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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# A Just Transition for Meerut's Sports Cluster

 **DOWN TO EARTH**2 July 2026 · **ECONOMY** · **GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# A Just Transition for Meerut's Sports Cluster

Down to Earth 2 July 2026 **GS3**

Source: [ujjyari.com](https://ujjyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Meerut makes most of India's sports goods and employs tens of thousands, many in small units. How do you green such a cluster without pricing it out of export markets or throwing its workers out of jobs?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#) [Down to Earth](#)

🟢 Every fact web-verified against primary sources (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

**Meerut** makes roughly three-quarters of India's sports goods, employs tens of thousands and exports to over **100 countries**, and the **Union Budget 2026** added a special provision for the sector. As climate and export pressures push clusters to decarbonise and modernise, the question is how to do so **without displacing workers**. For an aspirant, this is a rich GS3 case on **MSMEs, just transition and inclusive growth**.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Meerut's **labour-intensive, export-driven** sports-goods MSME cluster (thousands of small units, tens of thousands of workers, exports to 100-plus countries) must **decarbonise and modernise**, but thin-margin, informal firms cannot bear the upfront cost alone. Without **central support**, greening squeezes out the smallest units and their workers. A **just transition**, finance, technology, reskilling, protection, is the answer.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Just transition</b>	Greening without dumping the cost on workers	Climate goals must not destroy livelihoods
<b>MSME cluster</b>	Geographic mass of small linked firms	Meerut = ~75% of India's sports-goods output
<b>Decarbonisation</b> ( <a href="https://ujijari.com/vocab/decarbonisation/">https://ujijari.com/vocab/decarbonisation/</a> ) <b>cost</b>	Upfront cost of cleaner, efficient processes	Thin-margin informal units cannot bear it alone
<b>ZED certification</b>	Zero Defect, Zero Effect quality/green mark	Existing tool, but insufficient at cluster scale

## THE ANALYSIS: GREENING WITHOUT DISPLACING

- ❶ **The cluster's weight.** Thousands of mostly small units make around three-quarters of India's sports goods, employ tens of thousands and export to over 100 countries, so its transition carries real jobs and earnings.
- ❷ **The cost barrier.** Cleaner energy, efficient processes and quality upgrades demand upfront capital that thin-margin, informal MSMEs cannot raise on their own.
- ❸ **The market-only risk.** Left to itself, greening stalls or squeezes out the smallest firms, concentrating pain on the workers least able to adapt.
- ❹ **The just-transition frame.** Shared finance, technology, reskilling and social protection let the cluster decarbonise while keeping workers and exports in place.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Meerut makes roughly **three-quarters** of India's sports goods (cricket bats, footballs, boxing gloves, gym equipment); thousands of units; tens of thousands of workers; exports to **100-plus countries**. **Policy:** **Union Budget 2026** special provision for the sports-goods sector; **ZED** (Zero Defect, Zero Effect) certification; MSME technology-upgrade and cluster-development schemes. **Concepts:** just transition (ILO framework), informal sector, MSME thin margins, cluster economics, export competitiveness, green skilling. **Global anchor:** the just-transition principle is embedded in the **Paris Agreement** (<https://ujijari.com/terms/paris-agreement/>) preamble and ILO guidelines.

## THE DEBATE

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**Argument for central support:** The cluster's jobs, exports and informality mean an unmanaged transition is socially and politically costly; the state must fund finance, technology, reskilling and protection so greening does not displace workers.

**Argument for market forces:** Existing schemes (ZED, budgetary support) suffice, firms that cannot modernise should exit, and heavy support risks propping up inefficient units at taxpayer cost.

**Balanced verdict:** Market discipline has a place, but at cluster scale with mass informal employment, pure market Darwinism dumps the transition cost on the weakest. The just answer is a phased, worker-centred, publicly supported transition, not a subsidy for stagnation (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/stagnation/>), but a bridge that keeps workers and exports through the shift.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*A transition can be correct in aggregate and unjust in distribution if its costs fall on those least able to bear them. The analytical move is to trace the incidence of both the burden and the benefit. A policy that is efficient on average but concentrates pain on informal workers needs a compensating design, or it fails politically and morally.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Climate + export pressure -> Meerut cluster must decarbonise + modernise -> upfront cost too high for thin-margin informal MSMEs -> market-only greening squeezes out smallest units + workers -> central support (finance + technology + reskilling + social protection + market support) -> phased, worker-centred just transition -> cluster greens AND jobs/exports survive

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Fund the shift.** Provide concessional (<https://ujjiyari.com/terms/concessional/>) finance and shared common facilities so small units can adopt clean, efficient processes.
- 2 **Reskill and protect workers.** Pair decarbonisation with green skilling, and social protection so no worker is stranded by the transition.
- 3 **Keep exports competitive.** Back quality, design and market access so greener Meerut goods stay competitive in over 100 markets.
- 4 **Sequence it.** Adopt a phased, cluster-level, worker-centred road map rather than an abrupt, market-only shake-out.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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*Use Meerut to argue that a just transition is decided in labour-intensive informal clusters, and set out the central support (finance, technology, reskilling, protection) needed to green them without displacing workers.*

*“Meerut is a test case: green the cluster while protecting its workers, or the transition is neither just nor complete.”*

*Meerut = ~75% of India’s sports-goods output; exports to 100-plus countries; Union Budget 2026 sports-goods provision; ZED (Zero Defect, Zero Effect); just transition in the Paris Agreement preamble and ILO framework.*

*Is it just to let inefficient units fail if their workers have no alternative? How should the state weigh aggregate efficiency against distributive fairness in a green transition?*

*UPSC has asked on MSMEs, inclusive growth and the social dimension of economic reform. This editorial adds the just-transition lens.*

*MSMEs, just transition, informal sector, inclusive growth, export competitiveness, green skilling.*

**Sources:** *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in>), *Ministry of MSME* (<https://msme.gov.in>), *ILO* (<https://www.ilo.org>)

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**KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

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**Meerut's labour-intensive, export-driven sports-goods MSME cluster needs central support to decarbonise and modernise without displacing workers; it is a test case for a just transition in India's traditional manufacturing clusters, where climate goals must be met without destroying the livelihoods that make the cluster work.**

 **SUPPORTING**

- Meerut is a genuinely significant cluster, thousands of mostly small units making around three-quarters of India's sports goods, employing tens of thousands and exporting to over 100 countries, so its transition carries real jobs and export earnings.
- Decarbonisation and modernisation raise upfront cost that small, thin-margin, informal units cannot bear alone, so without central support, cleaner processes, energy efficiency, quality upgrades, greening will either stall or squeeze out the smallest firms and their workers.
- A just transition means the burden of the green shift is shared, not dumped on workers: reskilling, finance, technology access and social protection must accompany decarbonisation so that no worker is left behind.

 **COUNTER**

Some argue market forces and existing schemes (ZED certification, budgetary support) are enough, that firms which cannot modernise should exit, and that heavy state support risks propping up inefficient units; but this ignores the scale of livelihoods and the informality that make an unmanaged transition socially costly.

 **WAY FORWARD**

Fund a cluster-level just transition: concessional finance and technology for clean, efficient processes, shared common facilities, worker reskilling and social protection, market and quality support for exports, and a phased, worker-centred decarbonisation road map.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*"A just transition is judged in the informal, labour-intensive cluster, not the boardroom." Discuss with reference to greening India's traditional manufacturing clusters such as Meerut's sports-goods industry. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

India's climate transition will be judged not in the boardrooms of large firms but in labour-intensive clusters like Meerut's sports-goods industry. Greening such a cluster without displacing its workers is the real test of a just transition, and it needs central support.

**BODY**

Meerut matters. Thousands of mostly small units make roughly three-quarters of India's sports goods, cricket bats, footballs, boxing gloves, gym equipment, employing tens of thousands of workers and exporting to over 100 countries, with the Union Budget 2026 adding a special provision for the sports-goods sector.

But decarbonisation and modernisation, cleaner energy, efficient processes, quality and design upgrades, carry upfront costs that thin-margin, often informal MSMEs cannot bear alone. Left to the market, greening either stalls or squeezes out the smallest firms and their workers, concentrating the pain on those least able to adapt.

A just transition reframes the goal: the climate shift must be made without dumping its burden on workers. That means concessional finance and shared technology for clean processes, reskilling and social protection for workers, and export, quality and market support so units stay competitive.

The counter, that existing schemes like ZED certification suffice and that inefficient units should simply exit, underestimates the scale of livelihoods and the informality of the cluster; an unmanaged transition is not efficient, it is socially expensive and politically corrosive.

**CONCLUSION**

Meerut is a test case. If India can green a labour-intensive cluster while protecting its workers and exports, it proves a just transition is possible in traditional manufacturing.

That requires central support, not market Darwinism.


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