



DattopantThengadi Foundation

27, DeenDayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi

Event Report

“Decent Work for Women: Impact of Digitalisation”

Date: 7th September, 2021.

Mode: Online

The session started with the welcome note by Nityam Gaurav and Moderated by Shikha Gautam. The panelists included Dr. Kiran Limaye, Mr Prashant Tak, Ms Nilima Chimote, and Dr. Ellina Samantroy Jena. Setting the tone of the session Shikha gave a brief introduction of how digitalisation impacts the overall life of a person. Pointing towards the digital divide, she noted that digital technologies empower the lives of the people who have access to them and those with little or no access face social and economic inequalities. Bringing gender in the context argued that to understand the digital gender divide, one needs to go beyond economic factors, because socio-cultural values restrict and discourage women’s access to the use of technologies. Later she said that for women and men to benefit from the work opportunities offered by digital technologies, including platforms, efforts need to be made to ensure that flexibility does not occur at the cost of reduced job quality, in terms of pay, job security and social protection.

Dr Kiran Limaye (*Asst. Prof SAMSOE, NMIMS University, Mumbai*) highlighted the link between women labour force participation and women empowerment. Taking a human development point of view he pointed out that the modern economy provides choices, being a part of the competitive economy helps in maximising these choices. He raised concerns that gendered roles divided into breadwinner and homemaker and the fact that women are largely being seen as homemakers who have to be respondents narrows their choices. Making it a bipartisan issue, he noted that women labour force participation increases choices for both women and employers. Taking example of the Ricardian theory he said that the exchange helps in improving the overall well-being.

Drawing attention to a perceived linkage between productivity and digitalisation, **Mr Prashant Tak** (*Asst. Policy Analyst, CUTS International, Jaipur*), said that digitalisation has led to efficiency in productivity but still there are many concerns left to be addressed. While defining productivity in mechanical terms, we often exclude people out of it so we need to ask questions beyond efficiency

and productivity. He added that there is a need to contextualise the story of digitalisation in terms of regions, communities and global paradigm as there is an unequal society based on social identity and the current matrix of progress of any technological disruption is biased towards other factors of production. Giving a brief note about the structure and challenges of the labour market before the advent of digitalisation he highlighted that India's labour market has been characterised by low skilled manpower and lower women labour force participation. He also related digital literacy with overall education. Quoting the NSSO data on female literacy rate he said that literacy does not guarantee participation in the workforce but we have to see how much land and assets has been owned by women in India. Women may not have jobs because women have less access to digital technology as the data reveals that only 43% of women have ever used the internet and for rural women it drops to 34%. He pointed out that women can be good entrepreneurs. They have a huge opportunity in the food processing industry but the digital divide restricts women to be entrepreneurs. Lastly he said that without understanding social structures one can not comment on the impact of digitalisation on women and as the recruitment process and other things have gone online there will be a problem in the absence of digital literacy.

Ms Nilima Chimote (National Secretary, BMS) further enriched the discussion, she was of the view that to understand the digital revolution and be ready for facing its challenges and harnessing the opportunities we need to be little aware of the history. She pointed out older changes in the world of work that happened whenever technology changed, like the steam engines, computers etc. She said that the platform economy brings opportunities as well as challenges. She made a review of the situation of European countries who are ahead of us in these technological changes. She said that if we can make workers digitally literate then this digitalisation will not hurt more. Digitalisation will impact the service sector more and especially those areas in which women are engaged. She indicated certain problems like mental stress which are emerging due to digitalisation and for this social security for them will have to be addressed in a different way. She was of the view that flexible work due to digitalisation is good but this may intrude on personal space. She brought up the issue of the impact of digitalisation on unorganised women workers, specifically pointing out the issue of non-availability of documents that sometimes become a big hurdle in case of claims being made through digital mode. Other than this she also points out some technical problems like internet speed and server down problems. Some women workers also face issues in availing benefits of certain schemes like maternity benefits, in the absence of digital literacy. She said that we are looking forward to the positive impact of digitalisation and will seek the attention of the government by discussing these issues.

Thereafter **Dr. Ellina Samantroy Jena** (Fellow,VVGNLI, MoL&E) added that a lot of vulnerability is being experienced in the workforce. She brought recent PLFS data and pointed out that there is an

increase in the women labour force participation rate but this is largely in the self-employment category. ILO data of 2020 shows that 40% of employed women in some sectors are hardest hit. Women are largely employed in the low productivity and low paying jobs. The main concern is the sectoral location of men and women and for that there is a need for sectoral policy. When we talk about digitalisation we have to look into employment prospects for women in terms of skilling and moving up in their career hierarchies. There has been a rise of non-standard employment and gig platforms and one needs to categorise these women because registration alone can not help. The employment relationship after digitalisation has changed and one needs to identify new challenges of workplace harassment. Employment contracts are very important as regular wage employment has no written job contracts and we have to see how far these contracts are regularised. She brought the point of Gender-responsive social protection mechanism, for the women who have to look after the care work also. There is a need for Gender-specific data on the impact of new kinds of employment opportunities, as the government is promoting gig and platform work through social security code. She suggested focusing on stem colleges who provide vocational education and promote entrepreneurship for women. It is the responsibility of the government and working organisations to look into how reconcilable responsibility of work and family life balances.

Concluding the session **Shri Virjesh Upadhyay** (*DG, Dattopant Thengadi Foundation*) said that whatever changes are taking place in the external environment are pushing us for change. We cannot stop the change, the only option or solution that we have is to adapt ourselves. Even after 75 years of independence, we are struggling to involve women in the workforce. Economic situation depends upon the social fabric and geographical situation of a particular country and how far this social fabric is supportive to women to get employment is one aspect to be discussed. He praised the initiatives of the government which includes financial inclusion that focuses on digital literacy. He said that PM Modi's speech on the occasion of our Independence Day is remarkable as he has laid huge stress on the role which digitalization will play in the coming times. He said that more focus is needed for providing digital literacy to the masses and the entire society needs to come together to address this issue. He appreciated all speakers for bringing out important points and explaining them to the audience in a very simple manner.

Mr. Abhijeet proposed a vote of thanks.

Contact us: thengadifoundation@gmail.com

Twitter: https://twitter.com/df_torg

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