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Green Recovery in India to Strengthen Overall Social Resilience

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Crises and emergencies – natural or man-made – have always revealed underlying inequalities existing in society. The Coronavirus has not been very different in this regard. According to Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy in India, the unemployment rate in 2020 which stood at 8.74% in March rose to 23.48% in May. This rate, which was recorded highest in urban areas, led to a huge class-specific reverse migration at the announcement of a nationwide lockdown. This chain of events very

aptly showcased how an environmental occurrence causes widespread economic distress – putting the already vulnerable at even more risk – eventually leading to social upheavals.

Strengthening Social Systems by Formalising Labour

One of the green recovery features prevalent across global think tanks is the extension of social services. Formalisation of labour is the first step towards extending these basic services and realising decent work as aimed under the SDGs. According to the 2018-19 Economic Survey, 93% of India's workforce is employed in the unorganised sector and is found highest in agriculture, construction and trade, repair and food services which are also the sectors migrant labourers get most employed in. COVID-19 has revealed the confinement of laws like Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (UWSSA) on paper and the breaches in implementation of complementary services like public health infrastructure and quality education. Plugging financial gaps, compliance measures and monitoring mechanisms are indispensable in extending social safety net to the most vulnerable communities.

Skill Development to Ensure Economic Flexibility

In a world that is fast-progressing and volatile to the environment it has created; skill development is seen foundational to building resilience and indispensable to recovery. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship tries to address these concerns through an array of schemes introduced by the National Skill Development Council. Earlier, industry engagement to ensure the quality and relevance of skills, appropriate certifications, inclusion of women and technical collaborations with international bodies were vital aspects of these schemes. However, post-Coronavirus, it is recommended that the skills and jobs created are aligned alongside low-carbon and energy-efficient pathways. The idea is to transform economic activities so as to lessen their burden on environment and ensure people's flexibility to adapt to the processes entailed in doing so.

Public Works That Are Also Green

What will also be crucial for India is its implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) that serves the dual purpose of employment generation and building climate-adaptive infrastructure in the country. Together, such work could contribute to long-term economic growth by boosting rural demand and build sustainable infrastructure for development through ecological safeguarding. This is a huge opportunity to streamline NREGA implementation from converging different departmental works to revising the daily wage rate in order to make it effective in this time of crisis. Further, with a focus on sustainable agriculture and harvesting, non-timber forest produce, development of value-added products and self-employment, National Rural Livelihoods Mission's (NRLM) vision can be a significant push for agro-based and eco-friendly avenues of employment and entrepreneurship. These channels can deepen the reach of sustainability in various economic sectors and across social groupings, thereby creating green jobs.

Building Women's Resilience

In confining people to their homes, the lockdown took away social mobility and financial independence from a number of women. Other than falling incomes and mental health concerns, domestic violence saw a 10-year high. Women have been active contributors to the Indian economy despite which much of their contribution goes unaccounted for and they remain deprived of most financial services. Further, holding the positions of primary care givers as well as household managers while also being discriminated against in matters of access to livelihoods and basic services, makes them a highly vulnerable community. In 2019, NITI Aayog – the Indian government's think tank – called for an increase in women's participation in the workforce to 48% in the next 10 years. With women's participation at 27%, it noted that India cannot grow at high rates without the support of almost half its population. Agriculture employs most of rural women whereas service industry employs the most women in urban spaces. It is essential that processes manifesting discrimination against women make way for community resilience through economic and cultural changes.

Resilience for Future Shocks Like Climate Change

Green recovery through its emphasis on inclusive growth, sustainable food supply systems and social protection mechanisms has upheld social resilience as key to build a world capable of dealing with climate change. The fact that these social aspects are also found in SDGs as standalone objectives or at the interconnections between different goals depicts their strategic importance in the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. Other than UNFCCC which brings mitigation efforts together, addressing climate change also requires social and economic well-being of the poorest of the poor communities in order to reduce their direct dependence on environment. Considering the complex relationship of poverty with environment, this requires extending basic social services as well as inclusion of these communities in nations' mainstream development. The Indian NDC has taken a note of this by emphasising on universal energy access, mangroves and coastal protection, disaster management, livelihood security, sanitation and health missions.

German-Indian Cooperation

In regard to social development, BMZ is already supporting Indian government in extending social security coverage to the vulnerable communities and informal labour through government's insurance programs. This is accompanied with projects that focus on women entrepreneurs and micro and small enterprises (MSMEs). Aimed at sustainable development, BMZ and the Indian government need to now sensitise mutual efforts to the growing incidence of pandemics. Digital learning, wider provisions of health insurance, secure channels of food systems, developing clean energy network and inclusive approach in state programs are pertinent areas of concern in rural India. These matters require the collaborative energies of India and Germany to overcome technological and commercial gaps as well as manage cultural sensitivities of different communities. Furthermore, green recovery's focus on green jobs and clean energy can be met with efforts of linking rural livelihoods in India with

renewables. Together, agriculture and renewables encourage the expansion of sustainable food systems, contribute to the growth of a healthy population and help decarbonise the sector. In addition to agriculture, augmenting local economic activities with the assistance of clean energy alternatives can promote industry and innovation as well as reduce overall poverty, thereby having a cumulative effect on SDGs, India's NDC and its COVID recovery. GIZ is already running projects like the Indo-German Energy Programme – Access to Energy in Rural Areas and Indo-German Environment Programme in Rural Areas commissioned by BMZ. It would help to extend such programs focusing on climate change from four years to a longer duration to ensure ecological and behavioural changes. Informing welfare systems through collective endeavours is a significant step towards sustainable development. In the absence of a universal definition of green and resilient recovery, building knowledge partners to explore and understand the principles of equality, wealth distribution and public responsibility is an essential dive into the social dimension of sustainability.

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