

Identifying Emerging Green and Greening Jobs in Coal and Thermal Power Sectors in the Wake of Just Transition in the Eastern Part of India

Background

In light of India's gradual but determined transition towards clean and sustainably sourced energy, it is clear that the future of its energy economy lies in renewables, particularly solar and wind energy. However, unless this transition is well planned and well thought out, in terms of social and distributive justice, it can be potentially disastrous and reduced to just another climate change-induced disaster.

Currently, India's power sector is one of the most diversified ones in the world, with a mix of conventional resources like coal, lignite, natural gas, oil, hydro, and viable non-conventional resources like solar, nuclear, wind and biomass. However, thermal power generation by coal accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the total generation capacity. Hence to bring down the greenhouse emissions (GHG) from the coal sector, India has a dual challenge ahead of it — gradually “phasing down” coal mining in the country and being least discomfiting to the population associated with the thermal sector and coal mining communities in the process.

The eastern coalfields of India are spread over the states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha. It is one of the oldest coal belts in the country, which has spearheaded the economic development of their respective states. However, in recent decades, given the rising consciousness regarding GHG emissions and climate change -- the central as well as state governments have been increasingly looking towards renewables-particularly bio-energy, solar, and wind energy in a bid to decrease their reliance on thermal energy.

While such a move would put an end to the immense pollution and health hazards posed by coal mining and thermal power plants it would also spell doom for the socio-economic structure surrounding these mines. Coal mine contractions will inevitably have multifold effects not just restricted to miners and their communities but also the industrial clusters that are supported by the coal value chain.

CUTS Calcutta Resource Center (CUTS CRC) is leading the implementation of the along with CUTS Centre for Competition, Investment & Economic Regulation (CUTS CCIER). More details are available at (<https://www.cuts-crc.org/>) and <http://www.cuts-ccier.org>).

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Objective

The objective is to analyse and identify what are the gap areas in terms of skill training and capacity building of the community (both local and the workforce) to enable them to be active agents of the much-coveted transition to a cleaner and greener future.

Goals

This project goal is to create a skill matrix that will guide the development of industry-linked skill programmes to support the transition away from coal mining in the eastern coal belt region. The need for such programmes arises from the revenue and employment losses caused by the phasing out of coal mining.

Deliverables

The project endeavours to pinpoint both emerging and established green job sectors capable of absorbing displaced workers from the coal industry in the Eastern region of India, specifically in the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. Additionally, the project seeks to identify gender-inclusive vocational training opportunities aimed at enhancing the skill set and employability of these individuals.

Audience

The project's target audience encompasses a broad spectrum of individuals and stakeholders intricately connected to the coal chain. This includes miners, transporters, third-party vendors, coal companies, and any other individuals whose livelihoods would be impacted by the potential closure of coal mines.

Activity

The CUTS team conducted field surveys in various locations, including the Talcher Coal fields in Odisha, the coalfields within the Damodar River basin in Jharkhand, and the North Barjora coal mines in West Bengal. Their objective was to discern the existing impacts of the imminent transition in these areas and to examine the repurposing of land surrounding abandoned or overburdened coal mines.

Furthermore, the team inquired about the strategies employed for industry diversification and employment in these states. To provide a comprehensive understanding, they formulated a preliminary skill matrix for each region.

Location

The project primarily focuses on the eastern coal belt of India, specifically concentrating on the states of Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal, which account for 26, 24, and 11 per cent of the country's total coal reserves, respectively.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of the project will be a report that will outline a possible skill matrix identifying potential sectors/ areas in the coal value chain for skill interventions to ensure economic resilience in the affected communities. This will not only address economic vulnerabilities but also ascertain the involvement of stakeholders in the clean energy transition in terms of skill sets required for emerging Green Jobs as well as greening the existing supply chain.

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