

REPORT ON
**CONFERENCE OF
PANCHAYATS (COP)
CLIMATE CHANGE &
JUST TRANSITIONS
IN JHARKHAND**

DATE: 14TH-15TH MARCH 2022

VENUE: PRESS CLUB, RANCHI



◆Group photo with the participants on Day 1 of the Conference of Panchayats

SUMMARY

India signed Paris Agreement at COP 21 and committed to reduce emission intensity of gross domestic product (GDP) by 33 percent to 35 percent by 2030. It has also pledged to increase the share of non-fossil fuels-based electricity generation, increase its forest cover along with several other measures. While such transition is much needed towards sustainable forms of energy, there is a growing concern related to labour displacement in the existing coal value chain.

Jharkhand has a huge role to play in helping India meet its commitments because of its large-scale dependence on coal mining. Besides that, there are a large number of coal-based power plants which are a major source of carbon emission. Increasing consumption of coal to generate power is facing major challenges with respect to cost competitiveness and the commitment made by the country to be a Net Zero Carbon neutral country by 2070.

Policy & Development Advisory Group (PDAG) in partnership with ASAR, conducted a Conference of Panchayats (COP) on Climate change and Just Transitions. The two-day conference (14th and 15th March 2022) was organised, allocating full day sessions for local elected representatives (Mukhiya and Pramukh), NGOs/CSOs from North Chotanagpur (Bokaro, Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh) and South Chotanagpur (Ranchi, Khunti, Gumla, Simdega) divisions. The sessions were moderated by Sumit Kumar, Senior Consultant at PDAG and Munna Jha, Network and Media Strategist at ASAR. The two-day conference was attended by the key stakeholders from the districts of the North and South Chotanagpur divisions.

The conference aimed to foster a discussion around climate change mitigation strategies at the grassroots level and key issues and challenges to ensure Just Transitions in the regions impacted by coal mining in Jharkhand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

SESSION 1:

- ◆ To understand the impact of climate change on livelihood, water resources and air quality in the mining affected areas.
- ◆ To understand the adaptation and mitigation strategies adapted by community members to cope with the impact of climate change.
- ◆ To understand the application and use of renewable sources of energy for local use and current government schemes/programs for promoting renewable sources of energy.
- ◆ To understand the grassroots innovations promoted by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and government institutions like Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) for promoting clean energy systems.

SESSION 2:

- ◆ To understand the potential impact on lives and livelihoods of the local communities due the planned transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy.
- ◆ To understand the necessary skills required to mitigate the potential challenges because of the transitions.
- ◆ To understand the usage of funds like District Mineral Foundation Trust (DMFT) to mitigate the potential impact caused by the transition.

The sections below will further elucidate on the points discussed in the conference with respect to each of the objectives followed by a section on the way forward.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

14th March 2022

SESSION 1:

The participants from Khalari block (Ranchi) shared coal mining coupled with climate change has impacted the local flora, fauna and has also caused air and water pollution. Transportation, extraction, illegitimate utilisation of the water resource and untreated waste disposal has polluted rivers, river Damodar being a case in point. The area is also facing a serious crunch of depleting water table levels be-

cause of water extraction by the coal mining companies. The water scarcity has led the farmers in the area to move from multi-crop cultivation to single-crop production.

The dust produced by transportation of coal cover the nearby villages with a layer of white powder. Dust generated in the process, results in occupational hazards for miners such as pulmonary diseases, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and silicosis. The dust attracts insects and restricts the farm produce, like vegetables, to grow. Adding to that, soil organisms are also not able to survive this pollution, leading to degradation of the soil quality. The leaves of Futkal, which used to shed only once before, shed twice now. As mentioned by the participants, the pollution caused by mining has also affected the quality and taste of the produce.

The mukhiyas also stressed upon the danger of unfilled pit from open cast mining. These open sites are often taken by villagers to extract coal illegally resulting in fatal accidents. Participants expressed their concern asking for rehabilitation of villagers and filling of open cast mining pits.

The discussion then moved on to understand the grassroots innovations promoted by NGO/CSOs and government institutions, like JSLPS, for promoting clean energy systems. Stressing on the topic they said there is no presence of any NGO promoting innovation for a clean energy system. For institutions like JSLPS, the



◆Panchayat representative from Khelari block expressing her views on the issues related to climate change



◆Members from PDAG and Asar team moderating the session

organisation is limited to providing training on livestock farming and forming groups to avail loans for any livelihood purposes. Such groups, under JSLPS, are involved in small businesses like bee-keeping, mushroom farming, basket making, and other similar small business enterprises.

Talking about the mitigation strategies, the participants mentioned that patterns for irrigation activities had changed from thrice a month to only once a month, due to weather unpredictability and channelisation of depleting water resources for mining purposes. It was also mentioned by the participants that only a few villages use solar energy for agricultural purposes which are funded under Central Coalfields Limited's CSR project. However, the use of solar powered equipment is limited to streetlights, water pumps, et cetera.

Several participants raised the issue of migration, wherein the men migrate to other places in search of employment opportunities to sustain their families. The extent of migration to find work is such that villages are found to inhabit mostly women, children and the elderly. On being asked about the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM) Scheme, participants lacked awareness of the centrally funded scheme aimed at ensuring energy security for farmers in India.

SESSION 2:

The participants discussed about the usage of DMFT funds to mitigate the potential impact because of the proposed transition from coal to renewable sources of energy. The Mukhya said that around 50 percent of the population in the coal mining are-

as of Chotanagpur regions are dependent on coal extraction business both legally and illegally for their livelihood. The participants seemed well-informed about the fact that a total of 33 percent of the revenue generated through coal mining goes into DMFT funds which could be utilised for providing new skill sets and that could ensure just transition in the mining affected areas. Expressing their concerns regarding the same, they said funds collected from mining districts are utilised mostly for infrastructural development, such as flyovers, bridges, renovation of government buildings and parks outside the region where the fund needs to be spent because of which villages directly affected by mining do not receive the benefits from the DMFT fund. They insisted that DMFT fund would only serve its true purpose if it were utilised to strengthen livelihood options for women, members of the Adivasi communities and other vulnerable groups.

15th March 2022

SESSION 1:

Representatives from the civil society organisations on day two of the workshop talked about the issues faced by the communities in the North Chotanagpur division. They mentioned that the Khanjo river has dried up due to illegal and irrational sand mining. As mentioned by the participants, due to change in rainfall patterns, agri-



◆Representatives from Bokaro mining region expressing their views on climate change adaptation



◆Participants from local NGOs discussing climate change related issues affecting the North Chotanagpur division

cultural produce and soil productivity has been severely affected. Vegetable crops like potato, et cetera, cannot be sown; only paddy crops are able to grow in these areas. Badkagaon, once known as Dhaan ka Katora (rice bowl), now finds it difficult to justify its name. Like South Chotanagpur Division, changes in agricultural patterns from multiple to single crop cultivation, products such as mahua, phutkal, marua and gundli were flagged as a concern by the locals as these forest products are an important source of income as well as nutrition.

The participants informed that there are a few CSOs providing solar powered water pumps and inverter batteries for irrigation at subsidised rates in the Chotanagpur region as part of their program. Expressing their concern that such products are not affordable for small-scale farmers, the participants deemed it un-viable unless they are available at subsidised rates

SESSION 2:

Participants from North Chotanagpur mentioned that the use of solar energy in their region is limited to solar streetlights, solar lamps and pumping underground water to Jal Minars (overhead water tanks). They further mentioned about the lack of awareness among community members about the schemes and programmes rolled out by Jharkhand Renewable Energy Development Agency (JREDA) which is the key reason for lower uptake of benefits from the solar programs launched by the government.

They highlighted that coal mining companies should train local people on repairing solar equipment as an imperative to promote usage of solar power and generation of green jobs in the region. They also recommended use of over burden (OB) for generation of solar power, trench bunding to stop the flow of rainwater to conserve water resources.

The participants highlighted that the awareness among local communities regarding the transition from fossil fuels usage, like coal, to renewable energy sources is critical to ensure Just Transitions. A large population is dependent on coal related activities and thus it is important to enhance the skill of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers for sustainable livelihood. According to a study conducted by local leaders in the Bokaro district, they have identified around 39 categories of occu-

pation in the coal mining region which will be directly or indirectly impacted by the transition.

They also suggested formation of committees in which youth and senior citizens can participate for conservation of jal, jangal aur zameen (water, forest and land) by strengthening local institutions like the Gram Sabha and implementation of Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Panchayati Raj Extension for Schedule Areas (PESA) would be key to ensuring Just Transitions in the mining-affected regions. They further added the crucial role MGNREGA could play in creating assets and could also generate local jobs in their region. Pisciculture, sustainable agriculture, converting barren lands into improved fertile lands can help generate jobs for the adversely affected communities. Promoting tourism can also be a way of increasing livelihood opportunities and asset generation.

The DMFT fund received for the development of their villages are being utilised for infrastructural development, such as flyovers, bridges, renovation of government buildings and parks in other places of the district which are not directly being affected by mining activities. Despite the village and panchayat development plans submitted by the Mukhiyas to be funded by DMFT fund, there request has not been acknowledged by the district administration.

WAY FORWARD

- ◆ Undertaking a mapping exercise of the types of occupation with which the community members in the coal mining areas are associated and will get affected because of the transition.
- ◆ Socio-economic assessment of the people living in the coal mining regions in the state who will be impacted by transition.
- ◆ Developing a consortium of community members, local elected representatives, civil society organisations, thinktanks, government officials and thought leaders for developing a state level framework to ensure Just Transitions.

