

India's Green Jobs Have a Blind Spot



Clockwise from the left: Amit Kapoor
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INDIA MEASURES CLEAN energy transition in gigawatts and does this with precision. The 500 GW by 2030 dream is on track to be completed before time. The green transition race is not merely replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy. Legacy industries like iron, steel are decarbonising and the economy is transitioning around new industries, new supply chains and a new workforce. In this transition, the term 'green job' appears in strategies, reports and international climate discussions with growing frequency. Yet, there is just one problem. No one can agree on what a 'green job' actually is. Definitions determine what gets counted, financed or regulated. Green jobs are no exception.



Every solar park commissioned, every wind turbine installed and every electric vehicle sold gets logged and added to a running national count. India, however, measures its green workforce far less precisely. One of the primary reasons for this is that no one has agreed on what to count. The country is planning tens of millions of green jobs but no ministry, statute or survey has ever defined what a green job is. India's own Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGJ) estimated the addition of 30-35 million jobs in the next two decades. The SCGJ's definition of a green job itself is based on the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition which states that a green job is a decent job that contributes to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors or the emerging sectors. Even though their definitions are so closely linked, a huge disparity arises as the ILO has estimated an expansion of 54 million green jobs in India between 2021 and 2030. These differences are not rounding errors. The gap distorts the statistics, the skilling pipeline and the just transition itself. The word 'green' attached to these jobs carry no enforceable definition. Before India decides on a number, it must define what counts as one.

The divergence in these figures also emerges from the fact that this transition is not only creating new jobs, it is also changing existing ones. Coal mining, thermal power and carbon-intensive industries continue to employ millions. As these industries adapt, the workers do not necessarily leave for new sectors, their existing roles simply absorb new tasks. Mineral-rich states like Odisha alone have attracted Rs 2 lakh crore in green industry investment since 2023 which has the potential to generate 10 lakh jobs by 2030. The transition is transforming existing occupations as much as creating new ones. Renewable energy employment crossed 1.02 million in 2023 with capacity expansion especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan. This only implies that the green workforce cannot simply be measured by counting jobs in the renewable sector alone. In other words, green employment is produced as much by transformation as by addition. Thus, the country needs to recognise that 'green' increasingly is being described by how work is performed rather than where it is performed.

The lack of an official, consistently applied definition makes the problem more real as none of the national labour instruments can measure a real 'green job'. The

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broad definition, by design, is almost too broad for any survey design to capture it. The National Industrial Classification 2025 carved out codes for environmental remediation, carbon capture, waste management and renewable energy. However, the National Classification of Occupations was last updated in 2015; and its codes need refinement before classifying occupations by their environmental contributions. A green economy cannot be planned using yesterday's occupational categories. The missing piece is a mapping framework that connects occupations, tasks, sectors and environmental outcomes. So what gets measured is what gets planned for the future as well. Green jobs can no longer be excluded from this planning because the category itself remains loosely defined.

The World Bank states that green jobs

can command a 37 per cent wage premium over non-green work in high-income economies. Without a proper definition, this new category of jobs would suffer the same fate of lagging in security, benefits and contract stability. There would also be no way to verify whether the transition is genuinely improving job quality or simply repainting the same sub-contracted work in green. The definition must also account for quality and not merely quantity. A solar technician working without security is undeniably contributing to decarbonisation. The point of contention here is whether that role qualifies as a green job under a genuine just-transition standard.

The conversation on green jobs inevitably turns to skilling as well. Preparing the workforce for emerging green jobs becomes far more complex than sim-

ply scaling skilling programmes. The lack of proper definitions has created more questions than answers for how the workforce needs to prepare. The challenge is compounded as India transitions from a relatively weak base of high employment in low-competency occupations and limited formal vocational training. Green skilling also cannot become a standalone programme. It also requires proper industrial policy. This signals that India's green markets require better planning and stronger institutions.

Ambiguity only creates uncertainty and weakens

planning for the workforce's future. The silver lining here is that even globally, definitions of a green job are still evolving. This is an opportunity to move early and build a concrete framework that not only defines green jobs but also links them to sectors, tasks, and skills. Defining green jobs is not a semantic exercise. It is the foundation upon which the green transition must be built. India needs to bring the same precision in counting megawatts to the people powering the transition. Otherwise, India would keep including green job statistics, which sound impressive but offer very little insight into who these workers are, what they do, and whether the transition is transforming work or merely relabelling it. **BW**

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