

WEEKLY LIVELIHOODS UPDATE



17 OCTOBER 2020

COVID-19

- India's COVID-19 Dilemma: Adults Need Vaccines, Supply Chains Geared For Children
- Newly Formed Empowered 'Technology Group' and COVID-19

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- **India's COVID-19 Dilemma: Adults Need Vaccines, Supply Chains Geared For Children:**
Whenever a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available, India potentially has two advantages: Indian companies already supply the bulk of vaccines to the world, and India already conducts one of the world's largest immunisation programmes for children and mothers. India plans to immunise 200-250 million people--a sixth of its population--with 400-500 million COVID-19 vaccine shots by July 2021, the health minister announced on October 4. Vulnerable population groups including healthcare workers will be prioritised in the first round. Does India have a logistical advantage to manufacture and distribute enough vaccines to Indians? Is India's existing mother and child vaccine programme a backbone strong enough to bear the weight of a mass COVID-19 vaccination effort? [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/indias-covid-19-dilemma-adults-need-vaccines-supply-chains-geared-for-children/>]
- **Newly Formed Empowered 'Technology Group' and COVID-19 :** In his third televised speech since the lockdown, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 May emphasised the notion of a technologically self-reliant India. Apparently, he referred to the term Atmanir-bhar Bharat at least 19 times in the 30-minute speech. However, an oft-repeated complaint in India is that the country's policy regime with respect to science and technology (S&T) has suffered from two major shortcomings. First, the country has been very slow in terms of having instruments of innovation policy that could identify and encourage local development of technology to flourish. Second, is the contradictory nature of policies in India. There are many instances of policies contradicting each other and thus resulting in a deleterious effect on policy outcomes. Many of our important national S&T projects have not been taken to their logical completion—the National Civil Aircraft Development Project and the policy on nanotechnology, to name a few, are instances of very relevant research and development (R&D) projects that did not result in commercialised products and services. Despite a very sophisticated S&T establishment in the country whether in technology generation, standardisation or its diffusion, the country has lacked the benefit of having a real coordinating body to pull together different S&T activities that are being pursued at the central and state levels, as well as those -being pursued by

industry. In this context the constitution of an empowered “Techno-logy Group,” in February 2020, to be chaired by the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India with 12 members, needs to be welcomed. [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/42/commentary/newly-formed-empowered-%E2%80%9998technology-group%E2%80%99-and.html>]

- **Tax on Agricultural Income - Holy Cow of the Indian Economy:** In March 2016, in response to an right to information (RTI) application filed in May 2015 by an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) Officer, the Income Tax Department (ITD) revealed that agricultural income in the country rose exponentially between 2004 and 2013 and that the agricultural income earned by the 6.57 lakh assesseees who had filed returns in 2011 stood at nearly `2,000 lakh crore, which was over 20 times the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) of `84 lakh crore in that year, even though the total area under cultivation and agricultural production had remained almost constant over the period (Hindu 2016). The news created a furore inside and outside Parliament. The officer then filed another RTI application seeking details of top 100 such assesseees which the ITD refused to provide, taking refuge under Section 8 1(J) of the RTI Act which prohibited disclosure of personal information unless there was an overriding public interest, which in ITD’s opinion did not exist. However, it was forced to launch an investigation in respect of those reporting annual farm income of more than `1 crore, of which there were 307 in the assessment year 2015–16, and subsequently clarified, in January 2017, that it was -actually due to data entry errors that such huge farm incomes were erroneously reported (Indian Express 2017). [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/42/commentary/tax-agricultural-income.html>]
- **How Much Brinjal Does India Really Need?** A After a decade of moratorium on Bt brinjal, India allowed field trials to start in September, marking the first step towards the commercial marketing of what will be India’s second GM or genetically modified crop--after Bt cotton--and very first GM food crop. But environmental experts are warning that unbridled and unplanned growth could set Bt brinjal on the same trajectory as Bt cotton, whose commercialisation has been marked by poorly regulated field trials, inadequate safeguards and lack of transparency, and replaced other varieties by covering over 93% of all cotton acreage in India. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/how-much-brinjal-does-india-really-need/>]
- **Technical Change in India’s Rural Organised Manufacturing Industries:** The

contribution of the rural manufacturing segment to India's economy is growing. In 2011–12, it generated 51.3% of the economy's manufacturing national domestic product (NDP), its output exceeding that of urban manufacturing (Chand et al 2017). The authors' study (Mitra and Das 2019) on India's rural organised manufacturing industries revealed that from 1998–99 to 2007–08, the real output of these industries registered a healthy growth rate. Although labour force growth trailed output growth, the fact that labour employment went up at a reasonable rate is encouraging. The productivity of rural industrial labour has risen along with a rise in capital productivity and capital per unit of labour. The rising capital per unit of labour indicates that, over the years, techniques of production have changed in India's rural organised manufacturing industries. History shows that steady improvements in production technology with an increase in capital accumulation has resulted in higher productivity and economic growth (Foley and Michl 1999; Hayami and Godo 2005). This growth has sustained advancements in production technology through reinvestment of a part of the profit. The industrialisation that emerged in Britain in the late 18th century demonstrated the transformative power of technical change and has become a hallmark of capitalist economic growth (Foley and Michl 1999). [For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/42/special-articles/technical-change-indias-rural-organised.html>]

- **The Fragmentation and Weakening of Institutions of Primary Healthcare:** Originally envisioned to offer preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative services as per the needs of people at affordable costs, the health services in India are currently grappling with varied forms of fragmentation, at the macro-level institutions as well as at the level of primary healthcare. To arrest this crisis, it is necessary to revive referral services needed for primary-level curative care, by focusing on strengthening community health centres and developing a strong public health workforce at the grassroots level. The only way forward is to strengthen institutions of primary healthcare by effectively balancing people's public health with their curative care needs. (For further reading: <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/42/special-articles/fragmentation-and-weakening-institutions-primary.html>]