

**BROOKINGS INDIA**

**Strengthening local economies and healthcare post-COVID-19:  
Opportunities to use District Mineral Foundation funds effectively in  
mining districts**

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**Participants:**

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– Moderator

**Read Srestha Banerjee's blogs here:**

[District Mineral Foundation funds crucial resource for ensuring income security in mining areas post COVID-19](#)

[Utilising District Mineral Foundation funds to fight the COVID-19 crisis in India: Current and future opportunities](#)

**Watch the event video here:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VsD0f\\_zd\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VsD0f_zd_0)

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## PROCEEDINGS

**Srestha Banerjee:** I think it is fine now. Yeah.

**Rajesh Chadha:** Okay. Good afternoon and welcome. There was some delay because there was some connectivity issue. Sorry about that. Good afternoon, everyone. The webinar that we are going to discuss today is on, '*Strengthening Local Economies and Healthcare post-COVID-19*'. Why we are holding this at Brookings India has the following context, that Brookings India has started recently, last year, a program on non-fuel minerals and mining in India. And we are progressing on three strands on this program. The first one deals with efficiency of mining activities, which refers to positive economics. And the realm includes exploration, allocation, extraction, FDI, and various issues related to logistics and operations. We are also looking at the international good practices from other countries. And finally, the third thing that we are doing and working on, and that is the topic of the day, is normative part, normative economics. We are looking at the externalities and what ought to be done. And these include environment, local communities, mine closures, sustainable development goals.

As we all know that FM has announced on March 26, that District Mineral Foundation funds can be used by state governments to augment health care. Even though there are issues which particular districts can be- that will be discussed during the discussion today. And what the DMF funds are meant for and how they can be used. As we know, the scheme was inaugurated in 2015, and it is already about five years, and it has been conceptualized as a benefit sharing mechanism. Also, it has now been linked to the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY), and there is about ₹ 38,000 crores that has already been collected. And interestingly, 60% of this originates from non-fuel minerals, and 40% from coal and lignite. Only 38%, less than 40%, has been spent out of it. So, that is the discussion that we are going to go into today. And I'm glad that we are joined by some eminent persons, who have been dealing with it. Starting with Sri Arun Kumar; he's also on the advisory council of this project. He is Former Secretary, Ministry of Mines. We have Sri Sanjeev Verma, Director Ministry of Mines. We also are joined by Sri Ashish Thakare, Collector, District Magistrate, Keonjhar District, Odisha. And from in-house, we have Dr. Srestha Banerjee, who is a visiting scholar at Brookings India.

I might take a couple of more minutes to introduce because I think we all know Mr. Arun Kumar so well, but as it's my duty for everyone to know for those who don't, Shri Arun Kumar is from the Indian Administrative Service and was Secretary to the Ministry of Mines during 2017/2018, where he oversaw

amendments to the Mining Auction Rules, 2018. He had an earlier stint at the Ministry of Mines as Joint Secretary from 2012 to 2015. And he presided over the Mines Tribunal under the Mines and Minerals Development Regulation Act, 1957, which came into effect in 2015. He was also on the board of NALCO (National Aluminium Company), Hindustan Copper Limited and Mineral Exploration Company Limited. He has a combination of Engineering degree, partly from IIT, Delhi, and then he moved to the Railway Mechanical and Electrical Engineers and Economics from Annamalai University. So, he's a combination of engineering and economics both, and former Mining Secretary. Currently, he is an Independent Director of the Board of Petronet LNG Limited. He's also a Management Advisor and Arbitrator. A very warm welcome to you, Arun ji, on today's panel.

We have Sri Sanjeev Verma, who is kind enough despite having a very urgent meeting at 4:15, he is with us. He's currently holding the position of Director, Ministry of Mines. He's also in charge of issues pertaining to District Mineral Foundations funds. Since taking office in 2019, Shri Verma has also been engaged in improving the natural portal database on DMF and Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana, which is the key for improving public knowledge about this important initiative. Thank you very much, Sanjeev, for joining us today.

Hopefully, I think we already have with us, Thakare ji, Ashish ji. You're very welcome. And I would introduce you to all those who are listening to us. Ashish Thakare is from Indian Administrative Service and is the District Collector cum Magistrate of Odisha's Keonjhar District. Keonjhar is one of the top mining districts of Alisha. Prior to Keonjhar, he held the office of DM of Balangir District. He has keen interest in academics as well, and he had also been a Professor and associated with Symbiosis School of Economics, Pune. A very warm welcome to you, Ashish.

Finally, we have our in-house colleague, Dr. Srestha Banerjee, who is working with us on issues of the topic that we are discussing today, post-mining clearances, but more importantly, what we are discussing today regarding the DMF and the use for improving the plight of affected communities. She's currently a Visiting Scholar with us and holds a PhD in Environmental and Energy Policy from the University of Delaware, US. She held the position of a Program Manager at the Centre for Science and Environment before joining us. And has been working on socioeconomic and environmental issues for the past five years, and engaged with central government, as well as three mining states –

Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. So, while she's welcoming all of you, I welcome her to this panel.

And to take it forward, I don't think I'm going to introduce- you know, because I am directing the program, so I would very much like to say something but I know that the time is short and I would soon hand it over to Srestha. Srestha, the reason is that you would say something and, I don't know, Sanjeev, you have to leave early. So, what I'm going to stop at is to introduce things that we are going to discuss. Generally, I'll be coming in intermittently.

The scope and merit of DMF fund to address critical issues of income, livelihood and healthcare, administrative and planning issues with respect to DMF implementation, and accountability questions and engagement of local communities and public engagement. I think with this brief beginning, I would like to hand it over to Srestha. And Srestha, see to it that Sanjeev has to leave early. And I hope, Ashish, you will be with us during this webinar. I'm not able to hear you. So, you are here. And I hope Mr. Arun Kumar is already in, Srestha?

**Srestha:** Yeah. Everyone is there, Prof. Chadha.

**Rajesh:** Okay. Over to you, Srestha.

**Srestha:** Sure. Thanks, Prof. Chadha. Thank you for the introduction. And actually, it's a pleasure to have some of the very key people in this panel today. It's a pleasure to discuss this issue with them, particularly Arun ji was there when District Mineral Foundation was being instituted as the Secretary. And we have the Director of Mines, who is at the centre. And of course, Ashish, I have been very close to you also, communicating with him, working with him over the past years as the top mining district representative.

So, I will leave most of the discussions to, I guess, panellists to reflect on. But what I would like to start with is that, I feel that this is a time when District Mineral Foundation needs to be discussed with more importance than ever. What the past two months has actually showed us – the COVID-19 crisis – is that two of India's most critical sectors, the local economy, the economy, as well as the healthcare are in a dire crisis. We saw the scale that these things need to be improved. The migrant crisis every day, we are watching on TV or news is showing, you know, we cannot rely on people going to other states and looking for job options, but we need to provide them jobs in their own States and in their own districts. So, I believe that the work has to be done at the lowest administrative levels. And when we speak of the lowest administrative level in this country, it's district, and that's where the context of DMF is. The other thing is also, I believe that the government of India is looking into a lot of options right

now, how to spend in the economy and the healthcare system. But it is also a great opportunity for us actually, to tap into the institutions and the resources which we already have in hand, and maybe not have been utilized optimally.

Now, what is DMF? Before we go into how it constrained the livelihood, income and healthcare, Prof. Chadha has given a background already that it has been instituted as a benefit sharing mechanism with mining affected communities. And the thought actually started 10 years back. But the very important observations, which is I think is common sense that, if all of us go to mining areas, and if we have seen pictures of enough mining areas, looked at the statistics, one thing is very clear: that over the past years, India's mineral development has earned the government revenues, has benefited in many ways the mining industry, but what it's not really translated into is the ground-level improvement. When we talk of human development indicators, when we talk of income generation, so on and so forth. With that thought in 2015, DMF was brought into effect through an amendment of our central mining law, the Mines and Minerals Development and Regulation Amendment Act – it was amended. In September, the Prime Minister's scheme came into effect, the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana, and DMF and PMKKKY has been aligned together to improve the benefit from mining affected communities. We have already seen the stats and Prof. Chadha, as he spoke about it, that there was quite a handsome amount of money in DMF today. Just for reference, I will go through it.

So, yes, the accrual today, over the past four-and-a-half years is nearly 38,000 Crore. All types of minerals, coal, non-coal minerals share a significant part of it and also minor minerals. Now, how this money comes to DMF is it comes through a contribution by the mining companies, which are operating in those districts. So, they are supposed to pay an equivalent amount of royalty amount, a percentage of the royalty amount that they pay to the state governments. Which is, if leases have been granted before 2015, they pay 30% equivalent of the royalty. And if leases have been granted post 2015, which is through the auction mechanism, they pay 10% of the royalty amount. Now, with this kind of payment, some of the top mining states, which have the highest amount of DMF funds are very clearly, Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarhi, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, basically the mining heartbeat of India. When we come to fund use, the fund use actually have been much slower, and now it is gearing up. So, right now it stands at nearly 14,000 crores plus. And this is as for data of March 2020. So, until the last financial year, we can roughly see.

Now, the question is, why do we want DMF to invest on income and healthcare? There are two reasons to it. Number one is, the law requires it to be spent. So,

when we talk of DMF, it is saying that in all states DMF rules in fact, income generation livelihood and skill development has been placed as a high priority sector, where the DMF money has to be spent on. Secondly, the DMF law itself is saying that the people who have been worst effected by mining are the people who have lost their livelihood, or lost their land because of mining and related activities. And they are the key beneficiaries of DMF. The third reason is also, the PMKKKY guideline has clearly pointed out that one of its key objectives is to improve sustainable livelihood in the mining districts. So, there are three clear regulatory prerogatives why it has to be done.

For healthcare, it is the same situation. Like healthcare investments has been placed as a high priority activity for all DMF Trust under the law. Not just the law, what I would like to say is that, even if we look at the bare realities of this mining affected districts, we see that there is a huge situation with proper income. In fact, income security and healthcare. Most statistics says that we know that most of the mines are in rural areas of this districts. But if we look at the rural household earnings, it shows that about 80 to 90% of the rural household in most of these districts have the highest earning member getting below 5,000 rupees per month. And we don't know what is the lowest to that; it's below 5,000. What then adds to the problem is that most of the workers in this district, about 50% or more are manual or casual laborers. And we don't have data on this, but I have worked across mining districts, both coal and non-coal, and when we talked to many of these laborers, they say that they get half of the minimum wage. In India, our country does not have a great minimum wage rate, but even then they get half of it. So, the ground reality is very stark and that's why we see, for construction and all why people just leave their states and districts and go to some other place.

When we come to healthcare, it is the same situation. Actually, Brookings India had developed a fantastic health monitor and what it shows essentially, is the access to healthcare. And when we look at districts like Keonjhar, there is a critical problem of primary health care system. And not just Keonjhar, it is in West Singhbhum, it is the whole districts like Korba, Ramgarh, everyone. Where we see that about 5%, 10%, 15% villages only have a primary healthcare centre within five kilometres. The second question is not just the infrastructure, it's also about the resources. There are not enough healthcare personnel. Again, the data has been really poor on this, but the painstaking exercise across 13, 14 mining districts that I did over the past two to three years had shown that most of the centres run at a 50% staff deficit. So, we have a critical problem of healthcare staff, healthcare resources, as well as stock infrastructure.

Now, given that reality and the prerogative, DMFTs, unfortunately I would suggest, have not made the required spending on these two sectors. While I would also say that the tide is turning and Ashish ji can reflect on both and Sanjeev ji also. But over the past four years, what we have seen is that all the top mining state, starting from Odisha to Maharashtra, these are the states which have more than 1000 crores DMF accrual so far, has made much less investments than what is required on these two sectors. In fact, it's a shocking revelation that a state like Jharkhand has practically zero investment on livelihood and skill development. You'll see the same in Rajasthan, very low in Telangana, Karnataka, even in Chhattisgarh. So, the problem is stark.

Now the question is that, the COVID-19 crisis now, how do we actually deal with the situation? And I feel that the regulators are the best, the administrators are the best in reflecting on this right now. My own experience suggests that there are clear gaps in the number of issues. There are administrative challenges that the fund has not been used well. There are planning issues, which needs to actually integrate the people who are the local communities. And also, there are certain understanding public engagement and accountability issues, because one of the key challenges for the country has always been that we have fantastic laws, but no one knows what is there for them. So, if you go to a mining area and the person who is actually the beneficiary of DMF or PMKKKY even doesn't know about it. So, I'll stop at that and I'll leave to the other panellists to reflect on all of this, and we can take questions as we would like to. Thank you, prof. Chadha.

**Rajesh:** Thank you very much. Srestha, am I audible?

**Srestha:** Yes.

**Rajesh:** Okay. So, I think since Sanjeev ji has to leave, I will give the time to him now. And I would raise some queries and then some questions that can be taken later, but in his case, I need to do it, you know, because he has to leave at 4:15. Some of the queries that we were discussing internally, Srestha and I, and the team, is regarding what is government's perception on DMF fund use by districts at this critical time? You know, this COVID time is a critical time. The second thing that we were discussing, Srestha has already mentioned that, the DMF planning and implementation has been a key challenge in most mining states and districts. Some of the outstanding issues are lack of engagement of local communities to do a need-based planning, lack of DMF office or deficiency of required staff, and issues of public outreach, et cetera. The third thing that we were discussing is, what kind of administrative issues must be addressed to improve DMF implementation? And the Ministry of Mines had started the

process of revising PMKKKY guidelines to improve DMF implementation. What is the status on that?

Simultaneously, I have two questions from those who are listening to this discussion, and the ones that are pertinent to Mr. Sanjeev Verma I am speaking out. How long will it take to develop exclusive websites at the state level with the details of DMF collections and project proposals received? And the other one is that at one open forum, it was discussed that planning of DMF projects is way beyond the capacity of the existing district administration. How would we take it forward? So, maybe with these indicative questions, I would give it to Mr. Verma to respond, and I might have one or two more while you are discussing. Thank you.

**Sanjeev Verma:** Thank you, Mr. Chadha and his team for inviting me, and sorry that I will spend less time, otherwise it would have been an interesting discussion on this. I'll go through the data already Srestha had discussed, that we have spent almost ₹ 14,000 crores. But another thing we came to know that almost ₹ 10,000 crores, other than this 14,000 that states and districts have made commitment to different types of projects. For the last six months, now we are taking monthly review on video conferences with different states for improving the implementation of this fund. Because when it was very low in January, I think in total 24% or something. And last year, we have tried a lot to improve the spend percentage and monitoring of District Mineral Foundations. Currently, it stands at 36%. We'll try to achieve the target set by ministry the next year.

And looking into the COVID activity, as you have discussed, that is March. So, contribution of Minister of Mines, that in this current pandemic situation of COVID-19, how can ministerial mines contribute to the Indian welfare of the people? He assured that DMF funds can be used by states for the screening, medical equipment, food, sanitizer, masks, with two conditions: one that there should be a minimum of one patient of COVID-19 in the state, and food, masks, sanitizer all other things, they can be allowed in all the states. On Friday, we had a VC with all states, because there's a mechanism of monitoring this use of DMF funds for COVID-19 as finance ministry and empowered group of secretaries. So, we had a VC with all the states, 18 states, where we asked them whether there are any other issues regarding the use of funds for COVID-19. Barring one Odisha and Gujarat, no state raised any major issues for the use of DMF funds in COVID-19. And incidentally, one or two states said that they have kept these DMF funds as a contingency fund, like Chhattisgarh. Now, the cases are increasing there, Chhattisgarh. Today only I talked to the contact person, now that cases are increasing in Chhattisgarh, they will spend the funds now because earlier there



were no cases. And looking at the current situation of the country, almost 1.4 lakhs cases have been tested positive in India and 508 out of 574 districts which are having DMF districts which have minimum one patient.

So, there was an issue raised by one or two states that this one patient condition is hampering that use of DMF funds. But looking into that statistics, I don't see that there's any restriction; in 508 districts, the funds can be used for. And for food, like there was a discussion on migrant labour issue in Ministry of Finance, where I attend these meetings, that how can it be helpful, migrant labours? We request them that food, masks, sanitizer, it can be provided from the DMF funds. Until and unless that they can certify that all other funds available have been exhausted, then they can use this DMF funds. Because we also should know that COVID-19 will not stop within two or three months, so it'll go for long. It may go up for two to three years. So, there's life beyond COVID also. We have to see the picture or life beyond COVID, like Srestha is doing. Like she has written in this article, I was going through her article, she's written a beautiful article, that the focus should be on healthcare.

I have some suggestions, or it can be said that this suggestion should not be treated like these are coming from government. These are my suggestions, which I try to raise wherever that I get the opportunity. At post COVID-19, we should augment our health infrastructure drastically. Like Srestha told that the number of hospitals drastically and to do that, we need to augment our health infrastructure. And the most important thing that I came to know when discussing this is the testing facility. Because now also, the speed of testing is good. It is increasing day by day, but COVID-19 is going to stay here. It'll not go easily. So, we have to do more tests and we have to augment our capacity of screening and testing. We have to augment our existing health establishment, availability of ventilators, PPE, medical screening equipment. And also, not only medical equipment, we have to do capacity building for the staff also. Only buying a machine and hiring a machine will not do the purpose. Buying that machine with a maintenance contract, so that it can last for long, it will not be ideal because of problems into there. And there's another idea, there was the idea for telemedicine; we can go for telemedicine kind of thing post COVID-19 from the use of DMF funds.

And one day, particularly, I was going through, I was discussing with- now, as we're talking, skilled development, like Srestha mentioned, skill development. And post COVID-19, there will be shortage of jobs and all of the sectors. We should develop the Testing Training Institute for Diagnostics through DMF funds. Like sooner or later, we'll need more diagnostic, more tests. So, we should develop skill in these fields, so that more and more jobs can be provided into that.

And sooner or later, I hope it should come fast, either a medicine or vaccination will come for COVID-19. So, we should start developing mechanism that how we will go when the vaccine will be available. How will we go for the vaccination of our people? We should start developing pre-plan because sooner or later the vaccination will come. I hope it will come fast. We should educate our teams. We should train our teams. I don't know whether you know that iGOT training videos. We should train our people; the health staff, teachers. We should make use of our schools and video conferences for training of these staff through iGOT portal. We should improve our testing infrastructure. And there's an abrupt idea, I'll just flow to that. The next year, census is also going to be there, 2021, and COVID-19 may stay till 2021. So, whenever a person goes for a census, at least we should train a medical with him also, so that he will check the symptoms. If vaccinations come, we can include these suggestions which I talked that can be used, that it will breed up preventive measures of several ways of how to stay safe in COVID-19 moment, social distancing. And if vaccine is available, she can take a vaccine. So, during the census also, all the data will be built up on this.

And also, in rural areas, there are so many genetic diseases. So also, we should develop strategy for how do we prevent it from these genetic diseases? I could talk of, in this short time, of course COVID-19, these can be thought off. I know most of the activity that I have to do only, I've kept these things in my book and whenever, like you have discussed the guidelines. These are under discussion and very soon, ministry will come with new guidelines, we are going to approve it. Before COVID-19, we do the lock down, some of the discussions could not be done. And now very soon, maybe within a month, we'll come up with new guidelines. Well, I've tried to put all these discussions, what I have told here, to help make the guideline better.

And the question regarding the portal, that there's an existing portal, but I'm sad to say that because of some contract issues, the portal has not lived up to its expectations. So, we are going for a portal 2.0. You can say, what's in 2.0 of that? We're working on that. Very soon, you'll get a new updated portal, where the query of the person will be resolved. And like monitoring, you talked about stuff on mechanism of monitoring and implementation of that. I already told you that we are having a monthly VC with state governments. And in this lockdown also, we had a VC with all these states, so that there should be no problem of communication between districts, states and ministry on the use of these guidelines issued during COVID-19.

I have just these words to say. During this short time, I could gather only these. Thanks.

**Rajesh:** Thank you very much, Sanjeev, for giving the viewpoint of what you have in mind and how DMF can help. If you are still with us, I would run through maybe some queries so that when I invite Mr. Arun Kumar and Mr. Thakare, these questions can then be taken forward. And I won't name because I'm just reading out few questions, which can be considered as appropriate by Ashish and Banerjee.

First of all, there is a question on, are the causes of unspent balances specific to DMFs or problems with cess funds in general? So, this is one. The second one is, should unspent balances of DMF funds be mobilized to fight COVID-19, or should they be kept specifically for the benefit of mining affected communities? I think there is a debate on this already, you know, that you said that there has to be a COVID positive case in a particular district for DMF funds to be spent. And probably DMF funds cannot be spent in adjacent districts, only in the mining districts. The third query that somebody would like to take, this is to all the panellists, in fact, what reviews are there of DMF performance, including accumulation of unspent balances, and what needs to be done? Next, as there are not proper guidelines on the directly affected and partially affected areas in DMF and PMKKKY guidelines, it is leading to a likely misuse of DMF funds from the central and the state response on appropriating the DMF funds. What measures do states have in mind? And then, the next question is to both Sanjeev and Ashish: have you considered using DMF funds to develop cold chain infrastructure, to ensure village-level distribution of vaccines in future? And can we have some ideas about increasing liquidity in the rural economy? Investment on health infrastructure is not sufficient to support distressed communities.

These are some of the questions that I received while I am listening to both of you. However, we do have one more set that I thought that I would highlight, so that while you are discussing, you can take this forward. Now, the first set is regarding District Middle Foundation Trusts are governed under the rules notified by respective states. Has the union Ministry of Mines ensured that DMFTs, that is plus, are constituted in all relevant districts? Are any other ministries responsible for ensuring that DMFTs have been constituted? How can the Ministry of Mines, other ministries ensure that DMFT has been established? And is there, has there been any audit? Lastly, where I will stop, who is the most influential person implementing when the DMF trust funds? Are these the local politicians, bureaucrats or local communities? I'll stop here at the moment. And since this will give some food for thought for discussion. If Arun ji is already in, he was facing some problem, I would like to invite him. Srestha, are you aware

if Arun ji is online now? He's very much watching, but he couldn't get online for some reason.

**Sanjeev:** Sorry, I'll take one of the questions because I have to leave.

**Rajesh:** Please.

**Sanjeev:** Thank you. One of them asked that DMF funds can be used for COVID-19 that is reserved for mining community? So, that's why the DMF has a limit of 30%. Because as I said in my small introductory talk, that there's a life beyond COVID also. That's why we have that 30% on the capping, so not all the funds are spent on the COVID-19 and then we are left with nothing after the one or two years for spending on mining areas. Yeah, tell, Srestha.

Srestha: this is an observation for you, Sanjeev, since you will be leaving soon. The question, actually, the purpose of, I guess, the DMF is also- COVID-19 is just a trigger for all of us to realize. And I have been telling this to many people right now, over the past days, that in India, we don't actually see a crisis unless something like this happens. So, the healthcare situation and the income levels at the district levels have been a longstanding problem. So, I guess, to all the participants who are there, this discussion is not about how DMF can address COVID. No. The purpose is that COVID has shown us that these are the critical sectors, which needs a lot of focus. And unless we strengthen our local economy, or our local healthcare going forward, we will never be able to withstand any shock, not even to the level of COVID, even smaller shock. We have bigger challenge of climate change coming up.

So, I believe from there, we need to realize how important this fund to address some of the fundamental issues of this country. And I believe that the Ministry of Mines also, when formulating guidelines or thinking ahead, keeps that bigger picture in mind. COVID is a one-time signal, but I don't think it is the end of it in terms of DMF discussions, and the guidelines needs to think of a more strong future for India and these local areas.

**Sanjeev:** Yeah, I agree Srestha with what you have said. And I have seen the questions, I have taken them onto my points. I will try, I'll come back, I have a meeting, I'll come back to stay with you and try to answer more of the answers. Thank you, Mr. Chadha. Thank you, Srestha for bearing with me. Thanks, Ashish, I'll love to talk with you later. Bye.

**Rajesh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Verma. Thanks for joining. And I do understand that Ashish, you are going to be with us throughout. So, I do

understand that Mr. Arun Kumar could not join because of some issue with his laptop, but is he online, Ganesh?

**Ganesh:** Yes. He is online with me. One second. Mr. Kumar,

**Rajesh:** Arun ji, would you like to take forward from where I left?

**Rajesh:** Ganesh, I'm not able to listen.

**Ganesh:** Can you hear, Prof. Chadha?

**Rajesh:** No.

**Ganesh:** Okay now?

**Rajesh:** Yeah. Yeah. It is better. We can hear some.

**Rajesh:** Ganesh, I'm sorry, it's not working.

**Ganesh:** Yeah. One second.

**Rajesh:** Okay. I think while they're setting up, Ashish, over to you. And thank you very much, I said it in the beginning and once again, thanks for joining. We are really delighted to have you with us. Are you muted?

**Srestha:** I think he is muted.

**Rajesh:** something is not working. When you unmute, we are not able to hear you.

**Arun Kumar:** Okay, well, I'll keep repeating one, two, three. One, two, three.

**Rajesh:** Yes, ready to go.

**Arun Kumar:** Now you can hear me?

**Rajesh:** Yes, we can.

**Arun Kumar:** Okay. So, I'd like to react to a few things, which Mr. Chadha said. That number one, why is the implementation so slow? In the sense that there are funds, lying about 50% of the funds are, you know, unspent. That is one. And how can this be made vibrant? It is as, I think the Director for Ministry of Mine said, one issue is of course, COVID, but there are many other issues and other livelihoods, which Srestha said, lively is a concern, accessibility for health is a concern, road is a concern. So, there are other concerns in the rural areas. And that's a full mosaic of concerns.

Now, what is the implementation structure? The implementation structure allows the district to draw up a district plan, right? And the money accrues directly to

the state government with the district. Now, herein lies a problem at the central ministry monitoring. Actually, in truth, the central ministry does not release any funds. And when you don't release funds, you do not have the ability to ask the lion to jump when you crack the whip. So, to treat this as a central scheme, you know, it is said, DMF, PMKKKY and all that, is to begin with a slight misnomer because it is the funds are available in the states. The States have drawn up guidelines. The States are to take this forward. So, one has to look at state wise and engage, if there are people who wish to engage and take this forward, it'll have to be a state-specific initiative. Initiative from the central government will only go so far.

The other thing is that, you see at the district level, unfortunately, you know, it's a power matrix between the MLA and the DM, because these are the two designatory levels of negotiation, so to say, in the whole DMF issue. At some places, the CMs have laid down priority, this is what we will do. So, that is another level it has come in. Obviously, the CM has drawn up priority, MLAs and the district collectors surely will follow it at the expense of pain to themselves. So, this is the sort of devolution. This is sort of the implementation machinery in the power equations, which go into the making of the plan and the speed of the plan, et cetera.

Now, what is to be done? In this problem, it is really easy to say A, B, C, D, these are the problems, and then you sit back and just moan and then go away. So, as I said, in cases where states are not acting up, and they are not even utilizing the funds, there has to be state-specific trust. As I said, the central government would not be a very correct institution to do that; it'll have to come from the local people. Now it's easier said than done, but for example, if this was held in a zero-expenditure state, by Srestha leading the discussion, and some NGOs add pains to themselves – and I'm saying it in very polite language – pains to themselves and willing to take up this issue, then things would get moving. Or take up the issue because the guidelines are very clear. The whole thing is to be audited; audit reports are to be put up in the public domain, and so on and so forth. The other thing is that, you know, these are issues which need to come before the public. That look, you've got a few thousand crores, there is no audit report in the public domain, which was supposed to be there and therefore, you shape up.

So, as I said, it's really easier said than done. It has to be local initiatives to bring in accountability, to see that the expenditure bandwagon goes forward. I'll stop preaching more and be more in a listening mode hereinafter.

**Rajesh:** okay. Thank you very much. And the questions are pouring in for which we'll go later. And over be you, Mr. Thakare.

**Ashish Thakare:** Good afternoon. Rajesh ji, can you hear me now?

**Rajesh** We can. Yes, we can.

**Ashish:** Yeah. So, first of all, thanks a lot for having me on this webinar. I'm thankful to Prof. Chadha, I'm thankful to Dr. Banerjee also. And especially listening to Arun Kumar sir and Director sir on this webinar.

I think basing on the discussion that has been happening till now, from a district perspective, what I want to mention is that health and livelihood are the top most priority area for us in DMF. And I'll go on both sectors one by one. And also, keeping in mind the COVID context that we're dealing in now. One is that health sector has been topmost priority for all of us, and especially in Keonjar, where I'm working. Where we have been investing in all the three layers of healthcare sector; in the primary sector, strengthening our PHCs, getting more equipment, strengthening our CHCs. Then strengthening our district hospitals that has been one sector. Director Sanjeev spoke about telemedicine; over the last two years, we have been implementing a project called 'the district dispensary', which has been there. And we have done an investment in setting up a medical college and teaching hospital. Because what our investment should do in infrastructure, unless we have human resource, unless you have doctors who are there to work in various PHCs, these facilities are no use. So, unless we go for having more doctors coming out, hence the reason for having a medical college and a teaching hospital through DMF. With that, ultimately strengthening our healthcare facility, which happens there. So, that is that.

And coming to the COVID-19 context, I think, as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in states, we began to take actions for that. DMF funds are leveraged. And, as basing on the discussion by Director Sanjeev also, what we've been doing is that sharing our facilities. Now in Keonjar, we have a dedicated COVID facility setup. We had two buildings, which are meant to be hostels; we turned them into a COVID-19 hospital. And Keonjar district till now, we didn't have a proper ICU. But now, in this preparation for COVID-19, we have 14 bed ICU with eight ventilators set up there. And this could be done because we have DMF funds and we could easily fast track our preparation and get the thing done. So, we have 200-bed COVID hospital ready with all the equipment required for a multispecialty hospital. So, that has been a priority for us, in terms of COVID-19.

And, of course, apart from that, what we're doing is at every seized block level, we are setting up COVID care centres. Because for asymptomatic patients, you don't need a proper hospital treatment. You only need proper isolation for them and proper monitoring. So, we have created around 1,500-bed COVID care centres spread across the district, so that it can be better managed. And then we'll fill them up as the many cases arise and we can tackle them better. So, DMF funds have been leveraged quite effectively to prepare and augment our facilities for COVID-19. That has been one point for the healthcare sector. Of course, over the last two years, we have been hiring doctors, we're paying them very competitive salaries. Hiring specialists, getting super specialists onboard. And we have around 50 plus doctors working in various remote mining areas through DMF. And recently, we also went for hiring around 185 paramedic staff because paramedics staff play a critical role in healthcare management. So, we're having them through DMF. So, augmenting the human resource, augmenting the equipment and infrastructure. And of course, the physical buildings, which need to be built, which are there. These are broadly what we have been investing for the healthcare. And healthcare, the dividends are quite high that we are yet to see. That has been one sector.

Second is livelihood. Livelihood, broadly, we have been investing around 100 crores plus through agriculture production clusters, through silviculture – silviculture is quite a popular in the livelihood sector in Keonjar district. We have Wadi plantation, which benefits more than 1500 families, the agriculture production cluster covers more than 6,000 families. And we're also now starting with the poultry and a goatery cluster, where we can cover more than 5,000 families who are vulnerable. So, these have been clusters, which we have been working.

But coming to the real part of implementing it, the livelihood sector takes much more time to implement because these are the sectors where you can't fix a solution. You need to make it more localized. You have to contextualize in the constant blocks. So, what works in a mining block may not work in a block which is next to it. Block A will have some other issues, Block B will have some other issues. So, we need to contextualize it. Livelihood project is more about participation communities, understanding what the requirements are, building their capacities. So, it takes long time for us to ground any livelihood project. So, why do you plan just livelihood projects, which covers around 1500 marginal families or poor families. It took us around a year to ground it. Similarly, for agriculture production clusters, around 6,000 plus families have been covered through agriculture production cluster activities. It has taken around a year for us



to ground it. And this request a lot of hard work, a lot of, you know, going into details that needs to be done. So, these are broad challenges that we face in level of sector.

Of course, we have to also understand livelihood cannot be imposed upon communities. We have to understand what communities require and what kind of livelihood they would like to do, and then respond accordingly. If you go to the coal mining sector, they may not be very keen on traditional livelihood activities. They're more keen on, say, having some driving training given to them so that they can drive trucks, which are used in mining dispatch. So, one has to contextualize policies to create better livelihood. Also, to give ultimate livelihood apart from the mining sector employment, you need to also set up an alternate livelihood for them, which they can always fall back upon. These are broad points that I would like to mention.

Coming to the COVID-19 context. Now, Odisha being a state, which is receiving returnees, as we call them. So, returning labours who are coming back from, say, states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, that are coming back to our state, they're coming back to home now. And we are preparing in terms of, you know, once they come back, their health care and how do we receive them, how do we quarantine them. But in the long run, of course, we have to ensure that what kind of local refuge we can provide to them. And for that, a major proposal that we have worked out and we are sending to the government, and it has now moved to Government of India, is that under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme, the minimum wage that MNREGA or Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme gives is around 207 rupees minimum wage. While the minimum wage that comes, following the labour guidelines is 298. There's a gap of about 91 rupees, which is there. So, we have proposed that this gap should be met through DMF, so that In Keonjar, every NREGA worker gets the minimum wage as mandated by the notification of government. And we are hopeful that Government of India will accept our proposal because funding is through DMF. And this actually will help in actually giving much more income in the hands of NREGA workers. On a daily basis now, I have around 70,000 to one lakh people under the scheme. So, one lakh people are working in NREGA on a daily basis now, and this is the critical time that NREGA plays an important role. So, DMF can augment it by having more resources flowing to the people as of each component. That is one thing which we are pushing now and we're hopeful it will be through in the next couple of days. And of course, in the long run, livelihood projects are being taken up, which will help in augmenting income at the local level.

So, these are broad points, which I would like to start with. I'll be happy to answer questions or take further discussions in this regard.

**Rajesh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Thakare, for giving the view from the field, which is really, really important, you know, because you are at the forefront and acting on what needs to be done, and how best to manage the DMF funds. And you've given your perspective. Srestha, would you like to add anything before we proceed further with some questions? Your reactions?

**Srestha:** Yeah. Because I guess Prof. Chadha, we have a host of very interesting questions. I was going through some of it. My overall observation from all these years, I guess, Arun ji I think very rightly pointed out that instead of putting it on the centre and relying on the centre, in fact, to fix this fund use or implementation of DMF, that actually the engagement is required at the state and district levels. I believe so very much because it's a state-specific issue and it is a decentralized governance issue. In fact, DMF gives us an opportunity to build on the strengths of decentralized governance mechanism. I would just give an example because we have Ashish from Odisha himself. The Odisha government, in fact, during the COVID-19 crisis was given a lot of power to sarpanches, in fact, to deal with the migrant laborers who are coming back, to quarantine them, to take care. So, basically, we have a very good decentralized system, but which actually is in theory, but not in practice.

I believe this is the time we need to strengthen our local institutions more with, of course, accountability. But at the same time, media has been also not talking about it and it has come to the forefront. I was reading. In fact, the fantastic webinar that is coming up by the National Institute of Rural Development, where it will be discussed that how local frontline workers of NGOs can be roped in to improve livelihood and healthcare in these rural areas. I feel at the same time, strengthening some of the sectors like education, healthcare, in fact, feeds into the livelihood aspect. What DMFT needs to do going ahead is look, not into a sector wise investment, but look into a comprehensive investment plan because each sector feeds into each other. Education must actually improve someone getting a job. If you improve on healthcare, it creates a healthy workforce, but at the same time, we can create opportunities for doctors and nurses, local tribal women can be fantastic nurses. So, it's all interconnected. It is not one against the other that we have to prioritise, but that's what we need to go forward and think of.

The other thing I would say, because I have worked with civil society organizations for a long time, and I will go ahead and do so also, I love to engage

with people. I feel a lot of times, we need to create the trust in people about many of these funds. And going ahead, looking the COVID crisis every day, I think that there is so much distrust about what people can get and what people cannot get. So, for every scheme, every program, every fund we have, I believe DMFT, one of the critical challenges is outreach and accountability. Because unless that is there, it will always be a topic of a seminar or discussion within officials, but will never reach the scope it has. And I leave to that, and we can take the questions forward. Thank you.

**Rajesh:** Perfect. I think one of the things that one might need to know, when we are talking about the centre and the states' role, and this is a question for Ashish, I understand that districts in Odisha, like Khordha, Jajpur, Cuttack and Bhadrak, which are adjacent to the major mineral building districts. So, if there are issues of COVID or other important requirements in these adjacent districts, probably the state needs centre's permission and the same probably is not granted. So, if you can just give some of your thoughts on that, that'll be very important. And now, the queries that I'm reading out, I won't be commenting on that, but I think Arun ji, Mr. Thakare and then Srestha, you will be speaking towards the end.

I do have a question here. How can DMF be converged with government livelihood programs, given MG, NREGA, NRLM, et cetera alone can't be sufficient? I think you spoke about this, but still there is a question, if you would like to have a response to that. But there are few more, because we still have about 20 minutes to go, so I think it'll be good to discuss.

One is that, what are the possibilities for creating incentives using DMF for community workers in health, nutrition, et cetera in mining affected districts for better development outcomes in the district? I know you touched upon this, but if Arunjeev and someone else can take it up.

Then there is a question on mine workers and mining affected communities are at high risk category for COVID-19 because of, you know, the conditions and their morbidity conditions, given that their lungs are impacted by mining activities already. So, they will be the first to succumb to COVID-19 because of poor health already. Hence, will the people be eligible for compensation calculated based on some government schemes? And what measures for the future to prevent occupational diseases using funds from DMFT? I don't know why this discussion, but why is the name 'Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana' important?

Next question that comes to me is, with the absence of autonomy in the efficient execution of the DMF due to the interference from the centre and the state

governments, even at a crisis time like this, is it indicating a need for a radical paradigm change in the regulatory governance of the DMF? What kind of benefit sharing model will work better in India for the welfare of people in difficult times like this?

And lastly, what about state's health department budgets? Why from DMF? Why can't the healthcare be taken by the state governments? Some questions that I am highlighting, and can I give the floor to Mr. Arun Kumar? Because he said that he would respond to the questions and I have raised in many discussion points. Arunjeev, over to you.

**Ganesh:** Prof. Chadha, Arun ji is saying that he has answered the questions he can, and now he's taking a listening role.

**Rajesh:** Okay. So, over to you Mr. Thakare.

**Ashish:** Yeah. I think responding to that first question raised regarding what about districts adjoining the mining districts in Odisha? Now I can come in from a district perspective. I think to the best of my knowledge, there is no proposal from the state government to divert DMF funds to any other places apart from the concerned districts where it is located. So, I think government has clearly told the DMF districts in Odisha. So, for example, Sundargarh and Keonjhar, the two top districts having a DMF funds, they're utilizing DMF funds for our district requirement to manage COVID-19 situations. While other districts that you mentioned like Khordha or Bhadrak, they're getting state department funds for doing it. So, this whole thing of diverting funds to other districts is not there at all. So, I don't think that is a proposal also, with the rest of my knowledge, that is not there. That is that regarding the funding issue.

Now, regarding this issue regarding that, why not state budget and why DMF? I think that's the whole point. What happens is DMF acts as an augmenting factor for any district having DMF funds. So, for example, when Keonjhar began investing in healthcare, we don't have to wait for state budgets to be given because state budgets are always limited. So, for example, when we went for a medical college and a teaching hospital, we could do it at one go for the simple reason, we had sufficient funds to take it up. Because I have seen, in a previous posting in Balangir, where we had a medical college being taken up, there it took us around 10 years to balance funds and get things done. The entire project took around 10 years to come through. But in the case of Keonjhar, we're able to get the project sanctioned and taken up in the next two-and-a-half or three years, it's nearing getting competition now. So, DMF gives that leverage to have projects in a much faster way and much more effectively.

So, like for example, in case of education, as a step to improve the classroom environment, we have taken up two projects. One project involves electrifying every school where there is no power supply, where there's no power supply, giving them proper electric fittings, fans and tube lights. And second is, having every school in mining affected village dual bench and desk, which is appropriate so children don't sit on the floor. In our urban areas, we take these things for granted in schools. But if you come to rural areas, and the vast network of school that is there. So, we have installed around 17,000 plus units of dual bench and desk in schools. And the entire classroom atmosphere has changed. Children are coming back; children are enjoying the classroom atmosphere. Learning output tends to improve through these activities. We had a scholarship exam, where we have covered around 8,500 students and we had a scholarship for class third, fifth and eighth. So, these activities can be taken up because DMF funds are there. Or for example, in the midday meal program that government has, government mandates to give eggs on twice a week; that is, Tuesday and Friday. But what we do in the case of Keonjhar is that we give egg on daily basis because egg is quite nutritious, and we find children who consume eggs on daily basis are showing better nutritional parameters. Now, of course, attendance also improves because egg acts as a very good pull factor. And this project wasn't replicated by other non-DMF districts, so only DMF districts have the capacity to do this for such programs. So, I think that whole debate of state budget and DMF needs to be put aside because DMF acts as an augmenting factor in this thing.

The third question was regarding, you know, convergence of livelihood programs that various government at the state government and central government have, along with DMF. That, of course, we're doing. For example, the Wadi project that we do, a part funding is DMF, part is Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme. We have the agriculture production cluster scheme, where we have funds from agriculture department and DMF funds, which augment it, and we're able to increase the reach of the programs. So, if the government plans for us a block or a small unit to start with the project, in case of DMF, we're able to increase the scale immediately. So, that is our advantage of having DMF, that we're able to push and take it further.

**Rajesh:** Yes. Srestha, over to you.

**Srestha:** Yeah. I will put it just in one way. So, in fact, I was going through some of the questions, we received a lot of questions about whether DMF can be spent on this issue, such as workers' health, whether DMF can be spent on livelihood and so on and so forth, which are all very pertinent questions. And we have, in fact, heard this over the years.

One thing I would fundamentally like to clarify to all of you, the problem is that we often see a law as a rule book. And the challenge with DMFT has also become that we are looking at DMF rule as a rule book. Tick marking; X can be done, Y can't be done, Z can be done. But if someone looks into the law, and in my past organization, in CSE, what we tried to do is, we tried to simplify the DMF rules into Hindi/Oriya for people to understand that there's no rule book. In fact, DMF is a fantastic fund, which I didn't mention in the beginning. It's an untied fund and non-exhaustible fund. So, it does not have only one rule book purpose. The basic thing that it is telling is, that whatever is the need of a particular area and the community there, who have been affected by mining or related operations, DMF can be spent that way. In fact, I sometimes think that in some areas, you know, in coal mining areas, like Singrauli, there is a huge issue of energy access to the rural poor. In many areas, it is the challenge. Energy access can be a fantastic way to use DMF funds, at least to some extent, because if you have energy, many of the healthcare facility don't function because there is no light, there is no electricity. I have been in Jethra district where there was only two hours of electricity in the summer months. So, energy access is a key for children to be in school, for healthcare facilities to function. So, there's no rule book for DMF that it can be used in X or Y. But the main point is it should be need-based. Whatever is the need to improve the human development indicators.

And that's why I think DMF needs a vision plan. DMF needs a comprehensive planning board, I constantly emphasize on. And why I'm saying this also, Ashish is there, Arunjeev is there, the problem with district is that the district administrators, however they are good, they have a limited term. That is a limitation of our Indian administrative service. So, even a DC starts on something, we need to see it going ahead. So, today, Ashish starts something, there should be a continuity for big projects too. But in districts, a lot of times what happens is one district commissioner on my district starts something, his going away or her going away is an end to that work. So, I feel that that's the reason we need a vision. We need a planning and we need a need-based planning; I'm repeatedly saying this. Because unless people know what they're getting, or what is there, there will be continuous distrust. Prof. Chadha can reflect on it a little more, today we're talking mining sector has been put at the helm of India's economic revival. Now, there are other laws which are applicable to the mining sector, I'm not even going to go into that. But all I'm saying is that, you know, we are talking about these sectors, but people don't know about anything that is related to the sector; any laws, any regulations. So, this public engagement is extremely critical and we need that long-term vision planning. I don't think nothing is there that can't be done.

Yes, there was a question about laborers' health. Of course, it can be done. Like Rajasthan government, for that matter, has tied it to the state health policy. Now, how this can be revised? In fact, there was a discussion we also had on inputs we gave to the government, that DMF funds should augment, of course, comorbidity is much higher among mine laborers. So yes, DMF funds can be used. There is no rule book along that. Convergence has been one of the key issues that has been discussed in terms of DMF, which Ashish told but here maybe Arun ji can say how at the central level, there can be a coordinated effort on this. Because Arun ji, the only concern is that unless there is always a guideline or any direction from the centre, as we know, states or districts sometimes don't act on it because at the end of the day, they have to report back. So, these are the things that I would like to emphasize on, and Prof. Chadha back to you.

**Rajesh:** Oh, thank you. And I think I was discussing with Srestha today that we did read a news item, where Odisha had asked for some DMF funds to be spent on adjacent districts. So Srestha, we discussed it this morning. So, it seems that there is no clear verdict on that, Srestha, that you might like to think because Odisha-

**Srestha:** yeah. Prof. Chadha, I think Arun ji put it very nicely. The District Mineral Foundation has been conceived as a local institution. I mean, somehow, we are just forgetting that day and every day that thing gets drowned in the PMKKKY discussion. PMKKKY is just a scheme that has been aligned to DMF. DMF is actually the thing that has been instituted under the central law. So, the central law, in fact, envisions it as a district level institution where exactly, so the district has the autonomy, the 'autonomy' is the keyword to use it, however they use it, however they plan it and all that issues. The state, in fact, has notified these districts, so the state has the oversight over the district, but central role is only in terms of providing guidance. I do not think that the centre has any right to say- of course, they can say yes or no, because the law, there is something under section 20 of the MMDR act, which allows them to do so. And that's how they told that the COVID-19 fighting, DMF funds can be used. But in fact, it's largely up to the state governments to decide on that. But in this respect, I would say that the Odisha government's call to use DMF funds for COVID-19 crisis, the centre has rightly responded. That's my broader observation on the centre's response.

**Rajesh:** Yeah. So, what I think the centre has said is that you cannot spend on the healthcare in the adjacent districts, and only in the mining affected districts, if there is at least one COVID case, you can spend the money. I understand that. However, I'll just leave one part with Ashish, that to me, the districts are not kind of watertight sections. They're porous and effect can happen from one district,

whatever the mining related effect and happen from one district to another. So, I still have my open mind on this, that districts are porous, you know. The effect of mining in one district percolates the externalities to the adjacent districts also. So, I would need to think a little more on this and have discussions with you at some future point.

But then there are three more questions with which we can probably end. And one is, which has been discussed, but since I have received it after I had raised them. Is there a plan to address under nutrition that might come up in a fairly big way in the near future? This is post-COVID. The second question is regarding, has Odisha developed a comprehensive plan to use unspent balance of OMBADC – that is, Odisha Mineral Bearing Area Development Corporation? Any thoughts on that?

And finally, there is a question on, are there any examples where DMF is investing towards empowering community institutions? Empowered community institutions can make an empowered rural society. So, these are some thoughts that I thought that we shouldn't leave it unaddressed because we still have time. So, I would like Mr. Thakare to comment. And then, if Mr. Arun Kumar wants to. And then, Srestha, you will have the last word.

**Ashish:** I think I'll just broadly point the whole continuous 10 kilometre radius of the mines, which are there. So, I think mainly for Jajpur district and Keonjhar district. There is an inter-flow of border mining districts, so that happens there. So, the guidelines have been defined that way, but coming to your questions regarding OMBADC – the Odisha Mineral Bearing Area Development Corporation fund, that is basically a special purpose vehicle, it is formally at the state level, so it doesn't have anything at the district level, or it has no link with DMF policy. And for OMBADC, there is a special separate department which should take care of it. And we have a Supreme court appointed an authority to us, A.K. Pattnaik is the authority for Odisha. And there is also a Supreme court committee also, a committee which comes regularly. And only when the committee, when Justice Pattnaik comes, there is a meeting, they direct the discussion and then plans are presented. So, of course, the plans made- yeah.

But I think coming back to the previous issues raised, one is that I think we should look at DMF as a long-term investment because it should not be taken up as a yearly budget, which lapses. And so, there should be no hurry or spending it recklessly, it should be done in a very planned and a very sustained way, so that the results come in a much more grounded way, which is there. And I think what is happening is in Keonjhar or in other districts in Odisha is that we're trying to



systemize everything. So, even if there's a change of District Collectors who are Chairpersons of DMF in Odisha, the projects do tend to continue. So, that has been some area of trends that we see here. Also, what happens at the district level, we do understand that DMF funds are implemented by the state departments. We have the Roads and Buildings department, the Rural Development department, the Drinking Water department, which is going to implement projects. So, these departments have a limitation of their capacities. Like for example, the engineers in the field are going to see a number of any other districts which are not under DMF but the workload is at least 10 times or even 100 times more. So, it takes time to get these departments to implement the projects. Then also, they tend to get a lot of partners on board. So, for example, projects, which concern communities or which concerned, say, nutrition projects pertaining to education. We do take onboard NGO partners. We select them through various other processes. But one thing is of course, is that we have to build our capacities because we just do have a limited capacity, unless we also invest in building the capacities and then, they can rise to the occasion of, you know, making and grounding these projects in a much better way. So, these are the broader issues that are there.

And what was the first question that you raised? I'm sorry, I could not get it.

**Srestha:** I guess it's a nutrition question.

**Ashish:** Nutrition question, yeah. I think nutrition is a challenge and we have been through rushed projects through augmenting the midday meal by eggs and also, we did some electrician project, which was not in Keonjhar here, but we got department to do it in Keonjhar through DMF funds. We are now trying to augment nutrition, especially among children, both below three and above three. And below three has been a part of the project having creches in mining affected areas, and also, among women. So, we have been working on a project of 'One Hut Cook Meal', which actually we're supposed to launch in 1st of April, but because of COVID-19, we had to postpone it. Where pregnant women and lactating mothers will be given a nutritious meal and that's a project we're working on. Of course, nutrition will be a big challenge, it's a big challenge even now as we move further. And DMF, I think nutrition is a major area where we are investing also.

**Rajesh:** Yeah. Thank you very much. If Mr. Arun Kumar wishes to say something, most welcome. As Ganesh said, he is in a listening mode. So, Srestha, I think it has been a very fruitful discussion and for reasons that we could hear, the views of the Former Secretary Mines, we could hear the views of the current

Director, Ministry of Mines, who is also looking after DMF, sitting at the centre. And what a wonderful thing that we also could listen to the person who is right at the field, at the forefront and we heard his views also. And I think I have tried to cover all the questions that came to us before and during the discussion. And I really thank all the panellists once again. And to all our colleagues at Brookings who have helped us, you know, because what I sometimes think is that, you know, we used to rush for meetings from Brookings to another place, from one place to another place, not realizing that this is yet another way of interacting with many people all over the globe. So, a wonderful thing for us to listen to all the important views that you have expressed. And Srestha, I think I have thanked everyone and I will leave you to say the last word, and thank every one as well.

**Srestha:** Thank you, Prof. Chadha. And thank you Arun ji and Ashish, in fact, for your time. As I said in the beginning, I believe that this topic is not a topic to discuss just through webinars, but it's an issue where we could have more participation. And unfortunately, right now we all are restricted by movement and mobility. But going ahead, I feel that the purpose of the discussions and maybe what we always take forward in various platforms, through our own work and engagement, is that DMF is only still five years. And in government, we have seen that five years is still a new program, or scheme, or idea, or institution. But it is also standing at a very critical juncture because after this time, if some of the issues that it has the opportunity to work on is not appropriately addressed, then it can also be a missed opportunity. And I feel that given the situation we are witnessing today, and many of us are witnessing, it will be a lifetime experience, in fact, in a very negative way, that we don't think that we can afford to, I would use the word "afford" actually to misuse any opportunity anymore. We don't know what lies tomorrow. And every sector, we have been just shaken. Every day I watch TV, I stopped watching news about what I see every day on TV. We can't have millions of people walking on the road because no one is there to take care of them.

So, we need to fix the local economy. I mean, my pay check is assured at the end of the month, but we need to see that these people have some assurance, a fallback option, a livelihood security in their hometown. And I believe that DMF gives us the hope and we could capitalize on that hope. That's the word I will leave with. Because in India, DMF, if we look at global practices also, it's actually a fantastic opportunity. Not many countries have such benefit sharing mechanism. In fact, if DMF is implemented well and with the purpose, India can create a model for many other countries to adopt, just like similar economies like Africa, another very, very poor nation. And I believe that we have the opportunity to show

leadership in this, not just to strengthen our own local economy, help the people, but at least we can even from a policy perspective, we have the chance to do that. And let's hope not to miss the chance, and I look forward- This is the first engagement from Brookings but in various other capacities, everyone is engaging in their own ways. And I feel that this should be a collective engagement and at various levels, at policy level, at ground level and at implementation level, working with everyone.

So, I leave with that. I'll be in touch with all of you as I have been in touch with over the years and we all will be working together, I hope so. Thank you.

**Rajesh:** That sounds like a very positive note. And we all are keen to help the people who are affected and the best use that DMF funds can be put to should be done. And thank you very much, Mr. Thakare. Sanjeev is not here, so thanks to him.

**Ashish:** Thanks for having me at this webinar and thank everyone.

**Rajesh:** Yeah. And Arun, thank you very much for being with us, despite some issues with the connection. And I thank you all. And I think we can take leave. Thank you very much. Have a nice evening.