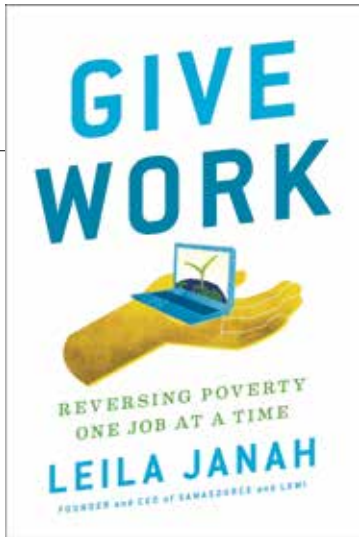


What Works to Lift the Poor

THE WORLD ECONOMY faces multiple challenges today. Growth prospects in advanced economies have dimmed. Many emerging market and developing economies feel the pinch from lower prices of oil and other commodity exports, resurgent debt levels, and gaping infrastructure needs. And threats from income polarization, climate change, and the mechanization of jobs continue to test the ability of policymakers to fulfill the dreams of economic security for their people. That is especially true for the poor, many of whom were left behind even when times were generally good.

Leila Janah
**Give Work: Reversing
 Poverty One Job at a Time**
 Penguin Random House,
 New York, 2017, 272 pp., \$27



While ending poverty has been a global imperative for several decades, achieving this goal has proved incredibly hard. Strong economic growth in developing economies like China and India helped pull several millions out of poverty, but history has shown that growth alone cannot always do it. Indeed, some 700 million people around the globe still subsist on less than living wages.

Give Work by Leila Janah, founder and CEO of the nonprofit Samasource, which connects impoverished people to digital work, provides a fresh take on tackling poverty from a social

entrepreneur's standpoint. The author argues that reversing poverty will require creating productive jobs for the poor that help break the cycle of despair and impoverishment once and for all. Giving jobs directly to the poor can have more traction than giving governments aid that can be misallocated or wasted, the author says.

Although Janah's views are not necessarily new, the book is compelling through the evidence provided. The narrative is a personal account of the challenges the author needed to surmount before founding Samasource to target and train the poor for work outsourced by big companies. Getting there was not easy and demanded resilience, learning and persistence, and customizing a business model to work in different countries under different circumstances. Today Samasource has transformed the lives of about 35,000 of the world's poorest people in countries like Haiti, India, and Kenya, as well as in rural areas of the United States.

The book emphasizes the positive potential of digital connectivity for jobs today—for example, training and providing people with digital work that can verify the data underlying search engines. At the same time, it recognizes that such solutions may not work that well down the road, given rapidly changing technology, and therefore need to continually evolve. But there is a clear case for making a difference and transforming lives as more such social enterprises join the effort to eradicate poverty one person and one job at a time.

But Janah is too quick to reject alternative approaches to addressing poverty elimination. She could have shown more empathy in recognizing that different entities—for-profit or nonprofit organizations like hers, public policymakers, international organizations—have different roles to play to support generation of economic growth and employment to reach the poor. Some focus on strengthening the economic conditions to make them more supportive of poverty elimination, while others directly target job creation, taking the enabling environment as a given.

Given the enormity of the poverty challenge, there must be a variety of approaches to chip away at it. More recognition of this range of tactics—and greater emphasis on the need for more traction in the work of all organizations—would have helped Janah avoid a somewhat defensive tone at some points. **FD**

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