

Thematic Track: Just Transition: A way forward for the energy crossroads at the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021

The track was organized by TERI as part of the [World Sustainable Development Summit 2021](#) on 11th Feb 2021 from 6:30PM to 8:30PM. **As part of the opening remarks Dr Ajay Mathur, Director General**, TERI, highlighted that while achieving the energy transition it is important to think about the millions of people who are going to be unemployed in mining and fossil fuel-based sectors.

Findings of the study, '**Mapping the impact of coal mines and their closure: A case of Betul**', **conducted by Ms. Ruchi Gupta, Research Associate, TERI**, was presented including the critical issues that the Betul district is facing due to the decline of the coal industry. Besides understanding the impact of the industry on the economy of the district and its local municipality; on urbanization and infrastructural development; employment levels and its pattern, the study brought to the fore issues of distressed migration, increasing informalization, low rural incomes, low educational opportunities and reduced economic opportunities in the district. The study recommends tailor-made approach for the district with a focus on improving agriculture, infrastructure and human capital.

Explaining the observations from the study conducted by Ms Ruchi in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh where 3 out of 10 mines are closed, **Mr Amit Kumar, Senior Director at TERI**, highlighted the need for a transition strategy. The lessons learned from the study showed that the social dimension will be at the core of just transition. There is a huge workforce working in the informal sector without any social security. Therefore, it is important to look at how communities will get affected and based on that a strategy should be developed. Skilling the workforce for upcoming opportunities is important. The solutions for Just Transition should be planned at the local level rather than at the national level. A dedicated "Just Transition" fund is required for implementing the plans that should be developed involving the local community.

Prof. Kuntala Lahiri Dutta from the Australian National University highlighted the diversity of the coal economy in different geographical areas in India with each state having its unique challenge of livelihood and political economy. She also highlighted the challenges faced by the informal sector and formal sector employees when mining is closed. The transition away from coal economy needs to consider the different aspect of justice which is inherently linked to morality and human consciousness. She emphasized the need for de-growth as the current growth paradigm perpetuates environmental injustice. As a solution, she emphasized that the world needs to transformatively step away from GDP as an important growth indicator and instead focus on wellbeing, social justice, and ecological sustainability.

Dr. Tejaswi S. Naik, former District Magistrate of Betul informed that the law and order situation is declining in parts of the Betul district where coal mining has stopped due to lack of employment opportunities. Also, the issue of permanent/ seasonal migration of local people for livelihood is a major challenge for the district. The District Mineral Fund can be very useful for the development of the district as it can support good road connectivity, urban water supply and education infrastructure. Other funding options are required to sustain the district economy once the coal mining industry phases out.

Dr. Anil Kumar Jain, Secretary, Ministry of Coal, Government of India as part of the special remarks highlighted that there is a wilderness and desperation among people where the mines are closing. There are discussions around the rehabilitation of dug-out areas but the rehabilitation of those people who will lose their jobs is not discussed much. Unlike in the west, coal in India continues to be the mainstay in certain geographical areas and it is very difficult to imagine what would happen if mining was to stop. Former coal bearing areas face a double whammy of loss of jobs and degraded environment. The way of using the scarce land in mining areas for improvement of the livelihood of the local people and the economy holds the key. But the improvement of local livelihood and economy cannot be the responsibility of coal companies alone. There is a dire need of national and international funding and a sustainable business model.

Talking about the solutions for supporting **Just Transition** **Mr S.M. Vijayanand, former Chief Secretary, Kerala**, emphasised on “eco regeneration” of the place, as a key solution. The healing of the local environment is equally important as the transition of livelihood and skilling of farmers and agriculture labourers which require very minimal cost and can yield a tremendous result for a sustainable transition. He highlighted that according to Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) INR 4000 per acre can be earned by Eco-regeneration and improving common resources. He further shared the example of carbon neutral green panchayat developed in Wayanad district of Kerala, which sets an example for the whole country.

Mr Jules Kortenhorst, Chief Executive Officer, Rocky Mountain Institute, shared an example from the Netherlands wherein the late 1970's poor quality coal mining was shut down and massive investment in economic development was mobilized leading to the creation of a hub for advanced technology and trade. He emphasised the advantage that India has in transitioning to clean energy. As a solution, strategic development of other industries around the coal mining areas will provide alternative livelihood to the local people. He highlighted the immense opportunities in the development of industries about e-mobility, batteries and allied sectors in India. Extending these jobs to the people who will lose employment in coal, will be perfect justice.

Dr Ashok Sreenivas, Senior Fellow, Prayas Energy Group, pointed out that issues of inequity and injustice occur not only when we phase out the old, but may occur when we phase in the new. He emphasized the importance and need of community partnership in planning the future of the locality to enable social justice. He reiterated the suggestions made by earlier speakers on strengthening sub-national institutions, improving the ecosystem for a sustainable transition of livelihood and custom solution for a country as diverse and vast as India.

Dr Anna Sobczak, Policy Coordinator for Transitions in Coal regions at the European Commission, highlighted that the European Green Deal is an all-encompassing, future-oriented growth strategy to transform our economy without harming the environment. Just transition is at the heart of the EU Green Deal. The just transition chapter includes activities that will support coal regions in transition based on an open dialogue with member states other stakeholders. Dedicated support to coal regions for developing transition plans is provided. A special dedicated fund “Just transition/clean transition fund” is planned to support coal regions with funding for sustainable transition through grants for economic diversification, skilling, and active inclusion of workers. Debt financing at lower rates is also provided for the private and public sector projects related to the green economy. The Next-Generation EU Fund is providing support for speeding up the energy transition. She emphasised the need for collaboration between all the stakeholders right from national-level members to local-level members, academicians, researchers, labour organizations.

Ms Moutushi Sengupta, Director, India office of MacArthur foundation said that no one should be left behind during this transition to clean energy and the community needs to be the co-creator for this planning.

Speaking about the planning and investing **Mr Michael Ward, Senior Sustainability Consultant with the World Bank** mentioned the need for mapping of geographical areas with this issue, coordination between state and national level bodies, national funding mechanism, capacity building for just transition and social inclusion. There is a need for monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to periodically access the progress and way forward.

The video recording of the session is available at: [Thematic Track: Just Transition: A Way Forward from the Energy Crossroads - YouTube](#)