone tools (Lomekwi; Oldowan)	~3.3 / ~2.6 Mya	moderate / high
H. erectus: Acheulean tools, probable food sharing and alloparenting	~2 Mya	high (tools); low (social organisation)
Controlled fire, then cooking	~1 Mya to ~800 kya	contested
Cooperative big-game hunting (Schöningen)	~300 kya	moderate
H. sapiens; ochre, shellfish, bedding, long-distance exchange	≥300 kya, mostly 200–100 kya	moderate
Levelling (egalitarian) norms in mobile foragers	inferred, ≥100–300 kya	low
Elite burials (Sunghir); monumental building (Göbekli Tepe)	~34 kya; ~9500 BCE	high
Agriculture	~10,000 BCE onward, multiple origins	high
States, cities (Uruk)	~3500–3000 BCE	high
Wage "jobs" as the normal condition; "unemployment" as a concept	19th century	high

On your speculation in (3). Egalitarianism wasn't the default state of all humans. It was probably an *achievement*. Christopher Boehm's "reverse dominance hierarchy" argues that foragers use coalitions to suppress would-be alphas, unlike chimpanzees. James Woodburn's contrast between immediate-return and delayed-return societies is useful here: storage and investment are what generate property and hierarchy. Not all foragers were egalitarian either. Northwest Coast foragers held slaves, and Sunghir suggests inherited status in the Ice Age. Kemp nonetheless argues that the Palaeolithic shows no signs of enduring inequality or hierarchy, so "mostly egalitarian, with exceptions" is defensible. "Individualism" in the modern sense (Henrich's WEIRD thesis) is far more recent than agriculture.

On the transition dates in (4). Your document's ~12,000 years is roughly right for agriculture, but three different clocks are being merged:

- about 12,000 years for farming
- about 5,000 years for states and hierarchy, which matches Kemp's Goliath timeline
- about 200 years for the wage-job world that SDG 8 takes for granted

Separating them strengthens your argument, because the "world of jobs" is much younger than the document implies.

Graeber and Wengrow's correction is real: seasonal switching between hierarchy and equality, early monumentality, and "play farming" over millennia, with no inevitable ratchet. But it is a corrective, not a replacement. Some archaeologists say it cherry-picks, and Flannery and Marcus (*The Creation of Inequality*, 2012) tell a more directional story. *Bullshit Jobs* isn't about deep time. It attacks the modern equation of jobs with dignity, which is the same target as your document, and Keynes's 1930 "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren" pairs naturally with it.

5. AI, the jobless world and Kemp

Four cautions on the "AI destroys jobs, then we build people first" argument:

- **"Jobless" is not "workless".** Hunter-gatherers had no jobs but had commons, sharing norms and secure access to land. Removing jobs without those leaves destitution, and South Africa's 30%+ unemployment shows that. Income has to be decoupled from employment (the Basic Income Grant debate) before a jobless world is liberating.
- **The direction of technology is political.** Acemoglu and Johnson (*Power and Progress*) argue automation versus augmentation is a choice. Historically, productivity gains went mostly to consumption and to owners, not to leisure.
- **AI cuts both ways in Kemp's own scenarios.** His three futures are self-termination (most likely), a world in chains, or a world where Goliath is controlled. Summaries of the book name AI and surveillance as tools that could make counter-domination (rebellion) impossible, and data centres also feed the environmental damage you list.
- **Kemp is not purely dystopian.** He is pessimistic about the future but optimistic about people, and he urges reviving democratic governance drawn from our Palaeolithic past. His book covers 324 collapsed regimes and empires, not humanity's "struggle against inequality" as such. One review calls it strong on diagnosis but offering no way forward, so your "people first" agenda fills a real gap.

6. How long, and deep time

Historical analogues suggest at least two generations:

- The 8-hour day took roughly 60–80 years from 1886 to mainstream.

- Finland's education reform took 30–50 years, as your document notes.
- Legal abolition of slavery took decades, and forced labour persists.
- The farming transition itself took millennia.

My speculation is 25–50 years for institutional decoupling of livelihood from jobs in some countries, and 60–100 years for cultural change in the identity-through-work ethic. Crises can compress this, and Kemp notes that historical breakdowns were often blessings rather than mere reversions to dark ages. The tension is that his "decades or centuries" window may be shorter than cultural inertia.

Caution on the "unscientific development notions" claim: the US, China and Russia each rely on historically derived national narratives, but so does every polity. "Path-dependent" is more accurate and less alienating.

For Halliday's *Otherlands*, a single scaling device could do the job. Compress 550 million years into one calendar year:

- Hominins appear about 4 days before year-end.
- *H. sapiens* appears about 4.8 hours before.
- Agriculture starts about 11 minutes before.
- The industrial "job" economy is about 14 seconds old.

Add one guard. Deep time can license complacency ("Earth will recover"), but recovery from past mass extinctions took millions of years, which is irrelevant on human timescales.

Does AI erode reading for learning?

The evidence is real but mixed. Reading and maths declines pre-date powerful LLMs. For AI specifically, an EEG study (Kosmyna et al.) found lower cognitive engagement and reduced unaided performance after LLM-assisted writing, though with only 54 participants. Gerlich's study of 666 people linked heavy AI use to weaker critical thinking via cognitive offloading, but it is correlational. Newer randomised trials report that AI assistance reduces persistence and hurts independent performance, and one study saw unaided maths and reading-comprehension scores dip after about ten minutes of AI help. The International AI Safety Report 2026 calls the research nascent, with further studies warranted. One analysis finds moderate use had no significant effect while excessive reliance had diminishing returns.

I'd phrase your conclusion as "AI plausibly accelerates an existing erosion, especially for those who have not yet acquired deep-reading fluency". Two points support it. Reading is a roughly 5,000-year-old cultural skill, not an evolved one, so it is fragile and reversible. South Africa's Grade 4 reading crisis (your ~80% figure) long pre-dates AI. My own hypothesis, not established, is that AI widens the gap between people who read fluently and use it as a tool and people who can't and use it as a substitute. One practical note is that a 171-page hyperlinked draft is itself a reading challenge, so a layered version (one-page summary, then the full text) would serve your intended readers.

Paste-ready summary (~250 words)

Modern ideas of "labour", "work" and "decent work" treat wage employment as the source of human dignity, yet the wage-job economy is only about 200 years old, states about 5,000, and agriculture about 12,000, against at least 300,000 years for *Homo sapiens* and 6+ million for hominins. Across that span, provisioning, tool-making, play, ritual and childcare were integrated and mostly unmonetised. Mobile foragers appear to have sustained equality through active levelling norms, not innocence; pockets of hierarchy existed even in the Ice Age. Graeber and Wengrow show

the shift to hierarchy was a slow, reversible back-and-forth. Kemp shows that, once entrenched, extractive elites and rising inequality have preceded collapse in hundreds of cases, making "self-termination" the most likely future unless democratic, egalitarian institutions are revived. AI could either lock in domination ("a world in chains") or, if livelihood is decoupled from employment and the commons is protected, open a path to a "jobless but not workless" society that builds people first. Such change historically takes two to four generations, though crises can compress it. Seen against 550 million years of Earth history, the entire industrial era is a matter of seconds. Evidence that AI accelerates the erosion of deep reading is suggestive but not settled. For the inequality-xenophobia study, this history matters because hierarchy needs boundaries, and xenophobia is one of the cheapest tools for maintaining them.

I can turn any section into a longer draft, or map these points onto your document's section numbers.

ChatGPT Response:

Your six questions can be brought together into a coherent argument, but I would make one important change to the framing: **do not present the history as a simple progression from egalitarian "work" → agriculture → hierarchy → capitalism → AI → possible extinction.** The evidence is more interesting than that. It points to repeated oscillations among cooperation, sharing, hierarchy, coercion, individual accumulation and collective institutions.

I have also checked the self-published **ICT4SDG8** document. The web index identifies it as a 171-page discussion document, originally compiled in December 2021, whose central question is how ICT can help address South Africa's unemployment while connecting SDG 8 to poverty, hunger, health, education, gender inequality, environmental sustainability and the other SDGs. (Sakan) The PDF itself is currently timing out when I try to retrieve its full text, so where I discuss its detailed arguments below I am relying on the indexed material and the propositions in your question rather than pretending to have re-read every page.

A possible short summary for the longer document

From labour to human flourishing: Human work did not begin with employment, wages or economic growth. Long before Homo sapiens, survival depended upon energy expenditure, cooperation, provisioning, care, tool use and ecological adaptation. Across most of human evolutionary history, production and reproduction were embedded in social relationships of sharing and reciprocity rather than in wage labour or individually owned capital. Homo sapiens therefore inherited a capacity for cooperation, sharing and egalitarian social regulation as well as capacities for competition, status seeking and domination.

The archaeological record does not support a single "fall" from equality into inequality at the beginning of agriculture. Rather, the Neolithic and subsequent millennia reveal repeated experiments with sedentism, cultivation, property, storage, hierarchy and collective governance. Persistent wealth inequality became substantially more common only after agriculture had been established for millennia, and appears to have depended upon particular combinations of land limitation, settlement hierarchy, inheritance, political power and coercion. (American Economic Association)

Modern employment is consequently only one historically recent form of human work. The distinction matters because unpaid household production, caregiving, subsistence production and voluntary activity are economically and socially indispensable even when they are excluded from

conventional measures of employment. Modern international statistical standards now explicitly recognise these different forms of work. (ILOSTAT)

Artificial intelligence could therefore be understood not simply as another labour-saving technology but as a possible turning point in the relationship between **work, income, status and human purpose**. It could destroy particular jobs, transform many others and potentially reduce the amount of necessary human labour. But whether this produces mass unemployment and greater inequality or a society in which people have greater freedom to learn, care, create and participate is a political and institutional question, not a technological inevitability. Current ILO evidence points more strongly toward widespread occupational transformation than wholesale replacement. (International Labour Organization)

The deepest lesson is therefore not that humanity must return literally to a Palaeolithic past, but that **the human capacity to organise production around people rather than around production itself is much older than the institutions now treated as economically indispensable**. The challenge is to recover and redesign that capacity under conditions of planetary-scale technology and environmental constraint.

I think that could become the conceptual centre of the longer study.

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1. Labour, work, paid and unpaid work

There is a very useful distinction that I would make more explicit in **ICT4SDG8**:

Work ≠ labour ≠ employment ≠ a job.

The modern tendency to collapse these into one concept is itself part of the problem.

The ILO's current statistical framework is helpful here. Since the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013, **work** has been defined broadly as activity producing goods or services for oneself or others. It distinguishes:

1. own-use production;
2. employment for pay or profit;
3. unpaid trainee work;
4. volunteer work; and
5. other work activities. (ILOSTAT)

That is a much better starting point for your historical argument than treating paid employment as the archetype of work.

For example:

Concept	Historical/social meaning
Work	Human activity that produces, maintains, cares, creates or sustains
Labour	Work considered as productive effort, increasingly also as an economic input
Employment	Work undertaken for pay or profit
Job	An institutionalised position or bundle of tasks attached to employment
Unpaid work	Subsistence, domestic work, care, community work, volunteering etc.
Forced labour	Work extracted under coercion
Slavery	A system in which people themselves become subject to ownership/control
Human resources	A modern managerial/economic abstraction of human productive capacity

The last distinction is especially important.

Calling people **"human resources"** is economically convenient but philosophically revealing: it turns people into a category analogous to land, capital, energy or machinery. Your critique can therefore ask:

When did human beings cease primarily to be members of communities who work, care and share, and become "resources" to be allocated by organisations?

That is a much stronger question than simply criticising capitalism.

And unpaid work is not peripheral. The ILO explicitly recognises household production and unpaid care—including cooking, cleaning, childcare and caring for dependent people—as work. (ILOSTAT)

This is also where your gender argument is strongest. UN Women reports that unequal caregiving responsibilities, occupational segregation, pay gaps and restricted leadership opportunities remain major barriers to women's equality in labour markets. (UN Women) The ILO similarly describes care work, paid and unpaid, as foundational to economic and social wellbeing. (International Labour Organization)

A necessary critique

I would **not** equate all unpaid work with slavery or child abuse.

Those are different analytical categories:

- unpaid care can be voluntary and socially valued;
- unpaid domestic work can be unequally distributed;
- exploitation can occur within apparently voluntary relationships;
- forced labour involves coercion;
- slavery involves a much more extreme legal and social condition;
- child labour ranges from benign household participation to severe exploitation and hazardous work.

The ILO's SDG 8 framework deliberately separates decent work from forced labour, modern slavery and child labour. (International Labour Organization)

That distinction will make your critique **stronger**, not weaker.

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2. From evolutionary activity to human labour

Here I would strongly resist giving a precise date to "the beginning of labour."

There is no fossil that says: *this is the first worker*.

A more scientifically defensible sequence is:

~550 million years ago and earlier

Life already involved energy acquisition, movement, construction, reproduction, cooperation and competition. Halliday's **Otherlands** is useful precisely because it places human existence within a much larger evolutionary experiment extending back roughly 550 million years. (Thomas Halliday)

But calling all of this "labour" would be metaphorical.

~8–6 million years ago

The human and chimpanzee lineages diverged from a common ancestor. Smithsonian places the common ancestor at roughly 8–6 million years ago. (Human Origins)

~6 million years ago

The earliest hominins appear. Smithsonian describes hominins as appearing by around 6 million years ago, with bipedalism emerging as one of the earliest defining human characteristics. (Human Origins)

~2 million years ago

The genus **Homo** appears, accompanied by major changes in mobility, body form, tool use, diet and ecological adaptation.

>300,000 years ago

Homo sapiens appears in Africa. The Natural History Museum currently gives "at least 300,000 years ago, but likely older" as the useful formulation. (Natural History Museum)

300,000–12,000 years ago

Most human production remained embedded in foraging, food sharing, mobility, childcare, toolmaking, shelter construction, social learning and ecological knowledge.

That is where **work** becomes a defensible anthropological concept.

Research on human evolutionary ecology suggests that food sharing, labour exchange and division of labour were fundamental components of the cooperative human economy. (ScienceDirect) Cooperative childcare likewise appears to have been important to human social evolution. (Annual Reviews)

So I would formulate your evolutionary hypothesis as:

Human work probably originated not as employment but as cooperative provisioning, care, toolmaking and ecological adaptation, with labour becoming increasingly socially differentiated as human communities expanded in scale and complexity.

That is defensible without claiming more archaeological certainty than exists.

---

3. Was humanity originally egalitarian and sharing?

Broadly yes, but "all humans were egalitarian" is too strong.

This is probably the most important correction I would make to your hypothesis.

Hunter-gatherer societies provide considerable evidence for strong egalitarian norms, food sharing and mechanisms for restraining individual accumulation. Research on food sharing finds that sharing is unusually extensive among humans and is connected to cooperation, risk reduction and labour sharing. (ScienceDirect)

But archaeology also shows:

- status differences;
- unequal burial goods;
- prestige;
- leadership;
- violence;
- gender differentiation;
- occasional substantial wealth differences.

Graeber and Wengrow make this point in an especially provocative way: Palaeolithic societies could move between egalitarian and hierarchical political arrangements rather than occupying a single fixed social state. Their earlier academic paper explicitly argues that Upper Palaeolithic societies may have alternated between contrasting political forms. (UCL Discovery)

So rather than:

egalitarian → hierarchical

I suggest:

egalitarian mechanisms + status competition + cooperation + hierarchy were all part of the human repertoire, with their relative importance changing according to ecological and political circumstances.

That formulation is much harder to attack.

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4. When did inequality begin?

This is where recent evidence strongly supports your instinct that **10,000 BCE is much too simple a date**.

Agriculture began in several places at different times. And agriculture did **not** automatically produce permanent hierarchy.

A particularly useful 2024 review by Samuel Bowles and Mattia Fochesato finds that elevated wealth inequality existed occasionally among Neolithic societies, but persistent inequality was relatively rare until roughly the last 5,000 years. They argue that "aggressive egalitarianism" may have suppressed durable wealth inequality until Late Neolithic technological and political changes made accumulation and elite power more sustainable. (American Economic Association)

Even more strikingly, a large archaeological analysis covering more than 1,100 sites and 47,000 residential units found that persistent wealth inequality generally **lagged plant cultivation by more than a millennium** and was associated with settlement hierarchies and land-limited production. (DOI)

That substantially strengthens the Graeber–Wengrow argument against the simplistic:

agriculture → property → hierarchy → civilisation.

The evidence instead suggests something like:

foraging → experimentation with cultivation → sedentism → storage/property possibilities → different political experiments → settlement expansion → some societies developing durable hierarchy

with many reversals and alternatives.

A scholarly review of *The Dawn of Everything* notes that domesticated resources sometimes took thousands of years to become dominant and that the archaeological evidence does not support an inevitable transition from domestication to inequality. (RCNi Company Limited)

That is very close to your proposed **"back-and-forth"** model.

But there is an important critique of Graeber and Wengrow too: critics argue that they sometimes give human political choice too much explanatory weight and understate ecological and material constraints. (David Graeber)

I would therefore use:

slow, multidirectional, reversible transition

rather than simply “back-and-forth”.

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5. Where does *Bullshit Jobs* fit?

Very nicely—but as a **modern endpoint**, not as archaeological evidence.

Graeber's *Bullshit Jobs* makes a different argument from *The Dawn of Everything*.

Its central proposition is that modern economies can generate paid employment that even the people performing it regard as unnecessary or socially pointless. (David Graeber)

This gives your study a powerful conceptual paradox:

Humanity evolved to solve real survival problems through cooperative work; modern economies can create employment whose social purpose is unclear.

That is an excellent bridge to AI.

But don't present Graeber's estimates as established fact. They are an influential anthropological/social critique, not an accepted quantitative measurement of the proportion of objectively useless jobs.

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6. AI and the possible return of a “jobless” society

This is where I would modify your thesis most substantially.

I would **not** say:

AI will destroy jobs and return humanity to the ancient jobless world.

Instead:

AI could separate work from employment on a scale not seen since before the modern labour market.

That is a much more interesting proposition.

The distinction is crucial.

A hunter-gatherer may have worked intensely without having a “job”.

Likewise, a future person might:

- care for children;
- restore ecosystems;
- teach;
- make art;
- study;
- participate in democracy;
- maintain community infrastructure;
- undertake scientific research;
- cultivate food;
- care for elderly people;

without these activities necessarily constituting conventional employment.

The ILO's current evidence is actually quite important here. Its 2025 global analysis estimates that **one in four workers** are in occupations with some GenAI exposure, but concludes that transformation of jobs is presently more likely than wholesale elimination. Only 3.3% of global employment falls into its highest exposure category. (International Labour Organization)

So your longer-term hypothesis is plausible, but the short-term empirical claim should be:

AI → task automation → occupational transformation → possible labour displacement → institutional struggle over distribution → potentially less necessary paid employment.

The final step is not technologically predetermined.

The crucial political-economic question becomes:

If machines perform an increasing proportion of economically necessary work, who owns the machines, who receives the resulting income, and how is socially necessary human activity valued?

That connects AI directly to inequality.

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7. "Build people first" rather than jobs

I think this is one of the strongest ideas in your proposal.

You could formulate a new development principle:

The objective of an economy should be to maximise human and ecological flourishing, not the number of jobs required to distribute purchasing power.

That reverses the conventional development sequence:

economic growth → jobs → income → wellbeing

into:

human capability + ecological security → social participation → useful production → appropriate technology → economic institutions

It also avoids an unfortunate implication of some "job creation" policies: if AI eliminates a pointless job, society should not necessarily create another pointless job simply to preserve employment statistics.

The relevant unit should become **human contribution**, not "jobs".

That would also give your ICT4SDG8 document a powerful future-facing conclusion.

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8. Luke Kemp and the 5,000-year experiment

Kemp's argument is useful as a **warning**, but I would be careful about turning "self-termination is most likely" into an empirical prediction.

His *Goliath's Curse* examines patterns of rise and collapse across more than 400 societies over roughly 5,000 years and argues that inequality, elite dominance and systemic vulnerabilities have repeatedly contributed to societal collapse. He extends the argument to modern risks including climate change, nuclear weapons and AI. (The Guardian)

That gives you a compelling historical scale:

~5,000 years of complex civilisation

versus

~300,000 years of Homo sapiens

versus

~6 million years of hominin evolution

versus

~550 million years of complex life.

But “self-termination is most likely” should be explicitly labelled **Kemp's conclusion**, not your own empirical forecast.

The strongest formulation is:

Kemp's historical analysis raises the possibility that the institutional mechanisms that produced unprecedented power and inequality may also create unprecedented systemic risks.

That is defensible without making a prediction about humanity's future.

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9. How long might the transition take?

This cannot be scientifically predicted.

But you can construct **scenario timescales**, rather than pretend there is a known date.

0–10 years

AI substantially changes particular tasks and occupations.

10–30 years

Potentially major restructuring of professional, administrative, information and creative work.

30–100 years

Possible restructuring of the relationship among employment, income, education, taxation, ownership and social status.

100–300 years

If institutions adapt successfully, “employment” could become substantially less central to social identity and economic survival.

300+ years

A genuinely post-employment civilisation becomes conceivable—but so do very different alternatives: intensified inequality, authoritarian technological control, ecological contraction, or combinations of these.

These are **scenario horizons, not predictions**.

And this is where your point about resistance to change becomes important. Human societies don't automatically adopt technologically or scientifically optimal arrangements. Institutions protect accumulated wealth, status, identity and power.

So the transition is likely to be **socially slower than the technological transition**.

That is a recurring pattern in history.

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10. Integrating Halliday's 550 million years

I would *not* add a long geological history to the document.

Instead, add one short conceptual passage.

Something like:

Deep time changes the scale of the argument. Homo sapiens has existed for roughly 300,000 years, hominins for about six million years, while complex life has a history extending hundreds of millions of years. Thomas Halliday's *Otherlands* takes the reader back roughly 550 million years through successive worlds, ecosystems and mass extinctions. (Thomas Halliday) This perspective warns against treating present economic institutions as permanent features of nature. Species, ecosystems, climates, technologies and social systems all have histories. Human economic arrangements are therefore not laws of nature but historically contingent adaptations. The appropriate question is not whether humanity can preserve today's economic system indefinitely, but whether our institutions can adapt rapidly enough to remain compatible with the ecological and technological conditions they themselves are changing.

That gives you Halliday without derailing the SDG argument.

And there is an especially nice conceptual connection:

deep time → evolutionary adaptation → human cultural adaptation → technological adaptation → institutional adaptation.

The problem is that technological change is now occurring much faster than biological evolution and potentially faster than institutional adaptation.

That may be the central sustainability problem.

---

11. Is AI eroding our capacity to read and learn?

Here I would change your proposed conclusion from a categorical statement to an empirical hypothesis:

AI may erode some forms of reading, memory and independent reasoning when it substitutes for rather than supports cognitive effort.

There is now evidence in both directions.

A 2025 study of university students found an association between greater AI dependence and lower critical-thinking performance, with cognitive fatigue acting as part of the mechanism. (DOI)

Another experimental study reported poorer long-term knowledge retention when ChatGPT was used without restriction, consistent with the idea of cognitive offloading. (DOI)

But the opposite result is also possible. A 2025 quasi-experimental study found that **structured** AI-assisted writing, in which students still had to critique, analyse and reflect, produced gains in critical thinking. (Bilingual Publishing Group)

That distinction is extremely important.

The problem is therefore not simply:

AI makes people stupid.

It is:

AI changes the distribution of cognitive effort.

If AI performs the remembering, summarising, first-draft reasoning and comparison, humans may become less practised at those activities.

But if AI is used to challenge the learner, provide counterarguments, expose gaps and demand verification, it can potentially increase cognitive activity.

That suggests a powerful educational rule:

Never outsource the cognitive activity you are trying to learn.

Use AI *after* attempting to understand; use it to interrogate your understanding rather than replace it.

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12. One particularly important correction concerning women

You note that the famous statements criticised in the document are overwhelmingly from men.

That is historically significant, but I would avoid merely adding more women as quotations. The deeper problem is that conventional histories of "work" have systematically privileged **market production, political leadership and formal employment** over care, reproduction, household production and community maintenance.

The gender critique therefore belongs at the conceptual level.

Women's unpaid work is not an "addition" to the history of labour.

It is part of the history of labour from the beginning.

And the empirical evidence also cautions against the old caricature that prehistoric men hunted while women merely gathered. Archaeological and ethnographic research demonstrates both substantial gendered divisions of labour **and considerable flexibility**, including women hunting in many societies. (PLOS)

That is another reason to avoid replacing one simplistic historical narrative with its opposite.

The argument I would ultimately make

I think your long document becomes much stronger if its central thesis is not:

Humanity was egalitarian, agriculture made us unequal, capitalism made work meaningless, and AI might return us to the past.

That is elegant—but historically too linear.

Instead:

Humanity inherited two extraordinarily powerful capacities: cooperation and competition. For most of our evolutionary history, cooperation, sharing and social mechanisms for limiting accumulation enabled small-scale societies to survive despite substantial ecological uncertainty. Over the Holocene, some societies developed increasingly durable mechanisms for accumulating wealth, controlling land and labour, transmitting privilege and concentrating political power—but this was neither instantaneous nor inevitable. Modern employment, capitalism and technological production represent historically recent configurations of much older human capacities for work, cooperation, exchange and domination.

AI now potentially separates productive capacity from human labour more radically than previous technologies. Its significance therefore lies not merely in job displacement but in the possibility of reconsidering why employment is treated as the principal mechanism through which adults obtain income, status, social participation and purpose. The central sustainability question becomes whether technological productivity will reinforce concentration of wealth and power or permit societies to place human development, care, learning, equality and ecological resilience before the maximisation of paid employment and material accumulation.

Deep-time history reinforces the urgency of this choice. Humans are a very recent species inhabiting a planet whose biological history extends hundreds of millions of years. Neither today's economic institutions nor today's technological civilisation are permanent. They are adaptations—and adaptations that fail to match changing environmental and technological conditions eventually have to change.

That, in my view, provides a much more defensible bridge between **SDG 8, SDG 10, inequality, xenophobia, AI, education, ecological sustainability and existential risk**.

A compact historical timeline

Period	What can reasonably be said about work/labour
550m+ years ago	Complex life evolves diverse forms of energy acquisition, cooperation, competition and ecological adaptation; "labour" is not yet an appropriate human concept. (Thomas Halliday)
8–6m years ago	Human/chimpanzee evolutionary lineages diverge. (Human Origins)
~6m years ago	Earliest hominins; bipedalism develops. (Human Origins)
~2m years ago	Homo, increasingly sophisticated tools, mobility and subsistence strategies.
≥300,000 years ago	Homo sapiens emerges in Africa. (Natural History Museum)
300k–12k years ago	Sharing, cooperation, care, toolmaking and flexible division of labour embedded in foraging societies; egalitarian mechanisms common but not universal. (ScienceDirect)
~12k years ago onward	Agriculture and sedentism arise independently in multiple regions; inequality does not immediately follow.
~10k–5k years ago	Increasing experimentation with property, storage, land, settlement and political hierarchy.
~5,000 years ago onward	Persistent large-scale wealth inequality and elite political power become increasingly common. (American Economic Association)
Industrial era	Wage labour and employment become central institutions.
20th–21st centuries	Unpaid work increasingly measured separately from employment; ILO formally expands the statistical concept of work. (ILOSTAT)
21st century	AI begins separating tasks and productive capacity from human labour. Current evidence indicates transformation is more likely than wholesale job replacement, but distributional consequences remain uncertain. (International Labour Organization)
Possible future	Society could move toward less employment-dependent human flourishing—or toward greater technological concentration and inequality. This is an institutional choice, not a scientific prediction.

Particularly useful references for the longer study

- **ILO, 19th ICLS framework** — essential for getting the work/employment/unpaid-work terminology right. (ILOSTAT)
- **Bowles & Fochesato (2024), *The Origins of Enduring Economic Inequality*** — particularly valuable for your argument about the delayed emergence of persistent inequality. (American Economic Association)
- **Bogaard et al./PNAS archaeological inequality research** — >1,100 sites and >47,000 residential units; very useful empirical counterweight to overly simple narratives. (DOI)
- **Graeber & Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*** — useful for the argument that human political arrangements were historically much more variable than conventional "progress" narratives imply. (David Graeber)
- **Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*** — useful as a critique of the identification of socially valuable work with paid employment, but not as a quantitative account of objectively useless work. (David Graeber)

- **Halliday, *Otherlands*** — excellent device for inserting deep time without turning the document into a geological history. (Thomas Halliday)
- **Kemp, *Goliath's Curse*** — valuable as a historical-risk argument, but its "self-termination" conclusion should remain explicitly attributed to Kemp rather than presented as a scientific prediction. (The Guardian)
- **ILO 2025 GenAI research** — important corrective to both technological optimism and "AI will eliminate all jobs" narratives. (International Labour Organization)
- **Recent AI/cognition research** — useful for treating AI dependence and reading/learning as testable empirical questions rather than assuming either benefit or harm. (DOI)

One final suggestion: I would make *"From jobs to human work"* or *"From labour to human flourishing"* a major conceptual subsection of the longer study. It would let you connect your critique of SDG 8 to SDG 10 and the wider sustainability argument without implying that the answer to inequality is simply "more jobs." The historical evidence actually gives you a more profound question: **what if the purpose of technological progress should ultimately be to make people less dependent on jobs, rather than to make jobs more efficient?**

Gemini Response:

This synthesis analyses the core themes surrounding the evolution of human activity, social organization, technology, and systemic inequality.

1. Critique of "Labour" and "Work" in ICT4SDG8

The critique presented in documents such as *ICT4SDG8.pdf* highlights a fundamental tension in international development frameworks like SDG 8 (*Decent Work and Economic Growth*).

- **The Problem of Definitions:** Orthodox economic metrics—often echoed by global statesmen and institutions—equate "work" exclusively with **formal, paid market employment** (waged labor, "human resources"). This narrow framing obscures vast domains of vital human activity:
    - **Unpaid Care Work & Gender Discrimination:** The global economy relies heavily on unpaid domestic labor, predominantly performed by women, which remains largely invisible in GDP calculations.
    - **Coercive & Abusive Exploitation:** Modern forms of labor, such as forced child labor, human trafficking, and severe wage exploitation, are often treated as mere external distortions rather than systemic features of unchecked supply chains.
- **Productive Critique:** The document rightly identifies that mainstream institutional statements frequently promote top-down, tech-centric solutions ("digital skills training", "job creation via ICT") without dismantling the underlying structural inequalities that determine *who* profits from that labor. When global leadership defines humans primarily as "resources" for economic engines, technology serves to optimize exploitation rather than liberate human capacity.

2. Deep-Time Timeline: The Evolution of Labour and Work

To understand how human activity became commodified into modern "jobs," we must trace the deep history of human labor over millions of years.

Early Hominins & Bipedalism

7.0 - 4.0 Million Years Ago

Early divergence (e.g., *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, *Australopithecus*). Locomotion frees hands, transforming physical activity from locomotion-focused movement to deliberate foraging and environmental manipulation.

First Tool Production (Lomekwi & Oldowan)

3.3 - 2.6 Million Years Ago

"Work" manifests as intentional lithic knapping. Labor becomes tool-assisted, requiring shared social learning, physical coordination, and forethought.

Homo erectus & Coordinated Social Labor

1.9 Million - 300,000 Years Ago

Acheulean handaxe technology, controlled use of fire, and cooperative hunting. Labor becomes deeply social, requiring shared energy expenditure, food processing, and communal protection.

Emergence of Anatomical Homo sapiens

300,000+ Years Ago

Fossil evidence (e.g., Jebel Irhoud) places early *Homo sapiens* in Africa. "Work" is embedded within hyper-social hunter-gatherer bands—characterized by communal foraging, toolmaking, art, and oral traditions.

Neolithic Transition & Sedentism

12,000 - 10,000 Years Ago

Emergence of agriculture. Human activity shifts from immediate-return foraging to delayed-return labor (plowing, storage, property defense).

3 & 4. The Culture of Sharing vs. Hierarchy: Linear Myth vs. Complex Reality

The Egalitarian "Ethos of Sharing"

For the vast majority of our species' existence (~300,000 years), human bands practiced an immediate-return system characterized by **demand sharing** and **assertive egalitarianism**. Accumulation of private property was practically impossible and socially discouraged through humor, ridiculing arrogance, or social ostracism.

Transition Models: Standard Agriculture Model vs. Graeber & Wengrow

- **The Traditional Narrative (~10,000 BCE):** The standard view (favored by Hobbesian or Rousseauian simplifications) suggests a linear path: Foraging = Egalitarianism; Agriculture = Surplus = Property = Social Hierarchies, Monarchies, and States.
- **The Nuanced Counter-Evidence (*The Dawn of Everything*):** David Graeber and David Wengrow synthesize decades of archaeological and anthropological evidence to demonstrate that human social history was **not** a deterministic, one-way trap toward inequality:
    - Ancient humans experimented with diverse social arrangements for tens of thousands of years.
    - Seasonal shifts were common: groups gathered in large, hierarchical cities during resource-rich seasons (with temporary kings or police forces) and disbanded into flexible, egalitarian hunter-gatherer bands during other seasons.

    - The transition to permanent state hierarchies, structural inequality, and specialized "jobs" was a slow, uneven, "back-and-forth" process where societies consciously accepted, rejected, or modified authoritarian power structures over millennia.
- **David Graeber's *Bullshit Jobs*:** Graeber further highlights that modern capitalism has severed the connection between work and societal value. Millions of workers spend forty hours a week in administrative or managerial roles that they themselves believe serve no meaningful purpose—a stark departure from ancient work, which was directly tied to survival and social cohesion.

5. AI, the "Jobless World," and Luke Kemp's Collapse Trap

Destroying Jobs vs. Building Human Culture

Generative AI and robotics threaten to dismantle the wage-labor paradigm built over the past 250 years.

- **The Pessimistic Trajectory (Luke Kemp's *Goliath's Curse*):** Historical state collapse is tightly linked to elite overproduction, wealth concentration, and multidimensional inequality. If AI is deployed within existing market frameworks, it will hyper-concentrate wealth among technology owners, render massive populations economically "superfluous," and accelerate environmental degradation—pushing humanity toward collapse ("self-termination").
- **The Utopian Opportunity:** If freed from the mandate to sell labor for basic survival, AI could theoretically restore a "jobless world" reminiscent of our hunter-gatherer past—where survival is decoupled from formal employment. This would allow societies to shift focus toward care, scientific inquiry, philosophy, artistic expression, and ecological restoration.

6. Timelines of Transition, Deep Time, and Technological Cognitive Erosion

The Friction of Human Resistance to Change

How long would such a profound cultural shift take? Given geopolitical inertia and institutional commitments to outdated growth paradigms (evident in the US, China, and Russia), a deliberate shift will likely take **several generations (50 to 100+ years)**—unless accelerated by cascading ecological or economic crises. Powerful nations frequently retreat into nationalistic or expansionist narratives rather than adopting scientific, long-term models of planetary stewardship.

Integrating Deep-Time Perspectives (Thomas Halliday's *Otherlands*)

In corporate or policy documents, introducing **deep time** (the 550-million-year perspective of Earth's biosphere) breaks through short-term economic thinking:

- **Perspective:** Earth's ecosystems have undergone multiple mass extinction events. Life rebounds, but dominant species that overexploit their niches disappear.
- **Application:** Frame current human economic systems not as permanent features of the planet, but as a temporary, fragile blip (a few hundred years) within a 300,000-year human trajectory and a 550-million-year complex biological timeline.

AI and the Erosion of Reading for Deep Learning

A critical threat to achieving long-term thinking is the erosion of deep literacy. As AI tools synthesize, summarize, and digest information, human reliance on short-form content and instant algorithmic responses reduces our capacity for **deep reading, sustained attention, and critical synthesis**. Without deep literacy, populations become increasingly vulnerable to hyper-simplification, historical amnesia, and xenophobic narratives—precisely the conditions that impede collective action against systemic collapse.

Summary for Executive Insertion

Executive Summary: Labor, Deep History, and Systemic Sustainability

Modern economic paradigms mistake formal, paid employment ("jobs") for the full scope of human labor, systematically devaluing vital unpaid care work while masking coercive exploitation. Deep-time evolutionary history reveals that for over 300,000 years, *Homo sapiens* operated primarily through communal sharing, flexible social structures, and cooperative labor—not rigid wage hierarchies. The rise of permanent inequality over the last 10,000 years was neither immediate nor inevitable, but an ongoing social choice.

As artificial intelligence dismantles traditional job structures, humanity faces a critical fork: either allow tech-driven wealth concentration to accelerate environmental and social collapse, or leverage automation to build human-centric cultures that decouple survival from wage labor. Overcoming powerful geopolitical inertia requires adopting deep-time ecological perspectives while actively counteracting AI-driven cognitive erosion, ensuring future generations retain the deep reading and critical reasoning necessary to dismantle systemic inequality and xenophobia.
