

Adapting to Tomorrow Climate Change and India's Workforce

August 29, 2024 | 15:30-16:45 (IST)



Background Note

India faces significant climate change challenges, ranking 8th on the Global Climate Risk Index 2023¹ due to its diverse climates and geography, and large population. With 91 percent of its workforce employed informally, marginalised communities in India - especially women - are disproportionately affected by climate change. The nation's future of work hinges on addressing these challenges effectively. To achieve net zero emissions by 2070,² India must prioritise creation of green jobs to ensure environmental sustainability and enhance the resilience of vulnerable populations.

Globally, including in India, informal farm labour is highly vulnerable to climate change. Workers lack adequate weather protection, facing erratic monsoons and extreme weather that reduce crop yields and incomes. Health risks from heat exposure and food price inflation worsens food insecurity, forcing many to migrate to urban areas for better opportunities, leading to further social and economic challenges.

Another sector affected by climate change in India is the construction sector that employs about 12 percent of the workforce³. Rapid urbanisation leads to an urban heat island effect, with 60 percent of workers experiencing heat-related symptoms in summer, resulting in productivity losses of up to 20 minutes per hour. Between 2001 and 2020, Indian workers lost an average of 259 billion labour hours annually due to humid heat. The ILO projects a 5.8 percent reduction in labour hours by 2030 due to climate factors, highlighting the need to protect workers from heat stress and air pollution⁴.

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https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1884764#:~:text=The%20Climate%20Change%20Performance%20Index_up%20from%20the%20last%20edition.

2

<https://forumias.com/blog/climate-change-and-its-impact-on-labor-productivity/#:~:text=Workers%20endure%20risks%20like%20physical.They%20are%20also%20heat%20susceptible>

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<https://forumias.com/blog/climate-change-and-its-impact-on-labor-productivity/#:~:text=Workers%20endure%20risks%20like%20physical.They%20are%20also%20heat%20susceptible>

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<https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/protect-labourers-from-adverse-impact-of-climate-change-3002811>

An additional group of workers in India, gig workers, currently 1.5 percent of the workforce and expected to reach 4.5 percent by 2030, face significant challenges from climate change, especially extreme heat. Essential to the food, transport, and e-commerce sectors, they often lack social protection and basic amenities like drinking water, shade, and restrooms when they are outdoors on jobs. AI empowered algorithmic management dictates their routes and gigs, leading to precarious income and working hours, forcing them to prioritise work over well-being. Consequently, health risks often go undiagnosed, leaving them vulnerable to heat-related illnesses without adequate support⁵.

Additionally, the MSME sector in India, which has created 120 million jobs⁶, is highly vulnerable to climate change due to its informal nature and lack of safety oversight. Rising temperatures and humidity reduce productivity and damage machinery. MSMEs struggle to recover due to limited financial resources, inadequate policy support, and lack of social protection.

Last but not the least, women across all such sectors are in the most vulnerable positions. They tend to be more exposed to extreme weather, rely on natural resources for income, and are less mobile, facing social and economic barriers to adaptation.

Despite such challenges, measures to address climate change could create significant opportunities in the form of creation of green jobs and improved labour conditions, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and disaster-resilient construction. Investments in these areas can provide informal workers with stable employment. Additionally, recognising the link between workers' rights and climate change can drive policy changes that enhance protections for informal workers, as seen in recent judicial interpretations in India⁷.

Aligned with this, CUTS International is hosting a virtual panel discussion to discuss climate change and future of work in India, especially focusing on the informal workforce. This event, part of the CUTS' project on Good and Better Jobs in India, aims to enhance the discourse on inclusive economic growth and the creation of quality jobs. The webinar aims to discuss:

- **Addressing Differential Climate Impacts on Vulnerable Populations and Marginalised Communities:** Climate change disproportionately affects marginalised communities, especially women. Solutions include targeted social protection programs, gender-inclusive policies, and enhancing access to resources and training, which can mitigate vulnerabilities and promote resilience.

⁵ <https://thred.com/change/indias-gig-workers-grapple-with-climate-change/>

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/in/business/msme-statistics/#:~:text=MSMEs%20created%20120%20million%20jobs,and%20MSMEs%20for%20over%2090%25.>

⁷ <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/climate-change/right-against-climate-change-part-of-right-to-life-equality-read-the-supreme-court-s-exact-arguments-95458>

- **Climate Change Impact on Informal Workforce and Future Adaptations:** Climate change intensifies risks for informal workers, who often face unsafe conditions and lack job security. Adapting to these challenges requires targeted policies, social protection, and support mechanisms to enhance resilience and ensure equitable opportunities for this vulnerable sector.
- **Climate Change Challenges and Opportunities for MSMEs:** Climate change poses significant risks and operational challenges for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Integrating sustainable practices, accessing green technologies, and receiving targeted support are crucial for enhancing resilience and fostering growth.

AGENDA

15:30-15:32	Welcoming Participants and House Announcements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tasmita Sengupta, Research Associate, CUTS International
15:32-15:40	Setting the Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sanchita Chatterjee, Fellow, CUTS International
15:40-16:25	Panel Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing Differential Climate Impacts on Marginalised Communities • Climate Change Impact on Informal Workforce and Future Adaptations • Climate Change Challenges and Opportunities for MSMEs
16:25-16:40	Q & A and Discussion
16:40-16:45	Vote of Thanks