

Strengthening the Discourse on Economic Policy to Generate Good and Better Jobs in India

16 June, 2021

Meeting Minutes

1. Introduction

The project titled “Strengthening the Discourse on Economic Policy to Generate Good and Better Jobs in India”¹ (GrowJobs) is currently in the last leg of its implementation. CUTS International had commenced this project in October, 2018, with the support of Ford Foundation, New Delhi. The main objective being to strengthen discourse around Good & Better Jobs (decent work) in the Indian economy, especially the labour intensive sectors.

For this purpose, the project research team has conducted a pan-India research inquiry in the Textiles & Clothing Sector² and the Food Processing Sector³. Simultaneously, the team has undertaken discourse strengthening activities in the form of preparing slide decks around different components of decent work, submitting comments on the Draft Labour Code Rules, writing Op-eds on issues around employment, labour rights, decent work & skilling and presenting observations from the field at different forums.

In furtherance of these efforts, a brainstorming session was conducted on June 16, 2021, to decide a roadmap for the last leg of the project (June to September, 2021). It was attended by GrowJobs team members and Abhishek Kumar (also a PAC member under this project). The meeting had a three-pronged agenda:

1. To discuss ways of fine-tuning the findings and learnings and amalgamate the sectoral findings for informing the larger discourse on decent work.
2. To discuss effective ways for packaging the content and creating smart, innovative and easy to communicate dissemination materials

¹ <https://cuts-ccier.org/strengthening-the-discourse-on-economic-policy-to-generate-good-and-better-jobs-in-india/>

² <https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/report-textile-and-clothing-sector-in-india.pdf>

³ <https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/report-food-processing-sector-in-india.pdf>

3. To chart out a communication and outreach roadmap for furthering the discourse during and beyond the remaining project period.

The meeting witnessed deliberation on the short and long term objectives of the project and the potential dissemination strategy to deliver the key messages. Additionally, the potential components of the phase 2 of the GrowJobs project were contemplated. Going further, the inputs provided by Rijit Sengupta (CEO, Centre for Responsible Business) on the “Discussion Note” and Synthesis Report of the 6th PAC meeting were also discussed.

This report lists down the major themes covered in the discussion and the way forward strategy. The list of participants is annexed to the report.

2. Major themes of discussion

2.1 Goal of the project should guide the activities under the project

The activities in the last leg of the project should be guided by the project’s goal, which is to strengthen the discourse on Good & Better Jobs in India. There has to be a clear distinction between what the objective of the project is and what it should lead to i.e. what its outcomes are. Under this project, the objective is to catalyse a discussion on Good & Better Jobs which as a next step should lead to the institutionalisation of such jobs in the Indian economy.

Therefore, the activities in the last leg of the project should inform the narrative on the Good & Better Jobs whereby the next phase of the project can focus on concrete steps for its institutionalisation.

2.2 Clarity on the process of discourse generation

The knowledge generated out of this project is extensive and adequate enough to generate the discourse around Good & Better Jobs in India. It is also distinctly different from the existing literature in this realm, which is mainly focused on the mainstream aspects of employment in India. Its uniqueness lies in its methodology that has enabled voices from the ground, which otherwise don’t find a place in the discourse.

It needs to be decided as to how the key messages will be culled out from the knowledge which is being generated through this project. It is imperative to identify partners with whom the GrowJobs team can carry out exercises to identify and develop such messages. For instance, one of the messages can be aimed at showcasing a business model where enterprise and worker welfare can co-exist. Coupled with it, the possibility for SMEs to generate Good & Better Jobs through the support of government or otherwise can be portrayed.

For dissemination and advocacy, the targeted groups and individuals need to be identified. Such groups and individuals can be the recipients as well as the advocates to take forward the key messages of the project. To start with, diverse partnerships can be explored with the local chambers of commerce and trade union groups. To start with, district level Chambers of Commerce, SEWA, Dattopant Thengadi Foundation and Ajeevika Bureau can be approached. Also, decentralised trade unions and industry bodies should be prioritised over

the central ones.

Possibility of reaching out to people and institutions with perspectives aligned with that of CUTS can also be explored. For instance, policy think-tanks, development practitioners, academia can be approached in addition to the local level industry bodies and worker groups.

2.3 Ideas to get industry and labour groups on board

There are different ways to get the Industry and Labour groups on board respectively. Industry can be brought on board in response to the reduction in the factor costs of production and via other EoDB measures. CUTS can run a signature campaign to seek endorsement from major industry groups to pass on the additional profit generated from reduced factor costs towards increased income of workers.

Similarly, different labour groups presenting diverse category of workers can be involved. They can be engaged to understand their concerns, and present them to the relevant category of employers and governments respectively. A fact sheet can be prepared supporting the concerns of the industry and labour groups to inform this process.

However, it has to be noted that the operationalisation of EoDB measures is complex process and therefore is a major challenge. The central government as well as respective state governments have been undertaking such measures for a long time but have secured very limited success.

Futhermore, enterprises have a pattern to scale up their businesses when additional profits are generated. The same has been observed in the field work undertaken by the GrowJobs team. Therefore, such signature campaigns are not anticipated to be effective.

2.4 Conceptualisation of the second phase of the GrowJobs project

Given the diverse learnings from the project, there is a need to put concrete efforts towards institutionalising Good & Better Jobs in the Indian economy. Therefore, Phase 2 of the GrowJobs project will be proposed to the Ford Foundation, New Delhi. The following pointers need to be considered while conceptualising it.

- **Assessment of the nature of investment and its impact on Good & Better Jobs-** The assessment of the nature and source of the investment in the Indian economy should be included within the scope of the Phase 2 of the project. It needs to be coupled with the identification of the sectors where investments have either led to Good & Better jobs or there exists a potential for the same. Furthermore, an inquiry into the measures required to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of the investment needs to be included.
- **Different categories of workers to be considered-** In the first phase of the project, the research framework included only industrial workers under its scope. In the Concept note for the Phase 2 of the project, different categories of workers like street vendors, mining workers etc. should be included under the research framework.

- **Insights from the Aspirational District level programme**-The assessment of the entrepreneurship level and worker welfare measures in the districts under the Aspirational Districts Programme should be included.
- **Insights from the Industrial backward districts**- The assessment of the entrepreneurship level and worker welfare measures within the districts classified as Industrial backward districts can be explored.
- **Evaluation of Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979**- The new labour Code on Occupational Safety, Health & Working Conditions Code, 2019 has merged 13 legislations into it. The Inter-state Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979 is one among it. The evaluation of the migrant related provisions in the said Code should be included.

3. Way Forward: Roadmap for implementation and communication strategy

3.1 There is a need to further nuance the learning derived from the project and take it forward to the identified stakeholders and institutions which can catalyse a change by strengthening the discourse. The identified institutions are SEWA, Dattopant Thengadi Foundation, Ajeevika Bureau, local level Industry Associations, Chambers of Commerce and Worker Unions. These institutions need to be approached once the actions points are finalised.

3.2 The actions points to be finalised after another round of email exchange within the GrowJobs team. The email exchange is meant for another brainstorming exercise so as to have clarity in the approach.

3.3 A Concept note to be prepared for the Phase 2 of the GrowJobs project with an objective to institutionalise Good & Better Jobs in the Indian economy. The note shall take into account the pointers mentioned above in the discussion points.

Annexure: List of Participants

S. No.	Name	Designation & Organisation
1	Amol Kulkarni	Director (Research) CUTS International Jaipur, Rajasthan
2	Abhishek Kumar	Partner INDICC
3	Bipul Chatterjee	Executive Director CUTS International
4	Pradeep S Mehta	Secretary General, CUTS International
5	Prashant Tak	Assistant Policy Analyst CUTS International
6	Sarthak Shukla	Assistant Policy Analyst CUTS International Jaipur, Rajasthan