



SSE and the Need for Solidarity Enterprises in Impacting the ‘Future of Work’ in India

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The Indian landscape and the need for formal SSE integration

India is an emerging economy but its current conduit still has more than 50% population engaged in agriculture either directly or indirectly but contributes only 18% to the gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, poverty levels are very high in India, vis-à-vis the international standards and about 22 percent of the population or about 270 million people belong to the below poverty line status. Thus, India’s inequality is unique and the Social and Solidarity Enterprises (SSEs) in form of cooperatives, self-help groups, and non-governmental organisations are the dynamic group of actors facilitating and promoting people-centred growth objectives. Unfortunately, there is no formal acceptance of the term SSE or SSEOs in Indian legislation. The economic landscape of India, like its culture and geography, has great diversity and India’s economic growth has not impacted the bottom of the pyramid and this is visible in India’s inequality figures and India’s prominently low in its ranking of the Human Development Index (HDI) of 131st among the 188 countries.

As the global impact of the SSEs have scaled-up and has showcased the provision of avenues that couple and present new employment and grassroot livelihood impact and as the new test cases emerge, the SSEs and its motivation of being ‘not-for-profit, not for charity, but for service’ is resonating in global conscience. This basic impact framework makes it urgent for the SSEs and their work being recognised in India, especially with regards to critical issues, such as protection of the environment and climate change which directly impacts India’s agriculture and rural livelihoods. To date the majority of Indian policy attention and investment has focused on building services and information technology toolset and encouraging the infrastructure development and adoption of new technological breakthroughs towards attracting investment for commercial welfare. However, as the Indian economy is experiencing the limited effects of conventional developmental roadmap, demanding policy responses beyond the obvious and those that focused on societal inclusion at the grass-root and empowering the bottom of the pyramid workforce are becoming essential.

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SSE and the 'Future of Work' in India

The SSE could be utilised in harnessing new technology tool-sets and thus, revolutionize the way India is learning, living and generating work. Ensuring that the technological skill-sets are fit for the future needs in fulfilling the SDG – 8 goal; there is a definite requirement to instil the sense of resilience in the current children and youth and include every competency particularly in education towards empowering the future generations of India. Decent work is the bedrock of any strategy to reduce poverty and is the means for achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development. As the 'future of work' becomes more complex and intertwined with the growth of technologies, and differential skill-set requirements becoming more and more essential; it becomes increasingly important that the SDG – 8 'Decent work and economic growth for all', especially in an agrarian economy such as India is empowered by alternate employment generation mechanism and engage the global learnings of the social and solidarity enterprises (SSEs). The SSEs embedment at the very local level in India and its heavy reliance on hybrid resources make them a futuristic developmental focused model for employment generation and growth in the rural Indian context.

SSE organisations as business and social organisation models for the 'Future of Work' are becoming the means of sustaining future livelihoods, where none exist today. India's growth story is required to have an inclusive definition of SSE as a way of doing business as a law, as only then can we make an impact of SSE at the grassroots by integration of SSE based economic model with technology and showcasing its power on development. According to one estimate about 65% of children entering primary school today in India, would be taking up an entirely new set of jobs that do not exist today. There is a need to employ technology towards efficiency; but a trade-off between technology and low-skilled employment by inculcating and recognising the impact that SSEs have made in India and integrating them with mainstream employment generation measurements could facilitate the appropriate job matching rewards in India. The inclusion, support and empowerment of SSE organisations in India would become an enablement and a dependable support system contributing to the growing Indian economy, by capturing and accounting for the informal sector and women contributions in sectors such as agriculture.

Policy Recommendations

1. Legalising the Indian labour laws for workforce participation in SSE based organisations: SSEs should be conceived as 'big-bets' in India as they are likely to produce highly positive outcomes, particularly as they often entail different views about the meaning of work and values around social equality. As SSE provide a range of opportunities in each geography and society, the SSE's visualisation and legal stature acceptance can proactively shape a better future for India's labour market and employ the ever growing young and marginalised workforce that get added to the labour market every month. The SSE legalisation could also formulate a technology integrated smart reaction within the context of future world scenarios. These are much required in the current Indian setting where climate change is shaping a whole new world and the worst affected are the local run rural business models and every day wage workers.
2. Recognising and Regulating SSE operations in India: The Indian government must take proactive approaches towards responding to demands of the SSE organisations, starting by recognising and regulating the SSEs in the country. As India's ambitious commitment towards rural electrification, sanitation, housing for all, clean and renewable energy expansion, universal elementary education and skills development; play a contributory role towards empowering the community based social structures and in providing low key employment opportunities in village infrastructure development and also supporting the village level cottage industries and local skill-set. The SSEs are in direct agreement with these ambitious goals and could empower India's huge rural youth bulge in proving an alternate employment set of opportunities with equality and sustainable finance.

3. Integrating the use of SSE with fourth generation technologies: SSE does not mean low-tech, the use of new disruptive technologies for example artificial intelligence and use of high-tech tools such as drones for more precise monitoring, tracking, sharing information and predicting user need would improve the impact of the SSEs. As the SSEs are embedded in the lives of the poor and marginalised societies in India, both visibly and invisibly, ensuring their recognition, regulation and governance becomes more important. SSE as facilitators for national level schemes in India such as micro-finance and digital cash would become empowering toolsets.
4. An Integrated SSE based system: The SSE organisations are best suited at impacting the small and marginalised communities by providing the central authorities data sets at optimizing business processes, uncovering statistical patterns and identifying social livelihood patterns that vary in volatile sectors for example agriculture and primary health. An integrated SSE based system with an artificial interface could arrest the areas that are being affected at the grassroot and present predictive indicators on social indicators.

The valuation of the SSE as organisations beyond the philanthropic and microscopic mindset of small and low-skilled service providers and empowering them as sustainable livelihood generators and prioritising them as impact generators holds the key for an overall economic development landscape in India. In the years to follow, SSE could be the accelerators for scale-based innovation and sustainable livelihood in India and the integration with next generation technology, would determine the success of the emerging economies and definitely hold the promise into tapping into the most essential resource required for economic revolution, India's young and energetic workforce.