

## Adapting to Tomorrow Climate Change and India's Workforce

 **29**  
August, 2024

**Thursday**  
1530-1645 (IST)



### SUMMARY REPORT

#### Introduction and Welcoming Participants

- **Tasmita Sengupta**, Research Associate, CUTS International

#### Setting the Context

- **Sanchita Chatterjee**, Fellow, CUTS International

#### Moderator

- **Prodipto Ghosh**, Former Secretary Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change  
CUTS Distinguished Fellow

#### Panellists / Key Speakers

- **Kiran Somvanshi**, Assistant General Manager, The Economic Times
- **Neha Kumar**, Head, South Asia Program, Climate Bonds Initiative
- **A B Chakravarthi**, India Country Director, Upaya Ventures
- **Saudamini Zutshi**, Partnership Association Manager, Purpose

#### Key Takeaways

- Climate change disproportionately affects informal and vulnerable workers, especially those in agriculture, construction, and gig economy sectors. They face increased exposure to extreme weather conditions without adequate social protections.
- There is a need for alternative economic growth models that prioritise worker welfare, particularly in sectors vulnerable to climate change impacts. This includes transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources while ensuring jobs are created in green sectors.

- Role of private enterprises is crucial as they play a significant role in climate adaptation by creating jobs and income opportunities for vulnerable communities, as demonstrated by Upaya Social Ventures and its investment in enterprises like Tamil Plates. Income generation and job creation of vulnerable communities is central to climate adaptation.
- The transition to a green economy offers new job opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and waste management sectors. However, this requires significant upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, and concerted efforts by all levels of governments, civil society and the private sector.
- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks are increasingly important for businesses to report and mitigate their environmental impact, particularly in their supply chains, affecting both large and small enterprises. Care should be taken to ensure larger firms do not push their ‘dirty activities’ to their supply chains, e.g. by hiring third party contractors to manage their blue-collar workforce which fall outside their ESG reporting liabilities.
- There is a critical need for public infrastructure and facilities for the workforce exposed to elements of nature such as shelters, access to drinking water, and public toilets, especially gig workers, construction workers and so on. Evidence suggests extreme weather such as heat waves have led to a fall in productivity and earnings of such categories of workers.
- There is a need for financial mechanisms in order to adapt to the climate change impact. Development finance institutions and banks, like Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), should provide technical and financial assistance to MSMEs for climate adaptation strategies, enabling them to tackle both challenges and opportunities.
- Enhancing targeted social protection measures such as climate-related insurance for unprotected and vulnerable workers is essential to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on their livelihoods.
- Raising awareness and building demand for climate resilience among informal workers is crucial. Empowering workers through information and collective bargaining can lead to sustainable systemic changes. One must bring informal workers in the conversations to hear their voices and adopt tools such as storytelling and other forms of simplifications to reach out to such stakeholders to make them understand the issues under discussions.
- Simplified frameworks, such as SEBI's BRSR, are being developed by governments and regulatory bodies to encourage MSMEs to adopt sustainable practices without complexity. Incentives, including access to tailored financing, capacity-building initiatives, and collaboration with larger companies, are provided. Transparent ESG monitoring and reporting are enhanced to improve market opportunities and stakeholder trust.

## Way Forward

- Governments should create comprehensive climate policies that address the specific needs of informal and vulnerable workers, and the MSME sector to ensure such stakeholders are equipped to handle climate-related challenges.
- To address the issue of larger firms pushing "dirty activities" to their supply chains, regulatory bodies should enforce comprehensive ESG reporting standards that include both direct and indirect environmental impacts. This can be achieved by mandating transparency in supply chain practices and extending ESG liabilities to encompass third-party contractors.
- There is an immediate need for developing green skills: companies must launch programmes focused on upskilling and reskilling the workforce in emerging green sectors, such as renewable energy and sustainable agriculture, to prepare for a transition to a green economy.
- Governments must invest in public infrastructure such as climate-resilient shelters, water facilities, and sanitation services, particularly for gig workers and informal sector workers as they are the ones majorly getting affected by climate change.
- Encouraging and strengthening collaborations between the private sector, government, civil society, and international bodies to develop innovative solutions for climate adaptation and resilience, sharing knowledge and resources effectively.