

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

6th Project Advisory Committee Meeting

31 May, 2021

Event Report

1. Introduction

The Indian economy across its manufacturing and service sector is encountered with a dual problem of unemployment and lack of decent jobs (hereinafter Good & Better jobs). Amongst other factors, it is caused due to the decreasing value of tripartism, a principle aimed at guiding the community, government and industry towards participative governance, for realising mutual interest.

This problem is compounded by the increased use of labour replacing technology and gradually increasing trust deficit, among these stakeholders. It has led to the rise in inequality and has posed an extraordinary challenge before the society in generating decent jobs for its masses.

In this context, CUTS International, with the support of Ford Foundation, India in October, 2018, has initiated a project on “Strengthening Discourse on Economic Policy to Generate Good and Better Jobs in India”¹. Under this project, CUTS is undertaking research to ascertain the conditions, under which Good and Better Jobs can be generated in the Indian economy². For this purpose, it has conducted a pan- India research inquiry in the Textiles & Clothing Sector³ and the Food Processing Sector⁴. Accordingly, reports have been formulated on both these sectors respectively.

In furtherance of this project, a sixth round of Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting was convened on May 31, 2021. The meeting was attended by PAC members, with expertise in areas, including employment, enterprise development, competitiveness and developmental

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/framework-for-good-and-better-jobs.pdf>

³ <https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/report-textile-and-clothing-sector-in-india.pdf>

⁴ <https://cuts-ccier.org/pdf/report-food-processing-sector-in-india.pdf>

economics. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of the progress made in the project, and discuss the way forward approach. The meeting was called in light of the COVID-19 induced circumstances, which have impacted the methodology of research, thereby restricting its field based component.

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 Need for strengthening the discourse through new material and innovative format of discussion & dissemination

The knowledge generated out of this project is extensive and different from the already existing literature which is mainly focused on quantitative aspects of employment in India. Its uniqueness lies in its methodology which has enabled voices from the ground, which otherwise don't find a place in the discourse.

It is particularly relevant in the present times, which has brought to fore the precarious nature of existing jobs and systematic exploitative structures functioning against the rights of the workers.

This knowledge is built over the time, with an objective to shape the discourse on decent jobs to further the agenda of inclusive growth.

In order to take it forward to different set of people and systems, there is a need to devise a new format to present, discuss and disseminate. The new format will expand our outreach and allow us to present the acquired learnings effectively. It will also feed into the goal of participative policy making process.

2.2 Changing mindsets through the knowledge generated in the project

The knowledge generated through the project aims to shape the national philosophy around employment, tripartism and value of labour. It provides a framework to think about social contract, industrial ecosystem and rights of workers. It can further be utilised to critically analyse the role of institutions functioning in the industrial ecosystem, especially those ensuring labour rights. Additionally, it can also open window for better understanding of the data around employment and status of labour rights in India.

The learnings from the project need to be contextualised to the whole worker community. Worker welfare should be ensured by focusing on both demand and supply side characteristics of factors in order to ensure a virtuous engine of growth in the economy. The Indian economy and society is currently in an equilibrium characterised by low justice, low efficiency and low effectiveness. The learnings should also provide a roadmap to address it.

The learnings should also inform the financing & investment decisions which have an impact on worker welfare. Currently, such decisions are made in silos, without considering the prerequisites of a sustainable ecosystem as these stakeholders are not aware of the challenges on the ground. There is a need for informing their decisions so as to bring about positive investments in worker welfare.

2.3 Need for assessing various facets of formalisation of the economy

Formalisation ensures workers, the access to entitlements, which forms the basis of Good & Better Jobs. It might not translate into worker welfare instantly but certainly ensures benefits which are incremental in nature. However, formalisation also has unwritten rules, which simultaneously restricts the realisation of Good & Better jobs. It is to be noted that in India, there is an increasing informalisation of workers but more formalisation of enterprises which is antithetical to worker welfare.

There needs to be a discourse on the nature of formality required to produce equitable welfare outcomes. It needs to be examined, if the formality has translated into worker welfare at all levels in India. Furthermore, the roadmap for achieving formality of ‘jobs’ and ‘enterprises’ desirable as well as its alignment with worker welfare needs to be discussed.

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 stakeholders and institutions which can catalyse a change by strengthening the discourse. The underlying idea is to adopt a systems approach for addressing this multistakeholder issue in a holistic manner.

3.2 There is a need to conduct structured brain storming sessions with a diverse group of experts and shareholders in order to create participatory and inclusive solutions for the future. The brain storming session should result into an actionable roadmap for the communication strategy of learning. To this end, the existing network available to CUTS i.e. trade unions/ worker welfare organisations (Dattopant Thengadi Foundation, SEWA, Aajeevika Bureau NTUI) and staffing/HR organisations (Teamlease) should be leveraged.

3.3 In order to do justice to the guiding principles, the strategy for going forward can be focused on contextualising the discourse with respect to macro developments, contemporising the learnings to current national and global issues, cushioning them with relevant narratives and communicating them through smart, interactive, replicable and scalable formats in order to achieve effective outcomes.

Annexure: List of Participants

S. No.	Name	Designation & Organisation
1	Amit Kapoor	President Institute for Competitiveness Gurgaon, Haryana
2	Amol Kulkarni	Director (Research) CUTS International Jaipur, Rajasthan
3	Arun Maira	Former Member Planning Commission of India, New Delhi
4	Abhishek Kumar	Partner INDICC
5	Bipul Chatterjee	Executive Director CUTS International
6	Pradeep S Mehta	Secretary General, CUTS International
7	Prashant Tak	Assistant Policy Analyst CUTS International
8	Radhicka Kapoor	Senior Fellow Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), New Delhi
9	Rituparna Chakraborty	Co-Founder and Executive Vice President, TeamLease Services Ltd.
10	Sabina Dewan	President and Executive Director, Just Jobs Network
11	Samar Verma	Program Officer The Ford Foundation, New Delhi
12	Sarthak Shukla	Assistant Policy Analyst CUTS International Jaipur, Rajasthan
13	Trinayani Sen	Senior Research Associate CUTS International Jaipur, Rajasthan