



Watch out China! Another nation on the rise

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India could be the world's next high-growth powerhouse as China's economy slows, but only after fixing serious social injustices holding it back, according to a new documentary.

India has already become a global economic engine. But the nation won't reach its potential until it bridges the notorious gaps that separate the rich, the poor and the ever-growing middle class, says a public television documentary "India Awakes."

The documentary, hosted by Swedish global economist Johan Norberg, makes the case India is moving in the right direction, but still has a ways to go. The 60-minute film, produced by Bob Chitester and Tom Skinner, aims to showcase the potential and ambition in the lower and middle classes that could establish the country as a world economic leader.

"A traditional way to look at India is through the big businesses, but that is in a way the old story of India," Norberg said in a recent interview. "Now I think the important thing to look at is how do ordinary people who come from poor backgrounds succeed in India?"

The documentary began airing on public television stations earlier this month and will continue running through September. (More information on where and how to watch the documentary is available [here](#)).

Unlocking Potential

From an outsider's perspective, the once bedraggled India is teeming with opportunities. Big cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Pune serve as its technology centers, while Mumbai is the financial hub. Fueled partly by dozens of internationally renowned companies, the country's economy is expected to expand by 7.5% this year, among the fastest-growing in the world, according to the International Monetary Fund. And it has exported to the U.S. high-tech luminaries such as Microsoft (MSFT) CEO Satya Nadella and Google (GOOGL) chief Sundar Pichai.

But here's the paradox: India is also home to a third of the world's poor. World Bank forecasts indicate India is poised to lift millions out of poverty in coming years. That will happen, Norberg contends, only if the country creates more opportunities for the lower and middle classes, including legal rights for street vendors, land rights for villagers, and the ability to break free from India's rigid caste system.

"India Awakes" highlights the struggle to achieve these goals through individual stories such as Mannem Madhusudana Rao, who was born into one of the lowest rungs of India's caste system, a situation that traditionally would bind him to a life of poverty. However, Rao was able to improve his financial situation after he created a major construction firm, dramatically improving his and his family's quality of life.

Also featured is Banwari Lal Sharma, the president of a new street vendors association, who has helped merchants in his area stand up for their legal rights after being forced to pay bribes to corrupt officials for years..

"There is an old saying that India grows at night, because that is when the government is asleep," Norberg said

Harnessing Technology

Rama Bhai, a leader and farmer in the Sagai village, comes from a group once viewed as trespassers on the land where they have lived and farmed for generations. Due to rigid land laws, Rama Bhai and his fellow villagers technically didn't own rights to the land, discouraging them from harvesting it to its potential since it could be taken from them at any time.

Then they discovered GPS and satellite imaging technology available online, which helped them obtain deeds to their land by proving they had farmed certain areas.

Technology, in fact, has become a big catalyst for the recent advances of India's lower-income groups. Uber, the mobile app that connects passengers with drivers, has spawned hundreds of thousands of fledgling entrepreneurs and is operating in 18 cities, making India the service's biggest market outside the U.S.

"Twenty-five years ago, people would have thought it was impossible for India to reach where it is today," Norberg said. "We've already seen dramatic changes, and people are waking up and seeing what is possible in the country and starting to demand their own rights.

"There is tremendous talent in the slums and villages."