



Women affected to a greater degree by the coronavirus pandemic



Source: Reuters

While 2020 was much awaited as the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, intended to assess and champion gender equality, the world is currently battling what can be called the deadliest pandemic. While the health and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have been widely discussed, what is missing has been a dialogue on the larger impact the pandemic has and will have on women and girls.

According to the **World Economic Forum**, at the global level, women make up 70% of all health and social services staff putting them at the forefront of the pandemic. Additionally, the burden of unpaid care work on women in such situations also points sharply to the existing gender discrimination that women face. This, when coupled with the economic vulnerability of women translates into fewer opportunities in the labour market and limited access to financial resources. All of this is further exacerbated by the spike in cases of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence that have been reported. And while the number of reported cases reflect just the tip of the iceberg it points at the larger systemic oppression that women are facing.

While tackling this pandemic, governments and policymakers must recognise this heightened impact on women and ensure that policies and measures implemented involve women in the decision-making process.

In Karnataka, women SHG lead the way in combatting COVID



Source: Reuters

In Karnataka, women **Self Help Group (SHG) members under the Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society's Sanjeevini scheme** are leading by example in ensuring the containment of the pandemic in the state. For a nominal fee, these women are making cloth masks for the underprivileged as well as migrant workers as an alternative to the expensive store bought masks. Women have also undertaken the initiative of producing and distributing sanitiser while also making door to door visits to educate people on the need for social distancing and other measures to protect against COVID. This effort only highlights the importance of involving women as both decision makers and change makers for sustainable development.

COVID-19 accentuates the challenge of declining women's labour participation in India

As India becomes the 9th most affected nation by the coronavirus pandemic, the lopsided impact of the pandemic on women cannot be ignored. While the epidemiological impact of the virus may be greater for men than women, the socio-economic impact on women is not just larger but remains invisible, with the effects of the pandemic threatening to further impede gender equality.



Source: PAC

Data from the National Commission for Women reveals that over 587 cases of gender-based violence were registered between March 23, 2020 and April 16, 2020 pointing to the fact that the nationwide lockdown had consequences larger than what was envisaged.

Another effect of the crisis is on the declining Female Labour Force Participation Rates (FLFPR) in India. While India already has one of the lowest FLFPR in the world (21% as per estimates by PAC's study and the World Bank), the crisis will most definitely accentuate this concern. With the threat of unemployment looming large on the Indian economy, women will be among the first to bear the burden of reduced pay or worse, job losses. This is largely due to the perceived social norms that curb women's role in productive forms of labour. As found during PAC's study on the causes for India's declining FLFPR, the burden of unpaid care work serves as a barrier for women who spend on an average, more than 5 hours per day on domestic care work. With the pandemic, these numbers are only going to shoot up.

Another concern is the fact that women employment tends to be clustered in the informal sector with 60% of women working in informal sector occupations. The absence of fair wages, social security and the option of remote work only worsens their situation at times of crisis.



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