

Restoring And Nourishing The Self-Sustenance Of Communities Vital To Build A Post COVID Economy: Social Activists

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New Delhi: Senior social movement leaders, trade unionists and activists asserted that restoring and nourishing the self-sustenance of communities and resisting the onslaught of corporations into their lives and livelihood are key for building up a post COVID economy for the communities whose livelihood are based on natural resources.

The speakers included Elango Rangasamy of Trust for Village Self-Governance, Jesuretinam, Executive Member of National Fishworkers Forum, Sagari Ramdas of Food Sovereignty Alliance and Com. Roma of All India Union of Forest Working People & New Trade Union Initiative. The session was moderated by Vijayan M.J. of Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy.

This webinar was a part of the series **Re-Imagining the Future: Peoples Agenda For A Post Covid Economy** organised by trade unions, people's movements and other civil society organisations.

Asserting that, land is not a subject of transaction and neither livelihood is a commercial item, Com. Roma said "ownership of means of production is essential to protect the livelihood of communities living on natural resources". Coming heavily upon the governments for diluting labour laws she said, "Scrapping of the labour laws is an attempt by this regime to push the workers into bonded labour slavery."

Drawing lessons from the recent past, where contrary to the starvation the urban poor and migrant workers faced in the cities, Elango Rangasamy said "if you look at the villages, the pandemic hasn't really harmed them, because the food is there. So, it is high time we revitalize our villages, by providing them with appropriate technologies." He added "the greatest strength available for local communities is to take a stand to produce for themselves. That's how they can exercise their power. Communities should be empowered, they should not be afraid of the corporates."

Portraying government's lack of sympathy for the marginalised Sagari Ramdas said that although Adivasis are able to cope through their self-sustaining way of living, the landless workers have been left on their own and the government is forcing them to choose between dying either of hunger or the pandemic. Touching upon the fundamentals towards creating self-reliant communities, she said "land struggles, land rights movements and land reforms are central to build resilience and self-sufficient communities."

Speaking on a post COVID economy she proposed, “we need to do away with the long production and supply chains systems. Local collectivized production, supply and creating small webs is the way forward.” This pandemic has provided an opportunity to people to re-engage with food and health systems which need to be central to new systems we want to build, she added.

Warning us about what is unfolding Jesuretinam said “we are moving to a situation where there is fish without fisherpeople. The change from sustainable fisheries to industrial fishing and aquaculture was driven by World Bank loans and subsidies.”

Fishers were a sustainable livelihood but was made to shift to fish for greed to feed for the rich in Japan and US. Fishers are now a victim of unsustainable means of fish and now there is a shift towards aquaculture expansion by industrial means, she lamented.

Explaining the situation on the ground she said COVID which stopped all activities have also resulted in fishing for local markets which gives nutrition for the local communities. It is poor peoples protein options which are taken away by industrial fishing to far away markets. “Re-imagining fisheries sector will have to reimagine the traditional fishing methods and disassociate from Industrial fishing and aquaculture,” she asserted.

The webinar was attended by a large number of people from all walks of life and generated very intense conversation.

This Webinar series was started on May 15, and previous sessions witnessed eminent speakers like Thomas Isaac, Finance Minister of Kerala; economists Prof Prabhat Patnaik and Aseem Shrivastava, social and environmental activists like Aruna Roy, Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva and Ashish Kothari and former civil servant M.G. Devasahayam.

The webinar which is conducted every Tuesdays and Fridays have future sessions on Employment & Livelihoods; Labour: Informal, Formal and artisans; Industry: Small, medium, large; Infrastructure; Banking, Finance and Financial Markets; Mineral Extraction; Energy; Urban Sustainability; Public Sector Units; Agriculture; Fisheries, Forest and Pastoral Economy; Environment and Economy.

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