

Disrupting Work So It Works for Everyone

India's youth are ambitious, digitally connected, and increasingly aware of the world around them. Every year, millions of young people enter the labour market with the expectation of building stable and meaningful careers. However, the economy they encounter is often unable to absorb them through traditional employment pathways.

While enrolment in formal education has expanded significantly, the growth of formal employment has not kept pace. India adds roughly 10 to 12 million people to its working-age population each year, yet quality job creation has remained largely stagnant. This has resulted in a widening gap between aspiration and opportunity, where young people are educated and motivated but unable to find work that they would typically associate with said skills.

When Jobs Exist, but Work Remains Inaccessible

More than half of India's workforce is self-employed, more often due to the absence of stable alternatives. Many young people turn to informal or gig-based work as a means of entry into the labour market. While such work offers flexibility, it is frequently characterised by income volatility and limited opportunities for long-term progression.

Women face additional barriers when entering or re-entering the workforce. Traditional work arrangements were designed without accounting for a world where dual roles of care and productivity need to be played by the same individual.

Career breaks related to marriage, childbirth, or caregiving are common, yet women are more likely than men to be penalised for these gaps. Employers often view interrupted employment histories as a risk, particularly in sectors that are changing rapidly due to technology.

Alongside employer bias, many women report feeling under-prepared for roles even when they meet formal qualifications. Extended breaks from paid work make it harder to stay current with industry practices, leading some women to opt out of opportunities before applying.

Location further shapes these decisions. In rural areas, limited transport and poor infrastructure restrict mobility. In urban centres, long commute times, high travel costs, and concerns around safety reduce the range of jobs women are willing or able to consider. For many, the absence of affordable and reliable childcare makes work outside the immediate vicinity of home unviable.

Fixed working hours, rigid contracts, and expectations of physical presence continue to dominate formal employment. As a result, we perpetuate cycles of exclusion which keep large groups out of the workforce.

Why Entrepreneurship Expands Access to Work

In this context, entrepreneurship emerges not as an alternative for a few, but as a practical pathway for participation in the economy.

Entrepreneurial models allow work to be organised around local demand, time availability, and household constraints. Instead of requiring individuals to adapt to inflexible job structures, enterprise-led work adapts to lived realities. This matters for several reasons.

- First, work can be created closer to where people live. Enterprises that operate within local economies reduce dependence on long commutes and address safety and mobility concerns. For women in particular, proximity to home often determines whether participation in paid work is possible at all.
- Second, flexibility becomes integral rather than exceptional. Entrepreneurial work can accommodate part-time engagement, variable hours, and seasonal patterns of work. This flexibility is essential for women with caregiving responsibilities and supports sustained workforce participation rather than short-term engagement.
- Third, skills and confidence are built through participation. Enterprise-led work enables learning by doing, allowing women to rebuild rather than get eliminated by formal re-entry processes that prioritise uninterrupted employment histories.

For young people more broadly, entrepreneurship shifts the focus from searching for jobs to creating value. This shift is increasingly important in an economy where stable, long-term employment is no longer guaranteed.

Reimagining Work for the Next Generation

India's employment challenge is not only about the number of jobs available. It is also about how work is designed and who it is designed for.

The prevailing model of formal employment assumes mobility, uninterrupted availability, and uniform life circumstances. These assumptions exclude large segments of the population, particularly women, rural youth, and first-generation workers. Skilling interventions alone are insufficient if the structure of work remains unchanged.

Entrepreneurship offers a different approach. It enables livelihoods to emerge in sectors and geographies where formal employment has struggled to gain traction. It also builds transferable capabilities such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and financial literacy, which remain relevant across changing labour markets. Importantly, these models allow young people to earn while they learn. They do not require long periods of unpaid preparation or relocation to urban centres before income generation begins.

For entrepreneurship to function as a meaningful employment pathway, particularly for women and underserved youth, three shifts are required.

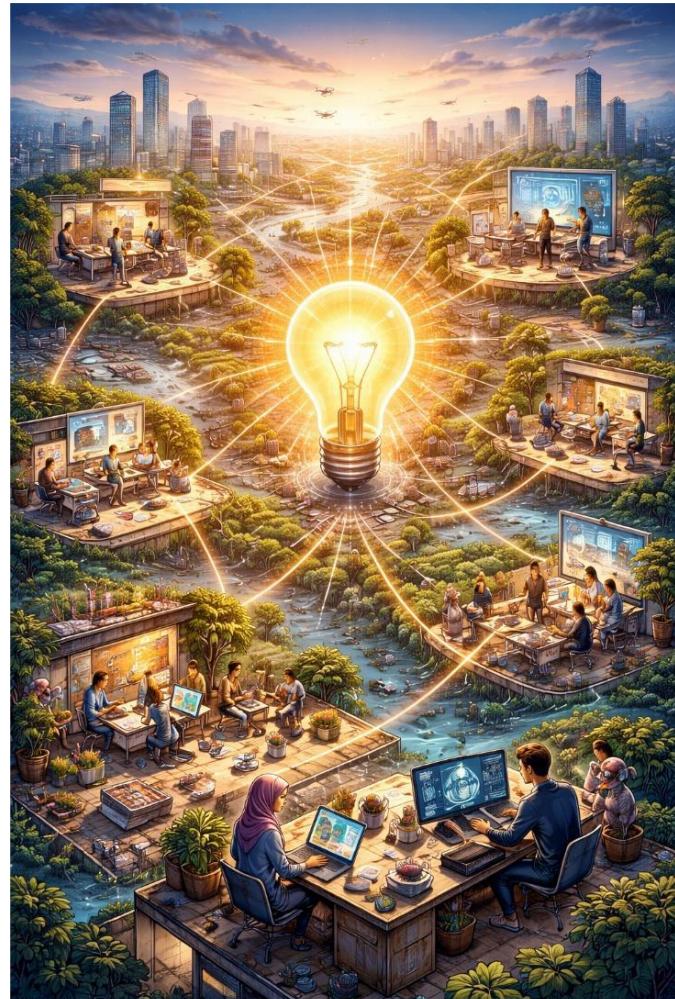
- First, enterprises need support to grow beyond survival. Many small ventures plateau due to limited access to capital, markets, and management capacity. Long-term financing and operational support are essential to enable scale.
- Second, policy frameworks must better reflect lived realities. Simplified compliance, recognition of flexible and part-time work, and incentives for decentralised job creation can significantly improve participation, especially for women.
- Third, entrepreneurship must be normalised as a career pathway. It should not be viewed as a fallback option or a response to job scarcity. Exposure, mentoring, and integration into education

and skilling systems are necessary to position enterprise-building as a legitimate and supported choice.

India's demographic trajectory requires a reconsideration of how work is created and sustained. Traditional employment pathways alone will not be sufficient, particularly for women whose participation is shaped as much by structural constraints as by opportunity.

Entrepreneurship provides one such pathway. It enables young people to create livelihoods that are locally rooted, flexible, and resilient. It allows women to participate in the workforce without having to navigate impossible trade-offs between care, safety, and income.

The future of work in India will be determined not only by how many jobs are created, but by whether work itself evolves to include those who have long remained at the margins.



Note: The writer has used AI tools for image generation and language refinement purposes.

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