

# Post-2015 Development Agenda: Employment and Growth with Special Reference to India

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**Abstract** The Post-2015 Development Agenda provides an opportunity to focus on employment. Productive employment is also crucial for the success of the MDGs. This article first discusses the impact of the MDG approach in India. It then examines the state of employment and growth in India, before considering how Indian policymakers are looking at employment and growth in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Analysis of employment and growth in India shows that the elasticity of employment with respect to GDP has been declining since the early 1980s. Most new employment is generated in the form of informal work in both the organised and unorganised sectors. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan objectives match global thinking on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A fresh perspective regarding employment and growth in India relates to shifting focus from quantity to quality and skill development. This is also important for taking advantage of the demographic dividend in India.

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## 1 Introduction

Expanding productive employment is central for sustained poverty reduction and food security in low-income countries, as labour is the main asset of most poor people. It is also known that a high output elasticity of employment generally ensures that growth is egalitarian. However, in spite of its importance, the concern for employment in development thinking has been pushed aside particularly in the last two decades. It is important to place the employment issue at the centre of the national and international agendas and the post-2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agenda provides this opportunity to focus on employment. Productive employment is also crucial for the success of the MDGs.

The experience of the last two decades indicates that, despite rapid growth in the emerging developing countries, creation of employment opportunities was inadequate. **Jobless growth** is a concern but on the other hand we should not have **growth-less jobs**. In other words, generating of employment *per se* without growth should not be the policy prescription. We should generate productive jobs.

Progress on the MDGs has been impressive but uneven across and within countries. There have been some issues that were not considered at the beginning when the MDGs were set. Some of these issues are: climate change and natural hazards, demographic transition, increased migration, productive employment, social protection, peace and security, governance. Of course, continuation of many of the present MDGs is important. For example, the *My World* survey provides some clues on people's expectations about the Post-2015 Development Agenda (*The Guardian* 2013).

In this survey, people were asked to choose six priorities out of 16 options. The top three priorities are: (a) an honest and responsive government;<sup>1</sup> (b) a good education; and (c) better health care (*The Guardian* 2013). Other top priorities include food, water, better job opportunities, protection from crime and violence, and protecting forests, rivers and oceans. Following the RIO+20 conference it is recognised that countries should have a holistic view of sustainable development, combining economic, social and environmental goals. Recent literature has suggested several approaches as a framework for the post-2015 agenda.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1 MDGs progress in India**

Goals/major indicators	1990 (estimated value)	Assessment done for the latest year	Value achieved for the latest year	MDG 2015 target
<b>Goal 1 Indicators</b>				
Percentage of population below poverty line	475	2009/10	29.8	23.75
Percentage of underweight children (<3 years)	52.0	2005/06	40.0	26.0
<b>Goal 2 Indicators</b>				
Net enrolment ratio in primary education	77.0	2008/09	98.6	100.0
Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5	62 (1999)	2008/09	76	100.0
Literacy rate (15–24 years)	61.0	2001	76.1	100.0
<b>Goal 3 Indicators</b>				
Ratio of girls to boys in primary education	0.73	2007/08	0.98	1.00
Ratio of literate women to men (15–25 years)	0.67	2007/08	0.88	1.00
Share of women in wage employment in non-agriculture	18.6 (2004–05)	2009/10	18.6	50.0
<b>Goal 4 Indicators</b>				
Under-5 mortality (per 1,000 live births)	125	2009	64	42
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	80	2010	47	27
Proportion of 1-year-olds immunised against measles	42.2	2009	74.1	100.0
<b>Goal 5 Indicators</b>				
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	437	2007/09	212	109
Proportion of births attended by skilled health professionals	33	2007/08	52	100
<b>Goal 6 Indicators</b>				
HIV prevalence among pregnant women 15–24 years (%)	0.86 (2004)	2008	0.48	On track
Prevalence rates associated with malaria (million)	2.08 (2001)	2010	1.6	Slow track
Patients registered with tuberculosis (million)	1.29 (2005)	2010	1.52	Off track
<b>Goal 7 Indicators</b>				
Percentage of people using improved source of drinking water	66.4	2008/09	91.4	83
Percentage of households without sanitation facility	76	2008	49.2	38
Percentage of people using improved sanitation	18	2008/09	47.6	64

Source Extracted from Sharma (2013) for Goals 1 to 5 and 7; GOI (2012a) for Goal 6.

One of the things missing from the original MDG agenda set in 2000 was productive employment. The objective of achieving 'full and productive employment and decent work' was added to the MDGs in 2005 as one of the targets (Target 1B) of the first MDG goal to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. ILO (2012a) argues for an upgrade of the target on productive employment to be a central goal of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

This article is organised as follows. Section 2 deals with the impact of the MDG approach in India while Section 3 examines the state of employment and growth in India. Section 4 describes how Indian policymakers are thinking about employment and growth for the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The last section makes concluding observations.

## 2 MDGs and India

It may be noted that in India policy formulation is implemented through five-year plans and the country does not follow MDG timelines. India completed 11 five-year plans and launched the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017) in December 2012. However, India is tracking the performance of the MDGs. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) coordinates the MDG monitoring system and periodically releases reports on India's achievements and progress towards the MDGs (see GOI 2012b). Sharma (2013) lists the latest information on India's MDGs achievements.

Table 1 shows progress on MDGs in India. It shows that the pace of poverty reduction has accelerated. The poverty ratio declined from around 48 per cent in 1990 to 30 per cent in 2009–10 and needs to decline to 24 per cent by 2015. India seems to be well poised to meet the MDG of 50 per cent reduction of poverty between 1990 and 2015. Apart from poverty, some of the indicators that are likely to be on track are: net enrolment ratio in primary education, proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5, literacy rate (15–24 years), ratio of girls to boys in primary education, ratio of literate women to men (15–25 years), immunisation, percentage of households without sanitation facility, percentage of people using improved sanitation. However, there is a long way to go to achieve the goal on sanitation although it has already been achieved in terms of the percentage of people using an

improved source of drinking water. MDGs that are likely to be off track are: percentage of underweight children, child and maternal mortality, proportion of births attended by skilled health professionals, share of women in waged employment in non-agriculture, patients registered with tuberculosis. There is a need to focus on these indicators.

As mentioned above, the MDGs are not synchronised with plan targets. Based on India's specific policies, the Planning Commission has identified 25 indicators and has set targets for them that will be monitored during the period of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. These 25 indicators cover areas such as economic growth, poverty and employment, education, health, infrastructure, environment and sustainability and service delivery (GOI 2012a). Although five-year plans do not mention MDGs explicitly, the schemes/programmes proposed to be taken up during Twelfth Five-Year Plan cover many of the MDG-related areas. However, the plan targets are not restricted to MDG areas only as they also cover targets for energy, transport, irrigation, etc.

## 3 State of employment and growth: Global and India

### 3.1 Global experience

According to the *Global Employment Trends 2013* (ILO 2013), global unemployment is estimated to have increased from 170 million in 2007 to 197 million in 2011. Around 39 million people have dropped out of the labour market as they do not see job prospects. These are also called 'discouraged workers'. The ILO (2012b) indicates that although economies achieved high growth from the early 2000s, the response of employment elasticity to growth has been low. The employment-to-population ratio stagnated at around 60 per cent when the world economy was growing steadily. The report says that while the trends may mask regional and country-level successes, at the global level, there is little evidence to suggest that employment has been responding to economic growth.

The ILO (2012b) report says that one of the reasons why employment is not responding to growth could be due to structural changes that the global economy is undergoing. Some of the structural changes are: (a) labour-saving technological advances; (b) workers are moving to the low productivity informal sector;

**Table 2 GDP growth, employment, productivity and elasticity in India**

Periods	GDP growth (%)	Employment growth (%)	Productivity growth (%)	Elasticity of employment with respect to GDP
1972/3 to 1983	4.66	2.44	2.22	0.52
1983–1993/4	4.98	2.02	2.96	0.41
1993/4–2004/05	6.27	1.84	4.43	0.29
1999/2000–2009/10	7.52	1.50	6.02	0.20
2004/05–2009/10	9.08	0.22	8.86	0.02

Source Derived from Papola (2012).

(c) economies are facing adjustments to ensure environmental sustainability in the face of climate change; and (d) some demand is coming from extractive sectors which have low employment intensity.

The conclusion of ILO (2012b) is that (a) growth is not a sufficient condition for employment generation although it is a necessary condition, and (b) the structural changes in the world economy do not seem to be conducive to employment generation. The challenge at the global level is creating productive and decent jobs for the working poor, the 200 million out of work and for the 40 million people entering the labour force every year, plus those ‘discouraged workers’.

### 3.2 The Indian experience

In a country like India with surplus labour, the importance of employment-oriented growth is well known. However, an overemphasis on employment generation without any regard to productivity and the incomes of workers is also not desirable, particularly in India where productivity and income levels are low. Therefore, the new employment generated has to be at increasing levels of productivity so that it does not assume a poverty-perpetuating nature (Papola 2012).

Table 2 shows GDP growth, employment growth, productivity growth, and elasticity of employment with respect to GDP since the early 1970s. The elasticity of employment declined continuously from 0.52 in the 1970s to 0.02 in the second half of the 2000s. The figures show that the relatively high growth in India has not been ‘jobless’ but its employment content has been low and has declined sharply over the decades since the early 1980s. Overall productivity is

increasing, particularly in the formal sector, but new employment is being created in the low productivity informal sector.

The numbers on GDP growth, employment growth and elasticity by sectors for India are given in Table 3. Employment growth and elasticity have declined in the primary sector. The share of agriculture in employment needs to decline. However, employment elasticity has also declined in the manufacturing sector, falling from 0.78 in the 1970s to 0.25 in the 2000s. Similarly, the elasticity of the tertiary sector has declined from 0.77 to 0.30 during the same period. In the last two decades, employment was generated more in the construction sector, trade, hotels, transport and storage.

Two other important trends are observed in the Indian economy. One observes a ‘jobless growth’ phenomenon in organised manufacturing. The growth rate of employment in this sector recorded consistently negative growth since the late 1980s with growth rates of -0.8 in 1988–94, -2.5 in 1994–2000, -5.9 in 1999–2005 and -3.4 in 2005–08 (Papola 2012). Secondly, the additional employment generated mainly relates to informal workers. Around 63 million workers were added during the period 1999/2000 to 2009/10. Out of those, 44.7 million were added to the informal sector and 18.8 million were informal organised workers. In other words, all the additional employment generated was of an informal nature.

There are large numbers of working poor in India. Around 92 per cent of the workers are in the unorganised sector with low productivity, low earnings, poor work conditions and lack of social

Table 3 GDP growth, employment growth, employment elasticity in India by sector

Sector	GDP growth (%)					Employment growth (%)					Elasticity of employment with respect to GDP				
	1972/3 to 1983	1983 to 1993/4	1993/4 to 2004/05	1999/2000 to 2009/10	1972/3 to 1983	1983 to 1993/4	1993/4 to 2004/05	1999/2000 to 2009/10	1972/3 to 1983	1983 to 1993/4	1993/4 to 2004/05	1999/2000 to 2009/10			
<b>Primary sector</b>	3.66	2.76	2.51	2.33	1.70	1.35	0.67	-0.13	0.46	0.49	0.26	-0.05			
Manufacturing	5.47	4.94	6.70	7.97	4.28	2.00	3.17	1.95	0.78	0.41	0.47	0.25			
Construction	3.08	4.88	7.63	9.20	4.43	5.67	7.19	9.72	1.44	1.16	0.94	1.06			
<b>Secondary sector</b>	5.09	5.35	6.68	7.78	4.43	2.82	3.97	4.64	0.87	0.53	0.59	0.60			
Trade, hotels, etc.	5.74	5.58	8.64	8.47	4.62	3.77	5.24	2.54	0.81	0.67	0.61	0.30			
Transport and communication	6.48	6.03	10.57	14.50	5.88	3.39	5.16	3.68	0.91	0.56	0.49	0.25			
Financing, insurance, etc.	5.95	9.07	7.29	9.47	7.43	3.58	7.23	7.68	1.25	0.39	0.99	0.81			
Community, social, etc.	4.49	5.86	6.53	6.58	3.18	3.91	0.40	1.85	0.71	0.67	0.06	0.28			
<b>Tertiary sector</b>	5.46	6.58	8.00	9.35	4.21	3.77	3.41	2.83	0.77	0.57	0.43	0.30			
All non-agricultural	5.31	6.12	7.54	8.84	4.30	3.36	3.64	3.61	0.81	0.55	0.48	0.41			
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.66</b>	<b>4.98</b>	<b>6.27</b>	<b>7.52</b>	<b>2.44</b>	<b>2.02</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>0.52</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>0.29</b>	<b>0.20</b>			

Source Derived from Papola (2012)

**Table 4 Percentage of workers by level of education by sector, 2009–10**

Education	Agriculture and allied	Manufacturing	Non-manufacture in secondary sector	Services	Total
Not literate	39.8	20.0	33.1	12.4	29.7
Literate without formal schooling	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5
Below primary + primary	26.3	26.5	28.7	16.7	24.0
Middle	16.5	21.4	19.9	17.3	17.6
Secondary	9.7	14.7	9.8	16.6	12.1
Higher secondary	4.7	6.7	3.3	11.3	6.5
Diploma/certificate course	0.3	2.4	1.2	2.8	1.3
Graduate	1.8	6.3	2.9	16.2	6.2
Graduate and above	0.3	1.5	0.6	6.4	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b> <b>(219.23)</b>	<b>100.0</b> <b>(47.90)</b>	<b>100.0</b> <b>(43.50)</b>	<b>100.0</b> <b>(109.96)</b>	<b>100.0</b> <b>(420.59)</b>

Note Figures in parentheses refer to estimated number of workers in millions.  
Source Estimated from GOI (2012a) based on NSS (66th Round), 2009–10.

protection. The Indian experience thus suggests the need to increase both the quantity and quality of employment.

#### **4 Thinking of Indian policymakers on the Post-2015 Development Agenda relating to employment and growth**

At the global level, the thinking is that productive employment should be one of the focus areas in the post-2015 agenda. As ILO (2012a) says, ‘development happens through jobs’. In other words, productive and decent employment is the best way to ensure that economies grow and diversify.

##### **4.1 Thinking of policymakers on employment and growth in India**

As mentioned above, the five-year plans provide the thinking behind the policies needed to face future development challenges in India. The broad vision of India and the **fresh perspective** are reflected in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan’s subtitle ‘Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth’. It also indicates the need for simultaneous achievement of these goals for the success of the plan. While striving for faster and more inclusive growth, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan also pays attention to the problem of

sustainability. It shows that Indian thinking on development challenges also matches global thinking on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan draft report also cites different types of inclusiveness. These are: inclusiveness as poverty reduction, inclusiveness as group equality, inclusiveness as regional balance, inclusiveness and inequality, inclusiveness as empowerment, inclusiveness through employment programmes and inclusiveness through gender equality. Economic growth is important for two reasons. First, it leads to a large expansion in incomes and if growth is inclusive the living standards of the majority can improve. Second, it generates resources for financing government programmes.

Both the Eleventh and Twelfth Five-Year Plans recognise that generation of productive employment is crucial for achieving inclusive growth. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan draft report says that ‘Generation of productive and gainful employment with decent working conditions on a sufficient scale to absorb the growing labour force was a critical element in the Eleventh Plan strategy for achieving inclusive growth’ (GOI 2012a: Vol. 3, p124). Out of the 25 targets, one

**Table 5 Distribution of formally and informally vocationally trained workers (aged 15–59) within primary, secondary and tertiary sectors (%) in 2009–10**

Training	Agriculture and allied	Manufacturing	Non-manufacture in secondary sector	Services	Total
Receiving formal vocational training	18.7	16.6	5.5	59.2	100.0
Received vocational training (formal)	7.8	19.8	8.1	64.4	100.0
Received vocational training (non-formal) of which:	31.9	35.0	11.0	39.7	100.0
Hereditary	56.9	26.3	4.1	12.6	100.0
Self-learning	26.4	33.5	9.2	30.8	100.0
On the job	11.1	45.1	14.5	29.3	100.0
Others	22.0	33.6	7.0	37.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>31.4</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: GOI (2012a).

target relates to employment, stating that it will be necessary to ‘Generate 50 million new work opportunities in the non-farm sector and provide skill certification to equivalent numbers’ (GOI 2012a: Vol. 1, p35).

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan document on employment focuses, apart from quantity, on the **quality of employment and skill development**. Apart from diversification of employment across sectors, there is a need to look into the qualitative dimensions of employment in terms of equity, dignity, social security, status of employment, etc. This is necessary if India is to formulate its strategy for dealing with future challenges in generating productive employment with decent working conditions (GOI 2012a).

According to the Twelfth Five-Year Plan report, there are four challenges for employment policy.

**1 Employment opportunities have to be expanded.** Here, government focuses on the manufacturing sector where major changes in industrial development are required. The government hopes to make the manufacturing sector an engine of growth and expects to generate 100 million work opportunities by 2022. Services like information technology, finance and banking, tourism, trade and transport, etc. will also be major generators of employment.

**2 Simplify the regulatory framework,** particularly some of the labour laws. Social security should be provided for both the formal and informal sectors.

**3 Address the problems of specific categories,** such as female employment, unemployment among educated people, promoting employment opportunities for minorities, scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and disabled people.

**4 Most importantly, promote skill development.** ‘The employment challenges as reflected above need to be addressed so as to meet the faster and inclusive growth agenda for the Twelfth Plan. Skill development should, therefore, occupy centre-stage in any employment strategy for the Twelfth Plan’ (GOI 2012a: Vol. 1, p139).

In India, the education and skills of workers are low. As shown in Table 4, even in 2009–10, around 52 per cent of total workers are either illiterate or have been educated only up to primary level. Only about 17 per cent have higher levels of education.

Skill development is also low. Overall only 10 per cent of the workforce aged 15–59 years received some form of vocational training. The main problem is that the vast majority of workers have

non-formal vocational training. Only 11 million workers had formal training while 33 million workers had non-formal training.

India has to take advantage of its demographic dividend. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh indicated that the youthful population is an asset only if it is (a) educated, (b) skilled, and (c) finds productive employment. India will have a surplus 56 million people of working age while the rest of the world will have a shortage of 47 million.

For these reasons, the government has realised that:

skill development is critical for achieving faster, sustainable and inclusive growth on the one hand and for providing decent employment opportunities to the growing young population on the other. The demographic window of opportunity available to India would make India the skill capital of [the] world (GOI 2012a: Vol. 1, p139).

The skill development mission is being launched to provide skills to at least 50 million people by the end of the Twelfth Five-Year Plan. The national skill development policy was formulated in 2009. The objective of this policy is to empower all individuals through improved skills, knowledge and high-level qualifications to get decent jobs and ensure India's competitiveness in the global market. Another challenge is to provide skills to the unorganised workers who form more than 90 per cent of the workforce.

One of the disappointments in the post-reform period in India relates to slow progress in labour-intensive manufacturing. The share of manufacturing employment in India is only 11 per cent as compared to 30–40 per cent in East Asian countries in 2009. Several studies have shown that the services sector would be an unlikely destination for the millions of low-skilled job-seekers (see Ramaswamy and Agarwal 2013). India needs to focus on the manufacturing sector to provide large-scale employment. Manufacturing has the capability to do this because it has stronger backward linkages than the services sector. In order to develop manufacturing, several factors need to be taken into account, such as infrastructure including power, the business environment, credit, availability of land and so on.

Finally, social protection is also becoming an important area to consider in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. India is also advocating a social floor for the workers particularly for the unorganised workers.

## 5 Concluding observations

Employment and growth are considered important development goals in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The fresh perspective at global level is that **productive and decent employment** needs to shift from being just one target to being the main goal. Along with this, social protection for the workers is advocated. The simple statement, 'Development happens through jobs', sums up the importance of productive employment for economies to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth (ILO 2012a). It is also important for the success of MDGs such as poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, environment, etc.

India does not follow the MDG timeline as the country follows five-year plans for monitoring development goals. However, India is committed to the achievement of the MDGs. The government also frequently publishes India country reports on the progress with MDGs.

The experience of employment and growth in India shows that the elasticity of employment with respect to GDP has drastically declined since the early 1980s. However, labour productivity growth has been increasing, particularly in the formal sector. In agriculture, manufacturing and services there has been a noticeable decline in employment elasticity but elasticity is quite high in the construction sector. Another finding is that organised manufacturing has been recording negative employment growth. Most new employment is generated in the form of informal work in both the organised and unorganised sectors.

The Twelfth Five-Year Plan objective of achieving 'faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth' (though independently done) is in line with global thinking on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The fresh perspective regarding employment and growth in India relates to shifting focus from quantity to quality and skill development. The focus is also on the labour-intensive manufacturing sector so that workers can be shifted from agriculture to high-



productivity sectors. Social protection for workers and improving the productivity of workers are also emphasised. However, skill development for workers is given the highest

priority for achieving faster and inclusive growth. This is also important for taking advantage of the demographic dividend in India.

## Notes

1 On the importance of governance for India in the Post-2015 Development Agenda see Rajesh Tandon, this *IDS Bulletin*.

2 See research papers from ODI and IDS. For example, see Koehler *et al.* (2012), Karver (2012), Melamed (2013), Melamed and Ladd (2013).

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