



# The Developer

*Collective Insights into Development and Emerging Markets*

The impacts of Artificial Intelligence

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Development with a circular economy

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Refugee rights in Europe, and more

2019

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# A Note from the Editor

**Kyle Johnson**

It almost feels as though "International Development" is just a guise for creating a collection of ideas and stories that can affect the lives of real people all over the world. With such a diverse collection of topics ranging from the UN and Artificial Intelligence, to poetry and eastern Tibet, "International Development" as an overarching theme can only loosely tie together these vastly different disciplines and outlooks on what development truly means.

Despite our departure from collaboration with WEMS, this year's edition does not disappoint. We have such a diverse range of articles, each of which very much deserves to be, and needs to be published and read. It is also worth noting, that should an article catch your interest in particular, feel free to contact their authors for more information.

To begin with, look into current programs and organisations who do fantastic work in the field. Michelle Yao, a masters student at Warwick contributes with a piece exploring paediatric and congenital cardiac services in Ghana. Given the lack of medical infrastructure, services catering to more complex health issues are in short supply, for the 1 in 100 children born with a heart condition, there is only the Little Hearts Foundation.

Expanding the scope to the international stage, we also have a piece co-authored by UNDP Research Analyst Olcay Tetik and intern Will Spurr. Which looks at how private sector initiatives can help the international community achieve the ambitious UNSDG goals.

Next we move onto ideas about development moving forward, Zakee Ulhaq, the former president of Warwick Effective Altruism, gives us a look at what mass adoption of AI and subsequent automation would mean for employment. WIDS' very own Careers Officer - Olivia Tsoutsoplidi also explores the impact

AI, but instead on its impact on society.

Podcaster and Warwick Alumnus Max Klymenko examines how the advancement of technology can impact inequality, for better or for worse. While Sven Herrmann, the Head of Research Operations at Global Priorities Institute, provides his expertise on the on how a Circular Economy could contribute to development.

Acknowledging that international development is not perfect, we also have a contribution from Brototi Roy, a PhD student from the University of Barcelona, who shares her conversation with Jacinta Kerketta, an indigenous Indian poet, about who is benefitting and who is suffering under the current model of development.

Finally, to remind ourselves of what all this is about, we look into the stories of individuals. Second year PPE student Kai Forester provides a review of the touching film "Une Saison en France", a movie that shows insight into the plight of asylum seekers as they move to countries seeking refuge, places where they face unfamiliarity and uncertainty. My personal contribution is a piece that looks into the intricate relationship economic development has with culture, delving into the fascinating case of Eastern Tibet, where traditions struggle alongside economic modernisation.

## Welcome to the 2019 edition of The Developer



# Case Study: The development of paediatric and congenital cardiac services in Ghana; Little Hearts Foundation

Michelle Yao

## BACKGROUND

Ghana has proven to be one of the first countries in Africa with great potential to attain first world status. Being the first Sub-Saharan African Country to achieve the first millennium goal (halving extreme poverty), Ghana continuously strives for development in various sectors of their country. But healthcare service provision has been a challenge for Ghana as with most developing countries.

Healthcare is largely obtained in government run districts, as well as regional and tertiary centres. Human resource, health facilities, medical equipment and capital are significantly limited, thus the result is run down, poorly equipped establishments where the patient still has to pay substantial amounts to get the basic healthcare services. It has been proffered that increased life expectancy and low infant mortality are linked to economic growth, nonetheless healthy people are more productive, and healthy infants and children can develop better and become productive adults.

The developing world faces poverty and lack of resources alongside its obligatory accompaniments of ignorance, superstition, high birth rate and insufficiently trained manpower, thus creating conflicting health priorities. Infectious diseases and malnutrition are some of the main health challenges Ghana faces. The biggest killers are diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria. It must be noted that all these are becoming easily preventable and treatable with simple health interventions, unlike more complex conditions such as Congenital Heart disease. Consequently, with its capital intense management, Congenital heart disease had previously not been an obvious priority.



Congenital heart disease is a heart problem present at the time of birth. Statistics show that approximately 1 out of every 100 children will be born with a heart problem of which 25% cent of these children are in a critical condition and require urgent intervention in the first year of life. Unfortunately, the appropriate services required to intervene are unavailable in Ghana thus apart from a selected few who can afford to get healthcare outside of the country, many of these children have an unfortunate fate. In 2012 a foundation was established to fill this gap in Ghana namely; Little Hearts Foundation.

## PRESENT

Little Hearts Foundation a philanthropic agency that seeks to address the medical and psycho-social needs of children with heart problems and their families. The vision of Little Hearts is based upon Article 6 and 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (16) which states that "every new born child has the inherent right to life, survival and development, the highest attainable standard of health and access to healthcare services for treatment and rehabilitation. he notion of legal obligations is reinforced in



General Comment No.15 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the child's right to the highest attainable standard of health and healthcare which specifies that States have an obligation to reduce child mortality and that particular attention should be paid to neonatal mortality." Thus, the ultimate vision of Little Hearts is: to see children with heart problems in Ghana receive cardiac and cardiothoracic care that meets the required standards of professional expertise and to collaborate with research programs into heart disease in children in Ghana and the sub regions of Africa. As well as their overall vision, Little Hearts' missions include; soliciting support for children with heart problems for paediatric cardiac and cardiothoracic surgical management (financial and professional expertise based), paediatric cardiac educational, psycho-social and emotional support for parents and families with children who have heart problems, public education on heart diseases in children, through media programs. They also aim to extend the vision to the sub regions of Africa.

Ghana's birth rate that works out at about 9000 children a year out of which 180 children born every week with heart problems. The cost of intervention and management for a child born with a heart problem is approximately \$8000. Funding for these procedures is most often out of financial reach for these families who have children with heart problems and need an urgent operation. To this end Little Hearts Foundation solicits support for the cost of the open heart surgery and cardiac interventions that these children require. They also aim to ensure that the children have surgery in emergently, before complications set in either in Ghana or outside the country. In honour of this, Little Hearts collaborates with agencies (both local and international) to sponsor and refer children with heart problems to the appropriate centre for cardiac care national.

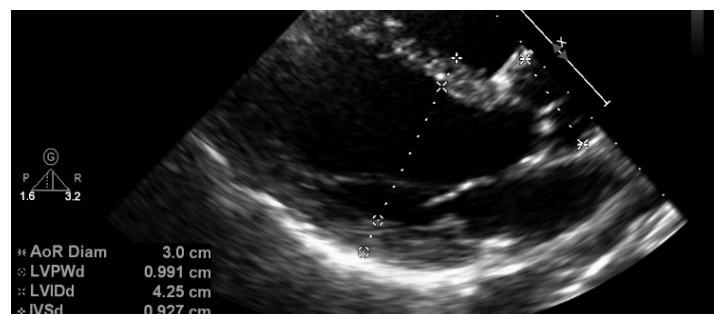


## Little Hearts

Little Hearts has been successful in giving thousands of children access to better healthcare services. The following life cases are cases that Little Hearts Foundation has been involved in supporting parents/families and assisting in medical referral and organising medical care:

### Study 1

NT presented at about 4 weeks of age with respiratory distress (breathing problems). He had been managed in different private hospitals around the country and then referred to the tertiary centre in Accra. He had an echocardiogram done which revealed a cardiac diagnosis of a hole in his heart and his great big blood vessels were swapped round medically called Transposition of The Great Arteries with a Ventricular Septal Defect. There was no surgical management available for him in Ghana. He was referred and transferred by air to Red Cross Hospital In Cape Town South Africa at about 8 weeks of age where he had life saving successful open heart surgery.





### Study 2

BO was noticed to be “blue” when he was born. He had a reduced amount of oxygen in his blood. Investigations including echocardiography showed he was born without the heart valve that leads to the lung blood vessels – the pulmonary valve and a big hole in one the walls of the heart, medically Pulmonary Atresia with a ventricular septal defect.

He was transferred to Johannesburg in South Africa, where he had successful surgery. Unfortunately he had postoperative complications, was in intensive care for months and sadly passed away. Little Hearts Foundation was involved in his transfer and during the time they provided psychosocial support for the family.

### Study 3

RA presented at 2 days of age with respiratory distress breathing problems, and decreased amount of oxygen in her blood, her mother had had diabetes during the pregnancy a condition that predisposes to heart problems. She was diagnosed as having her blood vessels swapped round. This condition was not treatable in Ghana and she had to be transferred out. She needed some basic short term stabilization key hole surgery prior to transfer. The equipment was not available in Ghana. Little Hearts Foundation assisted in organizing the medical equipment to be flown into the country and the baby had life saving key hole surgery “balloon septostomy” before being flown out for definitive surgery.

## Non-Clinical contributions to healthcare

**Media:** Little Hearts also contributes to radio and tv educational programmes in connection with World Heart Day to educate the public on congenital heart disease and what to do if a parent suspects a child could be showing signs in connection with heart problems. Their most recent media program was in September 2018.

**Education:** In December 2017, Little Hearts supported the first scientific conference in Ghana; an educational program about new born babies and their care in Neonatology. An educational paediatric cardiac program for the is planned for the second half of 2019.

Little Hearts was also actively involved in organising and supporting an educational program for doctors in November 2018; an international update course in paediatric cardiology. It ensured that doctors are aware of current trends and are able to diagnose and initiate management of paediatric cardiac conditions. Over 140 doctors were in attendance with an international and local faculty.





**Psychosocial Support group for parents:**

A WhatsApp parents group was established to provide parents and families of children with cardiac disease a safe place to share experiences, ask medical and social questions in relation to a child's diagnosis and get support. Little Hearts also organises formal meetings where all the parents and children can meet one another and socialise. This has been very successful and provided many families the psychological support they need.

**Funding:** Little Hearts solicits help for parents and families from philanthropic agencies and assists to fund some surgical procedures in the country and outside Ghana. Little Hearts is hosting a formal fundraising event in June 2019. All Proceedings from this event will be used to fund cardiac care for children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

**FUTURE**

Little Hearts most significant project already underway, is the further Provision of paediatric cardiac services in Ghana and west Africa. Currently Little Hearts provides both a public and private paediatric cardiac clinic however these operate within bigger health institutions. Consequently, they have collaborated with foreign investors to set up a solely paediatric dedicated organisation with paediatric cardiac services, in Ghana.

Overall Little Hearts has significantly contributed to the progression of paediatric cardiac care in Ghana; from there being none to now some level of paediatric cardiac service provision. This simply shows that every small initiative has the potential to make a significant difference thus it should act as inspiration and encouragement to anyone seeking to give back or aid in the development of any service. No contribution is too small.

**About the author:**

Michelle Yao is a student at Warwick studying a master's degree in Healthcare Operational Management.

# Inclusive Business and the Sustainable Development Goals

Olcay Tetik, Will Spur



**Building Wealth with low income communities promises multi-dimensional progress towards the SDGs.**

To a pessimist, the body of international development may look to be riddled with silver bullets. They could suggest that the problems which beleaguer humanity in the 21st century - whether it is hunger in an age of smartphones, scarcity in a time of surplus, or a thoroughly preventable yet seemingly inevitable global climate disaster - are systemic and require radical transformative action which escapes the scope of current political systems. By contrast, an optimist may point to the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - wherein the 17 interconnected goals for sustainable development (the SDGs) - set out both a destination and a roadmap for overcoming the social, environmental, and economic impasses which stand in the way of achieving an equitable, sustainable world, and leaving no one behind in the process. Both the optimist and the pessimist can agree that business as usual simply is not good enough.

UNCTAD estimate that there is a year-on-year \$2.5 trillion investment gap to achieve the SDGs and the private sector has the reach, resources, know-how, and dynamism needed to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda.

**“Only the private sector has the reach, resources, know-how, and dynamism needed to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda”**

How can the private sector become interested in sustainable development? Through making an effective business case. Hence the importance of the Business Council on Sustainable Development's keystone Better Business, Better World series, which indicated the \$12 trillion per annum pot-of-gold for firms should the SDGs be achieved. The subsequent question is therefore how can businesses get involved with development? One auspicious avenue is Inclusive Business. Inclusive Business, in its most refined definition, simply means engaging people living at the base of the economic pyramid (BoP) - the 4 billion people living off less



than \$8/day - in your business' value chain. At present, the BoP are categorically underserved by businesses and financial institutions, who through a lack of incentives and market-information prioritise building wealth amongst traditionally reliable markets; i.e. the middle classes. Engagement with the BoP can take many forms, for example: as consumers, developing products to meet the specific needs and buying capacity of the BoP; as employees, through providing context-relevant employment conditions and developing skills; as distributors, making use of local knowledge to take goods the 'last-mile'; as suppliers, by working with producers themselves, and not intermediaries; or as entrepreneurs, who require resilient relationships to ensure that everyone benefits from their existence.

## **“Only the private sector has the reach, resources, know-how, and dynamism needed to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda”**

What scope does inclusive business have for contributions to the SDGs? It provides clear impetus to industry-pertinent goals, such as SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, and SDG 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. However, it also has the potential for several developmental spillovers, for example, providing a reliable income and skills development to BoP employees can help to eliminate poverty and reduce inequalities, SDGs 1 and 10, or BoP-specific products, such as iron-fortified flour sold in affordable quantities, can contribute to both eliminating hunger and promoting good health, SDGs 2 and 3. Moreover, unlike corporate social responsibility initiatives, inclusive businesses are commercially viable and scalable; they are not built on generosity, one-off measures, and politically-sticky bilateral aid, but instead they are self-sustaining engines accelerating the SDGs.

For inclusive businesses to thrive, you need four key ingredients: investment, incentives, information, and capacity. Given the atypical investment climate of low-income communities (people often lack access to bank accounts, banks themselves, financial literacy, or a regular income), unorthodox investment systems are often required; these can include microloans, implementation of simple fintech solutions, such as mobile banking, provision of financial education for BoP clients, or simply better contextual information to deflate perceptions of risk amongst investment arms. This latter point can be supported by two of the other ingredients, information and incentives. Better data collection and mutual understanding between the BoP and businesses can eliminate distrust for both sides, whereas appropriately-applied incentives, coupled with an enabling regulatory framework, can spur businesses into making transformation towards inclusive business models. The final ingredient, capacity, concerns overcoming the physical barriers, namely infrastructure, that impede the effective functioning of markets at the BoP.

## **“Inclusive business literature runs the risk of essentialising low-income communities”**

The transformative power of inclusive business fits into a broader discourse of 'greening capitalism', i.e. directing the energy of market forces towards social ends, of which C. K. Prahalad, Amartya Sen, Muhammad Yunus, Ted London, Stuart L. Hart and Jeffery Sachs form an academic vanguard. The popularity of inclusive business has been explosive and has formed a core strategic platform for several G20 presidencies (including the most recent, Argentina 2019). Moreover, inclusive business is thematic working area for the UNDP's engagement with the private sector, through which country-specific reports on the status of inclusive business are released through the Business+ series.

Through the latter, we can see a small but growing momentum for inclusive business around the world.

Development history, however, teaches us that there are no fix-all solutions. Firstly, inclusive business run into an ethical quandary with respect to extending market logic to some of the world's most vulnerable communities. If a proper case for sustainable, equitable business practices is not made to companies, improving the access and climate for firms to engage with the BoP may only serve to extend exploitative practices and profit from indigence. Moreover, inclusive business literature runs the risk of essentialising the 4 billion people who comprise BoP; not only are these people internally disparate, dissimilar, and diverse in needs and attributes, but corporate qualities frequently emphasised in inclusive business literature – thriftiness, entrepreneurial spirit, working long hours etc. – are born of insecurity. As such, inclusive businesses should seek to end the necessity to act as such, rather than prolong the prevalence of these business-friendly qualities. These critiques are, however, by no means debilitating for inclusive business. The first response is to emphasise the mantra that inclusive business is about building wealth with, not at the BoP. As such, policies to promote inclusive business must always prioritise activities which improve the livelihoods of low-income communities through commerce. Inclusive business practices need to function within a context of responsible economic and social governance to achieve its full potential, and the scope of businesses to make social impact needs to extend beyond income, into the multidimensional development aspect of the SDGs. Inclusive business is not another silver bullet, but instead can be an effective force in catalysing the 2030 Agenda.

If you are interested in learning more about inclusive business, the World Bank group

provide a quick free course on the theoretical foundations, all official publications from G20 and partners are shared through iBAN, whilst the UNDP's inclusive business initiative, BCtA publishes regularly through The Guardian. Moreover, IICPSD's 2015 and 2017 inclusive business studies are available online.

### **About the authors:**

This article was co-authored by Olcay Tetik, a UNDP Research analyst and intern Will Spur, both of whom are based in Istanbul.

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1 For more information about the SDGs, see the SDG Knowledge Platform, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

2 UNCTAD. (2014). Developing countries face \$2.5 trillion annual investment gap in key sustainable development sectors, UNCTAD report estimates.

3 World Business Council for Sustainable Development. (2017). Better Business, Better World.

4 The G20 define IB as "a private sector approach to providing goods, services, and livelihoods on a commercially viable basis, either at scale or scalable, to people at the base of the pyramid by making them part of the value chain of companies' core business as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers.": See G20. (2015). G20 Inclusive Business Framework (p. 3).

5 Base of the Pyramid. Retrieved from <http://bopinnovationcenter.com/what-we-do/base-of-the-pyramid>

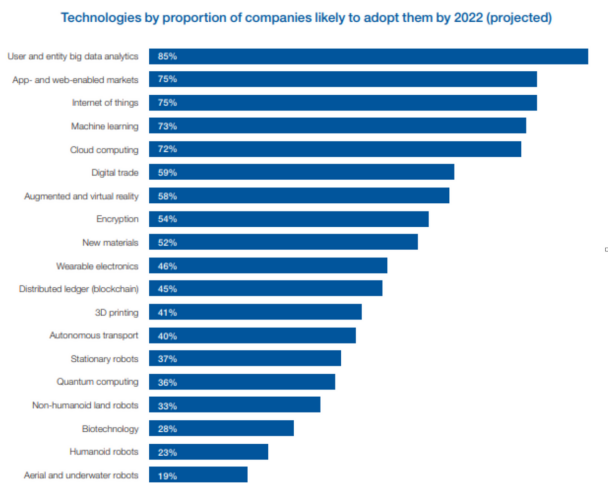
6 According to the G20 'Inclusive Business Ecosystem Diagram'. See G20. (2015). G20 Inclusive Business Framework (p. 7).

7 Through the authors' host institution, the Istanbul International Centre for the Private Sector in Development (IICPSD).



# The AI Transformation: Job Loss and Labor Markets

Zakee Ibrahim Ulhaq



Source: Future of Jobs Survey, World Economic Forum 2018

In the coming decades, it is conceivable that we will see substantial progress in artificial intelligence, potentially even to the point where machines come to outperform humans in many or nearly all domains of rational inquiry. Cars that drive themselves, machines that read X-rays, and algorithms that respond to customer-service inquiries are all manifestations of powerful new forms of automation which will only become more advanced with the passage of time. Though it is difficult or even impossible to make confident forecasts in this area, these advances could lead to extremely positive developments, but could also potentially pose risks from misuse, accidents, or harmful societal effects, which could plausibly reach the level of global concern.

There is a veritable smorgasbord of potential shifts in occupations in the years ahead, with important implications for workforce skills and wages; whilst there may be enough work to maintain full employment to 2030 under most scenarios, the transitions will be very challenging—matching or even exceeding the scale of shifts out of agriculture and manufacturing we have seen in past centuries.

## 1. The impact of automation upon work

It is unarguable that automation will displace many jobs over the next 10 to 15 years, but many others will be generated and even more will be transformed. Jobs of the future will use different skills and may have higher educational requirements. In fact, about half the activities people are paid to do globally could theoretically be automated using currently available technologies. Very few occupations—less than 5 percent—consist of activities that can be fully automated.

However, in just over 60 percent of occupations, at least one-third of the constituent activities could be relegated to mere automation, implying substantial workplace transformations and a 'transfiguration of occupation' for all workers.

It is however crucial to remember that the technical feasibility of automation is but the initial hurdle to overcome for the adoption of artificial intelligence in the civic sphere: the cost of developing and deploying automated solutions for specific uses in the workplace, the labor-market dynamics, the benefits of automation beyond labor substitution, and regulatory and social/governmental acceptance are all necessary facets in implementing robust technology for a more prosperous society.

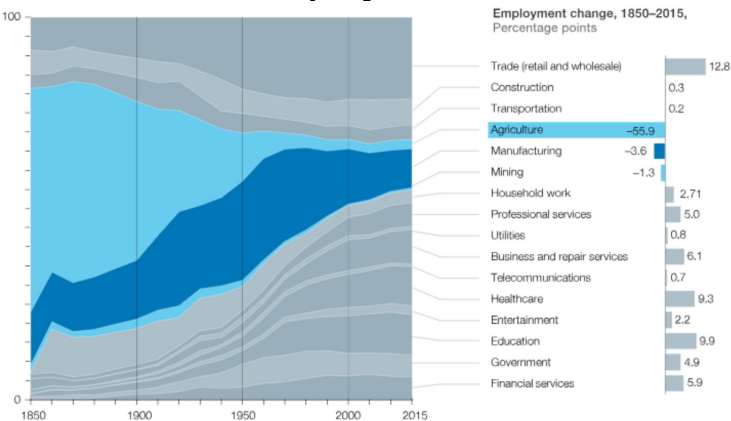
Furthermore, the potential impact of automation on employment varies by occupation, sector and country. Activities most vulnerable to automation include ones involved physical exertion in predictable environments, such as operating machinery and preparing fast food. Data collection and processing are two other categories of activities in which machines are increasingly gaining unparalleled mastery. This could displace large amounts of labor - for

instance, in auditing, paralegal work, loan origination, and back-office transaction processing.

It is cardinal to note, nonetheless, that even when some tasks are automated, employment in those occupations may not decline, but rather, workers may perform new tasks: artisans of the fourth industrial revolution.

## History demonstrates vast shifts in industries with the displacement but also creation of jobs

Share of total employment in the US (%).



Source: IPUMS USA 2017; US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Automation will have a reduced effect on jobs that involve managing people, applying expertise, and social interactions, where machines are unable to match human performance for now.

Jobs in precarious environments such as those done by gardeners, plumbers, or hospice workers will also generally see less automation in the immediate future, because they are technically difficult to automate and often command relatively lower wages, making automation a less lucrative business venture.

## 2. Potential growth for new jobs

### Skills demand in the age of artificial intelligence

Today, 2018	Trending, 2022	Declining, 2022
Analytical thinking and innovation	Analytical thinking and innovation	Manual dexterity, endurance and precision
Complex problem-solving	Active learning and learning strategies	Memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities
Critical thinking and analysis	Creativity, originality and initiative	Management of financial, material resources
Active learning and learning strategies	Technology design and programming	Technology installation and maintenance
Creativity, originality and initiative	Critical thinking and analysis	Reading, writing, math and active listening
Attention to detail, trustworthiness	Complex problem-solving	Management of personnel
Emotional intelligence	Leadership and social influence	Quality control and safety awareness
Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation	Emotional intelligence	Coordination and time management
Leadership and social influence	Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation	Visual, auditory and speech abilities
Coordination and time management	Systems analysis and evaluation	Technology use, monitoring and control

Source: Future of Jobs Survey, World Economic Forum 2018

Workers supplanted by automation are easily identifiable, whilst new jobs that are created indirectly from enhanced technologies are less clear and spread across a rich mosaic of different sectors and geographies. Below is a list of some potential sources of new labor demand that may stimulate job creation to 2030, and perhaps beyond.

### Rising consumption in emerging markets

It appears that global consumption could grow by over \$23 trillion between 2015 and 2030, and most of this will come from the rapid expansion of middle classes in emerging markets. The social and economic consequences of these new consumers will be felt not just in the countries where the income is generated but also in economies that trade with these countries. Globally, 260 million to 285 million new jobs could be created from the impact of rising incomes on consumer goods alone, with up to an additional 65 million to 80 million jobs generated from higher health and education spending.

### Living Longer

According to data from World Population Prospects: the 2017 Revision, the number of older persons - those aged 60 years or over - is expected to more than double by 2050 and to more than triple by 2100, rising from 962 million globally in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050 and 3.1 billion in 2100. Globally, population aged 60 or over is growing faster than all younger age groups. With increased longevity, individuals spending patterns shift, with a conspicuous increase in spending on healthcare and other personal services; this will create an overwhelming demand for a range of occupations, including doctors, nurses, and health technicians but also personal-care aides, and nursing assistants in many countries, causing the number of jobs in such professions to grow globally by over 50 million to 85 million by 2030.



## **Design, development and deployment of new technologies**

Professions related to the design, development and deployment of new technologies promise to see magnified growth. Overall expenditure on technology could increase by more than 55 percent between 2015 and 2030. About half of this would be on information services and consumer technology. The number of people employed in these occupations is small compared to those in healthcare or construction, but they are high-wage, high-skilled occupations. By 2030, this growing trend of integrating technology amidst everyday life could create 35 million to 60 million jobs across the world.

When determining net changes in job growth across all countries due to shifting global demands, the categories with the highest percentage job growth net of automation include the following:

- Professionals such as paralegals, computer scientists, and business analysts
- IT experts and other technology specialists
- Managers and executives, whose work cannot easily be replaced by machines
- Artists, performers, and entertainers will also be in demand as rising incomes create more demand for leisure and recreation
- Unpredictable environments, such as builders, home-health aides and gardeners

### **3. The Future of Work**

The change from one era to the next, from candles to steam-power, from Being to Becoming, heralded thunderclaps to which labour-markets quaked. The net occupational growth or decline due to the unprecedented efficiency of machine intelligence could be on a scale greater than the transition of the labor force out of agriculture in the early 19th century in Europe, and more recently in East Asia.

The Bank of England has warned that up to 15 million jobs in Britain alone are at risk of being lost to an age of mechanization where increasingly sophisticated entities do work that was previously the preserve of humans:

global estimates of individuals being displaced by automation are even more alarming: between 500 million and 750 million are expected to feel the brunt of the changing times. Whilst new jobs will be available, based on the growing demands of emerging sectors and markets, people will need to find their way into these jobs. Of the total displaced, 100 million to 370 million may need to switch occupational categories and learn new skills to compete in this unending race of technological transformation.

Thus, there is growing concern about whether there will be enough jobs for workers, given the exhaustive and transformative capabilities of automation. Given that we are alive, flourishing, enjoying cold cream and strawberries, love and the cascading rays of the sun, history would suggest that such fears may be unfounded: over time, labor markets adjust to changes in demand for workers from technological disruptions, although at times with depressed wages.

Contrary to the trepidation felt by many, the benefits of artificial intelligence and automation to users and businesses, and the economic growth that could come via their productivity contributions, are compelling. They will not only contribute to vibrant economies that establish new jobs but also help create the economic surpluses that will enable societies to address the workforce transitions that will likely happen regardless.

Faced with the scale of the challenge ahead, a primal response may be to try to curb the pace and widespread adoption of automation in an attempt to maintain the status quo of a simple life: this would be financially catastrophic. Although slower adoption might limit the scale of workforce transitions, it would greatly hinder the contributions that these technologies could provide to dynamic businesses thereby decelerating economic growth. We should embrace these technologies but also address the workforce transitions and

challenges they bring in unison. In many countries, this may require initiatives such as those involving sustained investments, new training models for, programs to ease worker transitions, income support, and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

## **Conclusion**

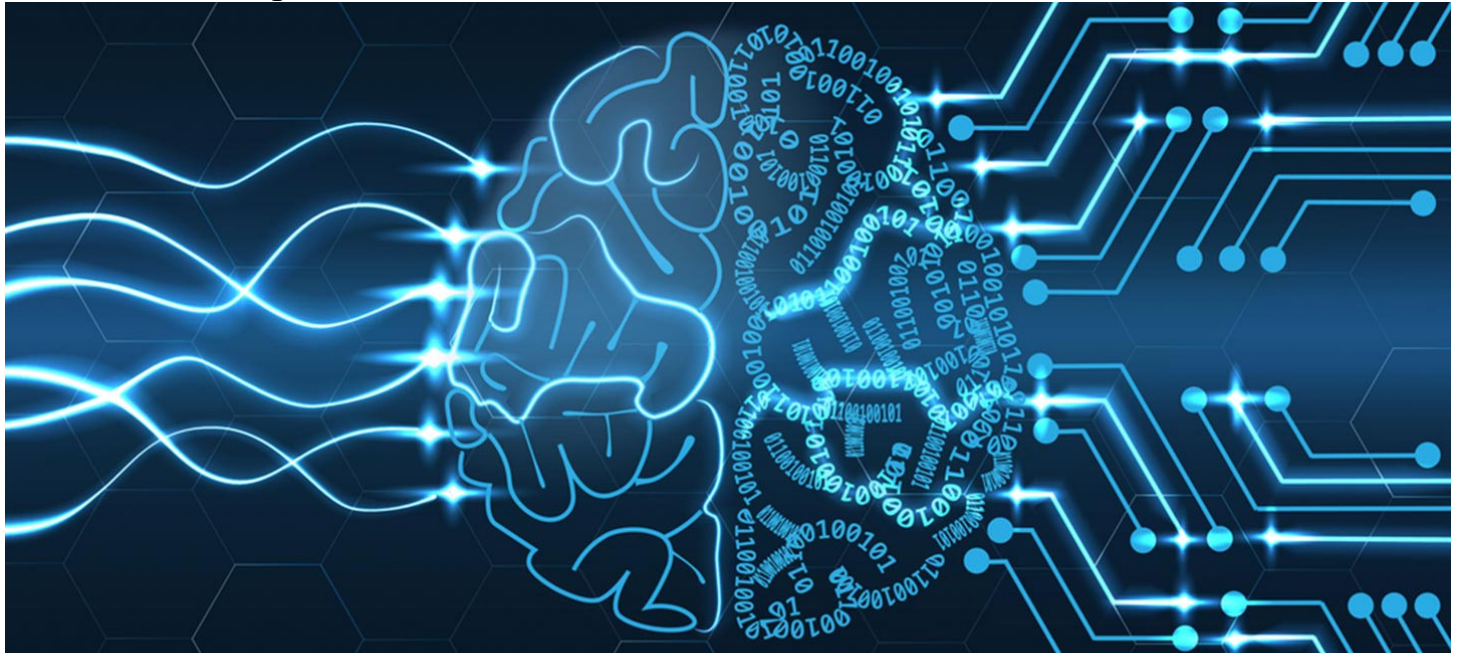
Automation promises to herald an age unlike any other. Just as Prometheus championed humanity towards conquering the deep truths of art and science, so too, artificial intelligence promises to revolutionize the realms of business and commerce. It is not a matter of whether it will happen, nor when will it happen, but what we do now to ensure automation allows humanity to progress into a new world order.

## **About the author:**

Zakee is a 4th year math student at Warwick, formerly the president of Effective Altruism Society.

# Shaping the Future of Work

Olivia Tsoutsoplidi



Eventually, most of us will not have a job. Prior to this, we will live in a world full of uncertainty in the labour market forcing us to constantly reinvent ourselves. Nevertheless, against all our effort, at some point, algorithms will outperform us in every single task there is to be fulfilled. A vain and stressful prospect made worthwhile by the promise of a higher standard of living. Classic. The artificial intelligence breakthrough has started a disruption of the economy that will mark the labour force permanently. The future volatility of work demands reforms in education, labour market, welfare system, and not least a revision of our social contract.

## **The Scale of Automation**

The impact of disruptive technologies on employment has yet to find consensus. The debate among labour economists has centred around estimating the number of jobs that risk to be automated in the upcoming 10 to 20 years. In 2013, Carl B. Frey and Michael Osborne at Oxford published the maybe most recognised paper concerning this topic yet, predicting that 47% of all US jobs are in high risk of automation (probability above 70%). David Autor at MIT challenged the extent of job automation arguing that for now machines mostly replace routine tasks, thus complementing labour and giving

people more space for creativity. This premise informed the hypothesis of economists at the OECD that occupations composed of several different tasks may be less susceptible to automation because the computational complexity of a synthesis of different skills is growing non-gradually; Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn found the average share of automatable jobs across 21 OECD countries to be 9%.

Looking further ahead, historian Yuval Noah Harari predicts a full scale automation of existing jobs. The rational is that AI gradually develops beyond task-specific applications such as predicting our musical taste, which is known as narrow or weak AI, towards artificial general intelligence or strong AI. AGI will be able to outperform humans in any job thanks to the advantages of an integrated network -perfect connectivity and instant updatability- as well as its potentially limitless computing power, while we might still be stuck with our brain. (Harari, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century).

## **The Skill Mismatch and Inequalities**

The imminent disruption of the job market will likely pose substantial threats to the low skill working class and women.



Undoubtedly, the AI revolution will generate new jobs, not least for its developers, but also for those who use its insights and algorithms creatively. Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo recently published on the four countervailing effects of automation that they think will lead to net job creation. However, these new jobs are unlikely to be offered to those displaced by automation due to a vast skills mismatch; indeed, new AI-enhanced human jobs will be hard to fill even by the most skilled workers. Consequently, displaced workers will constitute a class of economically irrelevant people, which will only grow as AI algorithms are strengthened. One of Harari's 'Lessons' for the 21st Century is the dangerous social and political implications of this rising class of useless people.

Women will be the main victims if the AI revolution perpetuates current inequalities. In 2018, only 22% of AI professionals globally were female. The World Economic Forum cautioned that large AI skills gender gaps might "exacerbate gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity in the future as AI encompasses an increasingly in-demand skill set", as well as result in algorithmic biases that "limit the innovative and inclusive use of AI". It is crucial that we ensure our trajectory towards gender equality does not bend due to lack of foresight.

### **De commercialisation and the New Social Contract**

We may eventually reach a point where economic value is produced by machines alone, or economic value is rendered irrelevant altogether. This thought arises from Ray Kurzweil's vision of a future of abundance where economics fundamental drive ceases to exist, scarcity of resources. Although for the greatest part of history, people did not identify with the remuneration for their work, we lack a blueprint for what I think of as de-commercialisation. How should post-work society function? If we stop working and earning money, we will need a new medium of exchange for goods and services. This requires to set a new social contract on the premise that in line with the freedom of the people from the need to work, we must ensure everyone's ability to fulfil their needs

and desires, in order to pursue meaningful lives and relationships. As we would definitely not desire to return to hierarchies and exploitation, some argue the framework of the future for this is a universal basic income. For that, global political cooperation in the form of a unified taxation system must be an important building stone in order to finance this effort. I call for all of us to build an inclusive and flourishing post-work society in which we can all pursue eudaimonia. We can opt for art, aesthetics and love, as Aristotle or Nietzsche have told us to, or we can philosophise about the virtue of leading a good life ourselves.

**Shape the future of work so as to preserve the dignity and promote the wellbeing of everyone.**

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Suggested reading on policy related to promoting a fair and inclusive future of work.

### **G20 Leaders' Summit**

In Buenos Aires December 2018, G20 Leaders called for "coordinated policy responses and international cooperation to ensure that the benefits of technological change are shared by all". The G20 Labour and Employment Ministers adopted a declaration Fostering opportunities for an inclusive, fair and sustainable future of work , committing themselves to promote innovative skills policies, strengthen social protection and formalise labour markets into more equitable, inclusive ones.

### **ILO Commission on the Future of Work**

In 2019 the International Labour Organisation turns 100 years old. The Global Commission on the Future of Work, launched the centenary by releasing an in-depth report on Work for a brighter future to achieve social justice in the 21st century.

[https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/shaping-future-work?](https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/shaping-future-work?fbclid=IwAR0aPYMfoBkLv7z1RiOX0QGP34PFinWFZZR7ZiVc-4OnxzJoiVrnUwlgKuE)  
[fbclid=IwAR0aPYMfoBkLv7z1RiOX0QGP34PFinWFZZR7ZiVc-4OnxzJoiVrnUwlgKuE](https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/shaping-future-work?fbclid=IwAR0aPYMfoBkLv7z1RiOX0QGP34PFinWFZZR7ZiVc-4OnxzJoiVrnUwlgKuE)

# Technological Progress and the 99%: Friend or Foe?

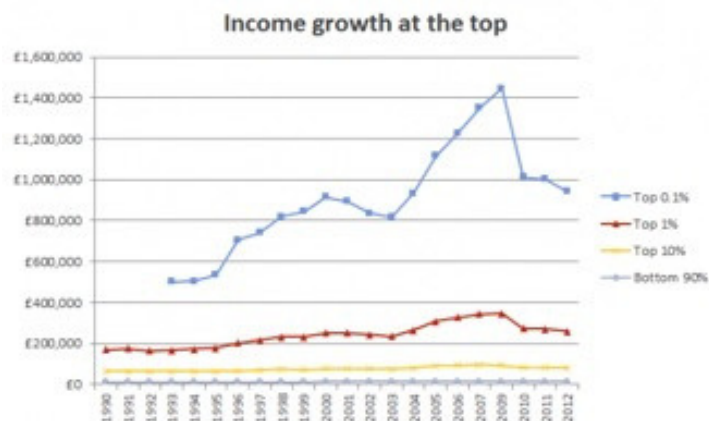
Max Klymenko

## The rise of within and between country inequality

Equality and equity have been at the core of philosophical and economic thinking since the birth of these disciplines. The concerns over social inequalities dates back to the works of Aristotle and Plato. However, the Occupy movement and 2008 crisis financial crisis have moved inequality from the periphery of economic issues to the center of the public discourse. Inequality, particularly economic inequality, concerns the distribution of resources in a society, and can entail both within country and between country inequality.



Taking the UK as illustrative of a wider dynamic, the data shows that income gap has been increasing over time, peaking in 2008 (Figure 1). In fact, Top 0.1% are the true 'winners' of globalisation and the knowledge economy, while Bottom 90% has had minimal income growth in the past few decades.



Source: <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/how-has-inequality-changed>

Zooming out to the global picture, although the emerging economies have been 'catching up' with high income countries, the size of a gap between regions in terms of standards of living is still striking (Figure 2).

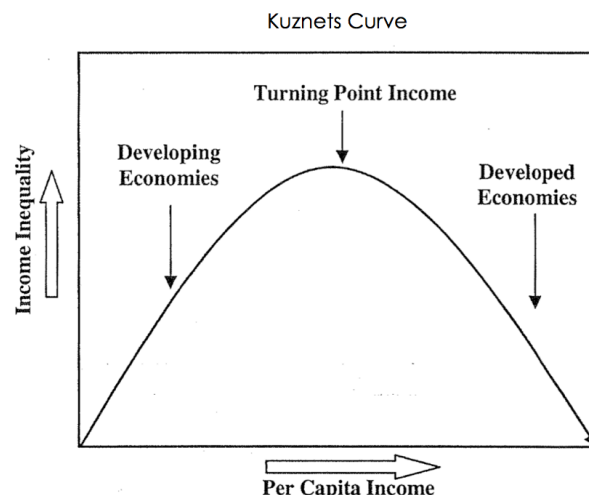
Figure 2



Source: Jason Hickel (World Bank data)

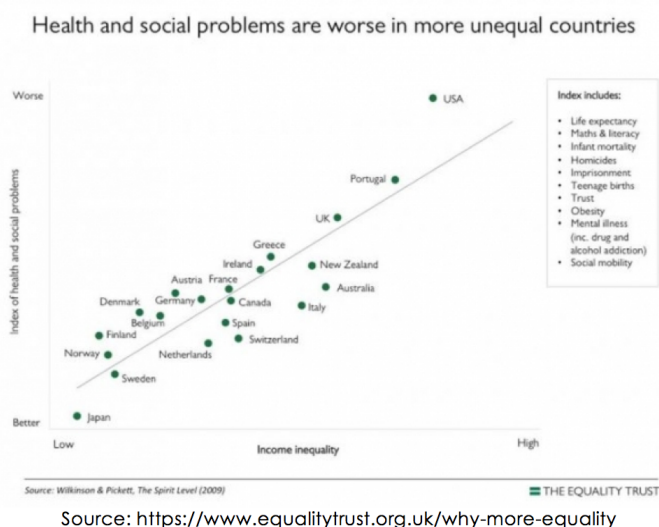
## Inequality is high...so what?

The logical question that is often posed next is: "So what"? The age of neoliberalism that has dominated the economic thinking has persuaded us that inequality is a normal interim outcome of economic development. Kuznets curve was used by the World Bank to persuade the global community that inequality is an inverted U-curve and it would inevitably decrease as income per capita grows.



As numerous graphs and academic studies illustrate, the rate of increase in inequality shows no signs of slowing down. Thomas Piketty neatly summarises the reason behind it in the formula:  $r > g$ . It means that the rate of growth of existing wealth is higher than the growth in economic output, resulting in compounding difference in resources between the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

That said, even if economic inequality is indeed increasing, some may argue that it is a natural outcome of a merit-based capitalist system. There are two issues with such reasoning. First, the most capitalist societies are increasingly becoming less meritocratic. The decline in social mobility in the US and the UK illustrate that point (<https://www.businessinsider.com/social-mobility-is-on-the-decline-and-with-it-american-dream-2017-7?r=US&IR=T>). Second, Wilkinson and Pickett suggest in *The Spirit Level* that high inequality has strong correlation with many negative social issues such as violence, low trust, social alienation, mental illness and others. What we are heading towards is an unequal society that is a result of preexisting wealth, not merit, with high rates of social exclusion and mental illness. This is far from ideal but many trust that technological progress has the potential to reverse this dynamic, equalising opportunities and income distribution.



## Why technology isn't a 'silver bullet': skill and capital biases

Technology is often hailed as a potential 'great leveler' that has the capacity to decrease the existing inequalities both among and within countries. However, technology also has dangerous potential to amplify existing disparities, due to its capital bias and skill bias.

1) Capital bias means that the rapid technological innovation often displaces labour, delivering a higher RoI on capital investments. The labour share of national income has been in a steady decline since 1970s. The world's most valuable companies are the 'big tech' firms with a small number of employees. For example, Instagram had only 13 (!) employees when it was acquired by Facebook.

2) Skill bias signifies the fact that technological progress has outpaced education achievement. The workers with the 'right skills' such as experience in data analysis and machine learning, are capturing the increasing share of labour profits in many sectors. This 'cocktail' of capital and skill biases can lead to the growing importance of existing wealth and the shift in profits to a small proportion of 'tech savvy' individuals.

## Grim prospect of 'genetic elites'?

Gene editing and biohacking are set to improve human longevity and overall wellbeing. Scientists around the world are already using gene editing too to identify key cancer cells. However, a more troubling idea is that gene editing and biohacking may allow the elites to put themselves and their kids further ahead. In addition to cash transfers, education, social and cultural capital, those who already have wealth would also be able to enhance their genes and cognitive performance. This example shows the duality of effects of technological progress.



## **Demonising technology => smart and forward-looking policy**

I believe that the task of both public and private sector is to understand that technology, in of itself, is not a silver bullet to achieve equality of opportunity around the globe. What is required is being proactive in ensuring that technology is not exacerbating the existing inequalities. Policy solutions such as 'robot tax' and distributive policies such as basic income have to be in the spotlight of the public and governments. Demonising technology is not a viable solution, but the global community needs to place emphasis on ensuring that technology is solving, not amplifying, the existing inequalities.

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### **About the Author:**

Max is the host of the podcast "Big Fan of the Human Race", and is currently studying a Master's Degree in Inequalities and Social Science at LSE.

# Rethinking development with a circular economy

Sven Herrmann



The idea of a circular economy – one that is restorative and regenerative by design and that creates value by keeping products and materials in circulation – has been rapidly getting traction over the last few years. Often cited as a 'trillion dollar opportunity', it is increasingly on the agenda of businesses, governments, and other organisations alike. So far, most of this attention has focussed high-income countries – trying to transition from their highly industrialised 'linear' economic system into a more circular one.

More recently, however, circular economy is also being discussed as an opportunity for development in low-income countries – supporting an alternative growth model that creates economic growth while minimising negative impacts on the environment and society. This would also be well aligned with initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement. The reasoning is as follows: Economic activity in low-income countries is usually quite circular with, for example, lots of reuse and repair and

informal recycling. This can be leveraged to move directly to a system that is more effective and based on circular economy principles– rather than taking a detour and getting locked into linear models and infrastructure. This can create a competitive advantage for emerging economies as moving directly to a more circular system would avoid the cost of transformation that current mature economies are facing as they are trying to move to a more circular system. An example where such a 'leapfrogging' approach has been successful is telecommunication: While industrialised countries have a highly material intense and costly infrastructure of landline phones for every household, the development of wireless technology has allowed people all over the world to have mobile phones – even in very remote and poor areas – with much less infrastructure cost.

While there is still more research needed on how low-income countries can use these opportunities in practice, the case for a circular economy approach to

development seems compelling. For example, a recent report has estimated that in India following a circular economy development path could come with annual benefits of ₹40 lakh crore (US\$ 624 billion) compared to the current linear development path. In addition, negative externalities would be reduced, and for example greenhouse gas emissions would be 44% lower. This article briefly discusses the concept of a circular economy and how it can play a role in international development.

### **Rethinking value creation with a circular economy**

The idea of a circular economy is to create a system that is restorative and regenerative by design. In a circular economy, products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times. A circular economy preserves and enhances natural capital, optimises resource yields, and minimises system risks by managing finite stocks and renewable flows. Value creation is decoupled from the consumption of finite resources.

### **A circular economy is based on three principles:**

**1. Design out waste and pollution.** The negative impacts of economic activity are designed out to avoid damage to nature and human health. For example, no pollutants such as greenhouse gases or toxins should be released. This principle also implies that the creation of waste should be avoided from the outset, creating a system that is most effective.

**2. Keep products and materials in use.** In a circular economy, products and materials are kept at their highest value. This includes creating products that are more durable, or that are suitable for reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling.

**3. Regenerate natural systems.** A circular economy avoids the use of non-renewable resources and energy. It also helps preserve and regenerate our ecosystem, for example,

by restoring nutrients to the soil, and by not exploiting natural resources such as soil quality or fish stocks.

In a circular economy there is a distinction between technical and biological cycles: In technical cycles, products, components, and materials are used, and through strategies like reuse, repair, remanufacture, refurbishment, or recycling kept in circulation. In biological cycles, resources can be consumed, though remaining nutrients are restored to the biosphere, for example, after processes such as composting or anaerobic digestion.

### **How low-income countries can profit from a circular economy**

In various aspects, low-income countries are operating much more 'circular' than high-income countries – mostly driven by need. For example, vehicles are likely to have much higher utilisation, are repaired more often, and used longer. Also, generally products are repaired if possible at all – instead of thrown away with minor defects as in high-income countries. Waste is treated as a resource, as waste pickers often collect materials that are at all usable – and in countries such as India waste-picking and the resulting processing of waste are huge – albeit informal – industries. These activities often provide for the livelihood for some of the poorest parts of the population.

However, most of these practices happen in isolation at the end of the value chain, rather than being part of a system that is designed for value retention and recovery. As a result, only a lesser part of the value can be retained. Also, the current activities have significant negative impacts on health and the environment, for example, health risks for people dealing with waste or large volumes of low-value materials remaining in the environment and eventually leaking into rivers and oceans.

As wealth in countries increases and the middle class expands, the existing circular activities are also likely to become less



attractive – unless a systematic approach is taken to professionalise them. Additionally, as the global economy is becoming more and more interconnected and countries will be integrated in the linear supply chains of global markets, economies of scale are likely to pull them to the linear model that is persisting in most of the industrialised world.

However, as in low-income countries many systems still need to be built, they can see this as an opportunity to move directly to a circular economy. Mature markets have many systems and much infrastructure designed to function in a linear economic model that are not easy to transition to a circular economy: For example incineration infrastructure, cities optimised for cars rather than public transport, and business models based purely on volumes of product sales rather than maximising value capture and utilisation. By adopting a circular economy development path today, such linear lock-ins can be avoided, creating a competitive advantage.

This development can be supported and enhanced by digital enablement. Big data and mobile applications can deliver many benefits, including better understanding of material flows; support in making complex decisions, such as materials choice or optimisation of business models; knowledge- and information-sharing platforms. These tools are particularly useful in developing economies as marginal costs are low and scaling is possible without high development costs.

When taking a circular economy approach to development it will be crucial to recognise the role informal economic activities currently play in low-income countries and to find a suitable way to integrate these into development. For example, this could be achieved by using more decentralised models of transitioning to a circular economy, with small businesses and entrepreneurs playing important roles. This discussion shows that there are huge opportunities for a circular economy to play a role in international development and help achieve goals such as the SDGs. However, challenges remain in how

to implement some of the ideas in practice and further work is needed to develop the most effective approach on how circular economy can be integrated in existing development work.

### **About the author:**

Sven Herrmann is the Head of Research Operations at Global Priorities Institute, and an advocate of Effective Altruism and the Circular Economy.

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1 Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Circular Economy in India: Rethinking Growth for long-term prosperity, 2016.

2 The discussion is mainly based on: Tearfund and Institute of Development Studies, Virtuous Circle: how the circular economy can create jobs and save lives in low and middle-income countries, 2016; Ellen MacArthur Foundation, Circular Economy in India: Rethinking Growth for long-term prosperity, 2016; Chatham House, A Wider Circle? The Circular Economy in Developing Countries, 2017.

3 See <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept>.

# In the Name of Development

A Poem and Conversations with Jacinta Kerketta



## THE DUST OF DEVELOPMENT

Breathing in the dust of progress  
Day and night life coughs in distress.  
The heart has aged before its time,  
And eyes once with hope alive  
Are now counting their numbered days.

No footsteps more are heard,  
Plodding along towards the fields,  
For addicted now are those feet  
To chase after trucks laden with coal  
Along the road of the PANEM mines.

So long it has been  
Since the hoe has heard sing  
The farmer his delightful song  
While it swung on his shoulder along,  
For now the farmer creeps  
Out of the house like a thief.

Every night are dreams  
Crushed under the wheels  
Of some truck running amok.  
Then come, as they please,  
Bidders and auctioneers  
To put the price tags on lives lost.

And in all this much ado  
Many lives are left to gather dust.

When asked by Truth,  
"What was as compensation paid?"  
Sitting in the corner,  
Old Experience could only say,  
Breathing in the dust of progress  
Day and night life coughs in distress.  
The heart has aged before its time,  
And eyes once with hope alive  
Are now counting their numbered days.

Jacinta Kerketta

The critiques of development from an international perspective is not new. There have been many books, papers and reports written to highlight the deficits, disadvantages and defects of 'development' interventions in the Global South. Since the 1990s, a post-development approach had fundamentally questioned the meaning of 'development' for the Global South by highlighting the destructive effects of 'modernisation' and 'development aid'. The underlying aim of this post-development school has been to 'displace development from its centrality in the representations about conditions in Asia, Africa and Latin America'. However, the narrative in the Global South continues to remain hegemonic around development ideals.

There are two main arguments used in the hegemonic narrative to justify these development projects, namely increasing employment and reducing poverty. However, there are enough empirical evidences and staggering data which show that the present development model is flawed.

In India, in particular, a lot of projects in the name of development have led to large scale displacement of local people. In the absence of official figures, grassroots organizations and intellectuals have estimated that more

than 60 million have been adversely affected, either due to displacement or lost livelihoods since India's independence in 1947. This disproportionately affects the adivasis, the tribal population of India. Estimates suggest more than 40 % of the people affected or displaced in the name of development are adivasis, despite constituting for 8 per cent of the total population.

In February 2018, Oxfam India published the India Inequality Report titled Widening Gaps providing evidences against a staggering rise in inequality in India. It claimed India to be among the most unequal countries in the world, with a rise in inequality in the last three decades. According to the report, last year 73% of India's wealth was generated by the richest 1 %. And this inequality went further beyond income, and into access to basic amenities such as education, health etc., which brings into question on who gains in the name of development.

In this context it becomes important to understand the meaning of development; who pays for development and who profits from it. And it becomes crucial to hear the what adivasis (original inhabitants) most affected have to say about it, the so-called 'underdeveloped' people. Incidentally, the term 'underdeveloped' was first used on January 20, 1949 by President Truman of



United States of America in his inaugural address. Using the word in terms of scientific advances and industrial progress, he changed the meaning of the word 'development' overnight, and was successful in categorizing people and communities with distinct cultures, traditions, languages and histories spanning hundreds of years such as the adivasis of India as 'underdeveloped'.

Jacinta Kerketta is an indigenous poet, journalist and social activist hailing from the central Indian state of Jharkhand, and belonging to the Oraon tribe. She has grown up witnessing and participating in the struggle of the vast Adivasi society to preserve their land, forests, rivers, languages and heritage and culture, which she expresses in her poetry.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation with her about her take on development-

### **What do you understand by development?**

The first fundamental thing to question is this very concept of how one individual or a group of individuals can claim to 'develop' another individual or society. The responsibility of development should and must be on the self. Development for me implies a life of dignity. And that necessarily implies respect and understanding of the indigenous way of life. You can't develop someone if you consider yourself superior to them, that only leads to oppression.

### **How different is it from the present model of development in India?**

The present model of development in India is an imposition; it is an imposition on the Adivasi way of life. The adivasis are strongly connected with nature- our words, rituals, culture and traditions all revolve around nature. We don't consider ourselves superior, but rather just a part of the nature. Hence, we don't want to live at the cost of harming other plants and animals. However, the current model of development is based on the premise of looting the natural resources, be it the forests or the minerals underneath it. In

other words, the currently model, for us, is destruction in the name of development. It feels very hollow and fake to me. How can you call something which destroys forests, rivers, hills and mountains for monetary gains as development? That will only lead to protests and conflicts, as you can see everywhere in the country right now.

### **What would be your development utopia?**

The current development model seems to be a way to fulfil the selfish needs of the ruling class. Imposing a completely different belief system- one of looting and plundering of the nature- would never sit well with the adivasis. It is not that the adivasis are opposed to developments. There are many issues plaguing the Adivasi society- be it that of poor nutrition, lack of accessibility to hospitals etc. However, my development utopia would involve a path where the inherent customs and traditions of the Adivasi life is not mocked or ridiculed, like it is currently being done. Rather, there is an attempt to understand more about Adivasi language, songs, festivals, rituals and dialogue with them. We want schools and hospitals and roads, but not at the cost of destroying our traditional ecological knowledge, or preaching to us that our religion and language and customs and way of life are inferior in any way. My utopia is one of dialogue and debate to reach the real meaning of development.

**About the author:** Brototi Roy is a PhD student at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain, where she researches on environmental justice movements in India.

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1 Progress and development can be used interchangeably for the Hindi word vikas, the language in which the poem was originally written. This poem was published in her first poetry collection in 2016 titled Angor.

# A much-neglected tragedy: Refugee rights in Europe

Kai Forester



"Une Saison en France" is a drama film which depicts the joy and sadness of an immigrant family from the Central African Republic struggling to begin a new life in Paris, France. It premiered as a special presentation to the Toronto International Film Festival 2017. Overall, it illustrates the flaws of the current immigration system in Europe and concludes by hinting at the extent of the much-neglected misery and hardship refugees faced during the Refugee Crisis 2015/16 and continue to face today.

In contrast to the title which associate picturesque scenes and famous sights in France, Mahamat Saleh Haroun's film takes place far from the ethereal beauty of Paris, in the cold, monotonous concrete-obstructed urban periphery of its outskirts. There, Abbas (Eriq Ebouaney) tries to construct a new living for his children Asma (Aalayna Lys) and Yacine (Ibrahim Burama Darboe). Over the course of the asylum-seeking process which spans the entire movie, Abbas meets Carole (Sandrine Bonnaire), a Parisian, who begins to support him by taking care of Asma and Yacine and offering advice regarding the asylum application process. While the

nascent friendship starts to blossom between the African family and Carole, this is overshadowed by deteriorating hope for gaining an asylum status and the difficult financial situation. Abbas, Asma and Yacine have to move to less and less comfortable apartments over time.

While the storyline is rather bleak and comfortless, Haroun succeeds in giving each scene its unique human touch, creating stirring episodes featuring the beauty and romance France has to offer as another perspective. The humbleness and normality of the film's characters' everyday life, such as singing good-night songs together, doing homework or meeting a new love-for-life, make watching the film a deeply heart-warming and gratifying experience. In particular, the scene where Asma, Yacine (and Abbas) sing their mother's old lullaby, walking down a street in the banlieues of Paris on a sunny winter morning - while the viewer is consciousness of their looming deportation - embodies a special kind of happiness; one that in its powerfully modest form, only a resilient family like Abba's can feel. It is exactly this

emphasis on the ability to be cheerful, to sense those fleeting moments of unadulterated happiness in the face of looming disaster, that give the film its characteristic quality.

The film is moving not only in its immediate story, but its deeper embeddedness into a trajectory that continues to engrave Europe today; or as *Le Monde* writes:

« Que cette histoire débouche, lors d'un final bouleversant, sur les dunes désolées de la « jungle » de Calais, alors démantelée, et le fil amoureux est soudain suspendu par la sidération devant l'étendue d'un désastre plus vaste, dont le vide vertigineux est peut-être le signe ultime de notre époque. »

"May this story lead, in a moving finale, to the desolate dunes of the dismantled "jungle" of Calais, where the thread of love is suddenly suspended by the amazement at the extent of a larger disaster, whose staggering emptiness is perhaps the ultimate sign of our time." Translated with

[www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator)

**About the author:** Kai Forester is a 2nd year PPE student at Warwick.

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1 Macheret, M. (2018). « Une saison en France » : dix mois pour prendre racine. *Le Monde*, [online]. Available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2018/01/31/une-saison-en-france-dix-mois-pour-prendre-racine\\_5249538\\_3476.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2018/01/31/une-saison-en-france-dix-mois-pour-prendre-racine_5249538_3476.html) [Accessed 25.02.2019]



# Where culture meets development in Eastern Tibet

Kyle Johnson



The Tibetan plateau, with its high altitude, harsh climate and sparse populations, is hardly ideal for rapid industrial innovation. And before the 1950s, life in Tibet was similar to how it had always been, communities of farmers, monks and nomads lived simple, subsistence lifestyles. Religion was an inseparable part of everyday life, monks (lamas) were hugely respected, and the monasteries played significant roles in social organisation and government. If people were sick or if there was a family/business feud, people would go to the monks who would initiate ceremonies to rid sick bodies of evil spirits, or call on less sinister ones to determine who was in the right. There was no modern industry, transportation system, electricity, medical or education system, and in a region with an average altitude of 4'500m, life was brutal and harsh.

Despite the dubious political circumstances in which such events took place, from 1950s onwards, the CCP government invested hugely in the building of infrastructure such as highways, tunnels and airports, while establishing new social and economic

systems like public schools, health care, welfare and citizen registration. They also kickstarted the harvesting of natural resources in Tibet, including the mining and logging industry. The objectives of such policies were: economic growth, safeguarding national unity, curbing separatism and preserving social stability and the overall development of Tibetan living standards.

But the heart of the political contention and economic industrialisation, there are individuals in an extremely complicated situation. Tibetans are coming to terms with life in a modern economy, where the costs of adaptation and acceptance may be tradition and culture.

## Agnes

Agnes Conrad is a research student at the Qinghai Nationalities University. She is being funded by the SOAS in London to complete her master's degree thesis on the documentation of the Muya language — a tongue spoken by a Tibetan minority group recently classified as an Endangered

## Language

The Minyak are a minority within a minority, a small group of Tibetans who live around the sacred Mount Gongaa, the third tallest mountain in the world outside the Himalayan range. They are culturally and linguistically separate from other Tibetans. Agnes explained that nowadays, Muya is a language only spoken at home, due to the relatively small population of its people, and that it is not a language of trade, commerce or law.

"I think modern economic trends, in a broad perspective, pushes us towards monolingualism. You want to have an expansive trade network, and to do that you'll need a common language. So there's been a real push towards standardisation of dialects, which is happening to Chinese dialects as well as Tibetan dialects."

"A girl I spoke to said that after her, she didn't know who would carry on the Muya language. I thought it was weird because she was only 18. The fact that she is so aware at such a young age shows that people feel it is slipping away, but also how much they value it."

"Some of the Minyaks think Muya is archaic, they want to learn Tibetan or mandarin as it will be more useful. You can engage in a modern financial economy, raise your standard of living."

"From an outsiders point of view there is this romanticisation of these minority cultures, but for them, this is their lives. One man I met in the village said that if you told me things could get better, I wouldn't believe you. Things used to be very hard for these people, and the modernisation has really helped make their lives better. People are generally open to, and want to have these new technology and infrastructure development."

"The roads especially, some might say it ruins the landscape, or the sense of adventure is lost when there's a highway cutting through, but to them, it changes their lives. So I think

these people like the changes.

"Interestingly, its the younger people who grew up in cities at boarding schools, those are the people who are more interested in traditional culture. I think its because they spent their whole life in a city, its kind of like the grass is greener on the other side kind of thing. So a lot of young people are opening these very Tibetan stylised businesses, like restaurants, hotels, stores etc. Its the younger people who had a period of time removed from the customs and lifestyle, then find that they want to go back to it, they realise they miss it. One guy I spoke to said when he was younger, they didn't think at all about maintaining traditions or language, yet nowadays he observes that many young people are aware, and care very much about these things. And from that, he also began to realise its importance. So he was optimistic."

## Patru

One of these Minyak Tibetans is Patru, an ex-herder who embodies more than no one the peaceful, obliging, happy-go-lucky spirit of the Minyak. Patru spent the first 30 years of his life in the valleys around Mount Gonggaa herding yaks, only visiting small towns to sell yak produce. After the birth of his second child, his wife got sick, and he made the decision to sell his yaks and move to the nearby city of Kangding, where he began work as a clothes salesman. Patru still lives in Kangding with one of his children, while two others live equally metropolitan lives in Chengdu and Lhasa.

"What I regret is that the culture of the Minyan people, a lot of people are forgetting about it. My own grandchildren they don't speak much Muya. This makes me sad. The rest of it [development] its all great. But culture, it comes from hundreds of years ago, and it is ours. My people, the Minyaks, we don't speak mandarin well, and our Tibetan [mainstream dialect] isn't good either, we are isolated."

Patru had lived the first 30 years of his life in a way similar to his forefathers of many

generations, yet the lives of Patru's children and grandchildren couldn't be more different.

### **Gyatso**

Gyatso is a young man who shares the experience of many young Tibetans. As a child, Gyatso (now in his mid-twenties) went to school in the local town of Tagong. His dad worked odd jobs in town while also helping his mother tend to the herd of yaks in the grasslands nearby. In the summer holiday, he and his siblings would join his mother in the plains to care for the yaks. It is an annual cycle that many Tibetan children go through every year. When Gyatso was 18, his parents decided to sell their yaks and move to the town of Tagong permanently.

"At the time I really didn't think much of it, I was young. Not having to go help my parents with the yaks seemed a relief, I could do other things in my time. It wasn't that I didn't like it, it would just give me more freedom to explore, which as a young man I really liked. But now looking back, it really seems a pity. I look back on those summers and there are very good memories."

He lamented at how many of the traditional nomadic Tibetan skills passed down for generations are being lost, for example how to turn clumps of yak hair into yarn and then fabric. He also mentioned changes in the Tibetan attitudes towards money, "As the economy gets better and is a bigger part of our lives, people get more and more economically minded, ie if a farmers barley crop was good, before they would have shared it or given it to the monastery, now they sell it".

He is optimistic though.

"Nowadays people have more individuality, they can go where they want, marry who they wish." "My father never went to school, he thinks that everything from the past was good, but that is not true, even for Tibetans. In Tibetan culture there are many things that are good, but also many many that are bad, like the violence between tribes.

Tibetans are still very happy, we love to laugh, love to help people."

"Some things will disappear. But we know what is important, what is good, so we will work to keep it, for example buddhism. Tibetan people love buddhism, we know this makes us good and happy, so we work to keep it."

### **Angela**

Angela Lankford runs an Ecolodge for travellers just outside of Tagong, and is sympathetic to the cause of preserving Tibetan nomadic culture. She's lived in the Tibetan region of Kham for 10 years, and is married to a nomad. As many Tibetans give up their nomadic lifestyle and move into towns in search of a higher standard of living, Angela aims to show locals that they can live a more comfortable life without sacrificing their nomadic ways. Angela runs an art cooperative that sells locally Tibetan products internationally, marketing an ancient craft for the benefit of their creators. She also runs multiple projects within her ecolodge, demonstrating an example of how one can live comfortably, while still having the ability to be a herder.

"I spent a lot of time with the nomads, and a lot of them were very interested in selling their yaks and moving to town. They just wanted running water, electricity and plumbing. But what didn't make sense to me was that if you were completely happy with the lifestyle you have, but you wanted running water and all that, why would you give up everything else to get it? Why not just bring those things to where they are? I saw in India a long time ago a similar project. It was a project on rurally appropriate technology, basically tech you can use in rural places that can help raise their standard of living."

She is optimistic that it isn't a lost cause.

"A lot of people have moved back up. You need to have a way to make a living, and in a lot of cases its harder in town. Suddenly they

have to pay for meat and cheese and milk, and rent, and water and electricity, whereas before they didn't have to. Also there may be work for men, but not really for women. They feel like they are more competent than just sitting at home, and want to use their time more wisely and make something of themselves. Up in the plains the women were incredibly busy and do very important work. They know they are capable people."

### **Kris & Stephanie Rubesh**

The Rubesh's are an American couple who run a hostel in the city of Kangding, they also co-ordinate programmes aimed towards raising the standard of living of local Tibetans.

The Birthing Project. In Tibet, it is common practice for women to give birth at home, whether that be in a townhouse, or a yak hair tent up in the plains. These women usually only have their mothers or close friends by their side, most of which have no real education about the process. So they have been providing a Midwifery training course, where they teach proper hygiene and birthing procedures for births at home.

Entrepreneurial Skills Training Program. A program which hopes to enable locals to realise their entrepreneurial interests and business potential, and gain the skills necessary to start a business. Relationship development course, given to teenage Tibetan boys and girls and covered topics like birth control, maintaining healthy relationships, introduction to STDs, being aware of one's self-image and building healthy relationships with the opposite gender.

It is hard to deny that such programs are nothing but good for the Tibetans who are a part of them. But even Kris agrees that there is a trade-off.

"Modernisation is going to take away some of their cultural practice. For example, science is taking away so much the monks traditional practices, they used to be called on the ward off the evil spirits making people sick, but nowadays people go to doctors, not

the local lama."

"How can you keep your teenage son up in the hills herding yaks, when he can go to Kangding or chengdu, see the big city, the night lights."

### **Conclusion**

It's difficult to account for how the entire people of Tibet are dealing with such a transition. There are the nomads, some of whom's story I shared today, but there are also the monks who face the challenge of modern science, and the farmers who face state subsidised or GMO competition. This is a phenomenon is paralleled by ethnic minorities around the world, take the hill tribes of Thailand, Native Americans in the US, and the Maori in New Zealand. There is an anxious uncertainty faced by these communities in the wake of significant social and economic change. People can no longer look to the familiarity and assurance of tradition, and this brings uncertainty about their own future, as well as their current identity. Ultimately, Tibet is just another place where real people are simply trying to make the best life they can for themselves and their families.

**About the author:** Kyle Johnson is a second year EPAIS student and member of the WIDS Exec.





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