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Beyond GDP: A Shared Opportunity for Growth and Job Creation

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As disruptions such as rising inequality, extreme weather events, demographic shifts, and automation reshape economies and societies, leaders around the world are beginning to realize that traditional approaches to growth no longer translate automatically into better jobs and increased economic opportunity for all. However, by pursuing broad-based, opportunity-led expansion and treating growth and job creation as two separate but equally important goals, governments can deliver both.

To navigate this shifting landscape, we propose a framework that will enable policymakers, multilateral institutions, and companies to rethink the nature of progress and design metrics that can be key tools in delivering on this promise. Our approach is anchored in five interconnected pillars that form a playbook for the delivery of economic growth, prosperity, and resilience: redefining progress for multidimensional growth; safeguarding labor force resilience; unlocking opportunity through greater access; promoting human-centered innovation and growth; and scaling economic access through enterprise.

By combining this reimagined model of growth with experimentation and rapid scaling, all stakeholders can contribute to a transformation that goes beyond GDP growth. Examples emerging on every continent demonstrate that embedding opportunity-led growth into national strategies, business practices, and social policies can generate employment while driving increased productivity, strengthened resilience, and shared prosperity. Initiatives such as national well-being dashboards, governance reform programs, digital infrastructure investments, and workforce resilience measures enable policymakers, multilateral institutions, and companies to start making a difference right now.

An Economic Crossroads

Economic growth, measured through rising GDP, has long been considered a proxy for progress. While GDP growth has improved lives and lifted millions out of poverty, its link to economic opportunity is weakening. The richest 10% of OECD member countries earn at least eight times more than the poorest 10%, yet real wages have stagnated in many high-income countries, while costs for essentials such as housing and health care continue to rise.

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Advances in AI and digital automation are also redrawing the economic map. Productivity and output could climb, but companies may need fewer human workers—another reason why growth may not mean more jobs. And even when new jobs are created, the gains may be unevenly distributed. Senior managers with skills such as communication, teamwork, and creativity could benefit while those in routine or mid-skill jobs—cashiers, clerks, even accountants—face shrinking employment opportunities.

Meanwhile, the impact of deeper structural forces should not be underestimated, particularly since they often disproportionately affect those least able to adapt:

- Rising life expectancy and shrinking working-age populations are stretching pension systems and forcing older generations to support themselves for longer. Access to stable employment and affordable housing is narrowing.
- As natural disasters increase in frequency and severity, they tend to disproportionately affect low-income communities, who often depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and lack the insurance, savings, or infrastructure needed to withstand or recover from such events.
- Meanwhile, a more economically fragmented world is redrawing the lines of opportunity. While Global South countries forge new trade and investment partnerships, many are vulnerable to fiscal fragility, institutional gaps, and global price shocks. And as businesses move supply chains to countries with robust infrastructure, skilled labor, and perceived geopolitical stability, lower-income nations that once benefited from cost-driven offshoring are losing out.

These trends point to deeper challenges: a global growth model built on outdated assumptions about what generates value and how opportunity spreads and traditional approaches to economic performance that often overlook societal well-being. In an era of disruption, economies that thrive will be those designed for resilience, social mobility, and environmental sustainability. But this requires rethinking the definition and pursuit of prosperity. The ambition is not redistribution, but regeneration, increased productivity, and a society whose success does not depend solely on safety nets.

Pillar 1: Redefining Progress for Multidimensional Growth

Metrics matter—they change decisions about how to create opportunity. In our framework, the first step on the road to increased job creation and economic participation is to design new sets of metrics that measure access to opportunity, social and environmental sustainability, well-being, and levels of public trust. Embedding indicators such as job quality, regional economic activity, and social mobility into policymaking and corporate decision making means that financial growth can be aligned with shared prosperity. New Zealand's Living Standards Framework, which has introduced well-being-based economic planning models, is one such initiative.

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Centralized decision making can overlook local needs. Adaptive, participatory governance models and place-based policymaking address this by fostering transparency and evidence-based decision making. As an example, the Home-Grown Solutions Accelerator of the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), working with BCG, offers African health care ventures investment and regulatory guidance, expert insights, and regional dialogues.

The next challenge is to integrate well-being into the way resources are allocated and outcomes evaluated. Public budgeting processes increasingly reflect this, with some governments using well-being indicators, interdepartmental scorecards, performance management systems, and transparent reporting mechanisms to guide spending decisions and assess trade-offs. For instance, the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo) aims to foster the development of well-being economies through the sharing of knowledge and policy practices among national and regional governments.

Pillar 2: Safeguarding Labor Force Resilience

As automation transforms labor markets, social protections must enable the continuous upskilling and reskilling needed for workforce transitions so that, regardless of gender, geography, or stage of life, everyone can flourish. Governments are incentivizing continuous learning and adult upskilling through training subsidies, tax credits, and learning accounts. Digital platforms connect learners, employers, and certified providers and can use real-time labor market data to target in-demand skills. Integrating real-world experience—such as apprenticeships and simulations—into education and training curricula can improve job readiness. Take Malaysia's Global Institute for Future Talent (GIFT). In collaboration with BCG, this program focuses on youth career acceleration and workforce integration, targeting skills that match industry needs and emphasizing learning by doing.

Another hindrance to labor force resilience is that certain groups face structural barriers including discrimination, inaccessible workplaces, and biased hiring practices, resulting in persistent wage and participation gaps. Bootcamp reskilling for underrepresented groups can be one solution. For those that find it hard to remain in the workforce because of care commitments, investments in child and elder care can help. Meanwhile, "returnships" provide support for people wanting to reenter employment after a career break, parental leave, or an illness.

Some employers are relinquishing rigid degree requirements in favor of hiring based on demonstrated skills and capabilities, while flexible schedules and smart workplace design make employment more accessible, particularly to parents, older workers, and people with disabilities. And fair-chance hiring—employing people with arrest or conviction records—is gaining momentum. Data shows these hires perform as well as, or better than, their peers.

In an era of constant disruption, social safety nets remain vital. However, today's systems must act as trampolines, cushioning shocks while equipping workers to bounce back into gainful employment. Governments, employers, and unions can collaborate to embed training in unemployment support and equip displaced workers to move into in-demand sectors through subsidized courses and apprenticeships. For instance, France offers workers individual training accounts; Denmark requires or encourages retraining after job loss. In Sweden, employer-funded job security councils offer laid-off workers coaching, retraining, and job matching.

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To support contractors and temporary and nontraditional workers, health insurance, pensions, and unemployment benefits can be attached to the worker, not the job. These portable benefits support smoother job transitions.

Pillar 3: Unlocking Opportunity Through Greater Access

Access to digital, financial, and physical infrastructure determines whether individuals and small businesses can fully participate in economic life. Yet nearly 2.7 billion people remain disconnected from the digital economy. Governments and businesses can accelerate investments in rural electrification, use public-private partnerships to fill infrastructure gaps, and implement open-access policies that support local innovation ecosystems. By scaling digital literacy and ensuring fair pricing for essential digital tools and services, they can turn technology from a barrier into an enabler of social mobility and economic participation. One program, the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) has tackled this problem by driving down internet costs globally through regulatory reform and market competition.

Financial exclusion remains one of the biggest barriers to economic mobility, with billions of people still unbanked or unable to access credit, savings, or digital payments. Solutions include regulatory reforms, digital banking innovations, and tailored financial products for low-income communities. For example, India's Aadhaar-linked banking framework has connected more than 400 million people to financial services. Scaling microfinance and digital payment ecosystems not only improves household stability but also fosters long-term economic resilience. Companies can benefit too. For example, expanding access to finance enables banks to serve the unbanked while expanding their own businesses.

Pillar 4: Promoting Human-Centered Innovation and Growth

Technologies such as AI, automation, and digital platforms can reshape industries and be a catalyst for economic transformation. Yet it is critical to ensure that they do not exacerbate inequality.

By involving users in AI system design, ensuring AI transparency and explainability, and adapting technologies to diverse social contexts, AI can be put to work in service of humans. BCG's 2025 AI Radar shows that 64% of companies are adopting human-AI hybrid models, and most expect AI to augment, not reduce, workforce capacity. One program promoting this change is the Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (Stanford HAI), which supports policy and research on bias mitigation, participatory design, and safety in AI development.

Without structured oversight, AI can reinforce biases, widen economic divides, and create labor market volatility. Countering this calls for robust AI governance frameworks that uphold transparency, ethics, and accountability while managing risk, bolstering trust, and enabling adoption at scale. BCG's Responsible AI framework has helped organizations develop ethical AI systems that come with tools such as risk assessments, fairness checks, and transparency protocols.

A mission-oriented approach to innovation and technology ensures that investments in AI, digital infrastructure, and frontier technologies are aligned with accessible economic opportunity. Japan's Moonshot Research and Development Program, for example, invests in high-risk, high-impact missions, such as supporting an aging society and decarbonizing the economy.

Pillar 5: Scaling Economic Access Through Enterprise

To create transformative business models that expand access to jobs, services, and value chains and unlock the potential of SMEs and informal entrepreneurs, companies must embed social impact and ethical sourcing in core strategy. This is not an add-on but a driver of value, such as improved shareholder returns, brand trust, resilience, and employee engagement, and lower attrition rates. This can be seen in Nigerian-founded agribusiness Olam International's Jiva platform. The organization empowers smallholder farmers through digital tools, market access, and finance, expanding economic participation at scale.

Expanding access to essential products and services is another opportunity to promote economic mobility and growth. In partnership with NGOs, governments and companies can combine investments in roads and broadband connectivity with use of digital platforms, smartphone apps, and last-mile delivery models to reach remote or marginalized communities and ensure business models are tailored to low-income customers. To this end, biopharma companies are ensuring that vital therapies are widely available and affordable in low-income countries, while financial services providers are offering no-frills digital accounts or micro-loans with low fees.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, which are critical to broad-based growth and community resilience, struggle with everything from access to finance and digital tools to barriers to entry into high-value markets. To fill these gaps, innovators are developing mechanisms such as alternative credit scoring, crowdfunding, and fund-of-funds initiatives. In India, for instance, the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) gives small and informal retailers direct access to online markets.

What This Means for Decision Makers

Creating broad-based economic opportunity requires sustained action by governments, businesses, and civil society, with strategies that are explicitly designed to create diverse opportunities in the labor market. Along the way, there will be trade-offs and hard choices. Should governments prioritize carbon pricing over energy affordability? When does labor flexibility become job instability? How can the benefits of accelerating AI development be balanced with the need to implement responsible AI?

These questions have no easy answers. However, the framework can help decision makers navigate these choices. Meanwhile, adhering to the following principles can help promote mobility and accelerate economic expansion while ensuring that decisions taken to drive growth, productivity, and resilience rest on solid ground:

- **Think big.** Objectives that connect economic transformation with societal well-being can be embedded into national strategy and institutionalized through clear metrics, long-range planning, and multi-actor leadership.
- **Start small.** Governments and their partners can use targeted, localized experiments as proof points to fuel larger-scale change. With structured feedback loops and adaptive design, micro-initiatives inform what to scale, what to adapt, and how to de-risk larger investments.
- **Scale fast.** Proven initiatives can be expanded rapidly using data-driven insights and cross-sector partnerships. Well-defined implementation strategies and sustained resource commitments are essential to maintain momentum until broader adoption occurs.

This is an era of unprecedented technological, demographic, and geopolitical upheaval. Yet the challenges of this moment could open the door to a more just and sustainable global economy if our focus shifts from promoting economic growth alone to pursuing growth that also creates jobs and opportunities for all. This means embedding a growth-for-opportunity approach into policy frameworks, resourcing them over time, and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

When growth models look beyond GDP, they can translate ambition into impact. And the results are tangible—increased productivity, employment levels, and economic participation, which go hand-in-hand with worker mobility, social stability, and sustainable growth. This is more than magical thinking. This is a future that lies within our grasp.

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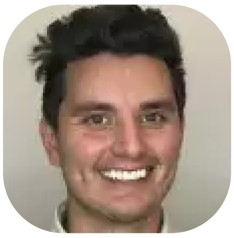

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