Emerging technologies and the future of work in India

Type:	Document
Content Type:	Emerging technologies and the future of work in India
Language:	
Sources:	
Topics:	
Knowledge Products:	
Publication Date:	19 Jun 2018

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edmsp1_217825.pdf

The study emphasizes the socio-political dimensions of technological trajectories and their impact in India. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), characterized by the convergence of a cluster of technologies — cutting across the physical, digital, and the biological worlds — machine-learning and artificial intelligence, advanced robotics and autonomous transport, cloud computing and the Internet of Things, among others, is expected to profoundly transform the future of work. Many jobs and ways of working will become redundant while many new jobs will be created. Production processes, business models, service delivery mechanisms along with employment relationships and social protection frameworks are likely to be reconfigured. Anxiety about the world of work is not new, but it is claimed that this time around the speed and spread of technological advancement will be unprecedented. Global narratives on the impact of 4IR need to be localized and re-examined. While new technologies will be developed and deployed globally, the impact on the future of work will be mediated through local political, legal and socio-economic structures. This study examines the likely impact of 4IR on the future of work in India, with a specific focus on job-displacement, employment conditions, and labour market inequities in India. Automation potential must be distinguished from automation adoption. While a high number of tasks might be technically automatable, the adoption of particular technologies will depend on a complex interplay of factors including the cost of labour; levels of education and skilling; legal frameworks for innovation; labour protection policies; the availability of supporting infrastructure; and the social and cultural norms that shape attitudes towards technological change and innovation.

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