AI Literacy for Factory Workers
CEMCA Consultative Meeting
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The Grand
Nelson Mandela Marg, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

Welcome Remarks by
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Dear all,

I am glad to extend my formal word of welcome with a heart full of gratitude to each one gathered here. Amidst your busy schedule, you have kindly accepted the invitation extended by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), and I am thankful to you for your kind gesture and the time spent with us.
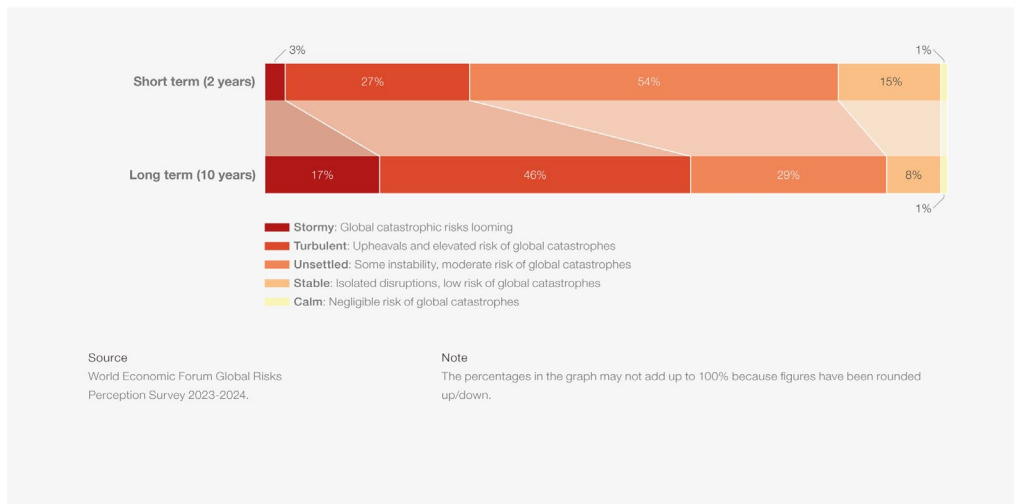
1. Why are we here?

We are here because we care about the people, especially the ones on the fringes and margins. We are here to discuss if and how the factory workers in the informal sector will be affected due to the onset of the frontier technologies, especially the advances made in the form of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The Global Risk Report 2024 states that the global outlook for the next two years is 1% calm, 15% stable, 54% unsettled, 27% turbulent and 3% stormy. And the same report predicts that in the next 10 years, it would be 1% calm, 8% stable, 29% unsettled, 46% turbulent and 17% stormy.

Four structural forces that will shape the materialisation and management of global risks over the next decade are also the longer-term shifts in the arrangement of and relationship between four systemic elements of the global landscape:
- Trajectories relating to global warming and related consequences to Earth Systems (Climate Change) – Environmental risks could hit the point of no return.
- Changes in the size, growth and structure of populations around the world (Demographic bifurcation) – Economic strain on low and middle income – people and countries – are set to grow.
- Developmental pathways for frontier technologies (Technological acceleration) – If technological risks go unchecked, 'truth' will come under pressure.
- Material evolution in the concentration and sources of geopolitical power (Geostrategic shifts) – geopolitical tensions combined with technology will drive new security risks.

FIGURE A — Short and long-term global outlook

"Which of the following best characterizes your outlook for the world over the following time periods?"

Short term (2 years): 3% | 27% | 54% | 15% | 1%

Long term (10 years): 17% | 46% | 29% | 8% | 1%

Stormy: Global catastrophic risks looming
Turbulent: Upheavals and elevated risk of global catastrophes
Unsettled: Some instability, moderate risk of global catastrophes
Stable: Isolated disruptions, low risk of global catastrophes
Calm: Negligible risk of global catastrophes

Source
World Economic Forum Global Risks
Perception Survey 2023-2024.

Note
The percentages in the graph may not add up to 100% because figures have been rounded up/down.

Source: Global Risk Report 2024

The report goes into detail of the various adverse effects of AI. Among other things, the notables are:

- Human development and prosperity may stall as barriers to economic mobility arise from climate, technological and geopolitical constraints.
- Deeply bifurcated labour markets could widen inequality between – and create additional risks within – developed and developing economies, as demographic structures and job demand and supply diverge.
- Living standards could recede for populations suffering entrenched unemployment and economic distress, radically reshaping political dynamics.

FIGURE C — Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term

"Please estimate the likely impact (severity) of the following risks over a 2-year and 10-year period."

Risk categories:
Economic
Environmental
Geopolitical
Societal
Technological

	2 years	10 years
1st	Misinformation and disinformation	Extreme weather events
2nd	Extreme weather events	Critical change to Earth systems
3rd	Societal polarization	Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse
4th	Cyber insecurity	Natural resource shortages
5th	Interstate armed conflict	Misinformation and disinformation
6th	Lack of economic opportunity	Adverse outcomes of AI technologies
7th	Inflation	Involuntary migration
8th	Involuntary migration	Cyber insecurity
9th	Economic downturn	Societal polarization
10th	Pollution	Pollution

Source
World Economic Forum Global Risks
Perception Survey 2023-2024.

Source: Global Risk Report 2024

What does the deeply bifurcated labour market mean? And how could it widen inequality? And how will the job demand and supply diverge?

In this context, let us look at the few pointers from the OECD Employment Outlook 2023: AI and the Labour Market:

AI has made important progress replicating cognitive and manual skills: As a result of AI development and adoption, some skills can be increasingly replicated by technologies. This is the case for manual and fine psychomotor abilities, as well as cognitive skills such as expression and comprehension, planning, and advising. ChatGPT, an AI model that made headlines recently for its performance in language tasks, is a striking example of how AI development and adoption are accelerating, which suggests that the impact of AI, including on skill needs, might be larger in the near future.

AI increases the demand for both skills required to develop AI systems and skills to use AI applications: While we foresee the importance of training to use and interact with AI applications, we also see, at the same time, skills needed to develop and maintain AI systems, and to adopt, use and interact with AI applications, will become more important. In some cases, specialised AI skills will be required, but the shift in skill needs is much broader, and there will be growing demand for basic digital and data science skills, as well as for complementary cognitive and transversal skills. As AI becomes widespread, it will be increasingly important for workers in various occupations to possess a broad range of skills to effectively develop and interact with AI systems.

AI development and adoption call for specialised education pathways as well as specific AI literacy courses: Training for specialised AI skills requires a combination of formal higher education and on-the-job learning. Basic AI knowledge or "AI literacy" should be taught at different levels of formal education, including in schools.

Specific groups of workers deserve special attention: Training for AI should be provided not only to vulnerable groups (low-skilled and older workers in particular) to help them adapt to the changes AI will bring to the workplace, but also to higher-skilled workers and managers, to foster AI development and adoption.

Firms implementing AI say they provide training to their employees, but more training may be necessary: Following adoption, companies tend to provide training for AI. Yet, the lack of appropriate skills remains a major barrier to AI adoption. Firms may under-invest in training for AI for several reasons including the existence of an important informational gap around AI and the fact that the benefits of training for AI may be wider than the firm.

Existing public policies supporting training for AI are not sufficient: Public policies have an important role to play to promote greater training provision by employers, to ensure an integrated approach to skills development for AI at all stages of the lifecycle, from initial education to lifelong learning, and to encourage diversity in the AI workforce. Although most policies and strategies for AI recognise the importance of skills, few propose sufficient measures to develop them.

AI has the potential to improve adult learning systems, but risks exist: Greater use of AI could be made to improve the design, targeting and delivery of training. Several examples of its use already exist, but they are currently limited. Yet, using AI in training also poses non-negligible risks. These risks need to be considered carefully and properly addressed before the use of AI in training becomes more widespread.

CEMCA is keen to look into the adverse and positive impact of AI on the small-, mini-, micro-enterprises and the informal sector and determine a course of action the stakeholders might consider undertaking.

This is the reason we are here!

2. Who is here?

A diverse set of experts who are accomplished in their own right and strength.

- We have AI experts who have applied AI for practical problems
- We have educators who have imparted technological skills among learners
- We have educators who have imparted vocational skills among the present and future workers
- We have development professionals who have seen change at the grassroots level
- We have specialists who have seen the world from the workers' lenses

3. What do we wish to do?

- Has AI affected workers in mini-enterprises and the informal sector? If not, will it affect in the near future?
- Which are the sectors/sub-sectors that are likely to be most affected by the advent of AI and to what extent?
- If we need to prepare the workforce for the future, especially at the mini- and micro-enterprises and in the informal sector, how do we go about doing it?
- What will we communicate when we say AI and HI will co-exist? What would that mean for the target group that we have in mind?
- How do we communicate the changes that are taking place and how do we prepare them?
- What is our reskilling strategy and what is our outreach plan?

4. Our sustained commitment to the cause:

Can we form a group of the concerned to investigate these aspects?

Thank you for your attention!