



Dattopant Thengadi Foundation

Women and the Pandemic

It is now a well established fact that whatever is good for gender equality is also good for the economy but in Pandemic times we have seen a disproportionate burden of the impacts of the pandemic being shifted to Women. More men across the world lost their lives but a disproportionately large number of women/girls lost their jobs and livelihoods. As per reports women are 1.8 times more likely to lose their jobs compared to men in the current scenario.¹ It may partially be accredited to major hits on some of the women dominated sectors like hospitality and tourism but the increased burden of care-work is obviously the largest and most important factor. It is estimated that more than 430 million women of which almost 47 million will be pushed into poverty by COVID will be living on less than \$1.90/day in 2021.² India's biggest challenge on the employment front is getting its women folk into the labour force. While 67% of all men of working age are employed, only 9% of all women of working age are. This gap between men and women in India's workforce is the potential labour available to deploy productivity in economic activities. Given that men continue to be considered as the principal earning member of a household, women are unlikely to accept poor quality jobs. With restrictions eased and economic activities struggling to achieve normalcy, men who had lost their jobs had regained most of it and left behind were women-- with no jobs, and no social security net.

The problematic combination of informal work, poverty and gender bias is common in many developing nations, but it is particularly acute in India, given the structure of the economy and society. The country has one of the world's highest rates of informal employment- and the pandemic has increased this further, leaving the vast majority of citizens outside the protection of labour laws or any social security net.

The economic fallout of women from workplaces has also led to larger social fallout for them. Several disenfranchised women have reported higher levels of anxiety and depression during and after the lockdown months. In India owing to COVID women have to spend an estimated 30

¹ COVID 19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects, McKinsey global institute
<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>

² From Insight to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19, UN Women
<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142>

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percent more time with families than before. There have been increased cases of domestic violence and abuse among women in the informal sector. This has had direct implications on their family life as well. It is the prevalence of these situations in the country that has led to a further slip of 28 places to 140 in World Economic Forum's global gender gap report 2021.

The pandemic has put women in a situation where they are forced to choose between family and returning to jobs if any are available and in many of the cases the damage is irreversible. Women have moved out of the workforce and will probably never return. Young college going girls, who looked to join the workforce have been married and their prospect of financial freedom has been nipped in the bud. The situation has worsened further for women with the 2nd wave. Approximately 5.7 million rural women lost their jobs (livelihood) in April 2021. It is worth noting that female Workforce participation in rural areas had increased by almost 10 percentage points as urban women returned to villages between April 2020 and March 2021 but with the 2nd wave as male migrant returnees were forced to take up these jobs for survival, women lost these jobs as well. Other factors that contributed to loss of jobs for them include restrictions on movement, increased care work and unavailability of MNREGA work in this period. The 2nd wave also came as another shock for the reviving supply chains and textiles sector, dominated by women took another major hit. Orders were cancelled and these women lost their money. Women always do some of the most arduous and backbreaking work in Indian agriculture, but get the least benefit from it as they are often exploited through lower wages. The ongoing anti-farm laws protest where men continue to protest on the Delhi borders but women swung into action to sow the Kharif crops. During the first and second world war too, when thousands of men were away at the battlefield and the women did those jobs which were considered "unsuitable" or too difficult for women. It is believed that 5-6 million women entered the workforce between 1940-45³ but sadly, when the war ended and the men returned, a large number of women were fired from their jobs.

Despite the fact that the country currently faces labour shortage, a huge number of women, who were working before the pandemic are yet to return to the workforce. It seems blurry for women in the country and as the 2nd wave is receding and vaccination gains pace, we can only hope for their return.

Even before the pandemic the world bank had estimated that it will take 150 years to reach gender equality and the pandemic seems to have extended that timeline but in what might come as a surprise, BARRON'S see a 'She-covery' after a 'she-cession'.⁴ Another DivHERsity

³ When adversity opens doors for women: Rasheeda Bhagat

⁴ Say Hello to the 'She-Covery': Post-Covid Rebound Accelerates Women's Job Gains by: Matthew C. Klein, published June, 09,

2021 <https://www.barrons.com/articles/say-hello-to-the-she-covery-post-covid-rebound-accelerates-womens-job-gains-51623186740>

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benchmarking report released in May 2021 notes that women hiring in mid-management and senior-level jobs increased from 18% in 2019 to 43% in 2020⁵ in the pandemic year.

While delivering the Ministerial address on Declaration and Employment Working Group Priorities at G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' meeting the former Union Minister Santosh Gangwar said that India is making collective efforts to reduce gender gaps in labour force participation. He also listed various steps taken by the government to ensure women are entitled for all types of work in all establishments and to ensure their safety and provisions for working hours. There are various schemes including Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, extended maternity leave for women and voluntary and contributory pension scheme to provide minimum assured pension after the age of 60 years for unorganised sector workers.

Almost all G20 countries made progress in terms of equal opportunities⁶, participation of women in the labour market and reduction of the gender pay gap as it was pledged by the G20 leaders in Brisbane in 2014.

Without the participation of women in active economics, India's dream to become a coveted \$5 trillion economy by 2025, becomes a daymare and the thematic debate on gender equality cannot continue anymore just on papers, it has to convert into actions that set into motion a holistic, comprehensive and inclusive recovery path for India. Although the massive fiscal stimulus package by the central government aims to provide support to the vulnerable groups, it is not enough. There needs to be an introduction of gender-neutral formalisation at a greater scale. Till the time gender lens is missing from policymaking and developmental initiatives and till social orthodox, norms and stereotypes continue to mar and hinder women's participation in economic activities, all that is done and achieved will become moot.

Our Publications:

- 1) Democracy, Capitalism, Labour Movement: In Quest of Decent Work: <https://www.suruchiprakashan.com/democracy-capitalism-labour-movement>
- 2) Decent Wage : It's not Just About Workers : <https://www.suruchiprakashan.com/decent-wage>
- 3) Industry 4.0 and the Future of Work(er) : <https://www.suruchiprakashan.com/industry-4-0-and-the-future-of-work-er>

⁵ Hiring of women in middle and senior management rises to 43 pc in 2020: JobsForHer report by: Rekha Balakrishnan.

<https://yourstory.com/herstory/2021/06/women-pandemic-hiring-jobs-for-her-neha-bagaria/amp>

⁶

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-making-collective-efforts-to-reduce-gender-gap-in-labour-force-participation-santosh-gangwar/articleshow/83783316.cms>

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DTF Events:

Virtual discussion on “**Importance of Digital - Literacy in Post - COVID World**” was held on July 15, 2021 with a distinguished panel representing Employees (SEWA, BMS) Employers (CII, FICCI), Government (Director NCS, MoL&E) and ILO.

Panel:

Speaker 1: Ms. Manali Shah, National Secretary, Sewa


Speaker 2: Ms. Harsh Juneja, Deputy Director, CII

Speaker 3: Sh. Arvind Francis, Assistant Secretary General, FICCI

Speaker 4: Ms. Lata Gautam, Director, National Institute of Career Services, Directorate General of Employment, MoL&E

Speaker 5: Prof. Santosh Mehrotra, Visiting Prof. University of Bath, UK; Ex-Prof. JNU

Speaker 6: Sh. Sultan Ahmed, Head of Bureau of Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), ILO



On the occasion
of World Youth
Skills day

DTF invites you to join
a discussion on
"Increasing
Importance of Digital
Literacy in the Post-
COVID World" with
experts from the
world of work.

**SKILLS
for a resilient
YOUTH**

Photos from Flickr.com/unesco: SkillAction Photo Series
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Venue: Online (via Webex)

On: July 15, 2021
From: 11:00 am
Duration ~ 02:00 hours

You can register at:
<https://surveyheart.com/form/6Oee065563ce1925e3005d5c>

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