



By ALBERTINA ALMEIDA


## High Time for Just and Equitable Transition

With the Supreme Court having directed closure of mines in Goa, with the “mining-dependents” having taken to the streets, and the issues of workers’ displacement lying unaddressed, it is necessary to expose the myths that are being fomented by the mining mafia, that has so far managed to lawlessly hold sway and control everything from governance and land, to media and identity.

It is true that there is displacement from jobs, which can lead to forced migration, on account of the present impasse. It is also true that organic environment-friendly solutions do turn out to be expensive for the people as consumers. And yet, it is also true that if we continue exploitation of natural resources at the rate we do, the impacts of the same will be acutely felt on the housing, fields, water availability, health, livelihoods, lives of the people in Goa, and more particularly those in the immediate vicinity, which actually ironically include the real mining-dependent people.

How does one get out of this conundrum? Certainly not by denying the existence of the aforementioned concerns, certainly not by using the master’s tools to dismantle the present extractive model and set up a new one. As Audre Lorde (1984) has rightly said, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

So who will decide which tools to use, and who will develop the framework for a green sustainable Goa? While the illegitimate profits gained by unscrupulous mining lessees (“mine-owners”) must be recovered and applied towards the social security of the workers’ displacement, so that their net displacement is zero, there has clearly to be simultaneous work of building a sustainable economy in a renewable socially beneficial way – in a way that looks not just at the individual workers impacted, but at ways to transition to work that is dignified and builds worker power, that creates socialised energy and focuses on employment creation. And who better than the *real* stakeholders – *all* the people in Goa?



Which Departments would be involved? Not the Department of Mines alone. It would involve the Departments of Health, Transport, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, Tribal Affairs, Science and Technology, Fisheries, Agriculture, Coastal Zone Management Authorities, and many other Departments/authorities.

A much talked about concept in international circles when trying to address such a situation – a concept more recently used in the context of climate change, is the concept of Just Transition. This concept was first mooted, it appears, in *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all* developed after a tripartite meeting of experts, organized by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation. In the *Guidelines* was a recognition that decent work, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability are three of the defining challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The *Guidelines* spoke about the need for the State to provide incentives, and, where necessary, regulations to stimulate demand for goods and services in sectors and subsectors that are relevant for the greening of economies; paying special attention to the industries, regions, communities and workers whose livelihoods might experience the hardest impacts of the transition; to formulate accompanying policies through social protection, including unemployment insurance and benefits, skills training and upgrading, workforce *redeployment* and other appropriate measures to support enterprises and workers in sectors negatively impacted by the transition to sustainable development; to ensure that fiscal and tax reforms comply with environmental taxes and levies; and to enhance the resilience of Small and Medium Enterprises, including cooperatives, to avoid disruption of economic activity and loss of assets, jobs and incomes.

India is also obligated as a signatory to the 2015 Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change which further cemented the concept of Just Transition.

So Just Transition means that the economy has to transition to a greened economy, precisely because, the present extractive economic model such as indiscriminate mining, is not working even for the workers in the long run. For the small state that Goa is, the extraction

has been phenomenal. The other proposed 'development' which includes coal hubs and highways and airports, which nowhere even border on the greening of Goa, is, in fact, a tool for further destruction of Goa and its people, and an accentuation of conditions for climate change. There is no evidence in sight of any measures being taken by the State to ensure a just and equitable transition - a transition which will protect people's livelihoods at both ends, arresting the loss of livelihoods because of environmentally unsustainable development, and restoring dignity for the people who came to be dependent on environmental unsustainability.

However, in all this, what cannot be lost is the initial idea that came not so much from climate change activists, but from the trade union movement. The idea that, in this process, the State has created a dependency of workers on the unsustainable development, and it is the State's responsibility to undo this dependency and ensure decent work with decent incomes for all workers in the State, including to displaced workers, even in the greened economies. We cannot afford solutions that reproduce the problems of fickle employment, unhealthy work conditions, demeaning work, contractualisation of labour, invisibility of unpaid care work, and exploitative work terms. It would only mean the same master's tools at work.

Hence the need to also lift the veil from green solutions that come under the guise of terms like ecotourism, to ensure that, in the garb of these, the same model of power and culture of exploitation of people and nature, is not reproduced, where after consuming the resources, the exploiters simply move to greener pastures, literally!, leaving local people to mop up garbage. The envisioning as well as the controls must lie with the people and particularly with those who have been thrust to the margins of development, not with dominant local and foreign investors who have thus far been dictating the terms, all with active assistance from local politicians.

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