



Thematic Track

Just Transition: A way forward from the energy crossroads

Date: 11 February 2021 | **Time:** 6:30 to 8:15 PM (IST)

Background:

With the rapidly declining cost of renewable energy, the electricity system in India is set to witness transition away from coal. Such a transition will undoubtedly benefit environment and public health, nonetheless it will have implications on those regions and stakeholders which have historically depended on coal. This necessitates that the journey to clean energy has outcomes which are 'just' for communities created by coal as well as for the region.

The potential of Just Transition is not limited to Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 13 i.e., on climate action, decent work and economic growth. By implications, it also addresses goals pertaining to poverty, gender equality, affordable and clean energy, reducing inequalities, sustainable communities, justice and partnerships.

Coal industry has been attributed to fueling the economy of the State with the taxes it pays. The public sector in coal in particular, gave some of the best formal jobs creating in turn a whole set of indirect and induced livelihoods, it nurtured towns where it was present with municipal services and provisioning infrastructure both physical and social.

However, coal is not eternal and will not continue to bring prosperity in the manner it once did. Besides, coal regions have experienced uneven development. Pockets of affluence emerged leaving its neighborhood poor. The structural weakness of some of the coal rich districts is seen from their low socio-economic indices. Some amongst these districts, also figure in the *transformation of aspirational districts programme* of the NITI Aayog, Government of India.

It is time, lessons on consequences of coal's embeddedness are drawn. Plans for mitigating the impact of its phasing out be integrated into the larger development program. Economic diversification of these regions needs to be brought about by investing in low carbon development pathways. The green economy already offers some of the low hanging fruits, particularly those brought about by renewables. It holds immense potential in generating employment opportunities, improving the quality of existing jobs and addresses the overall poverty in the region. Opportunities and skill building go hand in hand. For realizing net positive employment gains, skilling and re skilling across the green value chain need to take place simultaneously.

The biodiversity loss and ecosystem left behind by coal in these regions, cannot be overlooked. A significant number of people in coal regions, particularly in the vicinity of mines, depend on natural resources – agriculture, forestry, fishing amongst others for their livelihood. Remediation and reclamation of mining landscapes to be used gainfully by the communities, informs a transition that will leave no one behind

Moreover, infrastructure created by coal in otherwise infrastructurally deficit regions, need to be re-purposed and connected to the rest of the region.

There are geographical disparities in that the coal regions are the eastern and central states, most of the renewable potential has been realized in states in the north, west and south. Tailor made approach for each region needs to be developed keeping in mind their potential strength, but robust set of principles are required to guide just transition in the country.

The COVID crisis has exacerbated the vulnerabilities already plaguing India’s coal regions. The multi-dimensions of just transition calls for the coming together of various stakeholders - the local, state and national governments (various ministries therein), business, trade unions, civil society, media and academia in setting out priorities, mobilizing finance and building institutional capacities.

A thematic event titled ‘Just Transition, a way forward from the energy crossroads’ will bring together key stakeholders and distinguished experts from India and abroad to deliberate on -

- Critical issues in transition
- Turning challenges to opportunities
- Planning and investing in just transition

A case study of Betul, a district in Madhya Pradesh first witnessing upsurge due to coal centric development and subsequently a decline as coal mines began to exhaust, has been undertaken by TERI. It maps not only the impact of coal mining but also that of its closure on the district’s economy and society and captures the emerging political economy around closures. This study will be launched at the event.