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Weekly Livelihoods Update

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- **Farm revolution 2.0:** India's farm sector is a plateful of paradoxes. Chew on this, to begin with: We are the world's largest producer of milk, oilseeds, pulses, cotton, mangoes, papayas and bananas. There's more: Globally, India is the second-largest producer of rice, sugar, tea, vegetables and fish. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) currently has enough buffer stock of wheat and rice in its godowns to feed every Indian family dependent on the Public Distribution System for rationed grains for the next two years. Impressed? Then try digesting these contradictions. Agriculture accounts for a mere 17 per cent of the GDP but employs 56 per cent of the country's workforce. Fragmentation of land holdings has worsened over the decades, with 87 per cent of farmers now owning only up to two hectares of arable land on an average. Farm income for individual cultivators in terms of real prices has stagnated in the past decade. Now, 52.5 per cent of Indian farming households are steeped in debt. The average outstanding debt per agricultural household is estimated to be Rs 1.04 lakh, according to a 2016 NABARD report on rural financial inclusion, 36 per cent more than their urban counterparts. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 28 persons engaged in the farm sector committed suicide every day in 2019, with the annual toll being 10,281. [For further reading: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20201109-farm-revolution-2-0-1736293-2020-10-31>]
- **Pollution Regulators Misinformed, Low On Motivation: Study:** An acute shortage of technical experts and other staff has reduced central and state pollution regulators to mere advisory bodies, leaving them unable to enforce air quality standards, a recent study has concluded. The Delhi-based Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and a network of 27 State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) are tasked with regulating pollution across sectors. Ten years after India established new National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) that the pollution control boards must enforce, it recorded the worst levels of pollution ever, with the largest number of Indian cities making it onto the global list of the world's 20 most polluted. About 1.67 million Indians died due to air pollution that year. About 660 million Indians could live longer if India achieved NAAQS. To understand the institutional and informational reasons for this failure, the

Delhi-based non-profit, Centre for Chronic Disease Control (CCDC), conducted extensive interviews with officials at pollution control boards, bureaucrats, academics and environmentalists across eight cities--Lucknow, Patna, Ranchi, Raipur, Bhubaneswar, Vijayawada, Goa and Mumbai. The study found staff shortages, increased workloads, poor understanding of the health impacts of pollution, poor coordination with related agencies and low levels of motivation and accountability among the staff. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/pollution-regulators-misinformed-low-on-motivation-study/>]

- **How Reservation In Private Schools Isn't Working For Poor Children:** It was Sharadchandra Kale's dream to get his six-year-old daughter into grade I at a neighbourhood private school this year. The 33-year-old scheduled caste labourer from west Mumbai suburb Andheri had applied under Right To Education (RTE) Section 12(1) (c) that guarantees 25% reservation in non-minority private unaided schools to children from poor and socially disadvantaged homes. Kale's daughter did get a seat in the Andheri school but the experience has left him bitter. "I felt like I was being treated like a second-class citizen. They spoke in English which I don't understand so I had to repeatedly ask for an explanation," said Kale. "I was not allowed to collect my child's books for which the school is demanding Rs 1,200. And they haven't said anything yet about online classes." For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/how-reservation-in-private-schools-isnt-working-for-poor-children/>]
- **'Fast Drug Development Is New Normal Post-COVID':** When the COVID-19 pandemic comes under control, "we are not going back to February of 2020", in how we control other diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria, says Trevor Mundel, the president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The pandemic has shown how government regulators, manufacturers and companies can innovate faster and continue to do so in the fight against other diseases, Mundel explained. "This is the new normal standard." This is the first time that a vaccine has gone from inception to phase 3 trials, which involve human trials, in seven-eight months. What is the kind of research and innovation needed to produce the solutions the world needs? And is the pace sufficient? We asked Mundel, who has been the head of development at Novartis, and has worked in clinical research at Pfizer and Parke Davis. He is also a medical doctor with a PhD in mathematics from the University of Chicago. For further reading: <https://>

www.indiaspend.com/fast-drug-development-is-new-normal-post-covid/]

- **'Schools In Covid-Free Areas Must Be Kept Open, Even If Partially'**: If the pandemic has taught us one big lesson, it is to strengthen our public health system," said Poonam Muttreja, executive director of the Population Foundation of India (PFI), a New-Delhi based NGO. "We have to invest more in our public health system, not just in terms of finances but in human resources," she explained. In the eight months of the COVID-19 lockdown, women's reproductive and mental health was impacted as was their access to education. Muttreja spoke about how India could have used its grassroots health workers to provide these services door-to-door, the urgent need to invest more in India's public health system and using innovative techniques to make sure women and children get access to health and education. [For further reading: <https://www.indiaspend.com/schools-in-covid-free-areas-must-be-kept-open-even-if-partially/>]
- **More confusion than clarity on the trajectory of the COVID-19 virus**: Eight months into the COVID-19 pandemic, India continues to have less clarity on the trajectory of the virus than what the Central government claims. For instance, there is a huge variance between the findings of the second round of national sero-surveillance by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) presented on September 29 and a mathematical model on the spread of the SARS Cov-2 pandemic published in Indian Journal of Medical Research (a publication of the ICMR) on September 28. The second sero-survey concluded that 7.1 per cent of the population had been exposed to the virus compared with the 0.73 per cent mentioned in the first sero-survey of May-June and that 91 per cent of the population was still susceptible to the infection. [For further reading: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/more-confusion-than-clarity/article32992109.ece?homepage=true>]