

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



IMAGE SOURCE: NEW YORK TIMES

**NUTRITION AND SDG 2: A
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HUNGER**
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From the CEO'S Desk

Summarising a three-day conference that brought together over 60 organisations, across 29 sessions, nearly 200 speakers and 800 plus delegates to discuss the relevance of sustainable and inclusive business post COVID19, is not an easy task. However, given the timing and the relevance of CRB's 7 th annual sustainability conference held virtually 28-30October 2020, I am happy to share the broad take-aways that emerged from the event here, in my message for this edition of CRB's quarterly newsletter.

The theme of this year's CRB annual event was, *'Sustainability – a Key to Business Resilience in an Uncertain World'* and its high-level messages were:

- Applying *systems thinking* is critical while envisaging or designing sustainability solutions. Given the complex, multi-dimensional nature of sustainability issues/challenges (often involving trade-offs between social, economic and environmental aspects), it is critical to consider the entire system as a whole and not just in parts.
- Balancing the supply and the demand side issues is critical in fostering sustainable markets. Efforts to build sustainable enterprises cannot be accomplished without proper demand side management. In practice this would involve strengthening consumer awareness and market demand for sustainable enterprises and products. In India like other emerging markets, this would entail engaging young millennials whose preference towards sustainable and purpose driven businesses are clearly emerging.
- Data and IT enabled tools could help in finding scalable solutions to complex sustainability problems. However, caution has to be exercised such that the digital divide is adequately addressed and ensure that technology embodies fairness, equity and justice.
- New and unconventional models of collaboration are needed. Stakeholders would have to shed their inhibitions about engaging with other actors who they haven't partnered with earlier.
- As practitioners we need to expand our thinking of communities not just as beneficiaries but as key value chains actors. Local value creation is critical, will need to be led by the community level organisations, supported by investments and technology to help achieve (societal) resilience where most needed.
- Stakeholders will need to come out of their (our) comfort zones and innovate/improvise to design and implement sustainability solutions, as it can no longer be 'Business As Usual'.

Not just at this conference, but across various events and dialogues a consensus has emerged in favour of **sustainable and inclusive enterprises, markets and society** post COVID19. As a generation, we have the unique opportunity to **reshape and reorient businesses, policies and human mindset to achieve social equity, environmental balance without compromising on economic progress.**

Lessons from COVID19 should guide us in turning the Decade of Action on SDGs into a Decade of (measurable) Impacts.

Rijit Sengupta
CEO, CENTRE FOR
RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS



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COVER STORY

NUTRITION AND SDG 2: A DECADE TO ZERO HUNGER

BHAVYA SHARMA



IMAGE BY: AAMIR MOHD KHAN FROM PIXABAY

Nutrition is a critical aspect of good health and societal development. Better nutrition is related to improved maternal health, stronger immune systems, safer pregnancy and childbirth, lower risk of non-communicable diseases (such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease), and longevity. It is believed that healthy children learn better. People with adequate nutrition are more productive and can create opportunities to gradually break the cycles of poverty and hunger.

As per FAO, 8.9 percent of the world's population, an estimated 690 million were undernourished in 2019. This is an increase of 10 million since 2018 and nearly 60 million since 2014. Based on the Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report, hunger is highest in regions of Africa south of the Sahara and South Asia, whose 2020 GHI scores are 27.8 and 26.0, respectively. According to the GHI Severity Scale, these scores indicate serious levels of hunger. In contrast, GHI scores of Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, East and Southeast Asia, and West Asia and North Africa range from 5.8 to 12.0, indicating low or moderate hunger levels.

In India, strong constitutional provisions, legislative policies (such as the National Nutrition Policy) and nutrition supplementation programmes (such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Mid-day Meal Programme, Special Nutrition Program) are under implementation at the national and state level. India might have made great strides in lowering malnutrition rates and addressing several related issues through a slew of legal and policy reform measure; however, the challenge of proper nutrition continues to persist. India suffers from a high burden of under-nutrition and micronutrient deficiency diseases. As per the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) data, about 51% of all children from families in the lowest income quintile are still stunted and about 49% are underweight, i.e. 46.6 million children in India are stunted and 25.5 million are acutely malnourished. Statistics on nutritional status indicate that India has a long way to go to achieve its national targets and international commitments.* According to the GHI 2020 report, India is ranked 94th among 107 countries, behind its neighbours Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. The situation is grim and the country is battling widespread hunger.

* As per the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2016-18, an estimated 20.3 million children aged under five in India are wasted, 40.7 million children were chronically stunted, while more than half of Indian women aged 15-49 were anaemic (NFHS-4). Recently, as per the mandate of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) has constituted a National Council on India's Nutrition Challenges. The National Council established under POSHAN Abhiyaan has met thrice till now. The main issues initiated by NITI Team and finalized during the Council Meeting include: To provide holistic approach, all 36 States/UTs and 718 districts will be covered in a phased manner by the year 2020, To include 315 districts in phase I and 268 additional districts to be covered in phase II of POSHAN Abhiyaan, Finalization of "Package of interventions to be provided during the first 1,000 days of child's life", Outlined the POSHAN Maah Celebration Framework during September 2018 and Food Fortification of staple food (<https://niti.gov.in/index.php/national-nutrition-council-indias-nutrition-challenges>)

There is a lot of work that needs to be done to achieve the SDG 2 target of Zero Hunger by 2030. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the global progress on reducing hunger was not close to the efforts required to reach the listed goals. The onset of the pandemic has put light on the interconnected nature of the global economy and the fact that our food systems as they stand today are not only not resilient but also are inadequate for achieving SDG 2. The pandemic has laid bare and put light on the fragile nature and the existing inequalities in the global food systems, putting threat to global health and food security. Post this crisis, there will be significant long-term secondary impacts, including unemployment, falls in GDP, increased mental health issues, challenges to children's education – and increased hunger. The World Food Program has estimated that a further 130 million people will be pushed into acute hunger in 2020. Furthermore, the long-term impacts due to climate change are bound to worsen these numbers. In light of this, the need-of-the-hour is to address these challenges in a holistic and ambitious way, and to develop food systems that provide proper nutrition to all and are resilient to future shocks.

Tackling the issue of nutrition demands a combination of multi-front and multi-stakeholder approach. The necessity now is to have collaboration among the public and private players that is both granular and provides customized value-addition to lead impact at the micro/community level. Public-Private-Partnerships (where the private sector includes institutions, organizations, MSMEs, SMEs) can play a big role in the transition towards nutrition security by bringing together experts, organizations and institutions that can support each other in implementing a holistic program. These collaborations could focus on

- **Developing and designing strategy:** Private sector can be involved in designing and developing strategy and roadmap for new public initiatives. This could include components like research, advocacy, impact assessments, etc.
- **Implementation support partnerships:** Private sector actors can provide support to the government for implementation of large-scale programmes. These functions could also include monitoring, evaluation and assessments. It can include analysis of procurement process and proper engagement of actors in the supply chain including the last-mile delivery, improving local and regional food markets

- **Increased nutrition literacy:** This has been one of the major drivers of persistent malnutrition levels in the country. Private sector players could provide alternative pathways for expanding nutrition literacy among stakeholders. This could include designing interventions that help improve access and knowledge of farmers for agricultural inputs and extension services together with information on available techniques and technology for agricultural advancement and how it can help the nutrition scenario existing in the country
- **Technology:** innovations and technology enabled solutions can play a catalytic role in addressing some of the nutrition challenges, ranging from targeted policies through better/bigger data sets. Technology, can play a pivotal role in aiding effective implementation and shorten the response time to emergencies and other urgencies. Here, too private sector can play an important role through the development of simple and effective technology solutions.

At the macro-level the need is to bring about coherence in policies and programme as well awareness geared towards a social behavioural change. We at the Centre for Responsible Business are committed to this cause and are working to understand the public-private ecosystem that can assist in bridging these gaps and would be happy to engage with experts who are working on this subject.

Image by The Washington Post



INDUSTRY TRENDS: ESG FINANCING - EMERGING TRENDS AND WAY FORWARD IN INDIA



DEVYANI HARI

IMAGE BY AAMIR MOHD KHAN FROM PIXABAY

Corporate responsibility is rapidly refocusing on stakeholder wellbeing over shareholder primacy. Increasingly, there is a consensus that sustainability is crucial for a better recovery from the pandemic and is inevitable for ensuring business and community resilience. Higher consumer consciousness, a need for more transparency and traceability, shifting supply chains and increasing engagement with the civil society are some of the emerging realities that corporates have to adjust to. As the corporates realign to these realities and adapt their business models, the financial sector has a strategic role to play in a green and inclusive development. Financing and investment needs to be directed to low carbon intensive and inclusive business models.

Globally, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) financing (finance that takes account of positive and negative social and environmental factors, particularly the factors that tend to play out over the medium to long-term) is on the rise. Investments in ESG conscious companies have paid off better than traditional investments that predominantly focus on economic performance. A similar trend has been noticed in India with the NIFTY ESG 100 Index outperforming the conventional NIFTY 100 Index.



Traditionally, the discussion on sustainable finance has donned a green mantle and the focus has been on environmentally conscious investments. It would not be wrong to say that financiers are fairly conversant with energy efficiency, renewable energy, climate smart agriculture, water stewardship, deforestation free supply chains amongst others. There is now a need to

sharpen focus on social sustainability as well as the pandemic has clearly exposed the fragility of our existing systems to protect the vulnerable and marginalised sections of the society. Further, the following are also emerging as important avenues for financing of sustainable development:

Circular Economy – Circular economy is an economic system where materials and energy circulate in loops and stay within the value chain, as opposed to a linear system of take-make-dispose. The images below depict the advantages of circular economy and the emerging trends in Circular Economy financing.



SDG Financing – We have entered the Decade for Action for the SDG Agenda and resources have to be deployed sufficiently and rapidly to achieve the targets and impacts as envisioned by the SDG framework. The financing gap to achieve the SDGs in developing countries is estimated to be US\$ 2.5 – 3 trillion per year. Financing the SDGs necessitates mobilisation of private capital, leveraging on emerging digital technologies and trends and introducing innovating financing

mechanisms. Developments towards SDG financing include alignment of global frameworks such as UN PRI to SDG outcomes, rising popularity of SDG bonds and the establishment of the Alliance on Global Investors for Sustainable Development.

ESG Financing scenario in India and the way forward

In India, the discussion on ESG or sustainable finance has been underway since the late 2000s. Sustainable finance in India has received some impetus from the National Voluntary Guidelines (2011) that were applicable to the top 100 listed companies. The NVGs have since matured to the National Guidelines on Responsible Business Conduct (2018) that align closely to the UN Guiding Principles, the SDG Agenda, the Paris Summit on Climate Change (2015), Core Conventions of the ILO relating to child labour (2017) and the CSR guidelines as per Section 135 of the Companies Act. ESG financing is gaining ground in India and India has emerged as second in the emerging economies for green bonds (transactions amounted to USD 10.3 billion in the first half of 2019), ESG investing is gradually gaining traction and India attracted more than USD 500 million towards ESG investing in the time period of Jan – March 2020.

the financial sector will do well to play a leadership role in providing sustainable finance. This will require a marked shift in mentality and outlook to risk assessments. The financial institutions should play a proactive role to pursue and support sustainable investments and to develop internal capacities and systems geared towards embedding ESG aspects into operations and lending/investing decisions. Sustainable finance is here to stay and financial institutions that make this transition today are future proofing themselves against ESG risks and are ensuring greater resilience and performance in the long run.



A diagrammatic representation of the developments for sustainable finance in India
https://www.yesbank.in/pdf/esg_investing_scenario_in_India

Despite the positive developments in India, the availability of ESG financing falls far short of the requirements. Adoption of ESG considerations especially in bank financing tend to be disparate and are ransom to the absence of ESG financing guidelines. There are no standardised frameworks to guide adoption of ESG factors in financing and lending decisions.

There is now a need to have focused and system wide initiative to drive sustainable finance in India. India has a critical role to play in the achievement of the SDGs and

CRB ACTIVITIES

REPRESENTATIONS

VSS 5TH MEETING ON 'COVID19: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS & VSS ORGANISATIONS'

2nd July 2020

CRB convened the fifth meeting of the VSS Collaboration India (a coalition of VSS organisations working in India) on July 2, 2020. The objective was to discuss and learn from the perspectives and experiences of the VSS organisations over the course of the pandemic and the lockdown.

The discussions covered the following:

- Understanding the impacts of COVID19 on business continuity and sustainable business practices in India
- Discussions on COVID19's impact on VSS organisations & mitigation measures - sharing of experiences
- Perspectives and suggestions from VSS organisations to 'Build Back (Forward) Better'

ROUNDTABLE ON 'ADDRESSING THE ADVERSE IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON WOMEN WORKERS IN THE APPAREL & TEXTILE VALUE CHAIN'

14th August 2020

The roundtable discussion was organized under the aegis of PROGRESS Project of CRB briefly outlining women worker specific issues (both for formal and home-based workers) that have emerged during the pandemic. discussion was attended by representatives from Women in Value Chains, Traidcraft, Home Net South Asia, Prem Jain Memorial Trust, Shahi Exports, Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail Limited, Fair Labour Association, Marks & Spencer, Apparel Training and Design Centre, International Development Research Centre (Canada) and Aston University (UK).

WORKSHOP ON "CIRCULAR ECONOMY: STRATEGY FOR GREEN AND INCLUSIVE RECOVERY FOR TAMIL NADU'S TEXTILE AND APPAREL CLUSTERS"

21st August 2020

CRB, along with CAIF and FFG, held this workshop to solicit inputs from stakeholders from the apparel and textile sector in Tamil Nadu, on priority issues and solutions required for a transition towards circular economy. Policy intervention ideas were also discussed, which could help a sector-wide transition

in the state. The workshop was attended by manufacturers, innovators, brands, and government agencies from Tirupur, Coimbatore, Karur, etc.

WORKSHOP ON 'ROLE OF POLICY IN PROMOTING A CIRCULAR & INCLUSIVE TEXTILE & APPAREL SECTOR'

17th September 2020

CRB held a national-level workshop on how public policy can enable and accelerate circular economy transition in the apparel and textile industry in India, in partnership with Circular Apparel Innovation Factory (CAIF) & Fashion For Good & supported by Laudes Foundation. Findings on cluster-level challenges to circularity, their solutions and relevant policy support were presented, followed by a panel discussion by representatives from the Government as well as industry experts. Need for R&D, industry benchmarking, shared responsibility and accounting for embedded natural resources emerged as some of the important themes.

EVENT ON 'PRIVATE SECTOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DECADE OF ACTION: CATALYZING COLLABORATION ACROSS THE GLOBAL NORTH & SOUTH'

30th September 2020

CRB together with WBA, co-hosted a parallel event at UNGA2020 titled, 'Private Sector Contribution to the Decade of Action: Catalyzing Collaboration across the Global North & South'. The event explored how we can ensure closer alignment between the North & South to facilitate concerted and accelerated action on sustainability, how international businesses and their partners can expect to collaborate post COVID-19 given changes to global value chains, what kinds of collaborative models/approaches have worked, and how future collaborations & stakeholder engagements are likely to develop.

WEBINAR ON 'SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT IN FOOD RETAIL IN INDIA - BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCE WITH SDGS'

9th October 2020

The webinar was organized by CRB together with RAI, RSPO & I-SPOC with the aim to explore the business

case for sustainable procurement in food retail in India. The discussion addressed supply chain risks & transparency along with consumer trends.

CONVENINGS

INDIA & SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS 2020

28th - 30th October 2020

The 7th India and Sustainability Standards (ISS) International Dialogues and Conference welcomed sustainability professionals, academicians, financial experts, business representatives, government officials, media and civil society personnel to discuss and debate on challenges and opportunities to achieve sustainability, like its previous six versions. The theme 'Sustainability a Key to Business Resilience in an Uncertain World' focused on the new challenges we face with the pandemic which has added a layer of unprecedented uncertainty. The conference, conceived and presented by CRB, was co-organised with 63 partners and 200 speakers in 29 sessions with over 800 participants. The recordings of the sessions are available [here](#).

CRB EVENTS

WEBINAR ON 'CIRCULAR APPAREL AND TEXTILE - A STRATEGY FOR BETTER PREPAREDNESS'

20th July 2020

The webinar was organized by Shri Vaishnav Vidyapeeth Vishwavidyalaya, Indore together with CRB & The Textile Association of India. The agenda of the webinar was to provide an overview of the apparel & textile sector & impact of COVID19. Various aspects of circularity in apparel & textile & promotion of sustainable development in the sector were discussed.

THE 8TH WORLD SUSTAINABILITY FORUM, VIRTUAL, BASEL 2020

15th-17th September 2020

CRB was the cooperating partner for the 8th World Sustainability Forum 2020. The themes for the year 2020 were:

- Food Security and Agriculture
- Mobility and Transport



Webinar for Journalists and Media Representatives

WEBINAR: BUSINESSES WITH PURPOSE WITH PURPOSE: FUTURE in a Post Covid PROOFING BUSINESSES IN A POST COVID19 WORLD 11 - 6: 10 PM



ARTICLES



RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS NEWS ROUND UP

BY PRIYANKA CHHAPARIA AND NITYA CHHIBER



MSMES AND SUSTAINABILITY

GOVT FORMS FIVE TASK FORCES TO MAKE INDIAN MSMES FUTURE-READY

The government has constituted five task forces to make India's micro, small and medium enterprises future-ready and formulate a concrete strategy towards making the country a leading exporter. These five task forces would work for a month in five key areas where it is felt that the industry of the country and particularly the MSME sector should head toward. One of the five areas identified is Industry 4.0, including elements like artificial intelligence, 3D and virtual reality, and this task force has been formed with the objective of making India a global leader in Industry 4.0. Another area is export promotion and import reduction, including how to focus in the key manufacturing areas, how to improve our quality standards, designs and technology, packaging. Read more [here](#)



IMAGE SOURCE: IIFL FINANCE

PRIVATE SECTOR AND SDGS

KEEPING RURAL HARVESTS COOL: INDIA PILOTS SOLUTION TO FOOD LOSS AND WASTE

To reduce food loss, strengthen food security, and improve rural livelihoods, India must close the logistical gap between farm and fork. A lack of a reliable cold chain and logistics is responsible for up to half of post-harvest food losses in the country. A more effective cold chain would bring farmers closer to consumers, enabling them to reap fairer prices and access new markets. As a result, it would significantly aid the Government of India's goal of doubling farmers' income by 2022. Making sustainable cold chains a reality is rooted in the India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP), which analyzes different scenarios and provides policy recommendations on all aspects of cooling. Read the article [here](#).

IMAGE SOURCE: MCKAY SAVAGE



BUSINESS & HUMAN RIGHTS

IAA INDIA AND UNICEF COME TOGETHER TO PROMOTE EQUAL GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING

The International Advertising Association (IAA) India and UNICEF come together to promote equal gender representation in advertising. This is based on the understanding that marketing plays a powerful role in shaping gender roles and perceptions and advertising is an important tool that can influence women and girls' empowerment. The changing and evolving landscape of advertisements has a huge potential to promote gender equitable practices especially among young people. Read more [here](#).

VOLUNTARY SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS

SDGS-ALIGNED VOLUNTARY STANDARDS PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION, TRADE: UNCTAD, PARTNERS REPORT

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the European University Institute (EUI), the University of Amsterdam (UvA), and the German Development Institute (DIE) released a study that finds there is "significant overlap" between the SDGs and Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS). The report highlights how businesses can support progress on the SDG targets by adopting VSS. The report titled, 'Linking Voluntary Standards to Sustainable Development Goals,' uses data from ITC's Standards Map database to track the extent to which sustainable practices promoted by VSS align with SDG targets. The report concludes VSS can contribute to a stronger governance ecosystem to help achieve the SDGs. Policymakers can select from the large number of relevant VSS to deliver the SDGs, contributing to efforts to create greener jobs, build more resilient business ecosystems, and make the business case for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to adopt greener technologies. Read more [here](#).



BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

2020 COULD BE FOR MANUFACTURING WHAT 1991 WAS FOR OUR ECONOMY

The current government has tweaked its priorities to make the country a manufacturing hub under the overarching idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat. A major roadblock to faster economic growth, a necessary precondition for generating jobs, spreading prosperity and lifting millions out of poverty, is India's creaking infrastructure. It is learnt that the Centre has earmarked a massive ₹111 trillion for infrastructure projects in the coming years. Labour and land are two priorities that have been mentioned by the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi too. While we remain committed to labour rights, we need to move ahead on our unfinished agenda of labour reforms, initiated recently by many states. Land banks are also needed for dedicated industrial usage. Read more [here](#).

PRIVATE SECTOR AND SDGS

INDIA AND DENMARK RELATIONS ELEVATED TO GREEN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Mette Frederiksen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Denmark and Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, co-chaired a Virtual Summit between India and Denmark on 28 September 2020. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Frederiksen held an in-depth exchange of views in a warm and friendly atmosphere on bilateral relations, discussed the Covid-19 pandemic and global matters of interest to both sides, including climate change and green transition and reached common understanding with a view to accelerating sustainable economies and societies, the joint statement read. Given the shared desire to remain trusted partners, the two Prime Ministers agreed to elevate India-Denmark relations to a Green Strategic Partnership. This partnership would build on and consolidate the existing agreement establishing a Joint Commission for Cooperation (signed 6 February 2009) between India and Denmark which envisaged cooperation within the political field; economic and commercial field; science and technology; environment; energy; education and culture. In addition, it builds on and complements the existing Joint Working Groups on Renewable Energy, Urban Development, Environment, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Food Processing, Science, Technology and Innovation, Shipping, Labour Mobility and Digitisation. Read more [here](#).

Image Source: Business Insider

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

TN & WEF TO SET UP ADVANCED MANUFACTURING HUB

Guidance, a nodal investment promotion and facilitation agency of the State of Tamil Nadu, has partnered with World Economic Forum (WEF) to establish India's first advanced manufacturing hub (AMHUB) in the State. This will help the State harness opportunities in the sectors of electronics, electric mobility, solar energy and textiles

through collaboration with AMHUB. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu will be able to promote sustainable manufacturing by adopting new models of collaboration to scale sustainable solutions in manufacturing that enable Circular Economy transition and accelerate towards a carbon-neutral manufacturing industry. AMHUB will help the production ecosystem in Tamil Nadu by identifying and addressing regional opportunities brought by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), highlighting and amplifying regional success stories globally and engaging directly with other AMHUBs through WEF's network of AMHUBs to share best practices globally, a release stated. Read the full article [here](#).

Image Source: BBC



Image Source: The Hindu

TRENDING NOW

DIGITIZATION - AN OPPORTUNITY IN THE WAITING

BY RAMANUJ MITRA AND NANDINI SHARMA



Digitization: As a Remedy

About a decade ago, the Internet was in the running for the world's most distinguished honours that is the Nobel Peace Prize. Its candidacy supported and based on it being a potent tool for "advancing dialogue, debates and consensus" and thereby shaping the future. We have come a long way since then, while the opinions on the subject remain fractured and divergent, what remains irrefutable is that Internet today is an integral part of our day to day lives. Today, we are faced with a similar situation when it comes to Digitization, which evokes a mixed bag of perspectives.

Powered by the proliferation of landline-based broadband, mobile internet, and cheap internet-enabled devices and services, the phenomenon of digitization was long underway when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. The pandemic has just accelerated the process. In the duration of a few months, the world has seen innovation and uptake of digital technology that would otherwise require years to achieve.

Digitization is transforming the global business and social landscape rapidly. More and more processes are moving online. Businesses have adopted cloud-based systems that offer more flexibility than ever. Benefits and potential gains of digitization are many.

Digital financial inclusion: many Indians have benefitted from Aadhar-based direct benefit transfers from the government. Digitization of delivery of services has not only plugged the many leaks, but also quickened them. Internet and SMS-enabled banking modes help people in remote areas to avail services without having to physically access a bank.

Similarly, it has become easier for the private sector service providers such as banks, other financial institutions, and technology providers to onboard customers quickly and deliver services in a shorter time.

Climate and agriculture nexus: Climate-change induced variations in weather has consequences for cropping patterns, cycles and practices. Traditional methods of farming may not be adequate and feasible soon. Digitized services that collect micro-level data on weather, pest attacks, etc. from smartphones and

help farmers determine sowing and reaping timelines will be important for agricultural sustainability going forward. Real time data collection and analysis then becomes crucial. Moreover, these digitized services enable farmers to make informed decisions about selling their produce and accord better connect to the market

Healthcare and Food Security: rapid exchange of information and remote collaboration has enabled the world to fight the ongoing pandemic and reach closer to developing vaccines at a fast pace. Similarly, real time collection of data on disease outbreaks, cataloguing of symptoms and quick analysis can help identify and prevent pandemics. Digitization of data collection and storage will be crucial in such efforts. Currently, India has manual system of collection and categorising data.

Food and nutrition security is an important national priority and critical to nation building (particularly for the ties that we are in). Oftentimes it is found that lack of adequate knowledge on nutrition, government support policies and programmes last mile delivery of nutritious food are seen as some of the inhibitors to achieving food and nutrition security. Digital solutions and technologies once again can and have been playing an important role. The pandemic has left many bereft of basic means for survival such as food, shelter and livelihood. Digital solutions of tracking, tracing and monitoring have helped ensure that relief measures and benefits reach the right people in time.

Census-related activities can similarly gain from data collection through digital means; real time syncing of data on government's servers will save time spent on manually sorting and entering millions of data points. Availability of accurate and reliable data will help policymakers in robust and evidenced based decision-making.

The inequity in Digitization

While there are compelling reasons to acknowledge the benefits, inevitability and indispensability of digitization, the Covid-19 pandemic has also revealed underlying weakness and gaps that must be filled if the benefits of digitization are to reach everyone. The gaps point towards a existing digital divide, which inhibits the access to digital solutions and technologies owing to a variety of reasons which maybe classified along socioeconomic, geographical and gender lines.

Access and infrastructure: Since March 2020, within the span of a few months, many essential services ranging from education, healthcare to banking, and registration for availing government schemes have moved online. This sudden shift has deprived many of these essential services that they could otherwise access and utilize. For perspective, we will discuss a few cases in point

Online education involves livestreamed videos; accessing them requires internet-enabled smartphones or tablets, along with high-speed internet. Many regions in India, especially remote villages are still deprived of reliable internet access. Factors like income, gender, and geography affect the ability of individuals to access digital services. Women in poor households are less likely than men to possess smartphones and use internet; children from higher income households have better chances of accessing online education than their poorer peers.

Digital literacy: The internet enables us to access a plethora of information. For the uninitiated, it would be difficult to adapt to the sudden change in the way of accessing information and consuming them. During the lockdown, anecdotes from the industrial clusters revealed that not all workers were able to avail relief packages announced by the governments (central and state), as the necessary forms and formalities had moved online.

There is a glaring gap in digital literacy and proficiency in India. Digital processes are differentiated from their analogue and manual predecessors by "speed and versatility". It follows therefore, that pre-existing inequalities arising from wealth and other opportunities/privileges will only widen rapidly if digital proficiency isn't inculcated in the masses. Those who are unable to adapt to an increasingly digital world will be left behind.

Data security and online privacy: Data is the new currency. It must be collected, stored, and accessed securely, just like our money in the bank. As more and more of our personal information is available online, it is worth giving a thought on how much of such information should be available openly in the digital domain. Breach of client data, company secrets, intellectual property as well as privacy is now a common phenomenon. This is a clear side-effect of digitization and must be dealt with quickly.

While the importance and utility of digitalisation is no longer a matter for debate, it has, however, provoked several pertinent questions that need to be examined intently. These range from ensuring a truly democratized and equitable framework for digitisation that helps narrow the gap between the have and have nots. Moreover, given that Digitisation is and will be the new reality of our times, it will be important to develop the right set of regulatory-cum-policy directives that seek to eliminate the misuse of digitization (data theft/monopoly, breach of privacy, misrepresentation etc) and drive forth the agenda of inclusive and resilient forward nation building. How we proceed from here forth on the digitisation agenda will greatly determine and shape the future trajectory of our build back process.

ABOUT CRB

Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) was established in 2011 as think-tank to pursue its vision, 'businesses integrate sustainability into their core business practices'. Given that sustainability is a multi-dimensional problem especially in the context of India and other emerging economies, CRB has adopted a model of engaging multiple stakeholders to develop action plans for promoting sustainable/responsible business, across various sectors in India.

CRB has consolidated its programmatic activities into the following thematic areas:

- **Circular Economy**
- **Business & Human Rights**
- **Private Sector & SDGs**
- **Voluntary Sustainability Standards**
- **SMEs & Sustainability**

Editorial Team

SIYA BATRA & SONALI PAIKARAY



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An avid traveler and foodie, Ms Sonali Paikaray has a background of Life Sciences with a professional degree in MBA in Business Sustainability from the renowned Teri School of Advanced Studies. She has entrepreneurial experience and she applies the same learning and practical approach towards the work she handles.

She is currently working at the Centre for Responsible Business as Communications & Outreach Officer. Apart from food hunting and explorations, she likes to read and learn and practice about the sustainable approach towards life.