

Weekly Livelihoods Update

18 September 2018

- Fuel Prices: A burning issue** - In June this year, when fuel prices in India shot up after global crude prices crossed \$80 a barrel, Union minister for oil Dharmendra Pradhan said there was little that the central government could do, but states should look at lowering the value added tax (VAT) on fuel. He also said that petrol and diesel needed to be brought under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) if their prices needed to be lowered. Three months later, the issue of high fuel prices has boiled over, with the Congress calling for a nationwide bandh on September 10, even as prices of petrol touched Rs 88.21 a litre and diesel Rs 77.41 in Mumbai. The bandh saw sporadic violence in a few states, but again it seemed the Centre could do precious little to lower fuel prices. That is, if it had any intention of doing so at all. The reason for this is not hard to find. Traditionally, excise duties and VAT on fuel have been major sources of revenue for the central and state governments. [For further reading: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20180924-fuel-prices-a-burning-issue-1338628-2018-09-14>]
- Non-performing Power Sector Assets** - Having overcome a legacy of the extreme shortage of supply, India's power sector is in the midst of a crisis with ramifications of a wholly different kind. The crisis arises because firms accounting for a significant proportion of power sector assets have defaulted on their debt-servicing commitments, and banks are not able to find ways of restructuring that debt or recouping their money. So the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) guidelines require that the assets should be liquidated to recover whatever is possible and compensate banks from which these firms had taken loans, and then defaulted. But the assessment is that liquidation would yield the banks little, if anything at all. There are 34 projects that have been identified as stressed, accounting for 24,405 MW of commissioned capacity and another 15,725 MW of capacity that is still under construction. The total outstanding debt in these projects is `1.74 lakh crore. The projects are stressed either because the loans concerned have been declared as non-performing assets (NPAs) or are identified as being potential NPAs. Gross NPAs in the power sector were, at the end of June 2017, placed at `37,941 crore, of which as much as `34,244 crore was in generation. But the magnitude of NPAs is set to rise in the coming weeks and months. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/37/ht-parekh-finance-column/non-performing-power-sector-assets.html>]

+ **AYUSH and Health Services** - Maharashtra, despite several achievements in healthcare, does not have enough opportunities for Ayurveda or homoeopathy professionals in the government healthcare delivery systems. The opportunities for AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) professionals to work as clinicians in healthcare systems have been confined only to AYUSH medical colleges and few AYUSH dispensaries under the zilla parishads. This is unlike the situation with other southern states, like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, where the government healthcare delivery for AYUSH systems does have primary, secondary and tertiary levels for exclusive practice, with the medical colleges performing the role of tertiary-level hospitals. Within the private sector, there are very few AYUSH clinics and hospitals that ensure exclusive AYUSH practice. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/37/commentary/ayush-and-health-services.html>]

+ **Urban Canals and Peri-urban Agrarian Institutions** - The metabolisation of water to serve urban consumption through drinking and waste water canals is an important yet understudied aspect of urbanization in Indian cities. The empirical evidence from fieldwork in Budhera village in peri-urban Gurgaon suggests that the surface water that flows in the canal systems is open to seepage, theft, waste water irrigation, and these processes have a profound impact on agricultural livelihoods in the vicinity. The structure of the canals in relation to the geographic conditions of land, social relations and technologies create differentiated risks and opportunities for farmers and produce complex distributional impacts that are unplanned and arbitrary. This article looks at different types of conflicts that emerge in this context while also focusing on new norms, institutions and practices that support the changing rural-urban flows of water and prevent conflicts of interest from emerging into outright conflicts. This article is based on research carried out under the CoCOON-CCMCC project funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The authors thank NWO for financial support provided and SasiWATERS for organisational support during the conduct of the study. The authors thank the many members of the peri-urban community in Budhera and representatives of state organisations who gave of their time during the study. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/37/special-articles/urban-canals-and-peri-urban-agrarian.html>]

+ **Food Insecurity and Malnutrition among Santhal Children in Jharkhand** - Despite several strategic interventions, India is struggling hard with the many issues contributing to child mortality and malnutrition. This study is an exploration of various dimensions affecting the nutritional status of children in Gandey block,

Jharkhand, a populous tribal belt in India. It makes an attempt to evaluate the food security within this community by exploring predominant variables operating in the area leading to malnutrition: socio-economic, demographic and political factors, pattern of food consumption, and coverage of government schemes. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/37/notes/food-insecurity-and-malnutrition-among.html>]

✚ **National Health Stack: The Driving Force of The Jan Arogya Abhiyan** - Jan Arogya Abhiyan, or Ayushman Bharat, as it was known previously, shall encompass over 500 million Indians, offering approximately 110 million families an annual health cover of Rs 500,000. The scheme shall include the operationalisation of over 150,000 health and wellness centres, apart from players from the private sector. Catering to a pool of over 500 million Indians requires a robust digital infrastructure. Conventionally, the public sector has relied on the service-based Information Technology industry for solutions pertaining to banking, taxation, and so on. Jan Arogya Abhiyan, however, marks the beginning of an era in the public sector moving towards a product-oriented approach with the inculcation of a platform called the National Health Stack. [For further reading: <https://swarajyamag.com/infrastructure/national-health-stack-the-driving-force-of-the-jan-arogy-abhiyan>]